

Historical Perspective of Social Responsibility and Agricultural Guilds

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ABSTRACT

The Corporate Social Responsibility has become a worldwide concept whereby organizations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers, employees, shareholders, communities and the environment in all aspects of their operations. The concept of helping the poor and disadvantaged was cited in much of the ancient literature. The agricultural guild came to the scene on account of the gradual rise in cultivation as evidenced from a number of epigraphs. Agriculturists formed an important class of citizens among the society. South India was a predominant agricultural land from very early times. The organization is represented by its symbol *meli* or *meti*. The term *meti* of the Kannada inscriptions of 9th century from Dharwad region has been taken stand for the agriculturists who represent the organization. Another passage *jiyatam-jagatam-ett-palanam* conveys the idea that this organizations gives protection to the entire world and for the growth of the country. The term CSR was used in the early 1970s although it was seldom abbreviated. By late 1990s, the three concept was fully recognized; people and institutions across all sections of society started supporting it. This paper discuss about the CSR activities performed by various organizations from the 11th century onwards in South India.

KEYWORDS: Corporate Social Responsibility, Agricultural Guilds, Historical perspective of Social Responsibility.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Today CSR initiatives are taken for the welfare of the socially and economically disadvantaged communities living in and around its areas of operation, including the mines and collieries serving the plant. Over the years, its initiatives have encompassed provision of healthcare services, drinking water, rain water harvesting, tribal development, relief and rehabilitation endeavours, income and employment generation, women's health and education, awareness programmes on the ill-effects of drugs, alcohol, and patronage to sports and cultural activities and others. But in the ancient days, the corporate were not existed but their functions were carried out by the agriculturalist and the traders. The social activities were carried out by donating the agricultural produces, like areca nut, betel nut, oil, and a portion of the tax collected by the kings to the temple. The intension of donating to the temple was that in the ancient period the temples were not only meant as place of worship but also considered as the place for the deserted citizens. In the temple *mandapa* the trade dealings were made. Even the traders had contributed for the social cause in various forms. This paper will highlight the concept of social responsibility in the ancient days and the role of agricultural guilds.

II. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Today, Corporate Social Responsibility has become a worldwide concept whereby organisations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers, employees, shareholders, communities and the environment in all aspects of their operations. It is one of the most important global issues with serious challenges and implications on almost all sectors. Surging economies, including India, are coping with issues related to poverty, child rights, community welfare etc and are a hotbed for an innovative CSR Scenario which is still shaping up.

The concept of CSR in India is not new, the term may be. The process though acclaimed recently, has been followed since ancient times albeit informally. Philosophers like Kautilya from India and pre-Christian eras philosophers in the West preached and promoted ethical principles while doing business. The concept of helping the poor and disadvantaged was cited in much of the ancient literature. The idea was also supported by

several religions where it has been intertwined with religious laws. "Zakaat", followed by Muslims, is donation from one's earnings which is specifically given to the poor and disadvantaged. Similarly Hindus follow the principle of "Dharmada" and Sikhs the "Daashaant".

Practices of CSR dates back to the ancient Greece (Eberstadt, 1977). A similar development on CSR took place on the Indian subcontinent structured from the Vedic philosophy (Pandey and Tripathi, 2002). The giving tradition among practicing Hindus is actually immensely diverse and rich. It has also made very effective use of donor psychology and has built up a logical structure (Sanjay Agarwal, 2010).

III. AGRICULTURAL GUILDS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In the ancient times, agricultural organizations played a vital role for the economic growth. The agricultural organizations have a long history in the economy of South India. This witnessed the vicissitude of different reign periods South of Deccan particularly in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. We know that a number of mercantile organisations wielded their influence to augment the economic growth of this part of the Peninsula. The agricultural guild came to the scene on account of the gradual rise in cultivation as evidenced from a number of epigraphs. Agriculturists formed an important class of citizens among the society. South India was a predominantly agricultural land from very early times. The life of the people was centred around agricultural activities.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Inscriptions in Kannada, Telugu and Tamil not only speak of such lands but also of the fallow lands that were brought under cultivation. Along with the process of land deforestation and land cultivation, a greater extent of area in several regions of Tamil Nadu were brought under cultivation. We have instances to show that from the period of Chola Parantak I, if not earlier in Tamil country, lands affected by floods and breaches in the embankment of Kaveri river were reclaimed for cultivation. Later more lands that were brought under cultivation by the tenants of the soil or agriculturists enhanced the status of the society. The agriculturists felt the need of the hour to promote production or output of the agricultural produces. With the advancement of the growth of agricultural activities, the agriculturists organized a body which was referred as Chittirameli/organization. The organization is represented by its symbol meli or meti. The term meti of the Kannada inscriptions of 9th century from Dharwar region has been taken to stand for the agriculturists who represent the organization. It may be said that this word along with numerical division stand for 'a guild'. The numerical reminds us of the different mercantile guilds like the Tisaiy-yirattu-ainnurruvar, Ayyavoli-500 which were powerful organizations in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka respectively. References to the organization of cultivators (okkalu) along with numerical distinctions occur in the inscriptions of Karnataka. An inscription of Aluvarasa II, from Udiyavara is not dated but palaeo-graphically belongs to the middle of 8th century and records some grant to the god Sambukalladevi by a number of donors, including the seventy-tenants of Udiyapura (Udiyapurada-nakarad-elpatti-okkalu).

4.1 Vijayaditya Alupendra records

Another inscriptions from this place belonging to Vijayaditya Alupendra records that during Arakella's headmanship of the district, the king confirmed the gift of one half of the tolls levied in the cities of Pombulcha and Udiyapura to six persons who were agricultural tenants (okkalu). The numerical distinction in association with agriculturists represents the organization. Dr. Ramesh, drew the authors' attention to the existence of a village name Nappokkalu near Appangala in Coorg District of Karnataka. In Kodagu and Tulu languages, it is called Nalpatokkalu and Nalvatokkalu respectively. Therefore, it may be suggested that the agricultural organization had its beginning and even to a certain extent taken shape as early as the middle of eighth century in Karnataka during the time of Aluvrasa II. The second record discussed above, though not accompanied by numeral, yet indicate the trend of agricultural activity and in a limited context the members figuring therein as representatives of the guild. The revenue amount conferred by no less than the ruler himself on the individuals who appear to stand for a guild of agricultural tenants illustrates the privileged status enjoyed by them in the society. One more instance from Karnataka that relates to the executive authority vested on the agricultural organization can be witnessed from Sudi inscription during the reign period of Chalukya Somesvara I in 1050 AD. The ministers granted to various others including the eighty agriculturists (enbatt = okkalu), the renewal of the corporate constitutions. Almost nearer to this date, a record from Gubbur in Devarding taluk in Raichur District dated in the 8th regnal year (1082-83 AD) of Vikramaditya VI refers to the grant of the income from the levy of one hana on every kunteya-meli by the meli-sasiravaru to the deity Mahalinga Melesvara installed by them. The deity named Melesvara and the revenue term kunteya-meli are quite interesting. Thus guild has set its foot first in Karnataka even before the formation of Chittirameli in Tamil Nadu.

4.2 The Chittirameli

The Chittirameli, representing the agriculturist organisation appear in the Tamil inscriptions from about the middle of 11th century only. It had its own prasasti in Sanskrit and meykirtti in Tamil. This was short during the reign period of Rajadra II and grew in length in course of time during the subsequent centuries. A record of this king from Tamraipakkam in North Arcot District of Tamil Nadu gives the meykirtti of this organization. The characteristic prasasti of this organization available so far as similar in their version in the three places namely, Tirukkoyilur, Tittagudi and Piranmalai. The members of this guild are described as the children of the earth depending for their livelihood in cow's milk; as bent upon justice for the welfare of the entire universe. Another passage *jiyatam-jagatam-ett-palanam* conveys the idea that this organization gives protection to the entire world and for the growth of the country (rashtra). From the Tamil portion of the same record we come to know that the members had sound knowledge of fine Tamil and Sanskrit and became proficient in law (*niti*). As sons of the goddess Lakshmi they wore a garland of never fading fragrant flowers, shed light in all directions and protected the good with sweet words and warned off the wicked with harsh words. Further they were eulogized as the elements like vatarasan, the wind-god and Varuna, the god of the waters, god of Indra and the damsels (magalir) of the quarters and are stated to be at the service of this body. The activities of the guild brought riches due to the harvest of crops for the growth of charity and decay of sins. The symbol of royalty is indicated by their royal sculpture leading them.

Chittirameli is referred to as their deity. The evergreen pure gold served as their fence (*veli*). They convened the body and conducted their deliberations (*samaya*) with patience and sympathy. Not only they became fervent upholders of justice but also attained proficiency in the three Tamils, viz., *iyal* (literature), *isai* (music) and *natakam* (drama) which formed a garland (*malai*) to them. The Chittirameli of the inscriptions from Tamil country as stated earlier stands 'a picturesque plough'. The suffix 'Periyannadu' is always found mentioned with Chittirameli in their Tamil meykirtti. It bore the name of Chittirameli-periyannadu apparently from the plough-share which they worshipped and which also adopted by them as their standard. Both seems to indicate the agricultural organization in a wider sense of the term. The members of this body are referred to as Periyannattar. The Periyannadu is a bigger agricultural organization which began to play a dominant role and enjoyed the status of the sabhai or the assembly the Periyannadu either alone or along with Tisai-Ayirattainnuruvar also use to meet in the temple – mandapas and conduct their deliberations. They wielded influence in the sphere of society, law, temple administration and economic developments. Also they coordinated with other organizations such as *ainnuruvar*– *peruniraviya*, *munai-virarodiyar*, *tisaiyayirattainnuruvar*, etc., in a closed circuit but nevertheless with distinction on a broader level as envisaged in the Piranmalai and Sankarperiyapalayam epigraphs. The growing trend in the field of economic activities necessitated the communion of these bodies, keeping in view of the agricultural productivity and distribution.

Two inscriptions of Rajendra II dated in the 5th (1057 A.D) and 10th regnal years (1062 A. D) respectively from Tamaraipakkam and Tirumalai in North Arcot District refer to Chittirameli-perukkalar. They rendered justice by settling a dispute between the two brothers resulting in the death of the elder. The younger in expiation of the mistake committed by him in killing of the elder, was asked to provide for half a lamp to the deity Agnisvaram-udaiyar of Tamaraipakkam.

The other record from the same place beginning with the prasasti, seems to register the assignment, made by the body called chittirameli-perukkalar, as agreed to by the nadu, of the shares of the produce of *pisanak-kadamai* and *krk-kadamai* from both the crops from the lands under *devadana* and *pallichchandam* in the village. Though the composition of the body called perukkalar is not clear, it is interesting to note the consent of the nadu was obtained regarding the assignment of the produce. This record seems to afford one of the early references to the important organisation called chittirameli. The relationship of the nadu with chittirameli which was called *periya-nadu* is defined in an inscription from Nellore. The expression used in the two records is *perukkalar* meaning 'bigger court of justice'. As fully qualified in the *manu-nul* and *nanmarai* and extolled as *uttamanitiyar* – *perun-kirtti*, they have delivered judgement for social security and prosperity. There is every reason to believe that a member of their family should have been a representative of this body. Though the king was a powerful law giver, the guild must have acted in the interest of the society. The righteous sculpture is a symbol of their royalty is well-neigh attested to by the active role of this organisation in matters of judiciary.

The power enjoyed by them in matters relating to the land transactions of the temple are forthcoming from the inscriptional evidences available in the areas of their influence and control of agricultural activities from Andhra, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. It is already seen in the Tamaraipakkam inscription about the decisions taken by Chittirameli-perukkalar for the status quo to be maintained in respect of the *devadana* and *pallichchandam* lands of the village as agreed to by the nadu. Also the inscriptions from Kodumurti Medikurti in Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh give an idea about the powers of this body. The *sthanapati vyapakadeva* undertook the grant of the village from the minister of the Yadava king Simhana dated saka 1149 (1227 AD) as he looked after the affairs of the temples Chittirameli *Llitesvara-deva*. The Anbil record 16 of

Rajaraja II dated in his 19th regnal year (1164-65 A.D.) refers to the involvement of this body in the restoration of a previous grant made over to Amudamolipperumpalli, a jaina temple at Tiruvadaikkudi in Poyginadu. During the succeeding period of Rajadhiraja II dated in his 4th year (1167 A.D.) this guild which had come in active cooperation with Tisaiy-Ayirattu-innuruvar institutes the image of Bhudevi and granted the levies to the Vishnu temple at Tittaikudi.

4.4 The foundation of Kodandarama-chaturvedimangalam

The foundation of Kodandarama-chaturvedimangalam after the name of the king is referred to in a record from Vengur in South Arcot District registers the same of land to the Brahmana colonizing that settlement by the Bhumiputtir alias Nattamakal belonging to the Vellala community as can be seen from the prasasti normally seen as preamble in some of their records, especially the one from Tirukkoyilur. It may be remarked that the Pandya king Vira-Pandya who also bore this surname was a patron of this agricultural community. From the present inscriptions it looks as if the community had a corporate existence, and acted in that capacity in selling the lands to the Bhattas of the agaram, and in setting it apart for the maintenance of the Pugalalaiyan alias Bhumiputtiran-tirumandapam in the same village. This body also bore the name of Chittirameli-periyannattar, apparently account of the plough-share which they worshipped and adopted as their standard.

The inscriptions referring to the transactions of the guilds mention the involvement of persons belonging to bhattas, vellalas, setti, etc. The ownership of lands were in the hands of all the four castes (chaturvarna) thus signifying the privileged position enjoyed by the guild. This goes against the theory that the tillers of the soil alone were the members of the guild.

The agricultural guild besides the agricultural activities also extended their sphere of activity into the field of trade and commerce. A record from Mukundanur (Sankarperiyapalaiyam in Perunturai taluk of Periyar District speaks of the different organizations that have come together to coordinate their activities. The group of bodies involved with an idea to promote the agricultural and commercial prosperity included chittirameli-periyannattar, members of mada-vidi-padinerttup-pattnam, kadigai-tavalam and others. The word kadigai-tavalam meaning ghatika-sthana wherein the studies included veda, dharma, etc. Dr. Stein interpreted this term as an urban place. Inscriptions show that they not only served as vedic or educational institutions but also as the centre of deference subjects. Another interesting expression is peru-niraviyar which could be taken to mean a body concerned with the regulation of irrigational facilities to the cultivatable lands. We hear of a variyam (board) looking after the functions of maintaining lakes from the records of the Cholas, etc. like the Uttarmallur inscriptions. The mukundanur record refers to the taxes levied on different objects, which were made over to a temple of kurakkutali.

Dr. Stein explains that the class of supra-local authorities was separated from their peasant bases and origins as seen in the collaboration of the periyannattar with trade and artisan groups. It is one of the distinctive characteristics of this transitional period of the 12th-13th centuries that groups which before had no separate corporate existence now enjoyed increasingly independent identification, the powerful agricultural chittirameli-periyannattar, the itinerant, mercantile tisai-ayirattu-ainnuruvar or nanadesi, artisans (rathakaras) or kammalar, etc. The relationship between Chittirameli and merchant guild was mainly economy based unlike political-power based as suggested by Hall and independent of each other as construed by Dr. Stein.

The periyannattar played an intermediary role between the estate and the local assembly. They enjoyed higher status as it embraced several associated bodies. The agricultural guild helped the peasant community to trade their products and supported poor people in the society. Thus the organization of the agricultural guild was a powerful body which built up its own traditions and wide network of activities. It grew into prominence after about the 12th-13th centuries to serve the agricultural class and other communities.

V. GLOBAL CONTEXT

In the global context, the recent history goes back to the seventeenth century when in 1790s, England witnessed the first large scale consumer boycott over the issue of slave harvested sugar which finally forced importer to have free-labour sourcing. In India, in the pre independence era, the businesses which pioneered industrialisation along with fighting for independence also followed the idea. They put the idea into action by setting up charitable foundations, educational and healthcare institutions, and trusts for community development. The donations either monetary or otherwise were sporadic activities of charity or philanthropy that were taken out of personal savings which neither belonged to the shareholders nor did it constitute an integral part of business. The term CSR itself came in to common use in the early 1970s although it was seldom abbreviated. By late 1990s, the concept was fully recognised; people and institutions across all sections of society started supporting it. This can be corroborated by the fact that while in 1977 less than half of the Fortune 500 firms even mentioned CSR in their annual reports, by the end of 1990, approximately 90 percent Fortune 500

firms embraced CSR as an essential element in their organisational goals, and actively promoted their CSR activities in annual reports (Boli and Hartsuiker, 2001).

VI. CONCLUSION

A lack of understanding, inadequately trained personnel, non availability of authentic data and specific information on the kinds of CSR activities, coverage, policy etc. further adds to the reach and effectiveness of CSR programmes. But the situation is changing CSR is coming out of the purview of 'doing social good' and is fast becoming a 'business necessity'. The 'business case' for CSR is gaining ground and corporate houses are realizing that 'what is good for workers - their community, health, and environment is also good for the business'. ICSR was optional in the beginning and made mandatory later, but if each and every company perceive the significance of their social responsibilities, have concern for people and planet profit would follow automatically.

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