

The Catalytic Influence Of Gold Endowments In Illuminating The Nanda Lamps, With Special Emphasis On The Inscriptions Of The Keezhur Veerattaneshwarar Temple

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Abstract

The people's devotion was often demonstrated through generous offerings of gold, rich ornaments, and various essential items for daily worship of the deities. These offerings included items such as crowns, bracelets, earrings, gold flowers, garlands, and umbrellas, as well as functional articles like gold vessels, lamp stands, silver, fly whisks, spoons, and pots made of gold, silver, and bronze. Some inscriptions even provided detailed descriptions of the ornaments gifted to the temple. The prestige of a temple was directly linked to the number of ornaments it possessed, enhancing its glory. Consequently, temples with a rich collection of ornaments attracted a larger number of pilgrims, especially during special worship days or ceremonies when the adorned idol was displayed. This not only enriched the temple's aesthetic appeal but also increased its income through additional offerings from devotees.

Keywords Sri Bhandaram, Endowments, Worship, Lamps.

Introduction

In medieval South India, temples played a vital role in shaping the region's history. Beyond serving as places of worship, they symbolized the promotion of human welfare and guided individuals in leading a pleasurable and civilized life. Temples were

integral to the daily lives of the population, extending beyond religious practices to encompass various aspects of routine life. The temples, such as the Sri Veerataneshwarar temple of Keezhur in Tamil Nadu, were not only spiritual centers but also crucial economic entities. They actively maintained records detailing sale deeds, irrigational activities, and the organization of pujas and festivals. During these events, the recital of Devaram hymns accompanied by musical instruments added cultural richness to the temple environment. This multifaceted role demonstrates that temples were not just religious institutions but also dynamic hubs influencing various facets of society and daily life in medieval South India.¹ The early temples of Tamil Nadu were simple institutions and therefore their income and daily expenditure were very limited. But gradually, the temple became a major religious institution connected with the various activities of the people. Therefore, the temple required more income to meet its expenditure. In order to meet the expenses, the grants were made by kings, chieftains, officials, rich individuals, and corporate bodies such as the *ur*, *sabha* and *nagaram*. The temple ultimately became the focal point in the economic of the locality owing lands, commanding vast incomes, often controlling markets providing credit, providing remuneralise jobs and contracting out services, organizing festivals, patronising artists and learning maintaining charities and regulating social activities.² Sri Veerataneshwarar temple of Keezhur temple had many endowments and the wealth that accured added to the importance of the temple as an institution fostering socio-economic and cultural activities of the region.

Endowments

The various endowments to this temple were primarily meant for the maintenance of religious and charitable services connected with it. The Contemporary inscriptions refer the personnel who served inside the temple and looked after its affairs from outside. The temple personnel were well paid from income derived from various endowments made so it.³ The religious institutions during the period between C.E. sixteenth and eighteenth centuries received huge incomes from various sources. There was the need to maintain and manage their finance and temple endowments that were taken care of by both the State and the temple officials. Income from them were spent on the renovation and upkeep of

temples, maintenance daily pujas, periodical festivals and other services.⁴

The devotion of the people often found expression in making gift of gold to the deities or rich ornaments and various articles necessary for the daily worship. Ornaments such as crown, bracelet, ear-ring, gold flower, garland, umbrella, and articles such as gold vessel, lamp stand, silver, fly whisk, spoon, pots of gold, silver bronze were given to the deities. Some inscriptions give minute descriptions of the ornaments donated to the temple.⁵

Kalanju

Kasu is the Tamil term for coin and it has been vogue for a long time from a very early date. The term kalanju figures extensively in the gifts made in the period of the Pallavas, Cholas and the Pandyas in Tamil Country. The word Kalanju denotes either a coin of gold or one of equivalent weight. In the inscriptions of this temple several names have been referred to: Panam, Kasu, Pon (Gold coins), Manjadi, Kalanju and Mapanam.⁶

Sri Bhandaram

All this gold and silver were kept amassed and hoarded as a sort of reserve fund in the temple treasury known as Sri bhandaram.⁷ They were sometimes used in helping the needy in times of scarcity.⁸ Few inscriptions refer to the use of gold and silver vessels for the renovation or extension on the temples.⁹ But such closes were rare. Generally these ornaments remained as forms of wealth. The more ornaments a temple had, the greater glory it possessed and was visited by a larger number of pilgrims, especially on the days of special worship or ceremonies when all the ornaments used to bedeck the idol put up on display. This further added to the temple income by attracting offerings.¹⁰

Gift of gold was another way of enhancing temple economy. For gold, as a movable property of much value, was more reliable also. The ever-increasing price of gold and its standard value boosted the financial viability. While the revenue from the temple land was not dependable due to flood and drought, the income from gold was dependable.¹¹ Therefore, gold reserve of a temple enhanced its economy prestige and popularity. Several records furnish donation of gold for various purposes. For

instance, the inscriptions¹² of Kizhur Veerattaneswarar temple record the gift of gold to burn perpetual lamps.

Thus, much of the gold that was deposited in the temple was for the purpose of lamp service. Further, gold was gifted for the conduct of various festivals and to carry out repairs of the temple.¹³ The gold ornaments were also gifted to the temples.

48 Kalanju Pon

An inscription of Nandivarama II Pallava issued in his 11th regnal year 721 C.E. found on the prakara rock of the Kizhur, Veerattaneswarar temple refers to gift of 48 kalanju pon this endowment made for lighting two Nanda lamps by Videlviduku Ilango Ati Araiyanaik Vikrabhuti daughter.¹⁴

10 Kalanju Gold

An inscription of Kannaradeva of Rashtrakuta issued in his 20th regnal year 959 C.E. found on the south wall of the Kizhur, Veerattaneswarar temple refers a Mallan Annavan of Vairameka Chaturvedi Mangalatu of Udaikattunadu gave 10 kalanju gold to Thiruveerattanathalwar of Tirukoilur for lighting a Nanda lamp. Arrangements were made to provide ghee daily with this gold.¹⁵

12 Kalanju Gold

An inscription of Rajaraja I Chola issued in his 11th regnal year 996 C.E. found on the south wall of the Kizhur, Veerattaneswarar temple registers a Miladu Udayan Raman Nattadigal gave gold 12 kalanju to Tiruvunnazhikai sabhayar to light a Nanda lamp to Tiruveerattanamudayar of Tirukoilur. This inscription starts with the meikirti "Kandalursalai Kalamarttha".¹⁶ This refers to war activity of Rajaraja I Chola.

10 Gold Coin

Undated inscription of Kopparakesarivarman issued in his 6th regnal year found on the prakara rock of the Kizhur, Veerattaneswarar temple refers to gift of 10 gold coin for lighting the lamp. This endowment made by one royal woman, wife of Koilar Vanakovariya Deviyar Purasil Perumanar in the veerattanathu Mahadeva temple.¹⁷

Conclusion

The foregoing study reveals the fact that the above paper the temple of Kizhur Veerattaneswarar temple as had some types of gold donations. They were the endowment of gold. They greatly helped the conduct of daily services in the temples without fail and also to undertake certain welfare measures. The village assemblies, Kings and the authorities and the common people too took keen interest in keeping the prestige of the temples by providing much income to them.

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