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**History**

**SERMADEVI FROM THE LIGHT OF EPIGRAPHICAL SOURCES**

**KEY WORDS:** Sermadevi, Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to describe the epigraphical history of Sermadevi. Sermadevi, is located on the southern bank of the river Tampraparani in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. It lies on the latitude 8° 41 and longitude 77° 36. The medieval town at present functions as the head quarters of the Sub-Collector of Ambasamudram and Nanguneri taluks of Tirunelveli district. Sermadevi, which is situated between Tirunelveli and Ambasamudram once, formed an integral part of the erstwhile Chera kingdom. It became the meeting ground of all the major South Indian powers including the Vijayanagar Empire. It witnessed a series of political vicissitudes that rather decided the fortunes of the Chera, Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagar rulers. The political fortunes centred on Sermadevi decided the very course of the history of South India.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Western Ghats, which start near Kanyakumari, run straight from northern limit of the Tirunelveli district as far as to Papanasam. Its chains functioned as important strategic passages to the Cheras, Pandyas and Cholas and supplied suitable stones for the construction of buildings, forts and temples. Potigai hills, a chain of Western Ghats and Kolunthumamalai are situated eight kilometers west from the town and 2.4 kms east of Sermadevi. As claimed by Bishop R Caldwell, Sermadevi seems to have experienced Neolithic culture. There is no source material to mark the existence of a settlement, at Sermadevi from Neolithic down to the rule of the Cholas, especially of Rajaraja I's reign.

An evidence for the existence of the earliest settlement is known from a record dated in the thirteenth regnal year (998 A.D.) of Rajaraja I. The epigraph refers to the settlement as Sermadevi chaturvedimangalam, a brahmadaya. Apart from this, no other information can be gleaned with regard to the formation of the brahmadaya settlement from the record. Bishop Caldwell, K.A.Nilakanta Sastri and M.A.Dhaky opinion that the present Sermadevi brahmadaya had relations with its contemporary Chera rulers. But these scholars do not elaborate anything about the formation of the brahmadaya. The Pandyas and the Cheras had political rivalry. It is due to the marriage alliance, a congenial atmosphere could have been achieved between the two dynasties in the ninth century A.D. Parantaka Viranarayana (860A.D.-905A.D.) married a Chera princess named Vanavanmadevi. Being a pious and tolerant king, her husband patronised both Hinduism and Jainism. He created many brahmadayas and jaina pallis. He named a jaina palli after his queen Vanavanmadevi as Madeviperumpalli. Similarly the king might have named one of the brahmadayas after the name of his queen. As his wife was a Chera princess, it is believed that the name of her country would have been prefixed after her name. S.R. Balasubramanyan holds the view that the first settlement of the village seems to have been established around Ammainatha temple. His assumption seems to be correct. A record dated 1031 A.D. informs that certain number of ahanal igai sivabrahmanas gifted things to the temple. The ahanal igai sivabrahmanas of Cholendrasimha Uvaramudaiyar and Kailasamudaiyar engaged by the temple might have made their settlements.

An examination of the inscriptions of Sermadevi reveal that three settlements were established around Ammainatha, Ramaswamy and Deyvisamudaiyar temples during the Chola rule in Sermadevi and the fourth settlement would have been emerged around Appan temple during the Pandya period. The Ammainatha settlement seems to have been shifted to somewhere around Deyvisamudaiyar temple. As the Appan temple is located adjacent to the southern bank of the river Tampraparani, likely that its settlements would have been abandoned like the Ammainatha temple settlement fearing the floods in the river Tampraparani. The brahmadaya mahasabha members of Sermadevi like other South Indian brahmadayas possessed lands in the village. The lands belonging to the brahmadaya and temples were mentioned as pidagai in the records.

Parantaka, the Chola king invaded Pandya country and brought it under his control. He maintained the conquered Pandya areas with the help of a separate force called Pandippadai. But Cholan Thalaikonda Virapandya killed Parantaka and relieved Pandya country from the clutches of the Cholas. His rule lasted till 966 A.D. Sundara Chola alias Parantaka II, son of Arinjaya defeated Virapandya. Even then the Chola power had not been fully restored in the Pandya country, till the rule of the successor of Aditya II. Rajaraja I firmly established Chola power in the Pandya country after defeating, Pandya king Amarabhujanga. This invasion took place before 988 A.D. and conquered kandalursalai, a chief navalbase, in the Chera territory about the same year. Pandya subordination, however, lasted only for five years. In 993 A.D. Rajaraja once again invaded and completely conquered the Pandya country for the second time and annexed it with his empire. To suppress the revolt in Pandya country and to check Chera influence he created a brahmadaya in his name called Rajaraja Chaturvedimangalam. Like his predecessors he used this area as a military base against the Chera country. He stationed such a troop called munrukaimasenai at Tiruvalisvaram.

Rajaraja further consolidated his authority over the Pandya country by changing the names of administrative units, temples, villages, rivers and so on. He changed Pandyamandalam as Rajaraja valanadu in 999 A.D. He again changed it as Rajaraja mandalam 1012 A.D. and Rajaraja pandinadu from 1022 A.D. onwards. He issued orders in a script called vatteluttu, which is widely prevalent in the Pandya country. Seven inscriptions from his twenty third to twenty eighth regnal year (i.e. from 1008 A.D. to 1013 A.D.) written in vatteluttu and Tamil scripts are found in the Kailasamudaiyar and Ramaswamy temples of Sermadevi. A few of them bear his political achievements. Ramaswamy temple inscriptions date of 1008 A.D. speak that chaturvedimangalam was a brahmadaya village in Mullinadu, which in turn was a sub-division of Rajaraja valanadu. It shows that the valanadu was called by Rajaraja's name by 1008 A.D. In the next year 1009 A.D., he changed the name of the deity of Ramaswamy temple as Nigarilichola Vinnagar Alvar after one of his titles. Again, in 1012 A.D., he changed the names of the Kailasamudaiyar temple, the village Sermadevi chaturvedimangalam as Cholendrasimha Isvaram and Nigarilicholachaturvedimangalam respectively.

The son and successor of Rajaraja I was Rajendra, who inherited an extensive empire from his father. Three inscriptions are found in the Deviyamisvaramudaiyar, Ramaswamy and Kailasamudaiyar temples of Sermadevi. Like his father, he also engraved records in both Tamil and vatteluttu scripts to please the people of Pandya country. He built Deviyamisvaramudaiyar temple at Sermadevi and brought that area under his control. He brought about one thousand and five hundred Brahman families to Sermadevi. Srivallabha, the Pandya subordinate ruled over Attur, Tiruvalisvaram and Sermadevi. His Chera subordinate Rajasimha built Rajendra Vinnagar at Mannarkoil. The sub-ordination of the Pandyas to the Chola power led to a state of chronic revolt and disorder. Realising the restlessness in the Pandya country Rajendra I made some solid arrangements. He appointed his son Sundara

Chola who used the name as Jatavarman Sundara Chola Pandya to serve as viceroy to rule the Pandyanadu since 1021 A.D.

The creation of Chola - Pandya Viceroy ship from the Chola royal blood minimised troubles in the Pandya country and this practice continued till the reign of Vira Rajendra. The Chola-Pandya rule commenced in the Pandya country with the appointment of Jatavarman Sundara Pandya. Totally four Chola-Pandya Viceroys reigned the Pandya country for about sixty years. By way of respecting the sentiments of the people of the Pandya country Sundara Chola and his successors assumed the titles like Jatavarman and Maravarman indicating their authority over the Pandya kings. The sway of Jatavarman Sundara Chola over Pandya country lasted for about thirty years. He had a little control over the Chera feudatories like Rajasimha and Rajaraja Devar. Twelve inscriptions of Sundara Chola recorded in the temples of Kailasamudaiyar and Ramaswamy are available. Rajadhiraja I (1018 A.D. - 1054 A.D.) seems to have appointed his son Minavan alias Vikrama Chola as Chola-Pandya viceroy two years earlier to the out-break of Koppam battle that took place in 1054 A.D. He ruled as co-regent to Jatavarman Sundara Chola-Pandya. Rajasimha and Rajarajadeva, the Chera rulers, continued to be his sub-ordinates. The names of the king found mention in six of the records of the Kailasamudaiyar temple. An inscription informs that a dandanayaka i.e., a captain of a regiment of the Chola army, had stationed at Sermadevi chaturvedimangalam probably to check the Pandya power. In memory of his father he also created Rajadhiraja Chaturvedimangalam. Jatavarman Chola-Pandya was the third viceroy and he ascended the throne of the Pandya country in 1057 A.D. He engraved only one inscription which is found on the walls of Kailasanatha temple. His record mentions that he gifted quarter (L) veli of land at Sivapathasekaranallur as devadana to the Kailasamudaiyar temple in 1064 A.D. This record gives detailed information regarding land transaction procedures prevalent during his reign in the Pandya country. There was much internal disorder in the Chola country following the death of Vira Rajendra and the childless Adi Rajendra. Pandya prince Kulasekhara together with Ceylonese ruler Vijayabahu opposed Kulottunga I. Ceylon was relieved of from the Chola authority by 1070 A.D. Kulottunga gained victory over five Pandyas, whose identity was not certain. However the Pandyas agreed to pay tribute to Kulottunga, who discontinued the practice of appointing Chola-Pandya viceroys to the Pandya country.

The finding of his inscriptions in the Tirunelveli and South Travancore areas signify his interest in the bordering areas of the Cheras. Jatavarman Kulasekhara succeeded his father in 1162 A.D. Like his father, he ruled Tirunelveli region with his capital at Tirunelveli. His authority is extended over the whole of Pandya country and that is evident from his records as they are found in Tirunelveli, Madurai and Ramanathapuram districts. He wanted to expand his territory by invading Madurai, which was ruled by Parakrama Pandya (1143 A.D. - 1166 A.D.). He besieged Madurai and became its ruler. At the request of, Parakrama Pandya, Singalese forces drove Kulasekhara out of Madurai about 1171 A.D. Subsequently, Vira Pandya, son of Vikrama Pandya, was crowned at Madurai. To re-capture Madurai Kulasekhara appealed to Rajadhiraja III (1146 A.D. - 1173 A.D.) for his help. Rajadhiraja chased Ceylonese army and re-crowned Kulasekhara as king of Madurai around 1173 A.D. Forgetting the Chola help Kulasekhara changed his loyalty to Parakrama Bagu of Ceylon. The Cholas sent the marava and elagapadai to Kulasekhara against Ceylon which were stationed in his country. Chola forces defeated Ceylonese naval forces and deposed Kulasekhara. Subsequently Virapandya was crowned at Madurai with the help of the Chola power. Eight lithic records of the king are found in the Ramaswamy Deviyamisvaramudaiyar, Naduvul Appan and Appan temples.

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