CHOLA CONTRIBUTION TO THE THIRUVEEZHI MIZHALAI VEEZHNATHAR TEMPLE AS GLEANED FROM THE INSCRIPTION

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Introduction

The history of the Veezhinathar temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai could be reconstructed on the basis of three sources namely the myths, literature and epigraphy. The origin and evolution of the temple could be traced out form the myths related to this temple. The Quasi-historical information could be gleaned form the literature available relating to this temple. The real and true history of this temple could be inferred form the inscriptions of the temple. Here and attempt is made to trace out the history of this temple based on the myths. In modern times also the temple myths play an important role in the religious histories of the temples.

The temple myths related to this temple speak the origin and evolution of the temple. Eventhough, the puranic accounts are considered to be semi-historical and quasi-historical in nature, yet some amount of historicity can be obtained. Each and every temple has its own myths and it speaks the religious antiquity of the temples. Based on the temple myths and the contemporary stories, the temples had been built and even rebuilt by the rulers of the dynasties like the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Vijayanagar, the Nayaks and the Mahrattas of Thanjavur. So the temple myths related to this temple is taken into consideration while tracing the origin and evolution of the temple. Thiruveezhimizhalai is situated at a distance of ten kilometers, west of Poonthottam which lies between Thiruvarur and Mayiladuthurai. It can be reached form Kumbakonam too. Arul Mihu thiruvezhinathaswamy Tmeple, owned by Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam, is there with many glories. Saints Thirugnana Scamander, Thirunavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthi Swamihal, Santana and Arunagirinathar have visied the temple and sung hymns, praising the temple deity. The glories of this temple God, Arulmihu Veezhinathaswamy are narrated hereunder.
The Temple under the Palavers:

The legends of the temple noted in the previous chapter indicate the temple’s antiquity and its remote past. Nothing definite is known about the original builder of this temple. No record of any Pallava king is available in this temple. But st. Appar and st. Sambandar who lived in the 7th century A.D. visited this temple, worshipped the God and sang in praise of the Lord Veezhinatharswami. It is clear from their hymns that this temple was very popular in those days and that there were two mutts in the place. When they stayed in their respective mutts, a severe famine prevailed and the people suffered. The temple pandaram (treasury) presented them each with a gold coin to feed their followers daily, until the final disappearance of the famine. This incident is referred to in the Periyapuranam. From this account we can presume that temple Pandaram was rich in those days and it helped the people whenever they suffered from the natural calamities.

The temple under the Cholas:

There are many inscriptions in this temple. Most of the records belong to the later cola period, some belong to the pandyas and few to the Vijayanagara rulers. These records are largely donative in character. Still they furnish valuable information about the economy, administration and other matters connected with this temple. In the inscriptions, the main deity of the temple is called Thiruveezhimizhalai udaiyar and the Goddess is referred to as Pidariyar. The earliest inscriptions of this temple belongs to the period of a Parakesarivarman who may be identified with vijayalaya.

Vijayalaya (846 - 811 A.D)

Parakesarivarman Vijayalaya, who reigned in the 9th century had a long reign of thirty four years. The earliest inscriptions of this temple are not found on the walls of the central shrine, but on the pillars of the shrine of the Goddess Sundarakuchambai. The shrine is having some old Chola records dated in the reigns of the Parakesarivarman, Rajakesarivarman, Parantaka-I, Rajaraja-I and Rajendra I. But in the main temple, the records are of a later date. From this we may presume that the original temple was repaired at a later period, and the pillars
with epigraphs secured from some earlier building were used for the construction of the shrine of
the Goddess.

An inscription dated third year of Prakesarivarman records a gift a silver dish weighing 240 Kalanju to hold the daily Sribai offering to God Paramesvara Bhatara of Thiruvezhimmizhalai by Udaiyar Tantonri Tanichchevagar, The term Tantonri Tanichchevagar is perhaps meant the king himself as the ‘devote servant of God Tantori’. The village Thiruvezhimmizhalai is said to have been a murruttu – devadana of the God Vennatu Perumanar. In the south Indian Inscriptions volume the Parakeurr record is assigned to Arinjaya instead fo to Vijayalaya as is surmised in the M.E.R. for 1909, Part II, Para 35,1 But S.R.Balasubramaniam opines: “The peculiar wording of the data (using the normal pandyan style) and the name of the donor in such terms selfmade matchless varrior lead me to think that the parakesari should be Vijayalaya himself not Arinjaya.”2 Another inscription found on a pillar in the same shrine dated 6th year of Parakesarivarman records an endowment in gold made by a certain chief or officer by name Amarabhujangan Muppili alias Gandarulganda Pallavaraiyan for the daily feeding at mid day of Brahmanas in the temple of Tiruttantonri Mahadeva at Tirumalalai in Vennadu. with this 120 1/4 Kalanju, land was purchased for its yield in paddy to maintain this charity. After the demise of the donor the supervision of the charity was passed to Amarabhuajangan Vanaperaraiyan alias Vanavan pallavaraiyan, probably his son. The inscription is in early script and hence the record has been assigned to the reign of Vijayalaya.3

A record of Madiraikonda parakesarivarman who is identified with parantaka-I, is also found on one of the pillars of the shrine. About these inscriptions the Government epigraphist opines: “As parantaka-I who took Madura in or before the third year of his reign could not possibly have omitted to mention his characteristic biruda in the two inscriptions of the 3rd and 6th years, we may presume that the parakesarivarman of the records in sundarakuchambai shrine must have been earlier than Madiraikonda Parakesarivarman perhaps identical with Parakesarivarman vijayalaya.4 prof. K.A.N. Sastri also thinks that the Parakesari records nearer home are really belongs to Vijayalaya.5

Mr. S.R.Balasubramaniam thinks as follows: “given though the central shrine of Veezhinatharswami has been renovated and it stones used in the erection of the shrine of the Goddess, the Parakesari Inscriptions point to the conclusion that the original temple of
Vezhinatharswami should have been a foundation of the days of Vijayalaya. Further the frequent additions and renovations made by the later rulers resulted in the change of the original style and it has not been taken as an example of Vijayalaya temple style.

Parantaka-I (907-953 A.D.)

Parakesarivarman who is identified with parantaka-I, found on a pillar in the sundarakuchambai shrine dated thirty second year, records a gift of ninety sheep for a lamp to the temple of Tiruvagattiswaran Perumanadigal. This temple is perhaps a different temple from Tiruttantonri Bhatara. Another inscription of the same Chola king dated thirty eighth year found on another pillar of the same place mentions Pamburanadu. This pamburanadu is perhaps identical with Tirupambaram, where an old siva temple exists has the records of the cola period. A record mentions the famine occurred during the time of Kulothunga –III.

Arinjaya (956-957 A.D)

As Arikulakesari is one of the surnames of Arinjaya, we may assign this record to Arinjaya.

Uttama Chola (970-985 A.D):

Utahan chola was the son of Kandaraditya-I chola (950-956 A.D.) who came to power in 970 A.D. A record found on a pillar in the sundarakuchambai shrine dated. Fifteenth year of the chola king parakesarivarman states that a gift of 96 sheep for burning a perpetual lamp in the temple of Tiruttantonri Bhatara at Tirumalalai, in Vennadu by a Chief Muttan edudaiyar on behalf of his wife (deviyar) Acchan Kaliyugattaniyugattayar Viranaraniyar. The sabha of the village agreed to maintain the gift. It is probable that this parakesari record is identical with Uttama chola.

Rajaraja-I (985-1014 A.D)

Rajakesari Rajaraja I’s inscriptions are available in this temple. An inscription found on a pillar in the inner gopura dated in the twelfth year of the chola king Rajakesarivarman “who destroyed the ships at salai” whom we may identify with Rajaraja-I, records a gift of land as kani
by the assembly of Malalai to a servant in the temple of Tiruttantonri Bhatara. Though the gopura was built in the later period, the pillars with the epigraphs of Raja-raja-I were used for the construction of this gopura. Another inscription is found on the same pillar. This record is below an inscription of the 12th year of Raja raja-I and it seems to be connected with it. It records. That the garden land given by the assembly of Milalai to a temple servant, which had been dry on account of low level of water, was to get facilities for irrigation form a near by tank. A record dated in the eighteenth year of the chola king Rajarjakesarivarman who is identified with rajaraja-I found on a pillar in the gopura, left of the entrance refers to the great assembly of Tirumalalai. A record dated in the twenty second year of the same king found on the third pillar in the inner verandah of the temple states that the assembly of Thiruveezhimizhalai, a devadana village of the God in Vennadu, a sub division of Uyyakondar Valanadu made provisions for the singing of Tirupadiyam hymns twice a day in the temple. The assembly met in the Tirumurram of the temple. Another record dated in the twenty second year of the same king found on the third gopura seems to provide for lamps, 26 kasu for lamp by kaviniyan Eran sendan of the locality. T.A.Gopinatha Rao regards this sendan as one of the authors. Of ninth Thirumurai. An unfinished record on the south entrance of the Mahamandapa mentions one Tirumaligaidevar. Gopinatha Rao thinks that this record belongs to the 11th century. When the temple was repaired, the stones of the main temple were used in the various parts of the temple. This unfinished record might have been secured form the main temple. Gopinatha Rao further reaches the conclusion that sendan is identical with Thirumaligaidevar of Tiruvisaippa on the basis of these inscriptions. sendanar sang one poem in praises of this god in his Tiruvisaippa. But prof. K.A.N. Sastri opines: “The attempt to identify sendanar with Tirumaligaidevar on the strength of an inscription of the reign of Rajaraja-I form Thiruveezhimizhalai can hardly be considered satisfactory: the inscription cited does not seem to furnish conclusive proof the identity. And it seems unlikely that tradition could in this instance have erred so far as to make two authors out of one : for we should not forget that the arrangement of the canon seems to have reached its present form before the age of umapati.” Hence we may conclude that sendanar who lived in Thiruveezhimizhalai is different from Tirumaligaidevar who belonged to. Thiruvidaimarudur. Another interesting record of the same king belonging to his twenty-fourth year refers to a gift of paddy (21 kalams) by the assembly of
Thiruveezhimizhalai as interest for 30 kasus received in the Pandaram for the main tenance of
visitors in Aippasi Tiruvona festival.  

**Rajendra-I (1012-1044 A.D.):**

An inscription dated fifth year of the chola king Parakesarivarman alias
Rajendrasoladeva, found on a pillar in the Amman shrine records a gift of a lamp.  

Another inscription of the same ruler belonging to his tenth year mentions the copper image of
Alagiyamanavala which was caused to be made by the mother of Rajendrasola
Anukkappailavaraiyar.  

Another record of the same king, the date of which is doubtful mentions
Rajarajan Kasu.  

**Rajadhiraja-I (1018-1054 A.D):**

A record on the north wall of the central shrine dated in the seventh year of the Chola
king Rajadhirajadeva – I. Mentions the gift of a gold ornament.  

Another record of the same king belonging to his thirty-first year gives a detailed description of the boundaries of
Jayangondasolanallur, the devadana village of the temple at Thizuveezhimizhalai and refera to a
survey of the lands belonging to the temple.  

An inscription found on the north wall of the central shrine dated thirty-sixth year of a king records a gift of tiles covered with gold to the
temple of Thizuveezhimizhalai Udaiya Mahadeva. The donor was certain vijaya rajendradevar
Anukkiyar Pallavan Pattalingangal.  

As Vijayarajendradevar is one of the surnames of Rajadhiraja. We may assigned this record to Rajadhiraja-I. Probably the temple was originally a
tiled structure covered with gold tiles like the Chidambaram and Srirangam temples.

**Rajendra-II (1051-1063 A.D):**

An inscription found on the west wall of the central shrine of a chola king
parakesarivarman alias Udaiyar Rajendra deva belonging to his 3rd year records a gift of gold
by a maid servant of a certain lady Anukkiyar Pallavan Padolinangaiyar for a lamp in the temple
of Thizuveezhimizhalai in Vennadu. A sub-division of Uyyakondar-valanadu. This record
begins with the introduction Irattapadi elaraiyilakam etc. This record may be assigned to
Rajendra II, T.V.S. Pandarathar says that Rajendra-II has three Prasastis and one of his Parasasti
begins with Irattapadi elaraiyilakam etc. so this record may be assigned to Rajendra-II.
Kulottunga-I (1070-1120 A.D.) :

An inscription found on the west wall of the ganesa shrine dated in the fourth year of the chola king Tribhuvanachakravartin Kulottungacholadeva, records gift of an ornament by a native of Vilandai in Merkalanadu, a sub-division of Virudarajabhayankara Valanadu. It is probable that this Ganesa shrine situated to the south of Garbagraha might have been built in or before the time of kulottunga-I. Another record dated in the thirty-fourth year of the same king found on the east wall of the chandikeswara shrine refers to the building of the shrine of Adichandeswaradeva of stone. An inscription of the same king dated forty-fifth year, refers to the gathering of the assembly of Thiruveezhimizhalai to discuss the business of the village (grama-karya).

Vikramachola (1118-1133 A.D.).

An inscription dated in the second year of the chola king Tribhuvanachakravartin Vikramacholadeva, records a gift of money for two lamps. This record also mentions Avurkurram, a district of Nittavinoda-Valanadu. A record found on the north wall of the central shrine belonging to his fifth year mentions a gift of land for offerings at the request of a native of avur in Avur-Kurram. Another record of the same king in the same year mentions a gift of land in Tattamangalam for feeding Brahmanas, at the request of the same person. An inscription belonging to his sixth year of the same King mentions Vishnuvardanapuram, a village in Vennadu a sub-division of Uyyakondar Valanadu. “Perhaps vishnuvardanapuram was surnamed after the king himself who according to the Eastern chalukya genealogy, in which he also claimed a place, would be Vishnuvardana-XI” Another record of his eight year mentions a gift of land for lamp by purchase.

Kulottunga-II (1133-1150 A.D.) :

An inscription found on the east wall of the first prakara dated in the third year of the chola king Tribhuvanachakravartin Kulottungasoladeva mentions the temple of Tiruvagattisvaramudaiya Mahadeva at Valavan Anniyur in Vennadu, a sub-division of Uyyakondar Valanadu. It also mentions the sixth year of Vikramacholadeva (1118-33). As this inscription mention the sixth year of Vikramacholadeva. the record may be assigned to kulottunga 11. The temple Mentioned in the record is different form the Tiruttantonri Bhatara of Thiruveezhimizhalai.
Rajaraja-II (1146-1163 A.D.) :

A record dated the second year of the chola king tribhuvanachakravartin Rajarajadeva, mentions komaran kulottungasola chaturvedimangalam. Komaran kulottungasola was perhaps kulottunga-III. Another record belonging to his tenth year records gift for a lamp.

Rajadhiraja-II (1163-1178 A.D.) :

A record of the chola king Rajakesarivarman alias Tribhuvanachakravartin mentions Jayangondasola Nallur, a devadana. Village of the temple of Thiruveezhimizhalai. Udaiyar and the village koamaran kulotungaso1a – Chaturvedimangalam in Tiruvalundurnadu. K.A.N Sastri opines, “The village same to have been named after prince kulottunga, afterwards kulottunga – III, an inscription of whose reign, mentions gifts made in the same village as early as the third year of periyadevar, evidently Rajadhiraja – II”

Kulottunga – III (1178-1219 A.D.)

Kulottunga – III’s inscriptions are also available in the temple. An inscription dated the seventh year of the Chola king Tribhuvanachakravartin Kulottungacholadeva –III, records a gift of a lampstand and a lamp. A record found on the east wall of the mulasthanesvara sharine in the same temple belonging to his fifteenth year of the Chola king ‘who was pleased to take Madura and the crowned head of the pandya’ refers to certain arrangements in connection with the irrigation of the temple lands at Jayangondasolanallur in Uyyakondar Valanadu. It also mentions Tribhuvanachakravartin and konerinmaikondon and kirtimartandapperaru.

Perhaps kirtimartandapperaru is identical with the river kirttiman which flowe a few miles from Thiruveezhimizhalai. The Government epigraphist opines “the king at the request of pallavarayan (perhaps his executive officer) ordered that a new channel be dug higher up the river kirtimartandapperaru. Though the temple lands at anniyur, which joining the channel that supplies water to maninagankudi and Thiruveezhimizhalai.. May eventually be made to empty itself into the channel pattalavadi and thus irrate the lands at Jayangondasolanallur, the devadana village of the temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai. The necessity for digging the new channel is stated to be that the old channel was blocked up by sand in consequence of high floods in the river kirtimartandapperaru. It might be noted that the village annaiyur and Nagambadi (perhaps identical with Maninagankudi) are situated close to Thiruveezhimizhalai, and that Kirttiman is the name of a river which flows past konerirajapuram, not very far from
Thiruveezhimizhalai. another record dated in the sixteenth year of the same king mentions a gift of land by purchase to the shrine of parvatisvaram Udaiyar in the first prakara of the temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai. This shrine may be identical with one of the shrines located in the first prakara of the temple. This record also mentions the temple of Tiruchchvargam Udaiyar whose ‘devadhana’ village was kulottungasolanallur. Probably this temple is different from the Thiruveezhimizhalai temple and perhaps situated at a different place. An inscription dated in the thirty seventh year of the same king records a gift of land for offerings to the shrine of the Goddess.

Rajaraja – III (1216-1256 A.D.)

Rajaraja – III’s inscription are found in the temple. An inscription dated in the second year of the Chola king Tribhuvanachakravartin Rajarajadeva –III, records a gift of land to the shrine of Trivegambam Udaiyar in the first prakara of the temple. It also mentions anapayan sevur in panaiyurnadu, a sub – division of kulottungasolalavananadu. Another inscription found on the south wall of the first prakara dated in the eleventh year of the same king records a gift of land for offerings to the image of tiruvadavurdevar Manickavasagar set up in the third prakara of the temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai. It also refers to the thirty ninth year of Periyadevar Tribhuvanaviradeva who may be identified with kulottunga–III. Tiruvadavurdeva. was the surname of saiva saint Manickavasagar. Another record found on the north wall of the first prakara belonging to his thirty –first year of the Chola king rajaraja-III, records gift of land and a house site (iraiyilikani) given by temple authorities as teccasariyan pratisths dakshina to a carpenter (taccasari) for executing the repairs in the shrines of Ninraruliya Nayanar and Neriver Kulali Nachchiyar in the same temple.

Rajaraja-III (1256-1279 A.D.):

The last ruler of the imperial Chola dynasty was Rejendra-III and with whom the chola empire came to an end. Some of his records are available in this temple. A record dated in the second year of the chola king Tribhuvanachakravartin Rajendracholadeva III, registers a list of lands owned by the the Tirunavukkarasar – madam at Thiruveezhimizhalai. an inscription found on the west wall of the first prakukkarasar – madam at Thiruveezhimizhalai. an inscription found on the west wall of the first prakara dated in the eighteenth year of the same king records a gift of land by purchase. another record found on the same wall of the same king dated in his eighteenth year, refers to the Construction of a ‘Matha’ on the northern side of the temple.
record dated the twenty-third year of the same king, mentions a gift of land to a matha at Thiruveezhimizhalai. alagiya tiruchirrambalam udaiyar madam, by a certain gnanasiva who was the disciple of Tiruchchattimurrattu Mudaliyar of ‘Tirugnana sambandar Tirumadam’ Situated to the east of the temples of Tiruchchattimurramudaiy- Nayanar and Tirukkamakottamudaiya Periyanachiyar at Rajarajapuram Tiruchchattimurram in Tirunnaraiyurnadu, a district of Kulottungasola Valandadu. 54

The temple under the pandyas:

The second pandya empire was founded after the decline of the imperial cholas. They ruled the chola country and those monarchs endowed the temples in tamil country. The Veezhinatharsawmi temple was under the control of the pandyas. Inscriptions of jatavarman sundara pandya-I and Jatavarman virapandya are found in the temple. They mention gifts made by those kings.

Jatavarman sundara pandya-I:

An inscription found on the north-wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine dated the second year of the Pandya king Jatavarman Tribhuvanachakravartin sundara pandyadeva-I, records a sale of land. 55 another inscription found on the south wall of the first prakara dated the eighth year of the pandya king, Jatavarman sundara pandyadeva-I, records a gift of land for the benefit of ‘mathas’ and minor shrines in the temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai. 56 from this record we may presume that there were many ‘mathas’ in the place. A record dated the ninth year of the pandya king Jatavarman sundara pandya, who is identical with Tribhuvanachakravartin Jatavarman sundara pandyadeva-I. 57 registers a gift of land, by purchase for the recital of the Tirumurai hymns in the ‘Tirukkaikkotti mandapa’ which was constructed for that purpose in the temple during the time of king Narasingadeva. 58 the king Narasingadeva is perhaps identified with the Hoysala king Narasimha-II.

Jatavarman Virrapandya:

An inscription found on the north wall of the first prakara dated the sixth year of the panda king Jatavarman. Tribhuvanachakravartin vira pandayadeva, records gift of I and by a native of Periyangudi in Tirunaraiyurnadu, a sub –division of kulottungasola valanadu. 59 virapandya may be identified with, a co – regent of Jatavarman sundara Pandya – I.
Temple under the Vijayanagara rulers.

The temple contains records of the Vijayanagara rulers also. the Vijayanagara rulers were the patrons of the Hindu temples and Hinduism. The style and construction of some mandapas and gopuras of the temple seem to belong to the Nayak period. So this temple might have been under the control of the Nayak rulers. An inscription of the Vijayanagara king Viruppanna Udaiyar – II son of vira – Ariyappa Udaiyar (Harihara -II) dated in 1375 A.D. (Saka, 1307) found on the north wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine, recrds gifts of land for a garden by a merchant of Kauveripumpattinam in Rajadhiraja Vandalu.60

Temple under the Marathas of Tanjore:

Two copper plates belonging to the Marathas of Tanjore are available in this temple. They are now kept are now kept by the Tiruvavaduthurai Adhinam and in known as Tiruvavaduthurai Adhina copper plates. The king mentioned in these records is Ramadevarayar, probably a chief or a local ruler under the Marathas of Tanjore. The date of the record is 1690 A.D. (Salivahana sakapta, 1612). They record that some brahmins and peasants living in several villages giftet makamai. For the Ardhajama puja (mid-night) of this god. The donor of this gift was one sokappamudaliyar.61

CONCLUSION

The temple has many inscriptions of the later cholas, pandyas and Vijayanagara kings and copper plates belonging to the Marathas of Tanjore. The earliest inscription of the temple belongs to a parakesarivarman who may be identified with vijayalaya. So the stone temple might have been founded by him. And the later rulers developed the temple into the present form. As the walls of the cella contains the records of Rajadhiraja-I, the temple may have been renovated in or before his period. A study of the architecture of the temple clearly shows that the temple was converted into stone structure during the ninth century. A.D. and it has attained its present form by a gradual development. The temple has a large area comprising 12 acres, with three prakaras, three gopuras and many beautiful mandapas. Though the temple represents the early phase of Chola architecture, the additions and renovations changed the original shape. The temple is also a store house of sculpture of rare quality and antiquity. The sculptures of Dakshinamurthi and Somaskanda show simplicity and remarkable workmanship of the ninth
The temple is also possessing a good number of bronzes belonging to various dynasties. Most of the bronzes belong to the Chola period. The bronzes like Kalyanasundarar and Natraja are assigned to the 11th century A.D. The images of Manickavasagar belongs to the 13th century A.D. The images of Bhikshatana and Kalasamharamurthi are the most beautiful bronzes of the temple. Now the temple possesses a considerable extent of fertile lands in and around Thiruveezhimizhalai. The income from these lands is used for conducting daily and monthly pujas and celebrating the festivals of the temple. As a whole the financial condition of the temple is satisfactory. In fine this temple is one the best maintained in the state of Tamil Nadu.

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