

BRAHMADEYA GLEANED FROM TEMPLE INCERPTIONS**Ms. G. Chitra**

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Abstract

The *brahmadeya*, a word known under several variants, literally means “gift to Brahmins.” The gift was broadcast by a ruler, the more so when the donors enjoyed the share normally imparted to the King. Along with the land, privileges namely, on water resources and exemptions of taxes and other duties were also conferred to the beneficiaries. The gift was often made at the request of a local plutocrat, who also gave parts of his share of crops. The grant was regularly recorded and inscribed on open rock, walls of the temples, pillars and copper plate. Most typically, this type of gift consisted of land, originally as rights to a share in the crops of the donated land and, as the institution developed, in administrative rights over the land endowment. This paper portrays *Brahmadeya*, which designates a grant to one or several Brahmin householders, liturgical and scriptural experts, that is to say members of this settlement.

Key words: *devadana, chaturvedimangalam, agrahara, sabhaiyar and sabha***Introduction**

In Tamil Country, such lands came to be chosen by place names ending with the term *chaturvediman'galam*, “auspicious place for experts in the four Vedas,” that is, the Brahmins settlers, who were responsible for the diffusion and interpretation of the four Vedas and the performance of liturgies derived from them. The institution of a *brahmadeya* could lead to the relocation of the donors near the donated land. The *brahmadeya* can be analogized with the *devadana*, “gift to God,” somewhat like, except that the recipient was not a Brahmin or Brahmins, but the God of a specific temple.

They were also a political act, as, by agreeing to the request of a local magnate, the King made him an ally or complete his loyalty. Various reasons motivated such gifts. They were an act of piety, behind the socio cosmic order (*dharma*) and generating religious merit (*pun. ya*) for the donor. Usually, the suffix *chaturvedimangalam* was led by the name of the donor King who issued the grant. Furthermore, such land grants paid to the agricultural development of the kingdom. Grants, such as *brahmadeyas* and *devadaanas* both attested with *devada-na* becoming more common have been considered by historians as one of the chief factors. As royal prerogatives and administrative power were typically moved the recipients, leading to a supposed segmentation of state power. Such local assemblies have gone numerous inscriptions on temple walls recording their administrative decisions concerning their lands.

In Tamil Country, as the institution developed and the rights conferred expanded, the donor organized themselves in a local corporate body, an assembly of Brahmins *sabha*, managing the locality's estates. This view, however, has been contested. *Brahmadeya* villages were villages granted to Brahmins and inhabited entirely by Brahmins. *Brahmadeya* often it was donated by

kindred names, mangalam, agaram, brahmapuram, agrahara, agrabrahmadeya, brahmadeyam and brahmamangalam.

Chaturvedimangalam

In the early medieval period Kings and royal people donated lot of land to the Brahmins. It was also called as Chaturvedimangalam, as the term suggests it was inhabited by Brahmins who professed the four Vedas. The Brahmin community which was a landlord body over a class of tenants collected certain shares of the yield. The noteworthy features of the Brahmin Settlements were it was a settlement of a non-cultivating caste; it was in general a settlement of a landlord class placed over a body of cultivating tenants; and there were some elements of common ownership of land in the community. It is not opposed that a Brahmin village included only those who belonged to the community of Brahmins; on the other hand we have clear evidence to show that it quartered other classes as well-potters, black smiths, goldsmiths, washer men and village servants also lived there, though in separate quarters close to the Brahmin quarter of the village.

The Brahmadeya villages were independent administrative units in the segmentary level of the state. Brahmadeya settlements were shaped by the Kings. The Brahmadeya villages were not created by the Kings, but evolved out of the agricultural villages in a Nadu. They were enjoying socio-religious, economic, educational, political, administrative and judicial powers. Socially, they were the centers of learning of Vedic, Brahmanic, Itihasic and Puranic commentaries. In recognition of their services to the state and society they were fixed brahmadeyas for their maintenance. They were the settlements meant for the Brahmanas, who as repositories of wisdom' represented the intellectual serenity of the day. They, as 'keepers of conscience', functioned as a cohesive force of the state and society in one way or the other.

During the Chola period temples were an important social institution. They employed an important place in the life of the people-whether political or social; economic or cultural. The temples had different secular functions both in their internal and external activities. These were primarily attentive round land and hence the importance of temples depended largely on land grants. Brahmadeyas were the major center of temple activities of the Colas. The brahmadeyas were not exclusively a brahman settlement. The only social group, which was explicitly forbidden residence in a brahmadeya was the Ilava. There were two types of land grants given to the temples brahmadeyas and *devadana*. Brahmadeya means gift to brahmins specifically, a grant of village income, and its management to brahmins and *devadana* means gift to Gods; specifically, the endowment of income from land or a village to a temple.

However, in respect of a Brahman locality power was associated with land control. This appears to be a unique feature of South Indian society. Nowhere in the Indian subcontinent had such powerful Brahman village, such as brahmadeyas, existed as they did in the Coromandel and in many parts of the contiguous tableland during the period. Similarly nowhere in the Indian subcontinent there were so many vedic temples with substantial control over endowed villages as *devadana*, in South India, South Indian temples of the medieval period had peculiar functions as compared to the temples in the north. It was through temples that the Brahman temple functionaries used to exercise their ritualistic authority. There are many inscriptions dealing with brahmadeya

villages.

Quite

a few refer to the locality with its numerous settlements of non- Brahman cultivators.

The Brahmadeya Sabha

As the *Brahmadeya sabha* was a Brahmin assembly, its membership was restricted to Brahmins only. Each *brahmadeya* village had a *sabha* of its own. Next to the *ur*, the *sabhas* enjoyed a pre-eminent place in the hierarchy of local administration. It was an assembly of the *brahmadeya* or Brahmin village. The administration of that particular village was carried out by the particular *Brahmadeya sabha*. It's functioned as an administrative body and also as a governmental institution of the village⁶. The members of the *Brahmadeya sabha* were commonly known as *sabhaiyar*.

A *sabha* had various committees or *variyaams* to carry out its functions. The Uttiramerur inscription⁷ of Parantaka I Chola elaborates the rules and regulations observed in the composition of the *mahasabha* and the constitution of its various committees. It stipulates the qualifications required for its members. It states that persons, who did not possess certain required qualifications were not entrusted with any work in the *variyaams*. The learned Brahmins, who possessed certain area of land alone were eligible to become the elected members of the *sabha* and its committees. Only such Brahmins got membership and voting power in the *sabhas* and its sub-committees.⁸ Membership in the *sabha* varied from place to place and time to time⁹. The *sabha* was summoned by the beating of a drum. Usually, its meetings were held in the temples¹⁰. As an assembly of the Brahmin village, the *sabha* had various functions to discharge. Looking after the temples and their affairs was the pre occupation of the *sabha*. All royal grants and orders were addressed to the *sabha*. It is evident from a record¹¹ of A.D. 1242 of Maravarman Sundara Pandya that the oral order of the King sanctioning the grant of lands as tax-free *devadanas* to the temple was addressed to the *sabha*. The accountant of the *sabha*, known as the *sabha kanakku* assisted in all of its deliberations and used to sign in the transactions¹².

Powers and functions of Brahmadeya Sabhas

The *sabhas* enjoyed unlimited powers with regard to the day-to-day life of the villages and the temple administration. One such sphere of its influence was the management of charitable endowments of the temples, which were entrusted to the respective *sabhas* of the villages. The *sabha* was either directly in charge of them or left under its supervision. Endowments were left under the safe custody of the *sabha*. another record¹³ of the fifteenth regnal year of Parantaka I chola registers the gift of 96 sheep, which was left under the custody of the *sabha* of Thiruvamattur for conducting certain services in the temples, the gift of gold was left under the care of the *sabha*. Another record¹⁴ of the 41st regnal year of Parantaka I Chola found at Thiruvamattur informs a donation of 20 *kajanju of gold* by Chilaiyan Vadugan and Chettangai to the *sabha* of Thiruvamattur for lamps to be burnt in this temple. The *sabha* received the charity and accepted to measure out the stipulated quantity of ghee.

Sheep gifted to the temples for burning lamps were also left under the custody of the *sabha*¹⁵. Those, who protected the charity were instructed to follow the stipulated conditions strictly. Obstruction to charity was severely dealt with. Thus, the *sabha* played a unique role in the administration of temples. Thus, it is the duty of the *sabha* to keep the amount as a permanent investment, so that the capital remained intact always. The interest accruing from the capital amount alone could be diverted for various offerings.

Wide Range of Function of The Bodies

The local bodies paid special attention to temple administration. Regarding the issues of temple administration, the Kings issued orders to these bodies. Local bodies administrated local affairs. They discharged a wide range of administration functions. They included regulation, supervision and cultivation of lands, management of irrigation works, collections remission of taxes, maintained law and order render, justice,⁵ conduct trade, Supervise weight and measures and management of charities and temples . The inscriptions of this temple bear evidence to the involvement of these local bodies in the administration of this temple.

Powers and Functions of Local Bodies

They were responsible to the people of the village in dealing with anything affecting them. Ultimately, they were responsible to the King also. In the temple administration, the local bodies of the *urar* enjoyed certain powers, performed certain functions and had certain responsibilities too. They had a wide range of functions with regard to lands, their cultivation, disposal, sale and purchase, levy and collection of taxes and even the remission of dues. Though their influence in temple administration was unlimited. They had also to give certain undertakings, which gave some restrictions on their enjoyment of various powers. They were held responsible for some of the difficulties in the temple affairs.

The concluding part reveals that the gift was broadcast by a ruler, the more so when the donors enjoyed the share normally imparted to the King. Along with the land, privileges namely, on water resources and exemptions of taxes and other duties were also conferred to the beneficiaries. The institution of a *brahmadeya* could lead to the relocation of the donors near the donated land. As royal prerogatives and administrative power were typically moved the recipients, leading to a supposed segmentation of state power. Brahmadeya villages were villages granted to Brahmins and inhabited entirely by Brahmins. Brahmadeya often it was donated by kindred names, mangalam, agaram, brahmapuram, agrahara, agrabrahmadeya, brahmesam and brahmamangalam. The Brahmadeya villages were independent administrative units in the segmentary level of the state. Brahmadeya settlements were shaped by the Kings. They were enjoying socio-religious, economic, educational, political, administrative and judicial powers. Brahmadeyas were the major centre of temple activities of the Colas. The administration of that particular village was carried out by the particular *Brahmadeya sabha*. It's functioned as an administrative body and also as a governmental institution of the village⁶. The members of the

Brahmadeya sabha were commonly known as *sabhaiyar*. They had a wide range of functions with regard to lands, their cultivation, disposal, sale and purchase, levy and collection of taxes and even the remission of dues.

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