

ID.NO: IRCGS 147

TEVARATIYARS (WOMEN OF TEMPLES) IN SRI LANKA: A STUDY BASED ON EPIGRAPHY

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Abstract

In the medieval Sri Lankan society, Tevaratiyars were the female community associated with the Hindu temples. The Tevaratiyars system, widespread throughout India, was institutionalized and reached its height during the Chola period in South India. During the Chola rule in Sri Lanka, various communities were brought and settled from Tamil Nadu to work in building Hindu temples. Among the settled communities in Sri Lanka, the Tevaratiyars are prominent. A lot of research has been done about Tevaratiyars in India, but no extensive research has been done through epigraphy in Sri Lanka. Therefore the objective of this research is to bring it to historical light through epigraphy about Tevaratiyars who were settled in temples during the Chola rule in Sri Lanka and performed dances and songs for the Lord and have disappeared today. Also, it tries to answer questions such as the Hindu temples they worked in, the temple rules followed in connection with them and the privileges they received. The main sources of this research are Palamottai inscription and Polonnaruwa Vanavanmadevi Ishvara Temple Athirajendra's prashasti. Research on the Chola rule in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan dance traditions have been used in support with sources such as Mahavamsa, Konesar Kalvettu (inscription) and IbnBattuta's notes etc. Analytical, descriptive and explanatory research methods have been used to achieve the objective of this research. It can be known that Tevaratiyars were among the social classes organized to work in Vanavanmadevi Ishvara temple in Polonnaruwa through the prashasti of Chola king Athirajendra. It is possible that the Tevaratiyars who worked in this temple were involved in dance work as drum beaters are mentioned as Uvachar among the groups who worked here. The Palamottai Inscription shows that even after the end of the Chola rule in Sri Lanka, Tevaratiyars worked in Hindu temples under the rule of the Sinhalese kings. In the donation made by Nankaisani to the Tenkailasam temple, 23kacu out of 35 kacu for 7 Tevaratiyars with brand marks on their foreheads in order to maintain the system which shows the importance of Tevaratiyars in the socio- cultural system of temples at the time. Ibn Battuta mentioned that after the Polonnaruwa period, 500 Tevaratiyars continued to dance at Tevinuvara Temple. Through these evidences, it can be seen that Devadashi system existed in Hindu Temples during the medieval Sri Lanka and Tevaratiyars were supported as individuals in the society, through them, the tradition of dance was performed excellently with the patronage of the Kings at the temples. However, Tevaratiyars have disappeared from Sri Lankan Hindu temple social structure today.

Keywords: Athirajenthira's prashasti, Hindu temples, Palamottai Inscription, Tevaratiyar