

LAND GRANTS TO TEMPLES UNDER THE PALLAVAS

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Abstract

In the early Pallava period the royal land donations made to the Brahmins is comparatively more than that to the temple. The Pallavas, Pandyas and the Cholas welcomed the Brahmin migrants to Tamilnadu from various parts of India and made enormous gifts to them. Only scanty information is available regarding the other sections of the society. One of the greatest sovereigns of the Pallava dynasty, was a Jain, later converted to Saivism by Appar. He erected a temple for Trimvurate ie., Brahma, Vishnu and Siva with the use of imperishable materials such as stone. It marked a revolutionary departure from tradition. The temple became a major institution. The religious life of the people centered around the local temple. Temples provide solace and comfort to the people besides appeasing their inner urges and the search within. Those who wanted to amass the blessings of the God liberally donated lands to the temples as part of their prayers. There is a bulk of epigraphical evidence during the Pallava and Pandya times which speaks about construction, renovation and additions made to the temples. The benefactors in the list are the kings, chieftains, noble persons, royal ladies and other royal members beside them are the Brahmins including Brahmin ladies, officials, merchants, pontiffs and village administrative bodies. This paper focuses on various types of land grants by the Pallava kings donated to the temples.

Key Words: Devadana, Bramadeya, Chathurvedimangalam, Plates and Inscriptions

With the extinction of the Kalabhra rule, the Pallavas emerged as a new political force unknown to Sangam politics in Tondai *mandalam* region. They played a very important role in the History of South India for more than five centuries. The glorious period of Pallava history began with the accession of Simhavishnu (556-589 A.D) the founder. He and his successors are known as Imperial Pallavas. This period witnessed an era of religious fervour with the construction of numerous temples made of imperishable materials. Simhavishnu's successor Mahendravarman I (590-629 A.D),¹ One of the greatest sovereigns of the Pallava dynasty, was a Jain, later converted to Saivism by Appar. He erected a temple for Trimvurate ie., Brahma, Vishnu and Siva with the use of imperishable materials such as stone. It marked a revolutionary departure from tradition.²

One of the celebrated rulers of the Pallava dynasty was Narasimhavarman (630-668 A.D), who

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succeeded Mahendra Varman I. He distinguished himself as a conqueror, patron of Hindu religion and a builder. He was a vaishnavite, yet he patronaged saivism too. He was succeeded by Mahendravarman II (668-669 A.D), whose reign was short and peaceful. His son Paramesvaravarman I (669-690 A.D) followed him. He was a great devotee of Siva and he constructed Paramesvaragraha, the temple for Siva and granted the village Paramesvara Mangalam.³

The most illustrious among the Pallava ruler was Narasimhavarman II (690-728 A.D) surnamed Rajasimha. His period witnessed remarkable achievement in the field of temple building and religion. He constructed a temple to Siva called the Kailasanatha temple. He was tolerant of other faiths and constructed a Buddhist Vihara at Nagapattinam at the request of the Chinese emperor.⁴

Narasimhavarman II was succeeded by Paramesvaravarman II (729-731 A.D), who ruled for a short period and succeeded by Nandivarman II (731-796 A.D), who was from a collateral branch had a long reign. Then the later Pallava ruler. Dantivarman came to the throne in 796 A.D and ruled for a period of fifty one years. He was followed by Nandivarman III (846-869 A.D), the victor at Tellaru.⁵ He constructed the Vishnu temple at Kiliyanur in South Arcot District. He tried to restore the Pallava power to its former glory. He was followed by the rulers like Nripatungavarman, Aparajithavarman and Kampavarman. Some minor chiefs ruled Kanchi and Tondaimandalam after Kampavarman.

The Pallava power was eclipsed by the rise of the Imperial Cholas. Kampavarman's reign marked the close of Pallava power in 980 A.D. The Cholas rose again and grew into glory and greatness at the expense of the Pallavas.⁶ During the Pallava period the concept of divine origin of kingship was accepted. They claimed that they belonged to the Bharadvaja *gotra*. The kings were ardent followers of Hindu *sastras*.

Regarding society, Pallava inscription mentioned more about the Brahmins and Kshatriyas than about the other strata of the society. The Brahmins were at the apex of the social order. They received patronage from the royal families. The rulers took efforts to enforce the special rules of caste and orders as laid down in Varnashrama code. The temples built during the period of the Pallavas proved to be the citadels of the orthodox caste system and socio-religious tool to achieve the supremacy of the Brahmins.

In the early Pallava period the royal land donations made to the Brahmins is comparatively more than that to the temple. The Pallavas, Pandyas and the Cholas welcomed the Brahmin migrants to Tamilnadu from various parts of India and made enormous gifts to them. Only scanty information is available regarding the other sections of the society.⁷

During the key days of Pallava rule, their territory included the present Madras, Chengai, M.G.R.Vallalar in South Arcot, Sambuvarayar in North Arcot and parts of Trichi Districts of Tamilnadu. Even their rule extended upto Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. The end of the Kalabhra rule was a landmark in the History of Tamilnadu. After their decline, Hinduism grew in strength with the Bhakti movement. It was the Saivites who launched a vituperative and scathing attack on Buddhism and Jainism. The Bhakti age led to the proliferation of temples, multiplicity of deities and the growth of *agamis* literature.⁸

The Sanskrit word 'Bhakti' is derived from 'Bhak' meaning adoration or worship. One who adores the god with devotion is a 'Bhakta' (or) devotee of God. Complete self surrender to the principle of this universe.⁹ This period is called the Golden age of Tamil Hinduism which led to the decline of Buddhism and Jainism. The cult of Bhakti encouraged congregational temple worship and a large number of temple, big and small

were constructed. The Bhakti movement seems to have earned the support and patronage of the monarch. The movement spread to different parts of the country. With sufficient endowment of land grants and other gifts, it seems the traders, merchants, artisans, landocracy and other well-to-do became the followers of the movement.¹⁰

The beginning of temple architecture in South India is attributed to the Pallavas because the earliest temples were built only with the use of perishable materials. Mahendravarman I popularly called Vichitrachitta, one of the greatest sovereigns of the Pallava dynasty substitute imperishable materials like brick and timber. The last inference of the Mandagapattu inscription is important it proves that the Hindus knew perfectly well how to build temples during the period of Mahendravarman I. Which led to the evolution of so many temples during the period of the Pallavas followed by the Pandyas and the Cholas. Mahendravarman I built the temple for Triumvirate namely Siva, Vishnu and Brahma.¹¹

The temple became a major institution. The religious life of the people centered around the local temple. Temples provide solace and comfort to the people besides appeasing their inner urges and the search within. Those who wanted to amass the blessings of the God liberally donated lands to the temples as part of their prayers.¹² There is a bulk of epigraphical evidence during the Pallava and Pandya times which speaks about construction, renovation and additions made to the temples. The benefactors in the list are the kings, chieftains, noble persons, royal ladies and other royal members beside them are the Brahmins including Brahmin ladies, officials, merchants, pontiffs and village administrative bodies.

Land being the immovable property, (i) it was easy for the donors to donate them having easy access to the temples; (ii) donors preferred donating the lands which ever yielding, perpetual gifts unmarred by the change of time and fury of nature;¹³ (iii) yields from the lands became the major fiscal source of revenue for the temples and it was to be used only for the specific services; (iv) land was the most important, the most valuable, and most desired commodity of gifts in medieval times. It enabled the donees to meet almost all the wants of medieval households economy directly or indirectly; (v) the enormous endowments in land made to the temples show that the king and his people aimed at leaving no want of the temple unsupplied; and (vi) attainment of a place in heaven is the fruit of gifts of land.¹⁴

The land were measured in terms of *veli*, *kuli* and *ma*.¹⁵ Generally when the lands were to be given away as gifts, the boundary of the village to be given away was fixed by following the beat of a female elephant. In Prakrit and early Sanskrit inscriptions mention the extent of land measured by the *plough*, *nivartana* or *pattika*. Later on *padagam* is used in the sense of cultivable land. The boundaries of lands in Pallava times were measured and fixed differently.¹⁶

Gift lands donated to Siva temples were marked by a stone called "*tirsulakkal*" and in case of Vaishnava temple by *tirunalikkal* and on the boundary stones of Jain temple the three umbrellas (*mukkudaikkal*) were inscribed. The lands granted to Siva temples were named as *devadana*, Vishnu temples as *tiruvidaiyattam* and to the Jain Shrines as *pallichchandam*.¹⁷

Grants Made by Pallava Kings

The Pallava kings constituted an important part in the society. They were god fearing and they were keen in protecting the subjects and in promoting *dharmam*. They were called as *dharmamaharajas*, *adhirajas*. Each and everyone of the Pallava king was of a religious temperament. They were tolerant towards their subjects and stood as defenders and protectors of different faiths that prevailed in the kingdom. The kings

made a number of endowments to the temple because they might have felt that by appropriating the deity they could atone for all atrocities they committed in the war.¹⁸

The kings not only built most of these temples but made liberal endowments for the regular services and special festivities. The large tracts of lands were granted to big and small temples by kings. They were called as *devadanams* which were either partly or fully exempted from taxes. In the early Pallava grants, the orders of the village or land gifts as *devadana* was issued by the king himself to his officials with instructions to make a note of the gift in the register and to grant the village all kinds of immunities making it an entirely tax - free village.¹⁹

The royal gifts can be classified into *svadatti* and *paradatti*. In the later Pallava grants the *paradatti* gifts are those where some one acts as *vijnapati* or petition and some other as *ajnapati*.²⁰ In the early Pallava period, the royal land donations made to the Brahmins is comparatively more than that to the temple. Gift of villages formed an important source of revenue to the temple. It placed the temples on permanent financial status. There are only few instances of village grants to temples during the period of the Pallavas.

The earliest known copper plate inscription in Tamil and the earliest village grant to the religious institution was issued by Simhavarman in his sixth regnal year in 550 A.D was Pallankovil grant. It records the grant of the village Amanserkkai in Perunagarnadu in Venkunrakkottam and Sixteen and half *patti* of land in Tamar to Vajranandikkuravar, a Jaina teacher of Paruttikkunru as *pallichchandam*. The boundaries of the donated village are clearly mentioned in the inscription. Narabhaya, the minister figures as the *ajnapati* of the grant. It indicates the spirit of tolerance that prevailed among the members of the Pallava royal family towards the other religious sects.²¹

The Kuram plates of Pallava king Paramesvaravarman I state the endowment of a village Paramesvaramangalam as a *devadana brahmadeyam*. This village was divided into twenty five shares out of which twenty shares were given to the Brahmins, three shares for performing *puja* in the temple ie for the worship, the bathing of idol flowers, perfumes, incense, lamps, oblations, conches and drums . One share for reciting the *Mahabharata* in the temple, and one share for bringing water and fire to the *mandapa* at Kuram. It is interesting to note that this grant makes provision for the exposition of the *Mahabharata* along with the daily worship of Siva in the Kuram temple.²²

During the period of Dantivarman at the request of a certain Kaduvetti Muttaraiyan, an endowment of four *patti* of land made to the old temple of Vishnu called Tirumerrali at Iraiyancheri in Conjeevaram Taluk, Chingleput District. An inscription in the Parthasarathi temple at Triplicane, Madras describes Dantivarman as the ornament of the Pallava family and records a gift of land.²³

The donor of the Velurpalayam grant is Nandivarman III who was the grandson of Nandivarman II. He was a great devotee of Siva. His reign witnessed the ascendancy of Saivism.²⁴ In this case, the complete proprietorship rights over the village were not given to the donees. Only the kings income from the village is diverted to the religious institution. The village Tirukattupalli was donated by the Pallava king Nandivarman to the temple of Mahadeva at Velurpalayam in 852 A.D.²⁵ The Velurpalayam plates clearly state that taxes and immunities received by the king within the jurisdiction of the village were now assigned to the temple and not the ownership of the village. Nandippottaraiyar who defeated his enemies at Tellaru made a gift of land to the *pidari* temple of Mangalam at Niyamam.²⁶

At the request of a Bana chieftain the village of Vikramaditya *chaturvedi mangalam* which was formed by clubbing together three villages was granted by Pallava Nandivarman III to the temple at Tiruvallam.²⁷ Charitable endowments to the temple were entrusted either to the village assembly or to the authorities. Many village donations made for the purpose of maintaining jointly the temple as well as the Brahmins were known as *devadana brahmadeya* villages.²⁸ A copper plate inscription of Aparajitha dated 879 A.D refers to the royal grant of tax - free *devadana brahmadeya* by clubbing Pudur with Melirunjeru as *kani* to the *sabha* of Melirunjeru stipulating that they should measure out 1000 *kadis* of paddy annually as *panchavara* to the deity Subrahmanya at Tiruttani at the instance of vama.²⁹

A record in the 12th year of Aparajithavarman refers to a gift of land after purchase from a resident of Iganaimudur for offerings perfume, incense and for a perpetual lamp to the god Cholamalyisvara at Orrimudur i.e. Tiruvorriyur.³⁰ In the 25th regnal year of Vijayakampavikramavarman, mentioned a gift of land endowed to a deity called Irunda Perumanadigal as *devadana* and made tax-free for conducting a festival for seven days from *visakam* to *tiruvonam* in *vaikasi* (May) every year.³¹

It was also necessary for the king to maintain properly the land donations previously made to the temple. At Tirukkalukkunram the Pallava king Skandasisya gifted certain tax free land to the local temple and accordingly Narasingapottaraiyar Narasimhavarman I had to confirm the grant. Following this Rajakesarivarman Aditya I at the request of an individual maintained the grant like the former kings.³²

There are occasional references to the grant of *pallichchandams* in the stone inscriptions of the later Pallava rulers such as those of Nandivarman II and Kampavarman.³³ The status of women was fairly high in the upper strata of Pallava society. The Pallava queens were pious and made endowments to the temple. Charudevi one of the earliest Pallava queen of the heir-apparent Vijaya Buddhavarman made a gift of four *nivartanas* of land to a Vishnu temple at Dalura.³⁴

The royal ladies also made village grants after getting concurrence from the reigning king. An inscription from Manalurpet, South Arcot District registers a gift of village for offerings and lamp by a royal lady with the permission of her elder brother.

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