

## Pattern of Temple Grants in Medieval South Western India

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**Abstract:** In the medieval inscriptions of South Western India, there are numerous references to land grants and money grants bestowed to the temples of the region. These grants were made by kings, traders, trade guilds, artisans and other social groups. The purpose of this paper is to inquire into the sequence of these grants and to inquire into *raison d'être* of these grants and the people concerned. It is argued that grants were made due to justifiable devotion and to attain legitimacy and religious sanction. An endeavor is made here to interpret the land grants and monetary grants made to the temples in South Western India.

**Key words:** temples, kings, brahmanas, worship, traders, legitimacy

### Introduction

The theme of religion and religious institutions like Hindu temples in South India has attracted attention of large number of historians. Historians of South India like R. Champakalakshmi<sup>[2]</sup>, K.R. Hall<sup>[3]</sup>, James Heitzmann<sup>[4]</sup> and others have worked on this aspect. For instance, the studies conducted by James Heitzman on South India have demonstrated that in the Tamil region the expansion of local temples occurred alongside the growth of commercial networks focused on the commercial communities scattered amid the abundant agrarian zones.<sup>[5]</sup>

### The Region

This region called South Western India was a part of diverse imperial as well as local dynasties like the Alupas, Hoysalas, Vijayanagara, Keladi dynasty, etc.<sup>[6]</sup> At present, it consists of certain places on the south western part of India. These include the western coastal temple centres like Basrur, Udupi, Mangalore, etc. In simple words, we deal with region situated in southern part of western coastal India. During the medieval period, the rulers and the representatives of the rulers like the chieftains and officials attempted to obtain legitimacy by giving grants to temples.

Our study is mainly based on few inscriptions of the region. They mostly belong to Vijayanagara period. There are few inscriptions which belong to the earlier period. During the Vijayanagara period, there was a great increase in the process of temple construction in both core and peripheries of the empire. In South Western India, too one can notice this phenomenon.

### **Rationale of Temple Grants**

To begin with, one may ask the questions as to why land and monetary grants were given to the temples? Does it show the influence of bhakti ideology<sup>[7]</sup> on the common folk as well as elite section of people? What are the political implications of the grants given to the temples? It is our purpose to answer these questions by the study of the various temple grants made in the region of southwestern coastal India.

### **Function of Temples**

Temple for a Hindu in the past and in the present is a very important area. It is the place that is visited by every member of Hindu society. Temples became an important part of political, social and economic life of people.

The temples became vital to diverse sections of population. It was important firstly because the people needed to demonstrate their attachment to god. It was a place where the people could find an answer to their varied problems. For the kings and the traders or in other words, for the elite class, they were the agencies which would afford them legitimacy. This was particularly so when these elite communities came from an outside region and it was through temples that they perhaps tried to amalgamate with local

populace.<sup>[8]</sup>

Regarding emergence of temples in South India, M.G.S. Narayanan suggested that in the medieval period there was construction of large number of temples. According to him, these temples were patronized by monarchs and chieftains.<sup>[9]</sup> Regarding the function of temples, Nilakantha Shastri believed that "The temple is historically more important as a social and economic entity than as a religious institution."<sup>[10]</sup>

### **Political Structure**

The political structure<sup>[11]</sup> belonged to two different categories. The first category was that of the major dynasties and they administered a huge territory, which comprised of southwestern India. Thus this region was a periphery for these kings and hence it was not the only important region for these kings like those belonging to Hoysala and Vijayanagara dynasties.<sup>[12]</sup> They ruled from the core part of the empire and appointed the governors and other officials to monitor administration in the region.

The second category of polity comprised the local ruling families who maintained direct contact with the people of the locality. Majority of these local rulers belonged to Jainism, and obviously, they made numerous grants to Jaina temples. The larger dynasties like Vijayanagara preferred to give grant to the brahmanical temple deities like Krishna temple, etc.

### **Nature of Polity and Temple Grants**

We discern apparent distinction between the temple grants given by major dynasties and grants bestowed by minor local dynasties.<sup>[13]</sup> Major dynasties sought legitimacy from brahmanical religious institutions, while minor ruling families looked for support from local Jaina (non-brahmanical) temples and other religious institutions. However, there are instances when major dynasties gave grants to Jaina temples and the local dynasties gave grants to the brahmanical temples. It seems that a good number of the grants were made for expressing the love and devotion of the kings and officials towards the gods who were worshipped by the elite sections and the common folk in the society. These grants naturally strengthened the economic base of these religious institutions. One can discern mutual admiration for

royal authority, trading communities and religious institutions. Through these temple grants royal authority obtained both religious sanction and social legitimacy.

The above statement is substantiated by certain inscriptions, for instance, an inscription belonging to A.D. 1451 mentions that under the orders of Devaraya-Maharaya, Bhanappa-Odeya who was ruling over Barkur-rajya, made a gift of 121 *kati-gadyanas*,<sup>[14]</sup> for the service of god Nakharesvaradeva of the place.<sup>[15]</sup> God Nakharesvara was the personal deity of the traders of Barkur. By giving grants to this temple the kings were seeking the support of traders.

### Temple Grants by Other Social Groups

The various social groups like agriculturists, traders, women, residents of the locality, etc., gave land and monetary grants to the temples and brahmanas.<sup>[16]</sup> There are few cases of land grants by women, which shows the important position acquired by some women in the society<sup>[17]</sup>. The grants were made individually and collectively as a community. The kings and officials of the state were always not in a position to offer grant to the temples. This is particularly so in the case of a region which was not a core part of the kingdom. It is true that temple grants were made due to the extreme devotion towards a particular deity. However, apart from concept of devotion, there were certain practical uses of these grants.

In the absence of enormous patronage of temples and brahmanas by the kings, it was the traders and residents of the locality who provided financial support to the temples. In the case of traders, we find there were two categories, individual traders and trade guilds. Traders gave grants in their individual capacity. They also gave grants as part of trade guilds.<sup>[18]</sup> Among individual traders, we find two categories, local traders and itinerant traders.<sup>[19]</sup> The latter traders offered their service to the temple for the purpose of legitimacy and acceptance in the society. By sustaining the temples, the outside traders tried to demonstrate that they are sensitive to the requirements of the society.

The traders used to go on pilgrimage. The Basrur inscription dated A.D. 1472 mentions that Duggana-Setti of Paduvakeri at Basrur and his three nephews made a grant of land to Siriyappa on the latter's return from his pilgrimage to Benaras for the worship of the image of god Kasi-Visvanatha which he

had brought with him.<sup>[20]</sup>

The outside traders who came to South Western India made land donations. An inscription belonging to A.D. 1359 refers to one Bankarasa from Hubli making grants to Somanatha temple at Barkur.<sup>[21]</sup> An inscription belonging to A.D. 1412 mentions Jogi Setti of Arikana Ghatta of Nagamangala who made some grants to the temple.<sup>[22]</sup> An inscription belonging to A.D. 1444 mentions that the *nakharas* and *settis*<sup>[23]</sup> of Dharmapattana agreed to pay to the temple of Mahadeva a portion of toll-revenue raised in the village. It was to be used for the repair of gold pinnacle of the temple and the balance, if any, was to be used for the services of god and for no other purpose. The gift was made to expiate the sin committed by them in having murdered two men of their community.<sup>[24]</sup> The traders invested their money in land and other commercial enterprises in South Western India and made land and money grants to the temples. For instance, the Gangolli inscription belonging to A.D.1662 mentions that Bhadrappa Nayaka endowed land in the Gangolli village of Muguvinna *sime*<sup>[25]</sup> to Narayana Mallya who hailed from the Gove *rajya*<sup>[26]</sup> in Jayavarni *grama*<sup>[27]</sup>. Narayana Mallya installed Venkataramana deity in the Gangolli village and the temple is called Mallera *matha*.<sup>[28]</sup>

### Temple Grants and Urbanization<sup>[29]</sup>

The role played by the traders of South Western India in the emergence of temple-based or religion-based urban centers was considerable. Almost all the major towns of the region such as Mangalore, Barkur, Basrur, Baindur, Gangolli and Karkal gave shelter to traders trading in different goods, agricultural and non-agricultural. People of the locality sold and purchased the items as required by them. The devotees who visited the temples or *basadis*<sup>[30]</sup> or *mathas*<sup>[31]</sup> constituted another group of clients at the temple-based towns.<sup>[32]</sup> Besides, the annual festivals in the various religious institutions saw the exchange of a large assortment of goods in substantial quantities in the *jatres*<sup>[33]</sup>. In these *jatres* one could see not only the permanent shops but also a large number of provisional shops selling goods, eatables and musical instruments and play items.<sup>[34]</sup>

One inscription of Mudabidre states the patronage given by *halaru settikaras*<sup>[35]</sup> for the construction of second storey of the Jain monument Tribhuvana Chudamani in Mudabidre.<sup>[36]</sup> Another inscription belonging to A.D. 1451 mentions the name of several Settis who were responsible for the wonderful

construction of the *mukhamantapa* of Tribhuvana Chudamani.<sup>[37]</sup> The fact that the traders donated for the construction and maintenance of temples and religious institutions indicates that they contributed to temple-based urbanization.

## Conclusion

The above study demonstrates that the temples and other religious institutions in the periphery of an empire did not entirely depend on the grants made by kings as there were many other individuals and agencies, which filled the space that was created by the relative absence of royal patronage to local temples. Both royal authority and local elite communities played significant roles in the prosperity of temples.

## Appendix I: Temple Grants by Royal Authority

Sr. No.	Name of the king	Name of the deity	Year (Saka) <sup>[38]</sup>	Reference	Purpose
1	Bankideva Alupendra	Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara	1225	SII VII, 177	To perform post-death ritual
2	Harihara	Krishna	1314	183	To give food to brahmanas
3	Kulashekhara	Bankeshwara	Alupa	185	Land grant to temple
4	Harihara	Manjinatha	1308	189	Perform <i>puja</i> <sup>[39]</sup> in the temple.
5	Vijaya Bhupati	Durga	1345	192	To recite in praise of Goddess Durga
6	Kulashekhara Alupa	Durga	N.A.	222	A. A. <sup>[40]</sup>
7	Harihara	Parshwadeva (Jaina)	1312	229	Pay salary to the temple staff
8	Virupaksha	Kantheshwara	1399	236	N.A.
9	Virapandya	Parshwanatha (Jaina)	1468	248	Perform puja to the deity
10	Vira Timma Ajila	Chandranatha	1526	251	Land grant
11	A. A.	Shanteshwara	1526	252	A.A.
12	Devaraya II	Uma Maheshwara	N.A.	265	Land grant

13	Venkatapatideva	Krishna	1536	297	Renovate temple
14	Harihara	A.A.	1517	299	To worship deity
15	Mallappa Odeya	A.A.	N.A.	305	Land grant
16	Bukka	A.A.	1288	306	To worship deity
17	Mallikarjuna	Somanatha	1380	315	A.A.
18	Harihara	A.A.	1308	317	Perform Rudra puja
19	Devaraya II	Vinayaka	1371	337	Pray deity for good health and wealth of the king
20	Devaraya	Somanatha	1342	365	Go give food to the brahmanas
21	A.A.	Markandeshwara	1347	385	A.A.
22	Harihara	Ananta-Jineshwara	1277	Vol. IX Part II, No. 404	Grant to temple
23	Bukka	Shankaranarayana	1278	405	Gift of new land
24	Bukka	Koteswara	1287	409	To feed brahmanas
25	Harihara	Nandikeshwara, Nakhareshwara, Ulluradeva	1322	423	Daily offerings to the deities
26	Harihara	Tuluveshwara	1323	424	To feed brahmanas in the temple
27	A.A.	Shankaranarayana	1324	425	Grant of fixed quantity of rice per day for the service of god
28	N.A.	Kotinatha	1333	435	Gift of perpetual lamp to god
29	Devaraya	A.A.	1369	451	Grant of village for feeding 10 brahmanas daily
30	Devaraya	Nakhareshwara	1374	456	Monetary grant to god
31	Devaraya II	Mahadeva	1387	459	Gift of gold to god
32	Virupaksha	Mahadeva	1389	461	Gift made for the prosperity of the king
33	Narasimha	Mahadeva	1433	479	Land grant

#### Appendix II: Temple Grants by Social Groups

Sl.	Name of Person /	Deity	Year	Reference	Remarks
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No.	Community		(Saka year)		
1	Muniyakka	Chandranatha (Jaina)	N.A.	SII, VII, No. 202	Grant by women
2	Samasta halaru	N.A.	N.A.	204	Construction of temple by trade guild
3	Samasta halaru	Chandraprabha (Jaina)	N.A.	209	Trade guild
4	Adhikari, Ballala, Senabova.	Parshwadeva (Jaina)	1329	211	Officials
5	Birmana Setti	Chandranatha (Jaina)	1514	244	Monetary grant
6	Ganapanna	Janardhana	1324	270	Land grant
7	Damarsa Prabhu	Krishna	1536	302	Trader
8	Jogi Setti	Somanatha	1334	310	Outsider
9	Vishnu Bhatta, Shankara Bhatta	Somanatha	1353	311	Brahmanas
10	Sovanna Bakanna	A.A.	1258	312	Also refers to trade guild
11	Duggu Binnanati	A.A.	1293	319	Grant by women
12	Sankamma	A.A.	1387	320	A.A.
13	Narana Setti	A.A.	1507	321	Land grant
14	Narasimha Takkura	A.A.	1304	324	Trader from North India
15	Sovanna Setti	Gopinatha	N.A.	326	Grant to brahmanas
16	Naganna Setti	Somanatha	1282	329	
17	Kalimarasa of Hubli	A.A.	1281	330	Grant by outsider
18	Sannana Setti	A.A.	1508	331	Construction of matha
19	Narayana Giri	Vinayaka	1338	335	Grant by head of matha
20	Annapa Setti	A.A.	1383	338	Land grant
21	Siranga Setti	A.A.	1298	341	A.A.
22	Anni Setti	A.A.	1447	343	A.A.
23	Singanna	A.A.	1315	344	Outsider
24	Sanna Setti, Narana Setti	A.A.	1398	346	Land grant to brahmanas
25	Nagave	Somadeva	1301	352	Grant by women
26	Bemmana Setti	A.A.	1312	353	Grant for Rudra Puja and feeding of brahmanas
27	Amitakka	A.A.	1259	358	Grant by women



28	Sovakka	Somanatha	1399	360	A.A.
29	Son of Sovanna	Narayana	1321	364	Grant by brahmana
30	Sankamma	Somanatha	N.A.	366	Grant by temple sevant
31	Naganna Setti	A.A.	1359	372	Grant by goldsmith
32	Ganapa Seti	A.A.	N.A.	374	Land grant
33	Yisvaranna Seti, son of Ganapa Seti	A.A.	1502	375	Grant given by both father and son
34	Tangayiti Setiti	Markandeshwara	N.A.	379	Grant by women
35	Nagira Hanjamana	A.A.	N.A.	380	Grant by trade guild
36	Madanna Setti	A.A.	1356	382	Grant to feed brahmanas
37	Devuru Setti	Panchalinga	1336	383	
38	Halaru Settikararu	Markandeshwara	1347	384	Grant by trade guild
39	Thirty families of village Chakkare	Koteshwara	1287	SII, IX Part II No. 407	Grant by village community
40	Settis	Timireshwara	1299	416	Grant by traders
41	Isara Setti	Nakhareshwara	1356	444	
42	Bangle sellers	Matha at Paduvakeri	1358	446	Land grant by bangle sellers
43	Nakharas and Settis	Mahadeva	1366	450	Grant of part of toll revenue
44	Residents	Tirumaladeva	1404	471	Grant by residents

[1] Dr. Rao is Research Fellow of the International Noble Academy and Member of the International Association of Religious Studies.

[2] R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization South India 300 B.C. to A.D. 1300*, Delhi, 1996. (Henceforth this book is referred as *Trade, Ideology*.)

[3] K. R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of Colas*, New Delhi, 1980. (Henceforth this book is referred as *Trade*.)

[4] James Heitzman, *The Gifts of Power Lordship in an Early Indian State*, New Delhi, 1997.

[5] James Heitzman, *The Gifts of Power Lordship in an Early Indian State*, New Delhi, 1997, p.109.

[6] K.V. Ramesh, *A History of South Kanara (From the Earliest Times to the Fall of Vijayanagara)*,

Dharwar, 1970; P. Gururaja Bhat, *Studies in Tuluva History and Culture*, Kallianpur, 1975.

[7] M.G.S. Narayanan, "The Tamil Bhakti Movement I" in idem, *Foundations of South Indian Society and Culture*, Delhi, 1994. (Henceforth this work is referred as *Foundations.*) ; M.G.S. Narayanan, "The Tamil Bhakti Movement II," in *Foundations.*

[8] K.R. Hall, *Trade*, pp. 80-84.

[9] M.G.S. Narayanan, *Foundations*, p. 309.

[10] Nilakantha Shastri, *The Pandyan Kingdom*, London, 1929, p. 231.

[11] Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, New Delhi, 1993; Georg Berkemer, 'Political Systems and Political Structure of Medieval South India', in, idem et al., (ed.), *Explorations in the History of South Asia Essays in Honour of Dietmar Rothermund*, New Delhi, 2001. (Henceforth this book is referred as *Explorations.*)

[12] For a general administrative and political history of South India see K.A. Nilakantha Shastri, *A History of South India From the Earliest Times to Vijayanagar*, Madras, 1958; T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, Madras, 1955.

[13] See Appendix I.

[14] *Kati-gadyana* was a form of currency of the region.

[15] *SII*, No. 456.

[16] See Appendix II.

[17] This is also because non-brahmanical society in South Western India followed matrilineal pattern of inheritance. Even today, agricultural community called Bunts follows this system of inheritance.

[18] Regarding working of trade guilds see A.V. Venkataratnam, *Local Self Government in the Vijayanagara Empire*, Mysore, 1972.

[19] Regarding categories of traders see Ashin Das Gupta, "The Indian Merchant and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800," in *Explorations*; According to Kenneth R. Hall the itinerants depended upon an assortment of relationships beyond the coastal ports to support their commercial activities. He states that Their local presence was characterised as of three types: (i) itinerant merchants inhabited a specified and permanent quarter of a commercial centre; (ii) itinerant merchants occasionally visited a community and were thus rightfully described as part-time residents; (iii) itinerant merchant organizations incorporated local merchants into their membership as the local merchant became the itinerant organization's local trade representative. Kenneth R. Hall, 'Price-making and Market Hierarchy in Early Medieval South India' in Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Ed.), *Money and Market in India 1100-1700*, Delhi, 1994, PP. 77-82.

- [20] Aiyar, K.V.Subrahmanya (ed.), *South Indian Inscriptions*, Volume VII, Mysore, 1986, No. 464. (Henceforth source work is referred as *SII*).
- [21] *SII*, Volume VII, Inscription No. 330.
- [22] *SII*, Volume VII, Inscription No. 310.
- [23] They were the trading communities of the region.
- [24] *SII*, Volume VII, Inscription No. 450.
- [25] *Sime* was a local administrative unit.
- [26] *Rajya* meant state or in this context, kingdom.
- [27] The meaning of *grama* is village.
- [28] K. G. Vasanthamadhava, *Trends in Karnataka Historical Research*, Mangalore, 1996, p. 29.
- [29] Aspects of urbanization have been studied by different scholars. See R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology*; V.K. Thakur, *Urbanization in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1981.
- [30] *Basadis* were the temples of those who belonged to Jainism.
- [31] *Mathas* were the religious institutions. Here the ascetics lived and worshipped the deity.
- [32] Udupi was a classic temple based in South Western India. Here we find the emergence of eight mutts administered by vaishnavaits. Vaishnava saint Madhwacharya was responsible for this development. Regarding the process of emergence of such religious institutions, see, Narayana Panditacharya (tr. into Kannada Vyasanakere Prabhanjanacharya), *Sumadhwa Vijaya*, Bangalore, 1988.
- [33] *Jatres* were the periodic festivals.
- [34] Malathi K Moorthy, "Trade and Commerce in Colonial South Kanara (1799-1862)," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Mangalore University, 1991, p. 104-107.
- [35] This was a trade guild of the locality.
- [36] *SII*, Volume VII, Inscription No. 204.
- [37] *SII*, Volume VII, Inscription No. 197.
- [38] Saka era was the official era used by all Indian rulers in pre-modern era. It can be converted to Christian era by adding 78 years. For example, Saka 1250 = 1250+78 = A.D. 1328.
- [39] *Puja* was the process of worship of a deity.
- [40] A.A. = as above.

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