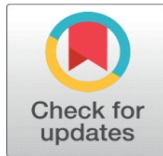
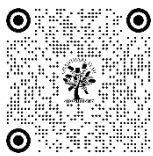


AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE PLAYED BY NON-BRAHMANAS IN THE TEMPLE CENTERED BRAHMANIC SOCIAL ORDER DURING EARLY MEDIEVAL KERALA

Suresh K. M¹

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of History, CHMKM Government Arts and Science College Koduvally, Kozhikode



Corresponding Author

Suresh K. M,
ureshkulangaramadam@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3271](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3271)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Temple is of great importance to medieval historians. In Kerala also temples played a very vital role in the social formation. Even though temples are generally considered as a Brahmanic institution it was not so. Temples was the center of medieval Kerala society which included Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas as well. The present study tries to focus on the non-Brahmana groups who were directly associated with the day-to-day functioning of a temple, i.e. the Sreevallabha temple in Central Travancore. Though there are several important studies on the general aspects of the temples' role in medieval social formation in Kerala, a specific study on the non-Brahmana employees depended on a Brahmanic temple is still lacking. This attempt is to fill that gap of knowledge by identifying varying non-Brahmana groups, their functions, social status and their relation to temple.

Keywords: Kerala Temple- Early Medieval Period-Non Brahmanas-Social Order- Functions and Remunerations-Sreevallabha Temple- Kerala

1. INTRODUCTION

An important Brahmanical institution that was crucial in the early medieval era was the temple. The entire social order consisting of both Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas evolved around this institution. The vast majority of non-Brahmanas, though they belonged to a number of caste groupings, had practically had some sort of connection to the temples. Both Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas worked for this organization, which paid them in a variety of ways, including goods and real land grants.

There are several academics, such as M G S Narayanan, KesavanVeluthat,Elamkulam P. N. Kunhan Pillai, P.M. RajanGumukkal, and M. R. RaghavaVarier, who have focused on the pivotal role that temples played in the social, economic, and cultural history of medieval Kerala.¹ However, there is currently no specific study on non-Brahmana social groups that rely on a certain temple. Therefore, the goal of this study is to describe the history of non-Brahmanas who had a direct bearing on the daily operations of the Srivallabha temple in Tiruvalla, Kerala.

How to cite this article (APA): K. M, S. (2024). An Examination of the Role Played by Non-Brahmanas in the Temple Centered Brahmanic Social Order During Early Medieval Kerala. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(6), 2663–2666. doi: 10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3271

The transcriptions of Tiruvalla copper-plates in the Travancore Archaeological Series and the materials published through the Kerala Society Papers serve as the major sources for this study.ⁱⁱ *Sri VallabhaKshetraMahatmyam*, the traditional work describing the temple's founding, is also mentioned. Additionally, the ideas and interpretations of different scholars that are offered in secondary sources, are also used.

The Srivallabha Temple case is particularly important for two factors. First of all, it was one of the thirteen *Padalpettadivyaadesamsor* places of Vishnu worship of present Kerala and a significant temple in early medieval Kerala. The sacred sites of Malainadu's Vishnu worship that are revered by the Azhwar saints of South India. Second, it has the most inscriptional sources from the same time period. These inscriptions, which are composed of 630 lines across 35 copper plates, offered details on a range of temple operations, including *poojas*, festivals, staff, administration, and more. Menial laborers, stage actors, suppliers of necessities, and *antaralas*, or the intermediate class, comprise this temple's non-Brahmana employees.

Drummers, garland makers, and *poduvalor samanjitana* are examples of *antarala*, or intermediate castes. *Poduval* means "public servant" in literal terms. The general secretary of a temple is referred to by this title in the inscriptions. In certain Kerala sources, *poduval* is also referred to as "*samanjitan*."ⁱⁱⁱ We can also infer from Tiruvalla plates that there existed a position of *kilsamanjitan*, or subordinate *samanjitan*. During Onam festival, he received four nali of rice.^{iv} Terms like *akappoduval* and *purappoduval* are also found in Kerala inscriptions, however they are absent from Tiruvalla inscriptions. The *samanjitana* is responsible for ensuring that the costs for the *pandiradipooja* are covered and adhere to the established budget. Every year on the day of *Visaka* in the month of *Vaisakha*, he was entitled to the gold and paddy that the officers of the hamlet of Kudavur owed him. The governor of Venpolinadue, Ravi Srikandan, performed this rent collection from the *kiidu* grant. *Poduval* was also given the responsibility of measuring out the necessary paddy in another section of the inscription. As a result, *Poduval* was served in an executive and managerial role on temple's behalf.

Another group of *antaralas* were the garland makers. The Tiruvalla inscriptions made three references to them. *PalaraTiruvadikal* is the name of the person who provided garlands for the Tiruvalla temple. For the purpose of providing flower garlands at the *Pandiradipooja*, he should obtain 18 ½ para of paddy.^v ParamesvaranSoman of Mararam devised a permanent arrangement for the supply of flower garlands by dedicating his garden, *Siraskkaripuraiyidam*, to the god Tiruvallavalappan in this regard. Four people were making flower garlands during the Onam celebration in this temple. They received eight *nail* of rice as remuneration.

Additionally, this temple regularly employed drummers. During the *pooja*, or worship, they were required to perform their instruments. Inscriptions from Tiruvalla allude to them as *uvaccar* and *kottikal*. Five drummers were scheduled to perform daily during the image bathing time.^{vi} In this temple, a Kilmalainatu ruler named Kumaran, also known as Maluvakkom, established the *pancamasabdam* with nine participants – four *cendai*, one *timilai*, one *centenkilai*, one pair of *kaittalam*, and two *kalam* – to be performed three times a day during *ribali* time. During the Onam festival, there are thirty-three drummers and pipers in total, and they are paid 99 nali of rice for their work.^{vii} Paddy fields with seed capacity of almost nine hundred tons were set aside for the upkeep of this drummer troop. Additionally, special endowments were created to cover the costs of hiring extra drummers for important events like the Tiruvona and Uttirada festivals. As a result, the drummers are vital component of the temple life and add a great deal of entertainment value to all of its events.

The *antarala* class can also include the theater actors of Kerala temples. They included both male and female performers. It is from the Cakyar caste normally the male artists came. The institution of *kuttu* existed in this temple as well, although the term "*cakyar*" is not mentioned in the Tiruvalla plates. There is a story of a PonnayakkaNayan from Kidanguparal who donated land that would yield 75 para of paddy each year, which would be used to pay for *akuttu*'s expenditures. On the day of the Rohininakshatra, or star which falls during the month of Vrichika, *Kaliyanga-kuttu* was scheduled to be performed.^{viii} The dance that Sri Krishna performed on the hood of the serpent Kaliya is most likely what is meant by *Kaliyangakuttu*. Twenty five para of paddy was set aside as an honorarium for the performers of this *kuttu*. Kuttambalam, a special location, was set aside for these kinds of dance performances.

In these inscriptions, the word "*tevatikki*" refers to the female entertainers. The phrase refers to a servant at the Lord's feet. Four *tevatikkikalare* alluded in Tiruvalla plates. For their performance on the day of Onam, they received twelve *nali* of rice.^{ix} They most likely showcased their skills and abilities on the *mandapa*, or elevated platform, directly in front of the inner temple. All of these forms of entertainment were primarily intended to draw visitors to the temple and propagate the bhakti worship. It provided a message of refuge in God as a moral remedy for issues resulting from social and economic disparities.

A different group of non-Brahmanas supplied the temple with a variety of necessities. In this instance, *Dvadasiganattars* congregation at the Tiruvalla temple devised a comprehensive arrangement.^x Twenty divisions, or *padagaram*, were formed from the individuals tasked with providing oil, and each division was further subdivided into eighteen shareholders, or *pangu*. This results in 360 *pangu*, which is equivalent to one *pangu* each day. One *nali* of rice will be given to the person who takes the oil to the shrine. If he neglects to do so, he will be fined double the amount delivered. If his fault continues for the third day, in addition to having his obligations doubled, the person shall be required to pay a fine of ten *kanam* of gold. He should pay a fine of six *kalanju* of gold if he fails for the full eighteen days that he has committed to. He will not be allowed to use the temple mess (*uttu*), associate with others (*kuttam*), or possess land tenure (*pattam*) if his negligence lasts for the entire eighteen days. The responsibility for supplying oil will inevitably fall on the shoulders of the remaining divisions in succession during those days of carelessness.

The twenty divisions listed above are: Ilaman, Mundaman, Mangalanjeri, Tengaman, Idaichcheri, Chennaturutti, Mundaippalli, Kurichchi, Narayanamangalam, Punjalppadagaram, Parambur; Mundaippalli, Tamarikkulam, Tengaman, Devarapalli, Punnaicheri, Kattur, Tenganman, Neduveli, Mangalachcheri, and Manikkamangalam. However, the list has 21 divisions, in contrast to the statement.

The shareholders are subject to additional restrictions. The lands they held in tenure were not to be sold or mortgaged among themselves. Additionally, they were denied the authority to lease the grounds. Nobody is allowed to cut off the oil supply or abuse the lands designated for this usage. If someone does this, they would be punished on the basis of *mulikkalamkachamor* the code prevailed there, which amounts to a fine of fifty *kalanju* of gold for the temple, twenty-five *kalanju* for the sabha, and fifteen *kalanju* for the *koyiladhikari*.

Tiruvalla plates make no mention of such a comprehensive structure for the provision of other necessary commodities, such as oil. The eight or more missing plates may have obscured this section. However, many providers of other necessary goods are listed in the section that lists the costs for the Onam festival.^{xi} One hundred *nali* of paddy should be given to the suppliers of both ripe and unripe plantains. He was required to provide six bunches of ripe plantains and seven bunches of unripe plantains, with an average of sixty plantains per bunch. For the Onam event, 10,000 betel leaves are needed. A proportionate amount of arecanuts should be brought by the person who delivers the betel leaves. This product costs fifteen *para* of paddy. Two *para* of paddy for asafetida and 26 *para* of paddy for oil and ghee are the costs for numerous other commodities. Twenty *nali* of rice for firewood, 20 *naligrams*, 10 *nali* of paddy for pepper, 10 *nali* of paddy for cumin, and 2 *nali* of rice for *vagaipodi*. Each of these things is necessary for the temple's daily operations. Similar to oil suppliers, the majority of these of rice for the potter, 8 *para* of paddy for salt, tamarind, and coconuts, 2 *para* and a half for green suppliers ought to hold land. There are some of these things that are unavailable locally. As a result, people who were responsible for providing these goods may have purchased them from the retailers. In any event, some kind of arrangement, similar to that for oil, must have been made to guarantee the continuous supply of all these necessities all year long.

The *pantaraka*, or treasury guards, watchmen and sweepers are among the numerous types of individuals who were dependent on the temple. One watchman and five treasury guards are mentioned in the Tiruvalla plates. They were given twenty and four *nali* of rice on the days of Onam, respectively. The sweepers came in three varieties. The first group consists of four sweepers who clean the interior of the temple. The others were those who swept outside the temple walls and those who swept the portions outside the temple. They were each given eight, eight and four *nali* of rice. The sweepers are needed every day. These inscriptions don't make it obvious whether they received land tenures. However, the temple was crucial to their survival, and they were undoubtedly included in the list of early medieval Kerala's temple folk.

In a nutshell, the Srivallabha temple in Tiruvalla, Central Travancore directly employed about 450 non-Brahmanas. Merchants, certain craftspeople, landless laborers, and actual tillers are among those who were indirectly employed or dependent on this temple. This study does not attempt to discuss them.

Despite being primarily a Brahminical institution, the early medieval Kerala temple was crucial to the establishment and upkeep of a specific kind of social order in the region, as demonstrated by an examination of Tiruvalla copper plates. Brahmanas dominated that particular temple centered social order and they were its primary beneficiaries as well. This does not imply that non-Brahmanas were entirely shut out of this institution's affairs. The medieval society, including both Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas, was centered there. *Antarala* group's enjoyed an esteemed social and economic position. However; the vast majority of non-Brahmanas who relied on the temple in different ways were from lower socioeconomic classes. They were very poor sections of that society. The Brahmanas manipulated the labor force of non-

Brahmanas' by cleverly using *bhakti* cult. Non-Brahmanas developed a sense of liability toward the temple deity as a result.

There is an allusion of non-Brahmanas enjoying mess at Tiruvalla temple. The oil suppliers who were defaulted for the entire eighteen days were not eligible for this mess. This mess may have been used by all the non-Brahmanas who relied on the temple. These non-Brahmanas received landed tenures or products like rice or paddy for their service to temple. The temple festivities were their primary source of amusement. In contrast to other low-wage labor groups, the *antarala* castes enjoyed a high social and economic standing among these non-Brahmana people. Among these non-Brahmanas, there was rigid social hierarchy but the dominating role that bhaktis played in relation to the divine balanced out the social and economic disparities. It is evident from the aforementioned analysis that the temple in early medieval Kerala was not solely a Brahmanic establishment. The non-Brahmanas in that society also was grouped around this institution. In this sense, the temple institution became the focal point of early medieval Kerala society, and reconstructing medieval Kerala history requires a thorough understanding of the role this institution played.

CONCLUSION

The study "An Examination of the Role played by Non-Brahmanas in the Temple Centered Brahmanic Social Order during Early Medieval Kerala" highlights the pivotal yet often overlooked contributions of non-Brahmanas in sustaining the socio-economic and cultural framework centered around temples. Non-Brahmanas, despite their subordinate position in the caste hierarchy, played an essential role in temple activities by providing labor, land, and artisanal skills crucial for maintaining the temple economy and ritual practices. Their involvement extended to agricultural production, crafts, and services, which ensured the economic stability of temples and reinforced the hierarchical social order. While the Brahmanas occupied a dominant position in this system, the study reveals that the non-Brahmanas were indispensable in creating the material and logistical foundations that enabled the temple-centered Brahmanic society to flourish during the early medieval period. This interdependence underscores the complex nature of social integration and stratification in early Kerala.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None

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