

Marathas of Thanjavur and Land Grants

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Abstract: *The present study represents cultural life of Tamilnadu in the Cauvery belt. The area of study is confined to Thanjavur which is inclusive of Kumbakonam and Nagapattinam. In this region, the river Cauvery flows and branches into numerous tributaries. Thanjavur is statistically described to be biform the richest and most fertile in southern India. The regions witness the different cultures other than native. This cultural diversity has enriched the life and thought of the people and the age produced philosophers, saints, literary personalities and artists. The Maratah rulers lavishly endowed land grants. Because of this Thanjavur and surroundings were buzzing with activity in many fields of learning.*

I. Introduction

The kingdom of Thanjavur is situated in Southern India and has always been reputed for the wisdom and good Government of its sovereigns, the fertility of its soil, the industrious and pacific disposition of its inhabitants, the vastness of its commerce and the beauty of its scenery.¹

The century following the death of emperor Aurangzeb was a period of stagnation and wretchedness in India. The shifting political situation the endless internal conflicts, the Anglo French rivalries and their repercussions all contributed to the general demoralization.

There was a steady growth and development in Sanskrit. Maratha rulers played a decisive role in spreading Sanskrit language. Rulers of South especially Nayaks and Marathas were great scholars and became the great patrons of great scholars. They left innumerable valuable works during that time. Thus in Thanjavur, a rich mixture of regional cultures and languages thrived under Hindu rulers who themselves were connoisseurs of literature, Bhaktas and sometimes poets and composers. The Maratha rulers were zealous custodian of Hindu art and cultures. For nearly three centuries in spite of occasional disturbances to the peace of the country, these rulers provided a congenial climate for more than one hundred and twenty five scholars great or otherwise to pourforth their literary output,² there was a steady growth and development in Sanskrit. Maratha rulers played a decisive role in spreading Sanskrit language.

Endowments

In this I want to highlight the village grants, land grants granted by the rulers of Thanjavur. Lands given gratis and free of tax is called Sarvamanyam.³

Achyutappa Nayaka of Thanjavur, a lover of fine arts gave away free gifts of lands and villages to the Telugu families of scholars, composers and musician who had taken shelter in the Cauvery delta after the fall of Vijayanagar empire. One such village Melatur was consequently renamed Achyutarayapuram and came to be a centre of dance drama and Bhagavata mela.⁴

Bhagavadamela music dance drama was in a flourishing condition in Thanjavur. For the growth of this art many kings gave land grants. Bhagavadamela is being conducted even today in Melatur, Saliangalam, Ammapettai, Utthukkadu . One of the Bhagavdamela artists was Narayana Theertha Swamigal. His disciple was Thyagaraja Swamigal he has written Nawka Charithzam and Brahalatha Baktavijayam.

Deepambal was the Queen of the first Thanjavur Maratha ruler Ekoji. She was known for her intelligence and goodness of character. She has donated a village near Thirukkotikkaval as sarvamanya to Brahmin scholars for vedic studies, that village is renamed as Deepambalpuram.⁵ This shows her personal interest in intellectual pursuits.

Sahaji II is called as 'Abhinava Bhoja'⁶ – He along with his brothers Serfoji and Tukoji was responsible for the growth of literature. Sahaji himself was a great scholar in Sanskrit, Telugu and Marathi. He has written a number of works. Sahaji was loved and appreciated by his scholars. He occupies a prominent place because of his scholarliness and patronage extended to the scholars.

Promotion of scholarship by Sahaji lies in land grants to scholars. The central event of this active interest that Sahaji took in the promotion of learning was his gift in 1693. Tiruvisainallur renamed after himself as Sahajirajapuram,⁷ to a group of 45 scholars as Sarvamanya – tax – free settlements allotting to each as many

portions as the Sastras he had mastered. It was very popular and famous and scholars were drawn from different parts of the South India.

Similarly Sahaji gifted a village on the northern banks of the Cauvery opposite to Tiruvalangadu to a Sakta scholar and writer Bhaskararaya and the village was renamed as Bhaskararapuram.⁸

Serfoji gifted a town Edaiyanthankudi to scholars and it is renamed as 'Serfojirapuram'. This land grant was given to three persons, one was Chidambaram pillai, another one was Sonjiappa, third person is not known. King's Dharma athikari Ayyavayan established Agraharam in Mangamadam in Tiruvenkkadu¹⁰

Serfoji asked a band of pandits drawn from different villages Ambapuram, Ekojirapuram, Sahajirapuram, Panchakanda, Melakaveri etc. to compile a dharmanibandha¹¹

There was a land grants to muslims also Sheik Usman Thambi Sahina Bakir got lands in Pasupathi kovil, Hajrath Padesa purani Sheik Hussain was given a village in Patteswaram.

Outside the fort of Thanjavur mosque was constructed. To meet out the expenditure of the mosque-oil for lamp, to conduct festival once in a year, to feed the Bakkins, land 12648 Kuzhi in Saliamangalam was given. It was renamed as Muhammadapuram.¹²

King Tulaja I granted 5 velis of land to three Brahmins. Madhavachariyar, Ivachariyar and Srinivasachariyar naming it Lakshmi Narasimhapuram in Kottur Mahanam and 3 velis to 8 persons in Tiruthuraipoondi Mahanam.¹³

King Tulaja II donated Srotrium lands, an agrahara with 12 houses with Venugopala swamy temple and a choultry on the bank of kollidam river near Valuthur. This was named as Tulajendrapuram.¹⁴

Land grants to Brahmins well versed in the Vedas and conversant with the sacred knowledge are termed as srotriyam¹⁵. It also granted to high officials of the Raj, temples and the Bhajavatha mela.

Uncultivable lands alone were granted as Srotriyam. The recipient, being well off had to spend for the reclamation and cultivation of the said lands. The descendants of the srotriyam holders could not inherit such property. The Srotriyadars could sell them, incase of emergency only to the Raja.

For Bhagavadamela, Poovanenthur, Kudikkadu, Paruthikkottai, Koraikkottai, Melavayal, Sonampettai were given as Srotriyam.

Ekoji II granted a village Sonpet near Tirupanandal fetching an annual income of 1000 chakras to Kasi Tamilian for feeding the poor at Benaras.

Pratap singh made grants to Anantha Narayana Sastri at Tiruvisainallur in 1739 and to Ramanuja chari at Pandanallur in 1768. Such grants were made to the muslims also at Pandaravadai.

Amarsingh granted Sarvamanyan in 1796 to conduct feeding in the chatram at Tiruvaiyaru, Serfoji II granted inam lands to Christian father John in 1813.

II. Conclusion

The Maratha rulers liberally endowed both religious institutions and individuals. Villages were granted as Sarvamanya to temples. They were impartial in the charitable activities; land grants were equally made to mosque and church. The patternisation of Marathas encouraged scholars towards literary contribution.

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