



PATRONAGE OF THE NAYAKA RULERS TO TEMPLES IN THANJAVUR REGION (1532-1675A.D.)

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses about the patronage of the Nayaka Rulers to the temples in Thanjavur region during the period under study. During the period, being the region confined to the delta of the river Kaveri, the region was a prosperous centre of the kingdom. Here in this period, the religious institutions occupy an important place in the society and act as a great centres of intellectuals activities since the beginning till the eve of the British occupation of the Carnatic. Thus the rulers during the period took keen interest and gave great importance to this religious institution and gave patronage for the maintenance and development which later leads to the emergence of new temples in the region. Besides the Marathas, the Nayaka rulers were also who contributed and gave great support to these religious institutions. Thus the paper discusses about relation of the state and the institutions and the patronage of the Nayaka rulers for the development and up keep of these religious institutions in various ways. Moreover, the paper also discusses about the motives of their patronage to this religious institution.

KEYWORDS: Nayak, patronage, religious institutions, temples, Thanjavur.

INTRODUCTION :

Thanjavur, a city in Southern India is confined to the delta of the river Kaveri. This rectangular river line area had many centuries, been prosperous and wealth-producing and hence the centre of the kingdom during the periods of the Nayaks and Marathas. The period between the 16th and 18th century marks the rule of the Nayaks and the Marathas in Thanjavur. The religious institutions during the period were the great centres of intellectual activity, which considerably enriched the intellectual life of the contemporary society and carries the history of South India from the best days of the empire of Vijayanagar to the eve of the British occupation of the Carnatic. On the ruins of the territorial possessions of the Hoysala of Dwara Samudra, the sultans of Madurai and the Pandyas of Tenkasi, there emerged several Telegu powers of whom the most powerful were those of Senji, Thanjavur and Madurai. Their rule in one part or other of Tamilakam lasted up to 1736. Those Telegu rulers were called the Nayaks and their administration was the Nayankara system.¹The sources of information for the history of the

Nayaks of Tamil Nadu are mostly epigraphic as well as literary. The epigraphic sources are inscriptions found on the wall of the temples, and copper chronicles written by court poets, ballads chronicles written by court poets, ballads composed for the purpose of recital at local festivals and the factory records of Europeans merchants. Inscriptions are found in Tamil, Telegu, Kanarese and Sanskrit. The literary sources consist of chronicles, ballads memoirs and epistolary works.²

During the Nayaka rule in Thanjavur Region under study, the state had its close relation with the Hindu religious institutions. There was a mutual understanding in the relationship between the two. The State's relation with the institutions can be discussed in the terms of patronage, supervision and control, protection and fiscal regulations. The chief patron of the religious institutions was the State. The institutions owed their foundation, maintenance and development to the endowments of the State. In continuation of Vijayanagar tradition, the rulers of the period stood for the protection and development of the institutions of their respective sects. The period under study witnessed the emergence of certain new temples. This was mainly due to the strong belief that the act of building temples was the primal duty among the seven great services of a King to his subjects.³ Furthermore, the Nayaka rulers felt that it was essential for the maintenance of kingship and political consolidation of the state as they are very conscious of the fact that they were alien in the land of the Tamils, politically and linguistically.

The Nayaka rulers extended a great patronage to the Hindu religious institutions of different kinds. They, except Sevappa Nayaka, were staunch Vaishnavites. Sevappa Nayaka gave importance to the Saivite temples too. In the sixteenth century, all Vaishnavite temples in Thanjavur region received the patronage of the Nayaka rulers. Such temples were found both in the region and outside the region. Some of them are the temples at Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Thiruvarur, Mannargudi, Srirangam, Nedunkunram, Vridachalam and Thiruvencatam. Among them, the Rajagopalasamy temple at Mannargudi became the spiritual centre of the Nayaka rulers. Sevappa Nayaka, the founder the Nayaka dynasty in Thanjavur rebuilt the Vaishnava temples namely the Mamanikoil and ManikunramKoil on the Bank of river Vennar in Thanjavur.⁴ He provided golden *Vimanato* the temple at Thiruvencatam.⁵ The Vishnu temples at Nedumkunram and Vridachalam also received the royal patronage of Sevappa. The contemporary inscription refers to that the Rajagopalasami temple in the North main street of Thanjavur was consecrated during his reign.⁶

Though Vaishnavite, he was an ardent devotee of Siva and had granted endowments to the Siva temples in Kudavasal, Avoor, Chirroyumur and Vridachalam. Sevappa erected the Murugan shrine and the Mallappar *mandapam* in the Brahadiswarar temple of Thanjavur. He specially granted a car to the Amman temple at Thiruvaidaimarudur for the grand celebration of Car festival. In fact, the task of constructing the temple at Swamimalai was accomplished by him.⁷ The standing *gopura* of the Thiruvannamalai temple and its long corridors are the living monuments of his patronage to Siva temples.⁸

All Vaishnavite temples attained greater importance during the reign of Achyutappa Nayaka who was a great devotee of Vishnu. However, he considered the temples at Srirangam and Chidambaram as one and the same. His attitude towards the *Saivasect* was proved by his coins which bear the images of Siva and Vishnu.⁹ His personal devotions to Lord Vishnu earned him the title Achyutappa Alwar.¹⁰

Achyutappa Nayak endowed land grants to the Vishnu temples in Thanjavur and Srirangam.¹¹ In A.D. 1570, he granted twenty-five villages fetching an annual income of 6200 pon to the Srirangam temple for conducting *pujas* and festivals.¹² His reign witnesses the expansion of many temples. The Rajagopalasamy temple at Mannargudi got seven corridors. A big *mandapa* was built in the temple at Vaidhiswarankoil.¹³ He endowed a *sarvamanyakattalai* to the Siva temple at Thiruvarur and the village Thiruvetkalam to the Tillai Chidambareswarar.¹⁴ He also established some water pandals on the way to the temple at Thirupati for the benefit of pilgrims.¹⁵

Reghunath Nayaka simply followed the foot-steps of his father Achyutappa in the patronage of Vishnu temples. Being a great Rama *bhakta*, he himself authored Reghunatha Ramayanam. He daily read the Rama katha and he had created a cell called 'Srirama Soudam' in the Thanjavur palace for the display of the different images of Rama. He was entitled as *anaviratharamakadamrudha sevakan*,¹⁶ to mark his devotion to Rama *bhakti*.

Reghunatha built the Ramasamy temple at Kumbakonam where he arranged the coronation ceremony of the Vijayanagar Emperor Ramarayan.¹⁷ He erected sixteen small shrines around the sacred Mahamaham tank to mark his sixteen kind of *danas*.¹⁸ In A.D. 1609, he endowed 60 *veli* of the land to the Bhaktavachala Perumal temple at Thirukkannamangai. He installed new copper icons in many of the temples which received his patronage. Reghunatha Nayak created an endowment of thirty pon out of the income from the Nodyur village for the above purpose.¹⁹ The Thiruvalangadu Vedavaraneswarar Thirukkoyil was one among them where the new copper icons were installed.²⁰ Further he denoted cars temples at Thiruvidadaimarudur, Thiruvaiyaru and Pattiswaram. The image of Raghunath Nayak was carved out in the temple's cars. The immense patronage to the religious institutions incurred a heavy expenditure on the state during his reign.²¹

Vijayaraghava's patronage to the Rajagopalasamy deity at Mannargudi was an inestimable one. His devotion to the deity led to assimilation of royal centre with the scared centre. He highly indulged in the worship of the above deity even without noticing the enemy's invasion of his state.²² The long corridors, sacred tank, thousand pillared halls, and the car of the female deity of this temple were all due to the extensive patronage of him. The contemporary Nayaka literate records that his unstinted devotion to the Lord of Mannargudi earned the title 'Mannarudasa' meaning the servant of the God Rajagopala.²³ He granted land endowments to the temples at Thirukkannamangai and Thiruvarur.²⁴ He also established some *mandapas* in the Saranathar temple at Thirucherai and Siva temple in Thiruvarur.²⁵ He endowed nearly three lakh *kalam* of paddy and three thousand gold coins annually to the temple for conducting *pujas* and festivals.²⁶

Moreover, the Nayak rulers extended their patronage to the village's temples too. These attained greater significance during this period under study because of the royal patronage. The Nayakas gave much importance to the village's deities like Angalaparameswari, Syamala and Ellamma. The state patronage was also even extended to the sepulchral temples. The sepulchral temples were built in stones over the mortal remains of the royal personages and public. Regunatha Nayak granted 1500 kuli of land for the maintenance of a sepulchral temple built in memory of the unnatural death of a girl at Vallam.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Thus, from the above study it can be notice that the state and institutions had depended upon each other from early times and still continued during the Nayaks period under study. But without the state, the institutions could not have flourished in the region. Likewise, the state solely depended upon the institutions whose recognition for the divinity of the Kingship became inevitable. It was also an essential requisite for a ruler to maintain his political stability. The state's relation was in terms of patronage, supervision and control, protection and fiscal regulations. The king was the chief patron of the institutions. Besides the royal patronages, pontiffs, private individuals and various communities granted endowments of kind and cash. All the Vaishnava temples attained greater importance during the periods of the Nayakas. Saivite temples too received great patronage in the hands of them. Achyutappa considered the temples of Srirangam and Chidambaram as one and the same. Rajagopalasamy temple at Mannargudi became the spiritual centre of the Nayakas. Vijayaraghava's patronage to the deity of this temple was an inestimable one. His devotions to the deity led to the assimilations of royal centre with sacred centre. Besides, though staunch Vaishnavites irrespective of the religious sects they belonged, the patronages to and development of the Hindu institutions never stood against the spirit of tolerance among the Nayaka. Though the rulers extended their patronage and protection to the Hindu religion and its institutions in the wake of the advent of Islam and Christianity, they never failed in extending the same patronage and protection to the Christian and Islamic institutions like churches and *dargas* of the region. Thus, during the period of Nayaks under study, various religious institutions received grants and patronages and witnessed the emergence of certain new temples in Thanjavur region.

ENDNOTES

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 2. Ibid., p. 19.
 3. Anna Rao, *Administration of Temples*, p. 32.
 4. *S.I.I.*, Vol. II, no. 22.
 5. Reghunatha Nayaka's *Sangita Sudha*.
 6. *S.I.I.*, Vol. V, no. 1404.
 7. *S.I.I.*, Vol. 23, no. 497.
 8. *Thiruvannamalai Temple Inscriptions*, no. 447; *A.R.E.*, 80 of 1945-46.
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9. ArumughaSetharaman, 'ThanjaiNayakkarKasukal', *Avanam (Tamil)*, no. 7, p. 82, 1996.
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13. KudavoyilBalasubramanian,*Cholamandalattu Varalatrru Nayakarkalin Cirpangalum Oviangalum (Tamil)*, pp. 247-248.
14. *A.R.E.*, 259 of 1913.
15. *Thirupati Devasthanam Inscriptions*, Vol. V, no. 114 (no. 438 G.T.
16. *Sangitha Sudha*, Slo. 54-56.
17. Reghunatha Nayaka's *Sangitha Sudha*.