



TEMPLE GRANTS OF THE RAYAS OF VIJAYANAGARA IN MEDIEVAL ANDHRA DESA

K. NARASIMHULU

Academic Consultant, Dept. of History and Archaeology, Yogi Vemana University,
Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh. E-mail: narasimhulukdu@gmail.com

Abstract: Building temples for the religious merit of a major section of the people became a very common religious practice during the Vijayanagara period. These temples without exception were dedicated to different deities like Vishnu, Siva, Rama and so on. During the medieval period, members of the royal family and others, made several endowments in the form of villages, lands, jewelry and monetary gifts to temples in different parts of Andhra Desa, and their subordinates also founded a good number of new temples and endowed them with villages and land gifts. There was no village in the kingdom without a temple; in fact most villages had at least two temples, one for Siva and another for Venkatesvara or Rama-Sita with Hanuman. The construction of temples and auxiliary structures and installation of deities was considered an act of great merit. The temple was conceived as a form of worshipping the deity itself. The building of a temple, which is one of the Saptasantanas, was expected to confer on the builder several benefits like longevity, health, wealth and prosperity in this world, besides religious merit in the other world after death. It is for these reasons that many people from the princes down to the ordinary citizens, vied with one another in building temples. It is proposed to examine the different aspects of the grants made to the temples by the Rayas of Vijayanagara in medieval Andhra Desa.

Keywords: Land Grants to Temple, gifts of gardens, festivals, offerings, worship, neck-laces.

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During the time of the Rayas of Vijayanagara giving land grants to temples became a very important activity. This served two purposes -

one was extension of agriculture by reclaiming fallow land; the second motive was to legitimise the power of the kings. While the Vijayanagara

rulers stabilised their political power by coercion, they established their ritualistic power by giving gifts and grants to temples thus legitimising their kingship. Moreover, monastic establishments, along with the kings, noblemen and their wives also gave similar gifts and grants for temples. Many Brahmins in the Vijayanagara period received endowment because they were associated with temple in some manner, when a temple was established an attached Brahmin village was frequently set up or separate plots of lands were given to the Brahmins and they were subsidiary to the temple. The kings were still the important sources of religious patronage but they were often overshadowed by the hundreds of non-royal donors.

The establishment of several new temples meant an expansion of the agrarian based of the society. The temple was not just the place for the gods to reside, but the human caretakers of god had to be clothed and fed. Hence, a temple had the support of weavers, potters, goldsmith, watermen and agricultural labourers. Besides this, a large variety of goods were required for conducting the daily rituals. The growth of these massive temples and religious establishment in the Vijayanagara kingdom coincides with the increasing popularity of donating land and other objects without which their maintenance would have been impossible. In view of the liberal endowments of lands made by the rulers, their chiefs and other feudatories, the temples were considered as landed magnates. As the temples received gifts of lands made by kings, queens, nobles and common people, these become large landed proprietors. We have many epigraphic records that tell us of villages, gifts and land being granted to temples.

The temple was the recipient of various types of land for various purposes. An inscription at Patnam in Kadiri *taluk* of Anantapur district dated 1367 CE during the reign of Bukkaraya I refers to a grant of one *putti* of irrigated land at Pantarlapalle by Bammi Nayudu, son of Papi Nayudu for food offering of god Ahobaladeva of Kadiri temple (Gai:1972:5). Another epigraph

from Tripurantakam in Markapuram taluk of Kurnool district dated 1386 CE during the reign of Harihararaya II states that, Bhavadura Odeya, the *Mahapradani* of the king, purchased four *tumus* of land for 200 *singayamadas* from Bhikshavritti Siddaya Devayyangu, and made a grant of it to the local temple thereafter (Gai: 1972:8). An inscription at Tangeda in Palnadu Taluk of Guntur District dated 1432 CE during the reign of Devaraya refers to a gift of land to god Siva of Tangeda for the merit of the king, and it also refers to another gift of land made to god Tripurantaka of Tangeda village (Archaeological Survey of India: 1986). In 1498 CE, according to the Proddatur epigraph of Kadapa District a gift of four and half *puttis* of dry land equivalent in extent to one *gocharam* to the *sthanam varu* was made for god Ramalinga of Ramesvaram in Mulkinadu by Ganti Kannama nayudu, with the stipulation that land be converted into a wet land fit for growing paddy with the water from the Ramesvaram canal (Gai: 1972:39). The Ramesvaram inscription in Proddatur *taluk* of Kadapa district dated 1507 CE refers to the gift of income due to the Nagar as taxes like *kanika*, *katnamu*, *grama-katnamu*, *stavara* etc. for constructing *koṭa*, *mandapa* and offerings to the god Ramesvara on the bank of Pinakini by Govindaraju son of Rachiraju for the merit of the king Vira Narasimharaya, Rachiraju and Saluva Timmaya on the occasion of *Utthana-dvadasi* (Sastry: 1978: 62).

The Gunduluru inscription in Rajampet *taluk* of Kadapa district during the rule of Devaraya II mentions that the gifts of lands in the village Gunduluru with the dues like *gutta-koluchu*, *siddhayamu*, *kattiga talarika*, *magama* and *gramavraya* for conducting festivals and offerings to the god Lakshminarayana of Gunduluru in Pottapinadu by Narasimha Peggada the minister of Rayadeva Maharaja. Some other gifts are also recorded on the other side of the stone, contents of which are not clear (Sastry:1978:43). An inscription at Chinna Ahobalam of Sirvel Taluk of Kurnool District dated 1563 CE during the reign of Sadasivaraya states that, grant of land

in the villages Kalutapalle in Korakola-*sima* and Padakallu, Gornipadu, Injedu and Bayyapaguduru, yielding a total income of 308 *varahas* to be utilized for offering to god Ahobalesvara by Mahamandalesvara (Gai :1972:260).

Several kinds of gardens like flower gardens, fruit gardens, vegetable gardens, areca-nut gardens, etc., were endowed to temples. In some cases devotees were interested in presenting lands for laying gardens and in some other cases, in planting trees in the temples gardens. An inscription from Vemalurpadu in Sattenapalli Taluk of Guntur District dated 1530 CE during the reign of Achutadevaraya states that, Peda Tirumalayyadeva maharaja son of Salakaraju had a tank dug and built a garden land near it and granted both gods Gopinatha. (Gai: 1972:93). An epigraph at Tamballapalle in Madanapalle taluk of Chittoor District dated 1406 CE during the reign of Devaraya I registers that, Peda Lakinayudu, Pina Avubhalinayudu and Balagopinayudu, son of Mahanayankaracharya Kamu Dorapanayidu granted lands for a flower-garden, lamp, cash and disk bell endowed for offering to the deity god Mallikarjuna temple of Chandragiri (Archaeological survey of India:1986). Grants of lands and villages converted the temple into landowners giving it economic and political control similar to the feudal lord. These temples had to employ laborers for cultivating the lands it had been endowed with the temple lands were known as *Devadana* or *Devavritti* lands and as such they were generally exempted from all kinds of taxes and were *sarvamanya* (accepted by all). In the year 1518 CE Dalavayi Nagaraju son of Singarasu, who was the Karyakartha of Rayasm Kondamarusayya, who was an important officer in the court of Sri Krishnadevaraya, gifted garden land, wet land and a tank to the god Telungu rayalu of Srikakulam (Sastri:1986:997)

An inscription at Palugurallapalli in Kadapa district dated 1396 CE April 18 during the reign of Devaraya Odayulu refers to Lakkaraju Allalaraju endowed the god Bhairava with a garden and lands with *arambha* and *koru* as

vritti (Sastry:1978:28). Another inscription at Porumamilla in Badvel Taluk of Kadapa district dated 1555 CE during the reign of Sadasivaraya refers to the gift of wetland and garden to certain Narasayya for conducting the offerings to the Vaishnavas during the Tirunakshatras of the Alvars in the temple of Porumamilla by Nandyala Varadarajayya (Sastry:1978:243). The inscription from Gollapalli in Jammalamadugu taluk of Kadapa district registers the grant of a flower garden to a temple (Sastry: 1977: 124)

Temple, as an economic institution, played a significant role in society. Lands, villages, money etc. were granted to the temples for maintaining daily worship, the perpetual lamps and various other services. Majority of the grants made to temples were exempted from taxes. The groups of the villages were endowed to the temples by devotees. The Vijayanagara ruler Saluva Narasimharaya, at the time of visiting Tirupati, made a grant of three villages for making sumptuous daily offering to Sri Govindaraja Temple in Tirupati (Vijayaraghavacharya: 1933:26). In 1518 CE Sri Krishnadevaraya granted five villages from the income of which the sacred food and unguents were to be offered every day to the deity Srikakulam Telungu Rayalu; this gift was made on the occasion of *Kumba sankramana* (Sastri: 1986:981). An epigraph found at Ramesvaram in Proddatur taluk of Kadapa district dated 1514 CE states that, Sri Krishnadevaraya granted the village Payindala, situated in Chernnuru-*sima* to the god Rayayyadeva of Maharamesvara situated in Gandikota-*sima* for maintaining worship and sacred food offering to the god for the occasion of Telugu New Year (*Ugadi*) (Sharma Sastry: 1941:496). Another epigraph at Pushpagiri in Kadapa District belong to the same period states that, emperor Krishnadevaraya gifted the village Chikamanchupalli in Chennuru-*sima* to the god Chennakesvaradeva for maintaining worship and sacred food offering to the god for the occasion of Telugu New Year (*Ugadi*) (Sastry: 1941:494). The Srisailam record in Nandikotkur taluk of Kurnool district dated 1515 CE states that, after

his victorious campaign against the Gajapati king Krishnadevaraya visited Srisailam on his way back to his capital paid obeisance to the god of Sriparvata Mallikarjuna of Srisailam. The king granted two villages and exemption of taxes on certain merchandise for providing mid-day food offerings to the deity (Gai: 1972:52). In 1556 CE Sadasivaraya granted thirty one villages to the *Ramanujakutam* at Sriperumbaduru for its maintenance and to carry on the regular worship of Vishnu temple (Hultzsch: 1896-97:1&22).

The donation of gifts of gold, jewels like crowns, necklaces, garlands etc., to gods and goddesses was considered an act of great merit. Various ornaments were presented by people of all positions in life from king family and others. The famous king of Vijayanagara, Sri Krishnadevaraya presented a *kiritam* (crown) of the following ornamentations: 1555 weight in gold for *commeccu* work or basement work for setting the stones, 1076 weight in solid gold selected for *kundamam* work, 2822 fine rubies, 160 emeralds weighing 108 carats, 423 old diamonds weighing 65 *manjalu*, three big rubies, ten sapphires, 17 cat's eyes and one topaz altogether weighing 663 *ratulu* or carats, one string of pearls, gold wire into which the pearls were inserted weighing 15 units, the total weight of the entire crown being 3308 units, to god Sri Venkatesvara of Tirumala in 1512 CE (Vijayaraghavacharya: 1998:32). An epigraph at Srikalahasti in Chandragiri Taluk of Chittoor District dated 1513 CE during the reign of Sri Krishnadevaraya states that, royal gift of pearls, necklaces, golden *prabhavali* set with precious stones and the grant of some villages for daily worship and offering and for conducting certain specified festivals to the god Kalahastisvara for the merit of his parents (G.S.Gai 1972:50). In 1513 CE Sri Krishnadevaraya presented three *kititas*, consisting of 405 pearls, 284 old diamonds, 222 rubies nine cat's eyes and 6 sapphires weighing 380 units to the processional images of Sri Venkatesvara of the Tirumala (Vijayaraghavacharya: 1998:60).

In 1514 CE the Vijayanagara, Krishnadevaraya lead an expedition against Prataparudra Gajapati

and drove him as far as Kondavidu, captured the fortress of Udayagiri and on his return journey to his capital, paid a visit to the Tirumala temple and worshipped Sri Venkatesvara. During this visit his queen Chinnadeviamma, presented one *kanthamala* or necklace with a *padakam* or pendant set with eleven pearls, the central ruby, two emeralds and four diamonds altogether weighing 200 units (Vijayaraghavacharya: 1998:70). In 1516 CE Sri Krishnadevaraya set out on military campaign towards the eastern region, after subjugating the forts of Udayagiri, Kondavidu, Kondapalli, Rajamahendravaram, etc., and visited Simhachalam where he worshiped Simhadrinatha and gift one *kanthamala* studded with 91 pearls, a pair of bracelets studded with precious stones, one pendant of *sankha* and *chakta*, a gold plate weighing 44782 *gadyanas* and money amounting to 2000 *kanika madalu*. At his instance his queens Chinnadevi and Tirumaladevi each made gifts of one *padakam* and 500 *gadyanas* to the same god. Krishnadevaraya made these gifts for the merit of his parents Nagadevamma and Narasanayaka (Aiyer:1928:694-696). In 1532 CE Achutadevaraya, the Vijayanagara ruler presented to the deity Sri Venkatesvara of Tirumala a necklace containing 600 pearls and ten units of superior gold (Vijayaraghavacharya: 1998:16).

One of the important activities in the temple was the celebrated number of festivals either by the temple authorities or at the instance of the devotees. An inscription at Koduru in Kamalapuram taluk of Kadapa district dated 1548 CE refers to the gift of the tolls named *pemta sunkam* due from the village Amdiraju Koduru for conducting the festival like *Sri Ramanavami*, *Dasami*, *Srijayanti* and *Sankranti* three *manedus* (measures) of rice for daily offerings to the god Chennakesvara by *Mahamandalesvara* Pasapula Timmayadeva Maharaju was governing *Gandikota-sima* as *Amaranayamkara* (Sastry:1978:198). The gift was made on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the *chaitra* month. Obviously the gift was actually made on the *Sri Ramanavami* day and the fact was engraved on the stone on the next

day. Some donations were made on the auspicious occasions of *Sri Ramanavami* and *Rathasaptami*. But the inscriptions are not clear whether the said festivals were celebrated in the respective temples. Another record from Potladurti in Kamalapuram taluk of Kadapa district dated 1546 CE during the reign of Sadasivaraya states that the gift of income derived as local taxes called *Stavara* and *gramakatnas* like *angadi stavara*, *magga- stavara*, *chakra- stavara*, *Idiga-stavara* *batte* and *pemjini- stavara* due from Potladurti village included in Nallaballi *thane*, the *sumkhamangani* of the donor, for conducting *Pallakiseva* on the occasion of *Krishnashtami* festival to the god *Chennakesava* by *Andugula Mallappa* and *Tippalagiri Timmayya* and *surayya*, the tax collecting officers of *Mahamandalesvara* *Nandyala Timmayadeva Maharaju* of *Gandikota amaramagani* (Sastry: 1978:187).

An epigraph at Nagalapuram in Gooty Taluk of Anantapur district dated 1555 CE during the reign of Sadasivaraya register a gift of the village *Etividu* alias *Nagalapuram* for provision of rice, green-gram and oil for the lamp for the *Kartika* festivals in the temple of *Siva* for the merit of the *Setti-Pattasvamins* (Comar: 1902: 372). Another epigraph at *Pedda Ahobalam* in *Sirvel Taluk* of *Kurnool district* dated 1558 CE during the reign of Sadasivaraya record states the grant of piece of land and some money *Emberumanar- Jayamgaru* and others conducting the festivals, when god *Ahobalesvara* was seated in the 16 pillared *mandapa* constructed by *Mahamandalesvara Kurucheti Timmaraju* (Embranthiri :1896:79).

The temple dancers (*devadasis*) were also quite rich and often played a dominant role as liberal donors to temples, mostly to seek immortality. An inscription dated 1517 CE states that *Tiramalai Amman*, daughter of *Raajakam Kuppayi*, made a donation of 3000 *panams* for the daily worship of *Sri Venkateswara*. In 1535 CE *Sevvusani*, *Peruchi*, *Chikkayya Savani* and her sister *Govindasani*, and other damsels stated the *Chitti Raya Vishnu Utsava* or festival in *Tirupati*; they gave 1750 *pannas* for that

purpose. In 1545 CE *Nagasani*, a temple dancer constructed a *mandapa* in *Tirumala* for the deity *Venkatesvara* of *Tirupati*. In 1546 CE *Tiru Venkata Manikantam*, a famous temple dancer and the daughter of *Tippasani*, was granted a *dandikai* or palanquin for her use by the trustees of *Tirumala temple*, as a token of honour for services rendered by her in *Tirupati* and at *Tirumala*. In 1548 CE *Lingasani* daughter of *Tiru Venkatadasi*, one of the temple dancers of *Tirupati*, arranged for ten *manoharapadi* to be made to *Sri Utsavamurti* on all the seven festival days during *Brahmostavam* at *Tirumala* as her offering. *Sewusani* daughter of *Anjali*, one of the *Tirupati temple dancers* paid a sum of 200 *panams* as capital for daily offerings to *Sri Venkateswara* installed by her in the temple of *Kapilesvara Swami* at *Kapilathirtham* at *Tirupati* in 1563 CE (Reddy:2014: 341).

To conclude, donations of land became a very important mechanism for the extension of agrarian activity in medieval times. Land was donated to individuals for temples and Brahmins besides the village community as a whole. The temple was a very important link between the state and the society. Temple also encouraged agrarian production by providing irrigational facilities and giving the donated land on lease. The income from the agrarian production was channeled toward the maintenance of the temples and providing employment to servants, masons, architects and giving loans to cultivators. Temple had trustees to look into matters of agriculture in the donated lands. Temples derived its income from the donated lands or *vrittis*. It is also received income from the collection of dues from the non temple lands. Temples were not just religious centres but also economic units functioning parallel to the state and contributing to agrarian development and the social and economic stability of the country.

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