

PALLAVA BRAHMADEYAMS

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Abstract:

Brahmadeyams as a settlement of Brahmanas is of great antiquity. It is one of the systems which flourished in the early and medieval days and survived for many centuries until its decline in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. As it is from the times of the Pallavas that the land grants made to the Brahmanas appear frequently, the Pallava age can be taken as the embryonic stage for the creation of such settlements. The present paper gives a detailed account of the Brahmadeyams under the Pallavas throwing light on the nature, formation, functioning and impact of the same on the society.

Introduction:

The agrarian history of South India in early and medieval times has been a complex field of study due to insufficient materials and the vagueness of several terms occurring in the inscriptions. The lands were granted to temples, Brahmanas, the Buddhist and Jaina Pallis for religious merit or charitable object. Brahmadeya villages were unique centers of civilization, whose culture molded the peasantry around them.

Brahmadeyam is a familiar term in South India, more so in the Tamil country. It is generally taken to mean a gift of land or an entire village to a brahmana or a group of brahmanas. They were the principal landholders. Brahmadeyams flourished in the early and medieval days and survived for many centuries until its decline in the fifteenth – sixteenth centuries. They played a very vital role in the educational, religious and social life of the people. The creation of Brahmadeyams in South India to a large extent can be attributed to the gradual Aryanisation of the South in third and fourth centuries A.D. which in turn was the outcome of the large scale immigration of brahmanas to the South of the Vindhyas. This Aryanisation of the southern parts of India took place in rapid strides during the rule of the Pallavas who claimed themselves to be of a Brahmana Gotra and strict followers of the varnashrama code. The Pallava kings welcomed groups of brahmanas from North and settled them in places made into Brahmadeyams. Gradually other rulers like the Pandyas, Cheras and the imperial Cholas followed the same policy. Thus, the Pallava age can be taken as the embryonic stage for the creation of such settlements.

Political and Social Setup:

The Pallavas appear as a ruling dynasty in the south and south-east of the Satavahana empire immediately after the last Satavahana king Pulamayi IV. The Pallava Charters themselves seem to argue a connection with the Satavahana . Since the Pallavas issued their charters in Prakrit and of a style like that of the earlier Satavahana Charters, it can be said that the early Pallavas of the Prakrit Charters were officers of the Satavahana governors of the south-eastern frontier gradually extended their territory, civilizing it as they conquered it, introducing the arts of agriculture and ultimately made themselves masters of the locality and extending southwards when the Tamil powers weakened to take into their territory Kanchi and Tondaimandalam. The Pallavas were first a Telugu and not a Tamil power. The earliest inscriptions of the Pallavas were found in the districts of Bellary, Guntur and Nellore and all inscriptions of the dynasty till the rise of Simhavishnu were found in the districts of Guntur and Nellore. The period of the Kalabhra interregnum(dark age) according to the Velvikudi plates coincides with the period of Pallava history under the rule of the Pallavas of the Sanskrit Charters (the earlier ones were known as Pallavas of Prakrit Charters). The Kalabhras moved southwards towards the Pandya country after overturning the Tondaimandalam first, and Cholamandalam next. It is this disturbance, and the confusion caused by the

invasion of Samudragupta through some of these regions, that ultimately brought the subversion of the settled order and the introduction of the confusion, from out of which emerged the Pallavas of Kanchi of the Sanskrit Charters.

Many royal dynasties ruled the Deccan which were contemporary to the rule of the Pallavas of the Sanskrit Charters. They were the Kadambas, the Vakatakas, the Salankayanas, the Western Gangas, the Vishnukundins and the Chieftains of various places in the region around the mouth of the Krishna and the Godavari figuring in the Allahabad Pillar inscriptions.

Literature of the early period and epigraphs for the later period are the most useful sources of information on Tamil Social History. It was clearly an unequal society from early times to the end of the Chola period. The social stratifications were hierarchically arranged basing them on professions, later becoming rigid as birth-based castes. In the Purananuru there is a reference to the four castes: 'vetrumai terinda narpaalullum' which specifies the Indian traditional four-fold caste system. The indigenous social stratification among the early Tamils was based on physiographic distinctions, which led to the different occupation. The five-fold divisions Palai or sandy desert land; Kurunji, mountainous country; Mullai, forest tracts; Marudam, the lower river valley, fit for agricultural operation; and Neydal, the littoral region appear clearly in the Sangam works. Besides this horizontal classification, there was a vertical classification of the people of any one region into Mannar, Kings; Vallai, petty chiefs, noblemen; Vellalar, owner of fields; Vanigar, merchants, all of whom were called Uyarndor or Melor, the higher classes, and Vinaivalar and Adiyor, the working classes and personal servants. When the brahmanas settled in Southern India and ancient Tamil kings desiring to secure the benefit of the Yagas, accorded to the fire-priests a supreme position in the society. From the very beginning the kings of the Tamil country accommodated the Brahmins in comfortable and separate quarters, settled them in exclusively brahmanical villages called Brahmadeyams and endowed tax-free lands for their benefit.

Social Division in Tondaimandalam under the Pallavas:

The four-fold division of society into Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras prevalent in the whole of India in ancient times continued theoretically in a modified form during the Pallava rule in different parts of their kingdom. It was during the period of the Pallavas that the dominance of the brahmanas in Tamilaham became pronounced. The Kuram record of Paramesvaravarman-I describes Mahendravarman-II as one who was strictly maintaining the rules of Varnasramadharm. Further, according to the Kasakudi Plates of Nandivarman Pallavamalla, the Pallava rulers, in general, are said to have enforced the special rules of all castes and orders.

The inscriptions of the Pallava kings are full of references to brahmanas and Kshatriyas, but Vaisyas and Sudras as such do not find mention in their epigraphs. The other members of the society were composed of various persons such as traders, artisans, agricultural workers etc. Trading communities like Manigamattar, Nandadesis, and Ainnutruvar of the later period might have their origin during the period of the great Pallavas when overseas trade with Indo-China and Indonesia, Srilanka and Persian Gulf must have flourished. That there was considerable mobility among the members of the castes during the Pallava age is attested by the fact that the Vaishnava and Saiva Saints who flourished during this period belonged to all castes. The hymns of the Alvars contain reference to Pulayas and Chandalas as socially down-cast people given to eating cows' flesh.

The learned and holy brahmanas were called Bappabhattacharakas and Nalkurnarpaarpar. They were respected and patronized by the Pallava kings by settling them in separate villages, which were known as 'Agraharas'. Since they were endowed to brahmanas, they were also known as 'Brahmadeyams'. These Brahmadeya settlements were created in different parts of the Pallava Kingdom and were named after the kings or their feudatory chiefs. In Madras Museum Plates of queen Charudevi, there is reference to a group of brahmanas brought from Magadha and settled in the south. There are several grants bestowed on brahmanas by Pallava rulers. These brahmanas belonged to various gotras.

Brahmadeyams:

The Brahmadeya settlements were tax-free villages created by the ruling families and their subordinate authorities for the religious merit that it conferred on the founder. In such land grants, the donees enjoy certain special privileges which were not provided to other types of land grants. The Brahmadeya and the temple were evolved as institutional forces by the brahmana-kshatriya allies in power, and hence, were products of brahmanical ideology expressed through Vedic and Puranic religion.

The Brahmadeya villages are also variously known by other names- Agrahara, Agaram, Chaturvedimangalams and Brahmapuri, each having its own meaning and significance which ultimately goes to prove that they mainly contained brahmana population. While the dominant community in these villages were certainly brahmanas who held the largest number of shares in the land, other communities too lived alongside of the donees who were brahmanas.

Contents of a Land Grant-

The Yajnavalkya smriti lays down the official procedure relating to the issue of royal charters for the donation of lands to brahmanas. As the gift of land was generally irrevocable the donees had to preserve the charters recording such grant carefully so that it could be exhibited from generation to generation to prove their title over the donated area. The deeds of grants were originally incised on cloth or on copper plates. A charter normally has the donor, the donee, the officers, the fiscal dues, the donated land or village, occasions for grants, imprecation on violation of the grant, immunities and exemptions, the seal of the state, etc. The Vaishnava Dharmasastra lays down that the king when granting the land should give a document written upon a piece of cloth or a copper plate to the donee, and such document should include the name of the donor and his three immediate ancestors, the area of the land granted, an injunction against those revoking the grant together with the seal of the royal authority. Most land grants bear the name of the writer and the executor. Apart from the rulers, the grants to the brahmanas were also made by private persons.

Early References to Land Gifts:

Before the advent of the Pallavas, there are instances of the existence of brahmadeyas in South India. One of the earliest Brahmadeyas in South India was created by the Satavahana King, Vishnukada Chutukalananda Satakarni. Brahmana settlements were known in the Tamil region from the period of the Sangam anthologies. References to gifts of land to brahmanas point to the emergence of such settlements long before the period of Pallavas and Pandyas, when the institutionalization of the Brahmadeya by the issue of copper plates, charter recording special privileges and rights, took place. In the Tamil country the earliest reference to the establishment of a Brahmadeya was found in the Velvikudi plates of Pandya king Nedunjadaiyan.

Under the Pallavas:

During the early Pallava rule (3rd-4th century A.D) evidence to the establishment of Brahmadeya was available in copper plates. The Pallava copper plate inscription can be divided into three classes: 1. Records written entirely in Prakrit; 2. Records in Sanskrit; 3. Records in Sanskrit and Tamil. Of these, the records of the first class probably belong to the earliest period, while the earliest 'Grantha Tamil' records of the Pallavas have been assigned to the seventh century. The earliest charters of the Pallavas in both Prakrit and Sanskrit languages issued from the capital city Kanchipuram speak about the creation of Brahmadeyams in the Telugu region.

Generally the Pallavas are considered to have been of brahmin origin. The Pallavoil plates show that though the Pallavas were brahmins, they took to warfare and consequently came to be called Brahma Kshatriyas. This is confirmed by the Kasakudi plates. On the contrary, in the Nedungaraya plates of Prince Vishnugopa, it is stated in the opening line that the Pallavas attained brahminhood while they were originally Kshatriyas and that they became elevated to the position of Brahmins later. Having assumed

brahminhood, the Pallavas became great patrons of the brahmanas and settled them in villages created newly or granted lands for their maintenance. There are many epigraphical references to the migration of common people to and from the Andhra country. Among the common people who migrated, brahmanas were more in number. A few copper plate charters of the later Pallava kings refer to many brahmanas of the Andhra country as recipients of grants in recognition of their scholarship. For instance, Pullur grant, Tandantottam and Pattattalmangalam plates of Vijaya Nandivarman Pallava dated in 33rd, 58th and 61st regnal years respectively, mention the names of brahmanas belonging to the Andhra country. The Pullur copper plate charter records that the king granted four villages viz., Neli, pullur, Kudiyur of Kilvelanadu and Takkaru of Manalakulanadu in Palkunrak-kottam to 108 poor and good brahmanas as Brahmadeyam. According to this inscription, some of the donees originally belonged to some places in Andhra country.

In the beginning stage, the location of the brahmana villages in the bordering area give the clue that their establishment was more due to political consideration than anything else. The social position of the brahmanas, could guarantee the safety of the king from the attacks of neighbouring kings, and their presence in the border regions, would to certain extent safeguard the frontiers of the kingdom. Nandivarman-I created the brahmanical settlement at the entrance of Kanchipuram. Other Brahmadeya established during the early Pallava rule are mentioned in Mayidavolu, Babbepalli, Omgodu-I, Vesanta, mangalur, Vilavatti, Peddamudiyam and Pikira copper plates. The earliest Brahmadeya established in Tondaimandalam was by the Pallava king Nandivarman-I. The village Kanchivayil and 4 pieces of forest land in Adaiyatu Rastra was granted to a brahmana named Kulasarman and the village was renamed as Udayachandramangalam. The seventh regnal year inscription of Kampavarman (A.D.876) mentions a Brahmadeya with the name Simhavishnu Chaturvedimangalam.

The agrahara and chaturvedimangalams were generally named after the kings, queens and other distinguished persons whose benefaction caused the formation of these villages. For example, the village Paramesvaramangalam was named after the king Parameswaravarman-I who caused it. Similarly, the name Nayadhiramangalam was given to a newly formed Brahmadeya after the surname nayadhira of the Pallava king Nandivarman-II Pallavamalla who caused its formation.

Nature of the Brahmadeyams:

While creating a Brahmadeya village sometime the whole village or land was endowed to a single donee. The village thus received by an individual brahmana is called in the epigraphical records as Ekabhoga village. There are references of Ekabhoga holdings in the Guntur and Nellore districts of present Andhra State. Examples of land grants of this nature can be obtained from the Udayendiram plates and the Chuvviuru grant.

There are several cases where the land rights within a Brahmadeya village was distributed among a group of brahmanas. Depending upon their importance, more than one share was given to some persons and the majority were allotted one share only. The Panturu Charter of Pallava Simhavarman registers that the village as agrahara in the Nellore region in favour of about 170 brahmanas of 26 gotras. This is the earliest charter which records so many brahmanas as donees in the south, about 500 A.D.

Some of the Brahmadeya were created by clubbing a few neighbouring villages. In the case of Nayadhiramangalam, the 4 villages Nelli, Pullur, Kudiyur and Takkaru were clubbed together and made into a Brahmadeya. In the case of the creation of a new Brahmadeya during the rule of Aparajita, a village Pudur was clubbed with Melirunjeru agrahara. This suggests the King's prerogative in the creation or reformation of Brahmadeya villages.

Like the brahmanas, the temples also received grants both from the royal family and private owners for its maintenance. There are instances where some Brahmadeya were given, wherein it was specified that such gifts to the brahmanas should exclude the temple land already being enjoyed by the temples. The Chendaluru grant of Kumaravishnu-III while granting some hundreds of nivartanas in that village, specifically states that the land was excluded from the temple land.

A close examination of the copper-plate records of the Pallavas indicate that although numerous privileges and immunities were allowed by the rulers to be enjoyed by donees, complete proprietorship rights over the lands were not given to them. The Hirahadagalli copper plate inscription of Sivaskandavarman deny to the brahmana grantees, the rights of proprietorship and the right of sale, gift or transfer.

Pariharas Enjoyed by the Donees:

The Brahmadeyams were created by granting some privileges. The most important privilege was that the royal officers were prevented from entry into the lands of the Brahmadeya village. When a village was endowed and stated to be tax-free, it meant that the income which till the time of the grant replenished the treasury of the King ceased to go him but was diverted to the donee or religious institution specified in the grant.

A Parihara means a special grant or privilege or exemption from tax. Normally Pariharas are of 18 different kinds. The Mayidavolu grant of Sivaskandavarman mentions 5 Pariharas and the Hirahadagalli grant mentions all 18 Pariharas. Some of the immunities granted included exemption from the royal right of digging soil in the village ground, exemption from the police and the magistrate of the district, exemption from supplying bullocks for the carts used by royal officers while on tour, exemption from troops entering the village even during battle and causing disturbances, exemption from obligations of supplying boiled rice, water pots, cots and other supplies to the officers who visit the place etc. There were several other taxes from which the brahmanas were exempted after they were given Brahmadeya lands for their maintenance.

The Chitru copper plate lays down a list of such taxes. They were Nadatchi (tax for the administration of the nadu), Vattinachi (tax on agricultural produce), illamputchi (tax on toddy drawers), Idaiputchi (tax on cattle breeders), erupadu (tax on the use of tanks), Kulam (tax on a well), Kallanakkanam (tax on marriage), Kusakkanam (professional tax on potters), etc. But among the pariharas granted to the donees of the village of Nayadharamangalam [Pullur copper plates of Nandhivarman-II] there occurs the term Pannira-attai-kkarai-yirameyum, i.e., the non-payment of tax for a period of twelve years. Thus, it is presumed that a Brahmadeya village also had to pay some tax, though not from its inception, at least after some years.



Sabhas or Mahasabhas in the Pallava Kingdom:

For administrative convenience, it can be found in ancient times itself the practice of dividing the kingdom into smaller units. Under the Pallavas, the administrative units were the Kottams, Nadu and the Ur or the village. The village communities in South India belonged to a general pattern having a few common characteristics and serving some common purposes and ends. Among them prominent mention may be made of the Ur, Sabha and Nadu. The Sabhas or assemblies of the South Indian Inscriptions were generally to be found in Brahmadeya villages and were almost entirely constituted by brahmanas. The jurisdiction of this administrative group extended over a Chaturvedimangalam. The assembly was divided into a number of bodies which shared among themselves the various functions connected with the administration. All the members of it were highly learned in the scriptures, sciences, arts and laws of the land and were known as Perummakkal (great-men). The reign of Nandivarman Pallavamalla witnessed the activities of Variyams and ganas in large number of villages where executive work in several branches of rural administration was carried out by these committees. One of the earliest references to the village Variyams in the Pallava period is provided in the Uttaramerur inscriptions. Dated in the ninth regnal year of the Pallava king Dantivarman, it records a gift of gold for dredging the Vairamegha tank every month. The Sabha of Uttaramerur received the grant and stipulated that the Variyar at that time should utilize the proceeds of the endowment without spending it on any other object.

The inscriptions on the activities of the Mahasabha during the Pallava hegemony are found in not less than seventeen places, seven belonging to the Chingleput District, six to North Arcot and Chittoor, one to South Arcot, one to Tanjore and two to Trichinopoly; total 14 for Tondaimandalam and 3 for Cholamandalam. These records belong to the eighth and the ninth centuries. By the time of Kampavarman in the first quarter of the tenth century A.D more than one specialized committee commenced in the villages. The annual committee called Samvatsara variya Perumakkal figures in an inscription of the village of Ukkal. Village Sabhas were functioning in the Pallava period in Uttaramerur, Tiruviprambedu, Kuram, Manali, Perunguli, Avaninarayana Chaturvedimangalam, Venkunram, anbil, Vidavidugu Charurvedimangalam, Siyapuram, Muttai, Pulavanur, Tengangudi, adambakkam, Ukkal, Tiruttani, Kalattur, Kilpudur, Tirupparaiturai, Aruvagur, Paiyanur and Naranakka Chaturvedimangalam. The Pallavas prepared the golden age of the Mahasabha under the Cholas.

Socio- Economic and Religious Impact:

The creation of brahmana villages had a great impact on and ushered a change in already existing culture of the south especially in the Tamil country. These changes could clearly be seen in the social, religious and economic life of the villages.

The immigration of brahmanas into the Tamil country changed the pre-Pallavan society. They brought along with them the vedic culture and thus as a result the Varnasrama form of society came into existence. The brahmanas occupied the first place in the Vedic social hierarchy dominated by the concept of varna. The agrahara formed the nucleus of agricultural expansion which brought the aboriginals of the neighbouring forest and hill tracts into closer contact with the centre of civilized life, and gradually absorbed them into different strata of the society. Some of the brahmanas noticed in inscriptions of the Pallava period sound more like aboriginal and non-sanskritic. Ganamadija of the Maidavolu record and Vilasarman of the Pikira record are some of such names.

Another impact seen was in the management of village affairs. The Brahmadeyas or Agraharas had as their administrative body the Sabhas or Mahasabhas whose members were exclusively the brahmanas. They were the predominant community holding the largest number of shares in the village land and possessed management rights.

New integrating forces like Brahmadeya and temple, led to the extension of agricultural activities and a more intensive organization of production geared to support large population in the Brahmadeyas and temple-centers. Two important spheres in which the Brahmadeya may be seen as harbingers of advanced

farming methods were the technology of irrigation and the seasonal regulation of the cultivation process. With each one off the Brahmadeya settlements an irrigation system was invariably established, either in the form of tanks , canals or wells in the Pallava region. Elaborate arrangements for the upkeep were made by the Sabhas. The brahmanas were the organizers and managers of production in the brahmadeya settlements.

The Brahmadeyas developed into centers of Vedic scholarship and traditional culture. They were considered as centers of higher education and served as abodes of learned scholars and professors. Among the brahmanas there were dvivedis, trivedis and chaturvedis. One of the important educational institutions during the Pallava rule was the Ghatika of Kanchipuram. The earliest reference to this is made in the Talagunda pillar inscription of Kakusattavarman, the Kadamba king. That the Ghatika of Kanchipuram was composed of learned brahmanas is confirmed by a reference in the Kasakudi plates.

The Bahur Sanskrit College existed as a well-established institution of higher Sanskrit lore before the gift of three villages as educational endowment to it was made during the eighth regnal year of Nripatungavarman.

When the Pallavas came to power it was seen that the major part of India was under the sway of the heterodox religions namely, Buddhism and Jainism. As a result of the spread of the Vedic culture, the hold of these heterodox religions weakened in the south and there started a revivalist movement which reasserted the hold of Brahmanism. The success of the movement was due to the royal patronage .This movement which started during the time of the Pallavas continued well into the Chola rule too. The Brahmadeyas and Agraharas thus became strongholds of religious orthodoxy and radiating centers of Sanskrit learning.

Conclusion:

The Pallavas were politically taken over by the Cholas in the ninth –tenth century A.D. Even during the Chola period, the society was divided into castes based on the Varnasramadharma. The Chola rulers too, like the earlier rulers patronized brahmanas. The Cholas too ,encouraged land grants to the brahmanas. During the Cholas, the creation of Brahmadeya villages gained impetus and many such villages sprang up. Though this was the case in the early Chola rule, by the time of the late Chola rule, Brahmadeya started losing its importance. By this period there emerged what was known as Chittirameli Periyanaadu. When granting Brahmadeyas, some misunderstanding and hindrance were evoked here and there because the land holders were the losers of their hereditary rights on fertile land by the forcible orders of the kings. This trend caused for the integration of Nattars beyond their Nadu limit for some joint action to protect their interests and this finally resulted in the emergence of Chittirameli Periyanaadu. It also worked to maintain mutual relationship and social harmony between Brahmin Sabhas and Nattars. Thus, at the end of the Chola period the hierarchy in the social stratum was in turmoil. The high position enjoyed by the Brahmins was under fire. The numerous village communities and their organization which flourished in south India from about 700 to 1400 A.D. showed signs of decay and disruption in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and finally disappeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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