

Madurai Nayak Patronage to Temple- Through the Charities and The Endowments

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Introduction

Two hundred years from 1529 to 1736, Madurai ruled by Nayaks of Madurai. The history of the Nayaks and their relevant information are known from the Scholars like J.H.Nelson, V.Rangachari, R.SathyanathaAiyar, Sewell’s List of Antiquities, the Annual Reports of the Madras Department of Epigraphy, and The Travancore Archaeological Series etc. A literary work called Thirupanimalai provide enough evidence for their patronage to temple through the charities and endowments.

The Nayaks of Madurai began their career as Governors or Viceroy otherwise known as Nayaks of Vijayanagar Emperors. They slowly announced their independence and became undisputed rulers of Madurai. Independent rule started from Visvanatha Nayak. It was continued up to Queen Meenakshi. Nayaks were known for their patronage. This was one of the manifold activities of Nayaks to temples. Nayak rulers were concentrated and provided their patronage to all temples of their kingdom especially at Srirangam, Rameswaram, Chidambaram, Tiruchenkodu, Srivilliputtur, Krishnapuram, Jambukesvaram, Samayavaram, Madurai, Tinnevely, Aruppukottai, Dharmapuri, Thirukkoshtiyur (Tiruppattur), Ambasamudram, Sivasailam, Srivaikuntham, Devikapuram, Arni and Alvarkurichchi, Tiruttarakosamangai, Palani, Nanguneri near Tinnevely, Kayattani, Kanyakumari and Suchindram. Most of the Madurai Nayak rulers, focused their attention on the Meenakshi Sundaeswarar temple at Madurai.¹

Visvanatha Nayak (1529 – 1564)

Visvanatha Nayak had a sense of public duty and generosity. He constructed the Madurai fort with bastion. This was done with the support of Dalavay Ariyanatha. He constructed temple for God Sundaesa and Goddess Meenakshi. He removed the Jungle on both sides of the river Kaveri and completely destroyed the menace of robbers in Trichy. Necessary police arrangements were made to save the life and property of the pilgrims. The town was fortified, and a double wall and a big ditch were created around it. He gave more attention to the temples of Trichy and Srirangam.²

The Koil Olugudocumentaed that he spent about three lakhs of pons for the sanctuary. He also constructed and fabricated extensive walled fortresses around the Madurai. While Visvanatha was thus busy in North his General,

Ariyanatha re-establish peace and order in the South. The town of Madurai was increased in size and improved. Visvanatha protected every convenience of the inhabitants. He constructed gopuras in Nellaiappar temple at Tirunelvely. In 1569 he created endowments for the construction of Arupattu Moovar Mandapa. He also provided valuable jewels embedded with precious stones to the Goddess Meenakshi along with a silver throne to god Chokkalinga. A copper plate inscription of 1560 documented a grant of twelve villages in the Tirunelvely country by Visvanatha and Ariyanatha. Visvanatha provided a gift of a village to the temple of Alagarkoil.³

Krishnappa Nayak [1564-1572]

Krishnappa Nayak donated a land for worship and repairs for Tyagaragasvami temple.⁴ He donated with a temple car to the Tiruvengatanatha temple at Palayamkottai and gifted many villages for its maintenance.⁵ Within the Meenakshi Temple complex he constructed Velliambalam, Kodikkambamandapa, Northern Gopura, Thousand Pillared Hall, Murtiamman Mandapa and Virappa Mandapa. A gold kavacha was given to goddess Meenakshi. He rejuvenated the golden flag staff with gold and gifted endowments to both Vaishnavait and Saivait temples. Among the most predominant were Vishnu temple at Seranmadevi and Nanguneri, Alagarkovil, Perumal temple at Erode and Srivilliputtur. His follower Krishnappa Nayaka II Epigraphical bestowed many jewels including a diamond crown and fifty thousand gold coins. Documents refer to his various gifts to temples.⁶

Thirumalai Nayak

Nayak Kings patronaged the temples through endowments and charities.⁷ Thirumalai Nayak was a man of generosity and selflessness. Thirumalai Nayak granted presents, gifts and endowments in the form of valuable jewels, ornaments, and beautiful clothes, to adorn the deities and his presents still in use. His numerous gifts to temples set down in the inscriptions and other records. Thirumalai Nayak gave a silver throne to God Sundaeswarar.⁸ He gave jewels embedded with precious stones to Goddess Meenakshi and also donated a gold Kavacha, coated and studded with gems. He renewed the golden flag staff with gold in Meenakshi Temple.⁹

The Madurai temple still preserves the valuable jewellery of the Nayaks and the most awe inspiring one was the crowns, made of gold and set with precious gems, usually called Navaratna or nine gems. Of the two crowns, one was a golden turban set with gems called, Ratnachummadu. The Mitturudrakshakirita, which is studded with parallel rows of pearls and Nedrakashainterspersed with gems, was another golden crown.

During Chitrai festival, on the day of celestial wedding, deities are adorned with the pearl turban or Muthu Talaipakai and pearl crown made of gold are presented by Thirumalai Nayak to God Sundaeswarar and to goddess Meenakshi respectively. 3230 grams gold idol of God Sundaeswarar, and 1960 grams gold idol of Goddess Meenakshi and 670 grams gold sceptre were offered during festival called Puttu Thiruvila, one among the 64 Thiruvilayadalor the sacred sport activities of Lord Shiva. It was during the time of Thirumalai Nayak received the gold sceptre.¹⁰ Now this sceptre was preserved in the temple and is still in use in Chithiraifestival. At present the temple trustee receives the sceptre and goes in procession with priests, musicians and devotees, around the prakarams of the temple and finally places it before the deity Goddess Meenakshi to mark the rule of Goddess Meenakshi over the kingdom. This was continued by the successors of Thirumalai Nayak. Queen Mangammal receiving the royal sceptre along with her royal paraphernalia are portrayed in the mural painting at Kilikuttumandapam at Meenakshi temple.¹¹

Jewels like Nelanagapatakkam, Kutirai Vahanatalai, Mudipagai, Ratinagondai, Kudirairatina Angavadi, Virakondai, Erutalaipatchipadakkam, Ratinasuryakandipu, Rathinavendayam, Nagar oddiyanam, Tirukkalyanamudi, Kusandarapadakkam, Duraipadakkam, Sanguchakrapadakkam, Ratinasengol, Pallayaran, Kalanji, Sornakumba and Pavalakkodimalai which were embedded with precious stones like rubies, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds and pearls, were offered and donated by Nayak rulers.

Thirumalai Nayak gave Muthupakikondaito the Vishnu temple at Alwartirunagari, in Tinneveli District. The Nayak rulers were gifted fabulous jewellery to temples at Alagarkovil, Tirupparankundram, Srivilliputtur, Alwartirunagari, Srirangam and Tiruchendur. Thirumalai Nayak offered a gold plated throne and a throne set with rubies to deity Meenakshi. He also gave an ivory worked car and a huge wooden car, and a throne set with rubies to the deity Goddess Meenakshi.¹²

Nayak rulers gave tax free villages for the temple priests and servants on the banks of river Vaigai from Alanganallur to Valayankulam. He also gifted land with an income of 44,000 pon for the daily worship. Nayak rulers showed their generosity through their action. He also used to offer 1000 pon, as Kannikkai in the Hundiya during his visit to temple, as offerings to deity. Nayak rulers really a soft honoured persons. Within temple premises Thirumalai Nayak arranged for free feeding food or Annadhanam. Not only Thirumalai Nayak but also his followers also followed the same practice. Ashta Sakthi Mandapam was built by his wives Rudrapati Ammal and Tholi Ammal. They built this Mandapam for feeding the pilgrims, at Meenakshi Temple. Many people like the Paradesi or wandering mendicants, were provided with free food in Madurai.¹³

Thirumalai Nayak contribution to Alagar Kovil temple was numerous. He donated two copper images of Dwarapalakas and palipida. He also donated flag staff in gold. The golden Vimana, an ivory palanquin were his remarkable contributions to the Alagarkovil temple near Madurai. The first great female ruler of Madurai, Rani Mangammal, liberally gifted and donated lands, gifts and ornaments to temples. She also constructed choultries at Madurai, Cholavandan, Srivilliputhur and Trichinopoly and donated lands for feeding the people through these choultries. The choultries which were constructed by Mangammal, were named Mangammal Chatiramor Choultry or Amma Mandapam. The choultry at Cholavandan was constructed by her in 1695 A.D., for feeding the pilgrims who come from Kasi to Rameswaram.¹⁴ She endowed villages, namely Kattakulam, Nandigundu, Puliankulam, Vellangulam, Mannaginaru, Kariappatty, Chinnakadambankulam and Karukuvaipatty in order to maintain this choultry. Two Karais of wet lands in Cholavandan were given to conduct free feeding charity. Choultries were put under Cholavandan choultry, that is under Akdhars and the Akdhar. She provided copper plate to Akshava Sastrigal. She, granted copper grants to Srirangam temple. She along with the donations to Srirangam temple gave a huge treasure, which was consisted of seven kinds of jewels, for adorning the deity, each kind of jewel on every day to the seven days of the week. She also donated number of vessels to perform pooja.¹⁵

The inscriptions of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak expressed his grants and gifts to temples and charities. He granted several villages, namely, Elambur, Rahmatpur, Anaikatti, Nelliambalam and Lakshmi pur to a mosque in Tinnevely. Once in two years, he visited holy places of his kingdom and temples at Madurai, Trichinopoly, Jambukesvaram, Srirangam, Tinnevely, Alvar Tirunagari and Srivaikundam and announced gifts and grants. He visited all these places with large gathering of scholars, musicians and devotees. He granted such donations to these temples during his frequent visits to them. Rani Meenakshi also presented to temples and Muslim Dargahs at Trichinopoly.¹⁶

The poligars donated huge sums as charities to improve the irrigation facilities of the people. In order to prove the supply of water they dug tanks and wells. They liberally granted gifts and endowments to the temples under their jurisdiction. The poligars decided to maintain of public charity as the essential function of the state. The contribution of charities and endowments and their advocacy to its administration and festivals were the real obstacles and hardship to Christian missionaries, in their attempt in conversion and propagation. Most of the presents and valuable presents like ornaments of Thirumalai Nayak, were still in utilization at Madurai, Alagarkovil temples.¹⁷ King Thirumalai Nayak donated a drum to Sri Andal Temple called Nagara. This drum announced the poojas, performed at Andal Temple, Srivilliputhur. He constructed several Nagara Mandapams from Srivilliputtur to Madurai. The religious charities of Thirumalai Nayak to Madurai temple and other temple were enormous.

MuttuVirappa Nayak to Queen Menakshi (1682 to 1736)

MuthuVirappa Nayak III constructed many temples and choultries and made grants of agraharas in charity. During the regime of Rani Mangammal, she gave lot of donations to temples and public charity. She constructed many public buildings and seeded many trees on the roads. She repaired the chatrams and gave lands for a feeding institution. The palace at Trichy is a living monument of her. She provided donations to Srirangam temple and offered a huge treasure which was consisting of seven kinds of jewels for the seven days of the week and many gold vessels for puja. She made lands to Muslim Darga at Trichy and baba Darga at Penukonda.¹⁸

Vijayaranga Chokkanatha's inscription record, charity of lands and villages to temples and charities. In 1712 he presented Elambu, Rahmatpur, Anikatti, Nelliambalam and Lakshmi pur to a Mosque in Tirunelvely. Once in two years he told to have moved with a large following to Srirangam temple, Jambukeswaram, Madurai, Tirunelvely, Alvar Tirunagari and Srivaikundam and provided gifts to the Gods.¹⁹ When he was told that the gift of jewels and other presents he had made on a previous occasion were all missing, he would not do so much as institute an enquiry into the matter, but would repeat his donations. Meenakshi, the wife of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha also granted lands not only to the Hindu temples but to Muslim darga.

The feudatories called Palayagars dedicated their time and energy for the improvement of the rural people. They safeguarded the supply of water by digging tanks and wells. They magnificently made gifts and endowments to the temples under their jurisdiction. This nursed a lot to safeguard Hinduism from the onslaught of other religions.

Conclusion

The origin of revenue during the Nayaks was land tax. The second income was tributes from the Poligars. The income differing with the circumstances of the times. There were numerous varied taxes such as ulavu, pandaravadai, Jodi and vrida, taxes on looms and weavers. According to a Meckenzie document 'from the public revenues Tirumalai Nayak gave one thousand wordplay out of every lac for the customary and extraordinary services and festivals of the God, he provided the temple with lands to the annual value of forty four thousand puns'. The chief items of spending seem to have been public works and Charities, besides the payments to the officials, the army, the police and judicial departments.

The preservation of benevolence was examined as an essential function of the state. The revenue spent on endowments and charities by the Nayaks reveal that the surplus of income and material prosperity of the people in general. As the benevolent rulers the Nayaks were ahead of their contemporaries such as Maratta and Mohammadan rulers. Some of the traditions appraised by the Nayaks are still followed. The approval of introducing many festivals goes to the Nayaks especially to Tirumalai Nayak. The Mandapas and temples constructed by them stand as testimony to the services of Nayaks to the Tamils. Each year the Chitirai festival is commemorate with enthusiasm in Madurai and people in and around Madurai. Tirumalai Nayak was accountable for making Madurai as a city of festivals. Most of the adored jewels donated to the temples have been lost through pillage and plunder during the troubles times of the mediaeval period. Some are regenerated and restored from time to time.

During the period of Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka, Robert de Nobili approach to Madurai in 1610. For his Missionary activities he constructed new Church in 1610. He come behind a different approach i.e to live in Tamil country like a Brahmin priest. But in course of time he perceived that this ancient seat of Hinduism was not the best place for prostelysation. The Missionaries admitted that 'one will never encounter anywhere obstacles so great in Madurai'.²⁰ From the time of Visvanatha Nayak down to Queen Meenakshi the enormous contribution in the form of charities and endowments made them to patronage temple.

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