Chapter 4

The Tiruvarruvai Inscriptions

SUB TITLES

- The Vazhappalli Copperplate
- The Agents and Rituals
- Political Practice of Kaccam
- Devises of Control
- The Copperplate Document of Mecheri Illam
- The Stone Inscription of Tiruvāṟṟuvāi
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The Siva temple of Tiruvāṟūṟvāi located on the bank of a tributary of the Manimala River is regarded as one of the oldest Siva temples constituting the locale. The localness about it is that its features differ widely from other Siva temples found even within it. The present chapter draws certain inscriptional evidences obtained from or pertaining to it with a view to tracing its genealogy. This will be carried out by examining the nature of its relation with other temples, rituals in the temple and the forces which propelled their benefactors to institute them at three distinct chronological points. It is the idea of power relations as against the idea of absolutely localisable power that orients our descriptions. We also attempt to reflect on the ways in which the ruling elites ruled themselves, other men and property. This exercise involves an examination of the manner in which the institutions and apparatuses were geared up for the exercise of the self-positioning of the elites as it happened in the locale. We will also examine how the inscriptions, while documenting the instituting of rituals, become functional in the discourse of Bhakti. The examination includes a description of the distinct ways in which the temple rituals regenerated and propagated bhakti. Our premise for the present is that devotion or bhakti was a crucial force in determining and regulating the affairs of the temple and people within its gamut.

Archaeological information and ethnographic indicators about the areas adjacent to this temple suggest strong Jain influence in the past. The unique feature of the siva linga is that it is made of a scarcely found stone classified as rudrākṣa sila. It stands hardly one foot above the pedestal but is still below the ground level outside the sanctum sanctorum, which is quite unlike that in other temples. The size of the linga and the features of the temple inform us that it bears traces of a pre-Brahmanic style;

2. These have been dealt with in considerable length in the Chapter entitled “The Locale”.
architecturally the localness may be that it bears the hybrid style, traceable to Pre-Brahmin, Saivite and Jain styles. At present we will highlight the genealogical connectivity between it and Jain architecture and sculpture. Some of the aspects of the temple’s antiquity are viewed in comparison with the yakṣā cult, which arguably is “ancient, wide spread” and “deeply engrained” in the lives of the people in India.³

Agarawala gives the description of the presence of ‘an inevitable yakṣā shrine’ in each village, which is “in the nature of a low-platform on which a conical aniconic image is placed (single on its platform).⁴ There is a close resemblance between the above characterisation of a Yakṣā shrine and the physical features of the Temple of Tiruvāṟuvāi. However one has to concede that there are differences between the “Siva linga” of this temple and the conical aniconic Yakṣā image found elsewhere.

Some of the pragmatic possibilities can be stated: it is likely that at the time of the founding of the temple, there was no river or rill passing by or that at the time when the site emerged as a cult centre, there was no need to anticipate any inundation. Considering the nature of the geography, it is possible to propose that Mannara Todu of the present day is an artificial canal that confluences with the Manimala River and that it had happened after the founding of the temple. Lexically this term ‘tōdu’ cannot be compared to puzha, nadi, kaivazhi, stream, tributary or river. Unlike them, this term ‘tōdu’ has both prefixes and suffixes when it is used as a proper noun. They have only prefixes. All the suffixes of the term are verbs connoting its creation through human effort and the prefixes are either proper nouns or the kind of verbs mentioned just above. This lexical interpretation is another basis to confirm the above proposition. The consecration of a “second Siva” with features conforming to specifications of the later Brahmanic norms points to the new-procedural

⁴  For features of the Yakṣa shrines in the ancient period see Ibid.
compulsions and needs of differentiations born out of them. It is to be added that the Tiruvaṟṟuvai was not the only Saivite stronghold of the pre-Brahmanic phase. The Saivite temple at Tukalassery, about which we have already mentioned, is the highest point of the locale where also we can trace the Jain connectivity. It is also regarded as yet another prominent Saivite temple having antiquity.

V R Nambiyar provides an impressive description on the unique features of the temple of Tiruvaṟṟuvāi. He says that the siva linga set up three feet below the general ground level is easily submersible when even a minor flood takes place and at that time there was heavy turn out of devotees taking a plunge in the rising water as the siva linga got immersed. In the case of such eventualities the daily pūjā-s were performed in another subsidiary sanctum located above the flood level on the north eastern side of the original sanctum. The deity consecrated here is called Tekkum Dēvar and was considered the second Siva. Later observations claimed more definitiveness that the Siva linga is ‘svayam bhū’ or self born. It is to be learnt that despite the variance from the standard format for a temple and despite the additions and alterations made on the general features of the temple, there had been a marked persistence in retaining the original location as well as the idol, siva linga, and the sanctum sanctorum. The other deities consecrated in the temple are Gaṇapati on the southern side outside the Śrī kōvil and Bhadrakāli on the north-western corner of the nālampalam.

For an understanding of the nature and scope of the transformations the three inscriptions pertaining to the temple are our chief sources of information. We may now attempt an interrogation of these inscriptions. The way they are discussed in the present chapter will enable us to have a panoramic view of the

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5 The occasion is celebrated as “the bath of Siva” (Śivanṭre āṟṟṟṟṟṟ).  
change in the management and functioning of the temple as outlined in the
diviography of medieval Kerala. Therefore, the object of historicisation here
is a certain process—the diffusion of ritual-based power relations among the
elite groups. The observations made here in the course of this exercise are
demed pertinent for the interrogation of similar documents in the ensuing
chapters also.

The Vazhappalli Copperplate

The Vazhappalli copperplate inscription was taken from the
Mecheri Illam—located within the locale—to Talamana Illam of
Vazhappalli at Changanacherry Taluk.⁷ There were matrimonial relations
between the two families.⁸ This copperplate is phrased as a decree and
refers to an agreement arrived at between several agents at Tiruvāṟṟuvāi.
This document is generally regarded in historiography as having been
written during the period of the ‘Cera’ Perumāl, Rajasekhara.⁹

The localness of the locale can be demonstrated through
highlighting the uniqueness of the present copperplate inscription in
comparison with other comparable documents obtained from Kerala. In the
first place, this is the only inscription beginning with the benedictory
phrase Namassivāyya as different from the usual expression for salutation,
Svasti Sṛī.¹⁰ This dissimilarity between the benedictory expression
Namassivāyya of this inscription and those in the inscriptions of the other
Cera rulers have been attributed to the ruler’s devotion to Lord Siva. The
Siva bhakti cult is argued to have established its roots in Kerala before the

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⁷ For details, see P Unnikrishnan Nair, Śṛī Vallabha - - -, p. 99. For the Tamil transliteration of
text and English translation of the document, See, T A Gopinatha Rao, Travancore
⁹ For discussion on the identification of Rajasekhara see, T A Gopinatha Rao, pp. 8-13. Also
see, M G S Narayanan, Index to Cera Inscriptions (C.800 to 1124A.D), A Companion
Volume to Thesis on “Political and Social Conditions of Kerala Under the Kulasekhara
Empire”, 1972, University of Kerala, No. A.1.
Viṣṇu Bhakti cult.\(^{11}\) In support of the above it has been pointed out that the centrally located temple of Tiruvanccikkulam in the chief city of the Ceras was dedicated to Siva. It has also been pointed out that this was the only Saivite temple in Malanadu celebrated by the class of Saivite saints called Nayanār-s.\(^{12}\) The locale and particularly this temple were closely associated with the Cera ruler, Rama Rajasekhara of the early ninth century.\(^{13}\) There are certain oral traditions in the Chennittala-Trikkandiyoor regions associating Rama Rajasekhara with the founding of the Trikkandiyoor temple near Mavelikara.\(^{14}\) On the basis of the inscriptions in the Trikkandiyur temple, it can be worked out that the year of its founding was 823 AD.\(^{15}\) This would tally with the period of the above Cera ruler. Secondly this is the earliest copperplate inscription obtained so far from Kerala, attributed to the Ceras of Mahodayapuram.\(^{16}\) Thirdly this is one among the few records found so far in Kerala which claims that the contents of the document are the proceedings of a kaccam which got the approval from the ‘holy hand of the revered one’. Yet another ‘royal charter’ in which the expression ‘holy hand of the revered’ is found is the Irinjalakuda temple inscription which records the unanimous decision taken during the reign of Stanu Ravi to lease out land.\(^{17}\) Fourthly this is the

\(^{11}\) M G S Narayanan, Perumāls - - - , p. 189.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.


\(^{16}\) The first of the historians to attribute several stone and copperplate inscriptions to the ‘dynasty of the Kulasekharas’ and to work out a chronology of the rulers of the dynasty of the Kulasekharas is P N Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai. The text of the Valappalli Copperplate with explanatory notes have been brought out in Pariñāmangal, pp. 74-75. The problem of nomenclature of the dynasty had been raised by M G S Narayanan which have been accepted by professional historians to this day. For details see, M R R Varier, ‘Epigraphical Studies in Kerala’ Tamil Civilization, Vol.5 Nos. 1 & March, June 1987. Also see Kesavan Veluthat, “Epigraphy in Historiography of Kerala” in K K N Kurup (Ed), New Dimensions in South Indian History, K K N Kurup (Ed), University of Calicut, 1996, p 32.

\(^{17}\) See Index A.3. See text in Bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute. Vol IX.I. The expression tirukkai kāti meaning “below the hand of the Lord” suggesting the presence of God/ruler. A difference with the Tiruvāṟṟuvāḷi inscription is the use of the expression “capatai” (probable reading) to mean vow instead of “kaccam”. In the Tiruvāṟṟuvāḷi inscription this is used in the sense of a resolution.
only record found so far in the Cera territory which gives an honorific title such as Śrīraja Rājādhirājā Paramēsvara Bhattāraka Rājasēkhara Tēvaṇ. Fifthly this is one of the earliest records with tremendous potential to shed light on a variety of themes and topics. They include aspects such as kaccam, the key features of the organisation of people, provisions by way of the share of resources for the rituals, fines for obstruction of rituals, penal interest for default, use of currency, notions regarding measurement of land, assessment of yield, classification of land into paddy growing and puraiyam, sharing of resources with the ruler, use of coins such as dinara etc.

The available document, dated to the twelfth regnal year of Śrīraja Rājādhirājā Paramēsvara Bhattāraka Rājasēkhara Tēvaṇ, is only partial and it is presumed that there is at least one more plate which could not be recovered as yet.\(^\text{18}\) It lays down the details of the agreement arrived at with regard to the daily pūjā-s (Muṭṭāppali) in the temple of Tiruvaṭṭuvāi.\(^\text{19}\) The first ever editor of the document, T A Gopinatha Rao, in the introductory note explains “patineṭṭu nāṭṭār of Tiruvaṭṭuvāi” as the people of the eighteen nāṭu-s belonging to Tiruvāṭṭuvāi.\(^\text{20}\) But further examination of the niceties of the words nāṭu and nāṭṭār has enabled an alteration of the above expression into ‘eighteen men of Tiruvaṭṭuvāi’.\(^\text{21}\)

The document’s objective is to ensure the uninterrupted conduct of the daily pūjā-s in the temple. The agreement/consensus reached on the matter finds the nāṭṭār and the urār at the behest of a person of high recognition and authority as well as the elaborate provision made for the same. As such the document brings out the broad spectrum of relationships that existed between the various parties involved in the management of the

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\(^{19}\) In the opinion of T A Gopinatha Rao, there is at least one more plate constituting the document. See *T.A.S. Vol. II*, p. 8.  
\(^{21}\) See M G S Narayanan, *Perumāls - - -,* note 28, p. LXX.
temple as well as the provisions made and procedures laid down for the performance of rituals.

This copperplate is the instrument for making explicit the uninterrupted conduct of the daily pūjā-s and the provisions for it. We get an idea of the newly instituted mechanism for the transfer of products from the primary producer or possessor of the lands to the functionaries of the temple for the performance of rituals. The text of the copperplate enables us to prise open the mechanisms, economic organisation and tenets of political practice.

The interrogation of the copperplate is made in the backdrop of the unique place enjoyed by Rajasekhara in the religious/cultural milieu of South India, at whose behest the document was caused to be made. The Rajasekhara of the document has been identified with the Ceraman Perumal Nayanar, one of the saints of the ‘Tamil Bhakti Movement in South India’. The origins of the theme have been traced to the ancient Tamil poetry and are assumed to have crystallised in the bhakti hymns. It is argued that the poetic compositions enshrining bhakti emerges at the threshold of a new realm of literary creation laying the foundations of a new religious faith and related practices in the Far South. We find a list of sixty three nāyanār-s or Saivite bhakta-s in the Tamil tradition, of which three of them—Appar, Sundarar and Sambandar are regarded as the prominent ones. Ceraman Perumāl Nayanār, who is identified with the Cera ruler Rajasekhara, was a friend of Sundarar. The developments of the new era included the establishment of a monarchical order of polity at the crest of the expansion of rice cultivation in the seventh and eighth

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23 Ibid, pp. 138-142.
centuries. This inextricable link makes it difficult for the historian to deal with each of the above in mutual exclusion.

On the basis of the inscriptional and literary references, scholars have identified the Cera ruler Rajasekhara with Ceraman Perumāl Nayanar of the early half of the 9th century. The literary works made use of for the identification are the Sanskrit work Sankaravijaya of Madhavacharya, Aścaryamanjari, Taptisamvaraṇa and Yudhiṣṭhiravijaya. Rajasekhara has been taken for a person on whom literary/poetic genius and profundity of sacredness converged, as could be read from his works Ponvaṇṇattandādi, Tiruvārūr, Mummaṇikkōvai and Tirukkailāsaṇṇā Ula. It is also pointed out that a passage in Śivānanda lahari of Sankaracharya contains a concealed reference to King Rajasekhara. The royal preoccupation with the theme of bhakti clearly affirms the inextricable link between the royal authority and the dominant religious ideology of bhakti.

It is held that the Vaiṣṇava bhakti cult had become popular in Kerala only after the Śaiva Bhakti cult had established its roots. In support of the above view it is pointed out that in the chief temple of the chief city of Tiruvanchikulam in Makotai, is the only Saivite temple in Malanadu celebrated by the class of Saivite saints to Siva. This may be said to be indicative of the ruler’s special favour for Saivism. It is the same pro-Saivite stance that is argued to have spilled over to other areas over which Rajasekhara had control. The application of the benedictory phrase Nama Śivāya in the Tiruvāṭṭuvāi inscription is taken to vouch for the ruler’s adherence to Saivism. Again the founding of the Saivite temple of

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28 Ibid, p. 188.
29 Ibid, p. 188.
30 Ibid.
Trikandiyoor near Mavalikara during the reign of Rajasekhara in 823 AD is taken to be in line with the ruler’s personal preference for Saivism. On the basis of literary evidence it has been argued that Stanu Ravi, the successor of Rajasekhara/Cheraman Perumāl Nayanar can be identified with the Vaišṇava saint, Kulasekhara Alvar. Much has been written in history about the link between the Bhaktā-s and the rulers. Three of the Saivite saints usually called the “Tevaram Trio”—Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar—were closely associated with the contemporary Pallava, Pandya and Cera rulers. The Saivite saint Appar is credited with the conversion of the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (c. 600-630). Sambandar is said to have gone to Madurai and saved the Pandya capital from the influence of the Jains and also won over the Pandya king and his people to Saivism. The association of the Cera ruler Rajasekhara with Sundarar has already been mentioned. The nature of the association between the rulers and the bhakta-s have prompted the comment in historiography that the distinction between the “sacred and the secular or the spiritual and the temporal centres of power is often an arbitrary one”. It is also seen that the

31 Ibid.
32 A strong ground for this identification is the references in the work of the court playwright, Kulasekkhararvarma where he calls himself ‘Mahodayapura Paramēśvara’ and ‘Keraladhinatha’ at the same time. See M G S Narayanan, Ibid, pp. 13-14. Also Kesavan Veluthat, Political Structure of Early Medieval South India, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1993, p.51.
33 For details of the story see K A N Sastri, A History of South India, pp. 423-424. Also see Kenneth R Hall, “Merchants, Rulers and Priests in an Early South Indian Sacred Centre: Cidambaram in the Age of the Colas” in Kenneth R Hall, Structure and Society in Early South India, Delhi, OUP, 2001, p. 87.
34 See K A N Sastri, A History of South India, pp. 424-425.
35 Champakalakshmi, “The Sovereignty of the Divine: The Vaiṣṇava Pantheon and Temporal Power in South India”, in Sreenivas Murthy et, al.,(ed), Essays on Indian History and Culture, Delhi, 1991, p. 49. It is also pointed out that “seats of power are divided into the sacred and secular zones on the basis of the location of the structures which housed the deity and the ruler” and that “the actual exercise of power in both the areas is undifferentiated and indistinguishable”. Also see Champakalakshmi, “From Devotion and Dissent to Dominance: The Bhakti of Alvars and Nayanars” in Tradition, Dissent and Ideology, Champakalakshmi, 1996, Delhi, OUP, pp. 137-138. Taking the cue from Friedhelm Hardy’s formulations, she delineates the various phases preparing the ground for a new era in religious practices and social reorganisation.
institutionalisation of the temple that had been part of the devotional movement made temple-service hereditary and professional.\textsuperscript{36}

The Agents and Rituals

In the first place the agreement, which is the subject of this document, is made beneath the hand of Śrīrāja Rājādhirājā Paramēswara Bhattāraka Rajasēkhara Tēvaṛ.\textsuperscript{37} The mere recounting of the titles/ birudū-s assumed by him could serve multiple functions. It proclaims the ideal of the ruler and the self-constructed image of royalty meant to be received by his subjects. The term bhaṭṭāraka is learnt to have been originally applied to a Jain priest. This tradition seems to have been carried forward beyond the days of the period of the Bhakti literature. The expression bhaṭṭa came to be used for teachers in the Vedic academies called sālai-s attached to the temples.\textsuperscript{38} We are also given to understand from historiography that it was a common practice to appoint a learned Brahmin or Bhatta in the temples for the purpose of reciting and explaining the Mahābhārata.\textsuperscript{39} It is obvious that the bhatta came to occupy a coveted place and was more in the nature of an instructor and scholar. The honours cited in the document qualify him as king of kings, lord of lords, scholar and the almighty. The expression ‘tēvaṛ’ still further employed in the title equates him with God. In essence he is to be understood as a person on whom sovereign authority, physical might and divinity converged.

\textsuperscript{36} See Idem.

\textsuperscript{37} See \textit{T A S, Vol. II}, p.13. T A Gopinatha Rao suggested that the relevant portion of the inscription (line 2) could be read as tiruvatī kīḻ vaiṭu which would then mean, “agreement / consensus made at the feet of the ruler”. The reading has been corrected by Elamkulam Kunjan Pilli as tirukkai kīḻ vaiṭu, which would alter the meaning as “agreement / consensus arrived at beneath the hand” of the ruler. See Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, P.N, \textit{Kerala Bhasayuṭe Vikāṣa Pariṇāmangal}, (Malayalam), 1953, Kottayam, NBS, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{38} See M G S Narayanan., \textit{Aspects of Aryanisation}, Trivandrum, 1973, pp.21-34. Also see for details Kesavan Veluthat., \textit{Brahmin Settlements in Kerala}, 1978, Calicut, pp. 102-111. In the Chola country Bhatta had been used as a title applied to high-ranking scholars and also as conductors of worship in temples. These title holders who were members of the executive committee of the temple, sabha seen along with other title holders such as Somayajin and Kramavit. K A N Sasti, \textit{The Pandyan Kingdom}, p. 116. Bhattar-s also figure in documents as conducting worship in the temple.

\textsuperscript{39} M G S Narayanan., \textit{Perumāḷs- - -}, pp. 190-191.
The extent to which the application of similar birudū-s or titles applied to the rulers, is generally taken in historiography as reflective of the powers of the rulers in contemporary medieval South India. However these titles are being viewed here only as indicative of the relative status of the agent as one who wielded more authority from among the various agents figuring in the document. This will be discussed in greater length elsewhere.

Prof. M G S Narayanan has examined in detail the nature of the titles and royal designations employed by Cera rulers in particular. Accordingly the title Perumāl or Perumān—used for kings and gods alike—literally means ‘the great one’ but the more formal expression used in the Cera inscriptions is Perumān Āṭikaļ to mean the feet of the great one’. It is added that the title Perumāl is not usually taken by feudatory chiefs. On the use of the expression Raja, it has been explained that it is the equivalent of the Tamil word ‘kō’ which is prefixed to the name of the ruler to indicate sovereign status. Further the use of high-sounding epithets, such as Parameśvara and Sṛīraja Rājādhīrājā would denote some military victories.

The implications of the above observations have been further elaborated by Kesavan Veluthat. He maintains that the mythical part of the praśaṣṭi-s—set aside as poykirtī-s by earlier historians—have to be

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40 Ibid, pp. 24-25, 78-80
41 Ibid, p.80
42 For detailed discussion on the ways in which titles and claims were taken on in the inscriptive preambles in South India. The pioneering epigraphical studies were initiated by Hultzsch and Venkayya. Also K A Neelakanta Sastri, The Cōḷās, p.5. Also Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in South India, p. 47. It is argued that the praśaṣṭi is all-important, as a statement of homage to a king by those locally prominent persons who instituted gifts (as benefactors). The praśaṣṭis could be viewed as powerful symbolic medium in the political system. Also see James Hietzman, The Gifts of Power, Delhi, OUP, 1997, p. 122. The author provides a brief account of the enormous temple of Rajarajeswara, called after the ruler himself and built in profound majesty. The monumentality of the temples of Medieval South India had been discussed in detail. Burton Stein, “The State and the Agrarian Order in Medieval South India: A Historiographical Critique” in Burton Stein (ed), Essays on South India, Delhi, 1975, pp. 73-74. Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in South India, p. 276.
construed as the clear expression of a general tendency in all contemporary sources of attributing divinity, ‘both to the person and the office of the monarch’.\textsuperscript{43} This is understood as one of the aspects of the power structure of monarchy in Early Medieval South India. He elaborates the point against the background of the known features of the contemporary social formation.\textsuperscript{44} The channels along which divinity had been bestowed on rulers have been schematised as follows:

1. Providing a genealogy of the ruler, in which the king is invariably presented as a lineal descendent of Brahma through different divine and mythical figures. The king’s consanguinal relationship with one of the high gods of the Hindu pantheon is claimed by tracing the pedigree, straight from the \textit{Brahma kṣēṭra}. It could also be by drawing the genealogy through the legendary solar or lunar races. This would serve to affirm the king’s divinity.\textsuperscript{45} This has been shown in the case of the records registering land grants by Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas also.\textsuperscript{46}

2. Equating the person of the king with one of the divine or \textit{purāṇic} personalities by the play of certain figures of speech. What one sees in certain cases is a dazzling play of \textit{double entendre}, wherein certain key epithets in court poetry and inscriptions are made to apply to god and the king alike.\textsuperscript{47} Other figures of speech, such as simile and metaphor

\textsuperscript{43} Details have been worked out in the form of a research paper. See Kesavan Veluthat, “Royalty and Divinity: Legitimisation of a Monarchical Power in South India”, \textit{Proceedings of the Indian History Congress}, Hyderabad, (1978). Also his \textit{The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India}, Chapter II.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Idem.}

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Idem.}

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Idem.}

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Idem.} A case in point is the use of the epithet in the opening verse of \textit{Leghubhaskariya} where epithets used in the opening verse could be interpreted as Siva and to the author Sankaranarayana’s patron Stanu Ravi.
have been employed in certain other inscriptions for equating gods with the kings.\(^{48}\)

3. The practice of consecrating royal personages in temples—the origins of which are traceable to the period of the Pallavas and reaching its zenith by the time of the Imperial Colas—is tantamount to the cult of the king.\(^{49}\) It has been argued that the temples thus consecrated came to be named after the founding monarchs.\(^{50}\) The close correspondence between the newly emergent monarchies of the Medieval South and the establishment of the large Hindu brahmanical temples is argued to be the monarchical patronage of an ideology that performed a self-justifying function in the wake of a new social formation.\(^{51}\)

4. The founding of a synonymy between the spiritual and temporal planes leading to an intricate bracketing of the two realms. A necessary outcome would be the divinisation of monarchy.\(^{52}\) Certain specific cases that have been pointed out in favour of the above argument are the application of certain expressions to denote the king and the deity alike such as  \(Kō\) and  \(Perumāl\) for the person of the deity/king and their places of residence being referred to as  \(Kōvil\) and  \(Kōyil\).\(^{53}\)

5. Accepting of certain royal titles associating the ruler with god and assuming divinity in the process.\(^{54}\) These titles are  \(Paramēśvara\ bhattāraka, Paramabhāgavata\ etc.

The complex dimensions of the ruler made up by the various  \(birudū\)-s may now be summed up. In the first place the  \(birudū\)-s used by

\(^{48}\) See for details  \(Ibid.\).

\(^{49}\) See  \(Ibid.\).

\(^{50}\)  \(Ibid.\).

\(^{51}\)  \(Ibid.\).

\(^{52}\) See  \(Ibid.\).

\(^{53}\)  \(Ibid.\).

\(^{54}\)  \(Ibid.\).
Rajasekharara are viewed as a definite instance of compliance with the political practice extant in the Cola and Pallava regions.\textsuperscript{55}

These titles figuring prominently in the inscription are synonymous with \textit{saṟvabhouma}, implying ‘suzerain over other rulers’\textsuperscript{56} and allusions to the titles are assertions to the ruler’s physical strength and a self-explanatory citation of his military might. Added to this is the dimension of divinity, equating him with the God Almighty. It is emphasised that the above image of the ruler should by no means be confused with that of the absolutist monarch upholding the theory of Divine Right in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{57} Rather this is to be viewed as a monarchy exclusive to Medieval South India. A wide range of notions throng the historiography of South India on the correspondence between the titles of the ruler and the actual exercise of political control of the territory and the people. This is particularly so in the case of the Cola state. At one end of the spectrum is the ideal of a ‘top-heavy monarchical state’—argued to be the conventional view.\textsuperscript{58} At the other end, there is the image of a weak monarchy with the ruler’s control waning to just a ‘ritual authority’ in the periphery.\textsuperscript{59} What ever may be the nature of the state historicised, the presence of the royal authority appears in various inscriptions of the Cera period recovered from different places\textsuperscript{60}.

The two titles \textit{Rājādhirājā} and \textit{Paramēśvara} appearing in the copperplate inscription would mean the combination of the two closely related attributes idealised in the monarchies of the period, viz., that of the


\textsuperscript{56} See Kesavan Veluthat, \textit{Op cit.} pp. 50-51.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{58} See. Kesavan Veluthat., \textit{Op. cit.}, The ideas of a centralised and bureaucratised state is a stereo-typical depiction in the works of such historians as K A N Sastri, T V Mahalingam, Meenakshi etc.

\textsuperscript{59} See for details on the ‘Segmentary State’ Burton Stein., \textit{Peasant State- - -}, Ch.VII. Here also the views of Sastri, Appadorai and Mahalingam have been rejected outright.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
hero and the emperor. These are expressions that would apply to the ruler and the deity alike. What is accomplished through this play of double entendre is the coalescence of the temporal powers of the ruler Rajasekhara and the spiritual authority of Lord Siva and a consequent positioning of the visible ruler as the sovereign head of both the spiritual and temporal planes. Leaving behind the niceties of the titles, we may proceed to some of the other themes that are of significance when judged from the point of view of the document.

The titles that are commonly found in the inscriptions during the time of the Cera rulers are ‘Perumāl’ or ‘Perumān Aṭikal’ meaning the great one. 61 We learn from inscriptions of the Cera period that Perumān Aṭikal was entitled to a share of the fine imposed for offences. 62 The inscriptional evidences we have are only those relating to the precision in the conduct of the temple rituals. From this it may be possible to arrive at his relative status/position. This has been worked out elsewhere in the chapter.

The uniqueness of the titles used in the Valapalli Copperplate inscription is that this is the only document to use the title Śrūrāja Rājadhirājā Paramēśvara Bhattāraka. It is obvious that the title or birudū as appearing in the inscription is pompous. Whether the title reflects the nature of authority wielded by the ruler is a question that historiography has problematised although the question as to what was the nature of the “rulers” remains unexplored. T A Gopinatha Rao maintains that the epithets Mahā Rājadhirājā Paramēśvara Bhattāraka used in the inscription are imperial titles. 63 This has been repeated by Prof. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, and adds that these expressions drawn from Kannada documents

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61 M G S Narayanan, Perumāls - - -, pp.78-79.
indicate the imperial status of Rajasekharan. The above view has been run down by Prof. M G S Narayanan on the grounds that such expressions as ‘emperor’ could not be applied to rulers of a small state which did not extend beyond the traditional boundaries through the conquest of new areas but maintains that the titles could probably denote some military victories. Kesavan Veluthat stretches the argument further. He considers the use of the epithets as resulting from “a conscious attempt on the part of the ideologues in the polities” of Early Medieval South India “to project a picture which was best suited to the cultural milieu of those ideologues.” It is added that the cakravartin image served the purpose of presenting the military character of kingship, which is primarily the king’s claim to power and the attributes of divinity invoked religious symbolism in an attempt to legitimise political power. What is primarily observed by the above historians in the projection of the images is a gap between the represented and the real.

The conclusion that could be drawn from the document is that Rajasekharan, among others figuring in the document, occupied a place of prominence. Again, the prefixing of epithets, to Rajasekharan’s name—which are not applied to the other rulers of the Cera line, makes his position unique. Further, it is significant that the person of the king became quite consequential, as is indicated by the use of the Perumals’s/ruler’s regnal year which is the vantage point from which the measure of chronological time is drawn. The community, for which the document was meant, had absolute knowledge of the solar calendar. This is testified in the stipulations relating to the fine for the obstruction to the muṭṭāppali. The

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65 M G S Narayanan, Perumāls - - -, p. 75.
66 Kesavan Veluthat, The Political Structure- - -, p. 60.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid, p. 61.
document insists that the fine should be remitted before the midday bali of the Puṣyanakṣatra in the month of Tai. We also find that the Kollam Era, referred to as the Malayalam Era was extant when the document was written. The document employs the ruler’s regnal year to mark out historical time by conceiving it in terms of the ruler’s reign. Such a marking out is an act of power because it is created overlooking or bypassing the knowledge of calendrical time. Reference to time gets anchored to the personage, and thereby power gets located on him. We also find the play of the double entendre in the document wherein the terms ‘tēvaṛ’ and ‘perumāṉ atīkaḷ’—signifying both god and the ruler — makes the latter on the same footing with the former.

The mention of the ruler’s entitlement to one tenth of the fine (patavāram) and the right to transfer the same, as per a certain proportion for the perpetuation rituals, may be construed as pronouncements emanating from his temporal power. But this has also to be understood as statements that accentuate the same.

Two of the other agents figuring in the document are urāṟ and nāṭṭāṟ. At the level of political organisation, the references in the inscription vouch for the working of the urāṟ and nāṭṭāṟ as corporate groups of spokesmen in the agrarian settlements, ūṟ and nāṭu respectively. Questions of common import are recorded to have been resolved collectively and consensus in the form of a kaccam or vow was reached. A detailed discussion on the kaccam in the political practice of the Cera period and beyond is undertaken in the ensuing section. It is contented that the making of vows of this sort had been integral to political practice during the period.

70 Valappalḷi Copperplate, line 1.
71 Line 3.
72 Other expressions used in the case of similar vows are kāriyam and sattiyam.
**Kaccam in Political Practice**

We have several temple inscriptions in Kerala which are phrased as *kaccams* or agreements. Most of them deal with the conduct of rituals and the provisions made for the same. In the inscriptions in the Pandya territory also, the expression *kaccam* has been taken to mean ‘agreement’ or a ‘consensus arrived at’. A general feature of the *Kaccams* is that it depicts unanimity which is indicated by the expression ‘*avirōṭattāl*’, literally meaning, ‘without dissent’. The deterrent actions in case of violation of the Kaccam also form part of *Kaccam*. It has been argued that a *kaccam* made at Mulikkulam—referred to in several records of the tenth and eleventh centuries as Mulikkaḷam *Kaccam*, Mulikkaḷam *Vyavastai*, Mulikkaḷam *ōlukam*, Mulikkaḷaṭaccavatai—is the model or precedent to be followed. It is contented that these expressions are synonymously used to denote the agreement made at Mulikkulam. The original Mulikkaḷam agreement has not been recovered so far, but references to the above “agreement” have been found in seventeen inscriptions of the Cera period. Based on the wide distribution of the inscriptions bearing references to the above, it has been argued that the agreement had Kerala-

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73 See Rajan Gurukkal, *The Agrarian System and Socio-Political Organisation under the Early Pandyas, c. A D 600–1000*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1984, Chapter IV. A case in point is the Sinnamanning inscription of the 46th year of Srimara Srivallabha records to a resolution (*kaccam*) by the *nāṭu* of Arikesarinallur regarding the operation of a sluice under its *jurisdiction*.

74 It has been pointed out that this had been the practice in the Cola country as well. See M G S Narayanan, *Perumāls - - -*, p.113.


wide acceptance. But then, we find that the invocations to the above *kaccam* are found only in connection with the conduct of the rituals and the management of the landed property endowed to the temples for some ritual. Referents of the *kaccam* include only a small segment, in terms of the land area and population of Kerala as devised in historiography. Moreover, it is possible to propose that, *kaccams* were formulated during the period when there were dissents. This is the lateral inference that we can glean from the usage “without descent”

Various injunctions have been gleaned from the inscriptions to argue that those who violated the agreement had been excommunicated after the confiscation of their rights and properties. An inscription of Trikkadithanam which does not make any explicit reference to Mulikkaḷam *kaccam* is taken as an instance of how the punishment meted out to a certain offender is in line with the prescriptions made in the Mulikkaḷam *kaccam*.

It is significant that several inscriptions in the *locale* make mention of the Mulikkaḷam *kaccam*. There is a detailed treatment of the implications of the *Kaccam* for the region of Tiruvallāḷ in another chapter. We also find Sankaramangalathu *Kaccam* as the agreement applying to certain arrangements made in the Śrī Vallabha Temple of Tiruvallāḷ. It is to be presumed that strict adherence to the *kaccam* as a rule applied to matters relating to the rituals and so too the endowments made for them. We also find that the expression Śṛṅkārīyam came to replace *kaccam* in the post-Cera period.

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79 See M G S Narayanan, *Perumāḷs*- - -, p.115. It is pointed out that the northern most inscription to make mention of the Kaccam is Narayan Kannur in Elimalai in Kolathu natu and southern most is Tirunandikkara in Aynatu.
80 *Ibid*.
82 *T C P.* II. 479.
Mechanism of Control

The use of the expression \textit{trikkai kil vaitu} (under the hand of the sacred one) avows the presence of the ruler at whose behest the \textit{kaccam} has been made. As such this is to be construed as an agreement or vow made in a field of power whereby all the agents appearing in the inscription such as the \textit{nāṭṭār} of Tiruvaṟṟuvāi, the \textit{urār} of Vaḷapperai, \textit{paṇimakkal}, the owners or possessors of the properties (earmarked for meeting the expenses in connection with the conduct of the \textit{muṭṭāppali}) etc. are subjected to a new ordering. This takes on the form of a formal decree for which the copperplate inscription is the instrument of perpetuation. We may now proceed to take up the questions as to how the agents were ordered and how the practices were proceduralised through inscribed decree.

The document insists on the strict compliance of \textit{patineṭṭu nāṭṭār} of Tiruvaṟṟuvāi and the \textit{urār} of Vaḷapperai and the other agents such as the \textit{sānti} and the \textit{paṇimakkal} with the prescriptions laid down in the document. As such they are the necessary and sufficient conditions for ensuring the uninterrupted conduct of the ritual (\textit{muṭṭāppali}) in the temple. Here the compliance is not merely a passive endorsement, but strict adherence to the conditions as an act of acquiescence. The specific roles of the \textit{nāṭṭār} and \textit{urār} are left unmentioned. It is obvious that the security of the property endowed for the ritual definitely falls within the gamut of their tasks. They also had to ascertain the steady supply of provisions by procuring them from the producers, monitor the time schedule of the rituals, initiate penal action in case of default, distribute the fine for the perpetuation of rituals and provide security to the temple itself. Table 1 gives details/specifications of the ritual and the fines that apply to the various agents/functionaries of the temples in case of default.

Before we move on to aspects of the classificatory scheme that ordered various agents associated with the conduct of the rituals, we may
have a look at the way land was classified. As pointed out earlier, the
general pattern followed in the classification of land is characteristic of a
well-set agrarian economy. Notions and expressions inherent to structured
practices and patterns, such as possessor and cultivator of land, name of the
field, boundary specifications, area of land/fields, assessment of yield,
classification of land based on yield, type etc. all figure in the inscription.\textsuperscript{84}
The annual calendar of cropping and related activities can be delineated
from the document. The reference to the \textit{puraiyi\u0101m-s} is of special
significance for the reason that they are referred in the \textit{kaccam} as the
din\textit{āra}-yielding lands. Another plot was named as paddy yielding. It is
noteworthy that the fines prescribed on the elite groups for obstructing the
daily \textit{pūjā-s} include din\textit{āra-s}. This suggests that apart from the ornamental
function, gold coins had circulation value as well.

\textbf{Table 1}

\textbf{Fines for obstructing the \textit{Muṭṭāppali}}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Offender</th>
<th>Social stature</th>
<th>Penalty and specifications</th>
<th>Penal Interest</th>
<th>To whom payable</th>
<th>Agency / Purpose</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Any one Brahman (?)</td>
<td>1. 100 Dinārā-s 2. Confiscation of property</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Perumānaṭkal</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Panimakkaḷ Brahmin</td>
<td>@ 4 nāli-s/ occasion on pushya nakṣatra- in the month of Tai</td>
<td>Twice the quantity</td>
<td>Santi (To the capital ?)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Source:} Compiled from \textit{Travancore Archaeological Series}. Vol II

Another classification of land which appeared in the deed document is
given in Table 2. This classification is made on the basis of the field-names
indicating the type/nature of the land. This could be correlated with the
yield specified from each area.

\textsuperscript{84} The classification base on type is made as water-logged/ wetland for paddy cultivation and adjoining elevated \textit{puraiyidam-s}. 
Table 2 Provision for the Temple/Ritual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Type of land</th>
<th>Yield</th>
<th>Eqi.</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kari of Kirankadambanar</td>
<td>Low lying/wet</td>
<td>20/25 kalam of paddy</td>
<td>250 paras (Approx)</td>
<td>Not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mandilakkalam with Ulaseli</td>
<td>Low lying/wet</td>
<td>10 kalam</td>
<td>100 paras (approx.)</td>
<td>Not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kallattuvai veli</td>
<td>Low lying/wet</td>
<td>500 nālis</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kanjikka</td>
<td>Low lying/wet</td>
<td>500 nālis</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pilikkodu &amp; garden of Kannan</td>
<td>Parayidam</td>
<td>150 tuni</td>
<td>600 Marakkal</td>
<td>Not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sankaran (Kavati)</td>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>3 dinaras</td>
<td>Not given</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ayyankadu</td>
<td>Marram (Incomplete)</td>
<td>13½ acres (approx.)</td>
<td>2 velis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Travancore Archaeological Series. Vol II

From the Tables, one can reiterate the proposition that land was purposively classified and conceived in terms of its spread, rights and produces from it. The rigour in the classification and conception is suggestive of well formalised land-relations.

We may now turn to the various categories of agents coming under the purview of the document in relation to other contemporary documents. There were categories bearing the suffix ‘ar’ as in the case of the urār, nāṭṭār, urāḷar, sabhaiyār, taliyār etc. In the case of the Tharsapalli copperplate the expression referring to the authorities of the Church is pāḷiyār expressive of the prominence attached to them as its trustees. In

85 1 Kalam = 10 paras approx., 1 Tunī = 4 Marakkal, 1 Veli = 6 ¼ acres approx. The conversion in the column is based on the scale provided by Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai in Kerala Bhaṣayate Vikāsa Paripāmangal, (Mal.) N B S, Kottayam, p.72.
86 For further indications on the elite nature these categories see M G S Narayanan, Perumāḷ s of Kerala, p.110. Rajan Gurukkal, The Kerala Temple- - - , pp. 72-73. It has also been pointed out that there are inscriptions that treat the ār, urār, taliyār, sabhaiyār etc. synonymously. Kesavan Veluthat, Brahman Settlements - - - , p. 55.
87 M G S Narayanan, Perumāḷ s- - - , p. 107. Also see his Cultural Symbiosis, pp. 92-93.
the present case the expressions urārı̥ and nāṭṭārı̥ may be taken to imply their elite status.

On the matter of prescribing the punishments for any hindrance to the mutṭāppalı̥, the document makes a clear distinction between the two categories, urārı̥ and nāṭṭārı̥ on the one side and paṇimakkal on the other. The punishment to be meted out to the urārı̥ and the nāṭṭārı̥ involved a heavy fine of hundred dinars. This is suggestive of their liquidity power. Further, the offence is equated with the abhorrent sin of having taken one’s mother for wife.\footnote{A detailed study of the implications of these injunctions has been made by M G S Narayanan. See. His “Socio Economic Implications of the concept of Mahapataka in the Feudal Society of South India”, I. H. C. Calicut, 1976.} The internal logic of the above punitive clauses in the document enables us to content that the offenders would be shorn of their caste status.\footnote{Ibid.} It has been pointed out that equating an offence with having taken one’s mother for wife is essentially an injunction drawn from the Āgamic texts such as the Yajnavalkya smṛiti, the local adaptation of which is available in the form of Vyavahāra māla in the South.\footnote{Ibid.} This text enumerates the Paṇca mahāpātakā-s or five great sins for which the punishment is excommunication or stripping of caste status. The loss of caste status implied elimination from the corporate bodies of urārı̥ and nāṭṭārı̥ and the consequent termination of entitlement to wealth and power and above all the loss of identity.\footnote{See Ibid, Also see Rajan Gurukkal., The Kerala Temple- - -, pp. 76-77.}

A third set of agents who could cause the hindrance to the mutṭāppali is the paṇimakkal— the temple servants — who would be fined at the rate of four nāḷi-s of rice for each occasion the omissions are caused, and double the fine as penal tariff in case of delay in the remittance of fine. The whole affair would be monitored by the first two categories. The perumāḷ’s claim of patipātavāram (one tenth the share) would go to the
account of santi or remuneration to the priest. The balance would be earmarked for the bali or the symbolic offering to other deities which are consecrated outside the sanctum sanctorum but within the temple. In either case, the fines were set apart for the perpetuation of the class of rituals, which the perumāḷ caused to be instituted. This would affirm that the inscription was executed as an instrument for the perpetuation and proliferation of the temple rituals. The ‘rituals’ and ‘political power’ acted as ‘means’ and ‘ends’ in such a way that they were fused together, making it difficult to disengage the two. Thus we find that ritual itself was ‘power’ and hence its propagation and documentation perpetuates it.

Ritual was power because those who were associated with it were subjects of bhakthi. Subjects, in the sense that they are constituted within the discourse of bhakthi and they in turn constituted other bhaktās. The Tamil heroic poems of Peripāṭal and Tirumūrukāṭṟṟaṉṟai were the main carriers of this discourse. Their persuasive force is argued to have reached its culmination in the ninth and tenth centuries. The ritual, temple and their functionaries were made into objects of the discourse of bhakti and their everyday life and other life cycles were standardised and systematised. The presence of earlier religions and their locations of worship were fully accommodated or rearticulated into a new pattern of religious practice. By the early ninth century Bhakti had become an all-pervading regime of power capable of normalising and canonising the temples in the self-hood. It prescribed their pantheon and sacralised the

92 This has been dealt with in detail by Rajan Gurukkal. See his “Towards a new Discourse: Discursive Processes in Early South India”, Tradition, Dissent and Ideology, OUP, Delhi, 1996, pp. 313-327.

93 Evidences of pre-Brahmanical temples may be hard to come by. But there are ever so many cases of cult centres with no shrine. Just an image or a totem served the purpose. There are several cases of the base of tree trunks being regarded as worshipping places in the region of Tiruvallavāḷ. Among them the yakṣi ṭaṛa-s were numerous. So were the rituals associated with these centres ranging from simple to complex to include, animal or even human sacrifices. For details see Chapter II entitled “The Locale”.

geography of the temple. The political rationality was over determined by divine sanction.

The precise ways in which bhakti as a discourse worked in the historical region will be dealt with in another chapter. The discourse of bhakti sought not to prohibit or restrict, but to discipline, facilitate and produce. It was irrevocably committed to prosperity, well being and order, not only for the Brahman but for all the land and the people in it.

In the case of the document, it is found that all the agents figuring in the document are subjects of bhakti. Power is such that it organises relation amongst agents and affirms their relation with god through the temple. Both the rhetoric of the document and the procedures outlined in the inscription, systematise a power hierarchy of the parties figuring in it. The elite groups of Patineṭṭunāṭṭāṟ and urāṟ get subordinated to the perumāḷ. On being made a subject in the above bodies, the paṇimakkal are positioned below the nāṭṭāṟ and urāṟ. The fines imposed on the elite bodies were to be paid to the perumāḷ in full. But fines on the paṇimakkal were to be pumped back into the temple for further rituals. This brings us to the significance of the ritual in relation to political power. Ritual remains the central topic of the document and the Vāḷappaḷi copperplate inscription presents a case of the exercise of political power operating through the conduct of the ritual on the subjects.

The punitive measures outlined in the document are significant in many ways. In the first place, it is a punishment per se for dishonour done to ritual and is envisaged as deterrent. Further it is a legal ritual, instituted and carried as per decree. That is to say that the performance of the ritual was made mandatory by prescribing a code of conduct and by engaging a chain of agents for its meticulous conduct. The temple as the venue of the ritual was an institutional site where economic and political aspects relevant for the area converged. The ritual is made a reference point from
which the agents mentioned above are categorised and ordered and it brought about a binding among various agents. It is seen that the document foregrounds a hierarchy with the *Perumān Aṭikal* at the top of *urāṟ* and the *nāṭṭāṟ*. The temple functionaries/ *panimakkal* were placed just below them in the hierarchy.

We may now turn to some relevant details that the inscription provides regarding the past of the *locale*.

1. The document phrased as an agreement or *kaccam* acts as an instrument for bringing about a reordering of certain procedures of the temple.94 Such bodies as the *Patineṭṭunāṭṭār* of Tiruvaṟṟuvāi and the *Urāṟ* of Vāḷappaḻi, had been the pre-existing organisational apparatus for the management of the Siva temple. But *muṭṭāppali* gets endorsed as a newly instituted ritual at the behest of the ruler. The organisational apparatus gets endowed with financial resources in gold and a huge quantity of grain as well as civil rights over the *panimakkal* to manage the temple affairs. The fines or excommunication imposed on defaulters are in themselves harsh punishments for controlling them from outside but the compliance to the new devise—*Kaccam*—shows how it created individuals with *bhakthi* as an overwhelming aspect of life.

2. Tiruvaṟṟuvāi—located hardly one kilometre east of Sṛṉ Vallabha Temple—and Vāḷappaḻi separated by a distance of ten Kilometres were both centres of Sivite worship. Though the two places are not close to each other, they are accessible by numerous waterways. The Western side of both had vast stretches of low-lying, waterlogged lands suited for paddy cultivation. In both traditional and academic accounts Tiruvaṟṟuvāi and Vāḷappaḻi are considered to have

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94 For details on the practice of arriving at decisions through consensus for managing the affairs of the temple called *kaccams* see M G S Narayanan, *Perumāls - - -,* p.112-119 ff.
developed into upagramam-s of Tiruvallavāḷ. The location of Tiruvāṟṟuvāḷ was on the banks of one of the tributaries of River Manimala. It had proximity with other centres of pre-āgamic or non-āgamic ritual practices. It would be possible to think of Tiruvaṟṟuvāḷ as a nerve-centre of activity prior to the ‘glorious’ days of the Sṛī Vallabha temple.

3. Categorisation of land on the basis of yield, crop and utility was extant. The idea of naming plots of land, identifying them in terms of rights over it, assessing them on the basis of yield, categorising them on the basis of crop and even identifying the land in terms of its potential for gold, suggest nothing short of systematic agrarian relation. Equally well set were the notions associated with such standardised measures as tuni (12 kalams), kalam (approx.10 paras), nāli (one idangazhi), etc. The mention of puaiyidam yielding dinaras as different from paddy fields suggests the presence of exchange in products that went overseas.

The Copperplate Document of Mecheri Illam

Yet another inscription that has been obtained from Tiruvallavāḷ is the copperplate inscription in Vaṭṭēḷutta belonging to Muvidathu Mecheri Illam. The inscription dated in the 17th year of ‘Tanu Iravi’ is a kaccam making provision for the feeding to be conducted on Ṭhānam day in the month of Āvaṉi or Chingam. The decisions were jointly arrived at by the Sabha of Tiruvaṟṟuvāḷ and the atīgaḷ.

Sthanu Ravi who figures in the inscription as the ruler during whose period the document was executed, is regarded as the immediate successor of Rajasekhara. As such the date assigned to this document is the second

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96 TA S Vol II, p. 86.
half of the ninth century. The celebration of Āvaṇi Ōṇam was to be conducted out of the yield from lands endowed by Sendan Sankaran from two lands—Sendan Sendanar-kari yielding 10 kalams of rice and Kaderu yielding five hundred nālīs. This inscription provides the first epigraphic reference to the Ōṇam festival.

As already pointed out, the donation of land made to the temple in the present case is by an individual—Sendan Sankaran—whose caste identity or official status are not mentioned. The categories mentioned in the document and implied as capable of obstructing the feeding are the sabha and the aṭīgal.

Historians recognise the Sabha as an assembly figuring uniformly in the inscriptions in the brahmādy-ś in the South. But the character of the sabha has been viewed in different ways. Early historiography has viewed this as a highly representative body exhibiting democratic characteristics as well as elaborating its judicial functions. Stein finds the sabha as the assembly that functioned in the brahmādy-ś of the ‘macro region’, which was the instrument through which the Brahmins exercised considerable secular control functioning in a general background of sabha raj. As different from earlier perceptions highlighting the popular

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97 See for a chronology of the Cera rulers, M G S Narayanan, Op. cit. The precise year of writing the present document correspond to 861 AD.
98 The day specified is the Ōṇam day falling in the month of Chingam of the Kollam Era.
102 Ibid., p. 49.
and democratic character of the sabha of the Chola period, Stein underlines its position as the body of ‘great men’ or powerful spokesmen of the brahmadesāya exercising considerable degree of secular authority on its residents. Several historians have underlined the caste identity and financial status of the sabha and even their access to knowledge of the Vedas and Śāstrā-s that accounts for its prestigious position as a body of prosperous Brahmins. Prof. M G S Narayanan, gives the meaning of the word sabha as assembly and equates the sabha of the inscription with the Patineṭṭunāṭṭār figuring in the Vazhappalli copperplate inscription.

The aṭigal referred to in the document has been interpreted as temple servants. This expression meaning ‘feet’ is used as a mark of respect to refer to a person of distinction. The implication is that the one being referred to is to be held in such a height of esteem that only his feet are seen. The expression was generally used in early medieval Kerala as a suffix for royal personages, spiritual leaders, dēvadāsi-s etc. For the present, this expression could denote the priest of the temple.

In the context of the inscription under study, we may view the sabha as an elite body with powers to take decisions on the celebration of the Āvaṇi Ōṇam and to execute the same. In the given case the subject is the conduct of the celebration. Of these the stipulations regarding the feast/feed assumes greater significance. In the matter of the feed, the aṭigal is made accountable as the joint guarantor on the same level with the sabha. The precise date of the feed given as Āvaṇi Ōṇam implies nothing less than the addition of the feed as an annual programme to be supervised.

104 Ibid., p. 141.
107 Ibid, p. 110. This equation is also found in Rajan Gurukkal, The Kerala Temple- - -, p.73, f. n. 2.
108 The expression has been taken to mean ‘temple servant’ as a possible explanation by T A Gopinatha Rao. T A S II., p. 86.
by the *sabha* with endowments. The benefactor or donor—Sendan Sankaran—gets registered or recognised with the particulars of his donation.

We are not left with any room to make a convenient guess as to the situation which necessitated its institution. We may now turn to the earliest available mention of the feast/feast in connection with Ōṅam as a newly instituted ritual.\(^{109}\) Two of the constituents forming part of the celebration are the sumptuous feast for a few people and the symbolic honouring of the god (Siva) and the *bhūtā*-s. The insistence on the time-schedule and the emphasis on the items for the feed, and the share of resources earmarked for the feed suggest that there was greater thrust on the feed/feast than the *nivēdyā* and *bhūtabali*.

The time span laid down for the cooking is given as being from afternoon to evening and the additional items for the feed/feast being listed as *ney* (ghee), *payar* (green gram), *chaṟukkarai* (sugar), *vālaippalam* (plantain) mark it out as a special feed/feast. Moreover the number of the beneficiaries has been restricted by attaching certain qualifications. Unfortunately it is not possible to learn from the document the exact nature of the exclusion techniques employed. It is found that generally the ritual feed was not meant as charity for any one but as a ritual meant exclusively to benefit the *Brahmins* as is clear from the Perunna inscription of 976 AD\(^ {110}\), the Trikkodithanam inscription of 976 AD\(^ {111}\), the Perunna inscription of the eleventh century\(^ {112}\) etc. The other offerings crisply prescribed in the document are eight *nālis* of cooked rice for *tēvar* (god) as *nivēthiya*, one *ulakkku* of ghee as *nivēthiya*, lighting a lamp with one *ulakkku*

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\(^{109}\) See M G S Narayanan., *Index to Cera Inscriptions (A Companion volume to Thesis on “Political and Social conditions of Kerala under the Kulasekhara Empire)* p.4.

\(^{110}\) Index, A32.

\(^{111}\) The expression used for such a feed is *Akkiram*. This had been taken to indicate the *Brahmins*. See T A Gopinatha Rao., *Op. cit*, p. 86. See *Index A 31*.

\(^{112}\) See *Index, A 22*. 
of ghee and cooked rice with four nāli-s of rice as pūtabali. The document also leaves provision for remuneration at the rate of five nāli-s to all those who are classified as pātamulikaḷil naṭantu chērtu koḻvōṛ (those attendants who walk here and there in connection with the ūṭṭu).

As laid down in the Vāḷappāḷḷi copperplate inscription, the present document asserts the punitive measures adopted against any hindrance to the conduct of the feed. This is the same manner in which the muṭṭāppali had been dealt with in the former case. The fine in this case is fifty-four kanams of gold equalling Paḻangay and double the fine in case of default. This by all standards is very high. The insistence on the ritual feed, even after the payment of heavy fine brings out two things. On the one hand it establishes the role of the fines as a deterrent to any kind of laxity, which any one of the agents involved in the ritual might cause. On the other, it establishes the nature of control brought about by casting a steel-frame mediated through the resolutions of the temple committee. The inscription does not foresee chances of any evasion of the prescribed fine lest it should bring some major disqualification. However the details of the disqualification are not clear in the document. In other words the disqualification cited above is to be construed as a measure that pre-empts any possibility of the evasion of fine.

The application of the term in the inscription Pon Paḻangāynōdu oppatu would literally mean the quantity of gold equivalent to palangayu. The implication is that the Paḻangāyu though used as a medium of exchange in an earlier period was slowly giving way to payment in gold for which the unit was kanam. The expression Pon Paḻangāyu is taken to denote dinara of the earlier period. Secondly, this enables the historian to get at the equation linking the old kāyu as against the new standard of kanam. On the basis of references in the contemporary inscriptions the equation worked out between the two coins and the metal is 1 dinara = 1
old $kāśu = 3 \text{ kalacu-s}$ of gold.\footnote{M G S Narayanan, *Perumāls of Kerala*, pp.163-164. Also see Rajan Gurukkal, *The Kerala Temple* - -, p. 47. The equation has been made on the basis of a specific reference in a Trikkakkara inscription of 913 AD. Which equates 40 *palangayu* with 120 *kalanju* of gold.} Thirdly, despite the knowledge of coins as the medium of exchange, an indigenous currency economy had not yet been developed.\footnote{It has been argued that such towns as Kollam and Kodungallur were thriving centres of trade. The Tharsappalli copperplate executed about the same period (844 A D) and the Jewish copperplate of Bhaskara Ravi (1000 AD) bear testimony to hectic trading activity.} Fourthly, income from fine in the present case is to be understood as being collected by the temple. This leads us to the inference that the temple’s capacity and mechanism for the collection and storage of gold has to be recognised.

Along with the addition of the celebration of Ōṇam, with all the marks of a ritual, the beneficiaries get recognised as a class with privileges. The custom of lighting a ghee lamp adds to the glory of the temple. Bhūtabali is a ritual associated with the Siva temples as offerings for propitiating the conglomeration of the bhūtas who are the permanent attendants guarding and thronging the abode of Siva. The new bali/homage to the bhūta-(s)/demon(s) added on to the tally of rituals indicates the incorporation of further ideas drawn from *purāṇic* pantheism. Though the cult of Siva is found all over the subcontinent, it is in the southern part that Saivism and associated rituals are more widely practiced. The temple, its servants, its routine, festivity, offerings, lighting of lamps and attendants, all get reordered and integrated into a functional network.

The important aspects that connect the ritual, the temple and the various agents in the locality may now be summed up. Resources from the land that belonged to some one are being transferred for the performance of rituals through the mediation of the sabha. The two inscriptions of Tiruvāṟṟuvāi and Mecheri Ilam—separated by a gap of thirty one years—highlight the mediatory role of the respective councils—ūṟ and sabha. The temple exists by adding new rituals, and the rituals performed there retain
the strength of the temple. It is noteworthy that the ritual feed instituted in
the temple has a long tradition. It is found that there was continuity in the
ritual feed. There were changes in the benefactors, beneficiaries, agents at
work, sources of income, attitudes of the giver and the recipient etc.
Precisely, this is continuity in altered forms.

It looks strange that despite appointments for the celebration of
Ōṇam, there is no provision for a symbolic honouring of Viṣṇu. Surprisingly there is no reference to a Viṣṇu image in the temple premises
at any stage. This could raise certain basic questions—which could prompt
an array of supplementary queries—that are to be considered seriously
before they are accepted or rejected.

(1) Considering the fact that the Siva linga of Tiruvārūvai is one of the
earliest of its kind in Kerala and considering the importance of the
temple as one in which the provision had been made to conduct the
muṭṭappali at the instance of the Cera ruler, isn’t it worth tracing the
roots of the Ōṇam festival itself to the prevailing Saivite practices?

(2) Isn’t the Vamana episode of the puraṇā-s an interpolation into the
cultural milieu of Tiruvallavāḷ?

(3) If so, does this interpolation explain the transformation of an existing
pre-Brahmanic deity into Viṣṇu? Perhaps, even the founding of the Sṛī
Vallabha (Viṣṇu) temple close to the former one could have been a cult
site which had remote or no association with the Purāṇic religion but
came to be appropriated by the Vaiṣṇavite Brahmins.

The Stone Inscription of Tiruvārūvai

We may now turn to a third inscription from the Siva temple of
Tiruvārūvai which is inscribed on the base, north of the maṇḍapa in front
of the central shrine in Tamil language using vatteluttu alphabet. The
inscription is taken to belong to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century A D.\footnote{Period assigned to the inscription is based on palaeography. See \textit{T A S. III}, p. 196.} The subject of the document is the \textit{srīkāriyam} (sacred affair)\footnote{It is considered a revered affair as \textit{an ipso facto} business of the temple.} for instituting endowments to bathe the god in ghee, to make offerings to the temple, to make payments to the functionaries of the worship and to feed six persons. Vengadavan Āṭigāḷ Nambi of Mecheri Illam and Devan Narayanan of Ilaman\footnote{The place of the Mecheri and Ilaman \textit{illams} in the history of the region will be dealt with in greater length in another chapter.} are the joint donors of the endowments and two \textit{emperumākkal} were entrusted with the endowment of forty-two \textit{achchu}.

The inscription, which is the third available document relating to the Siva temple of Tiruvaṟṟuvāi, is significant in many ways. First, the document makes no mention of any assembly or council. The \textit{Patineṭṭunāṭṭar} of Tiruvaṟṟuvāi, \textit{Urār} of Vāḷappaḷi, \textit{sabha} etc. which figured in the earlier documents are absent. Instead, persons from the Mecheri and Ilamaṇ Illams find their place as individuals instituting rituals. These absences suggest that the decision to make the endowment was unilateral and required no external approval other than the consent of the \textit{emperumakkaḷ}. Secondly the oft-repeated expression of \textit{kaccam} denoting consensus now comes to be replaced by \textit{Srīkāriyam}. This replacement is not without implications. It has been found that in the ninth century the instituting of rituals needed the consent of the elite bodies in the form of a \textit{kaccam}. However by the thirteenth century the unilateral decision of the donors got recognised as the \textit{Srīkāriyam} or the sacred affair. Thirdly the \textit{emperumakkaḷ} were entrusted with forty-two \textit{achchu} as endowments. In turn they are expected to arrange for the regular conduct of the ritual on the day of Viṣu.

In comparison with the previous document, the directives in this bring out the enhanced responsibility and function of the \textit{emperumakkal}. 

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\textsuperscript{115} Period assigned to the inscription is based on palaeography. See \textit{T A S. III}, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{116} It is considered a revered affair as \textit{an ipso facto} business of the temple.
\textsuperscript{117} The place of the Mecheri and Ilaman \textit{illams} in the history of the region will be dealt with in greater length in another chapter.
They were privileged to be the sole managers of the given endowment money.

Fourthly, with the interest accruing from the forty-two achchu entrusted with the two emperumakkaļ, the required ritual-articles and the rice for the feed were to be procured. This substantiates the linkage between ritual, money and commodity flows. The document distinguishes between the emperumakkaļ who were entrusted with money and those who returned the interest in kind, that is the articles meant for the ritual.

Fifthly, the tradition of the clearing of dues and the closing of accounts on the distinctive day of Viśu\textsuperscript{118} is confirmed in the case of the Tiruvāṟṟuvāi temple also.

What distinguishes this document in comparison with other documents pertaining to this period are the following. There appears an absence of collective decision-making involving bodies other than the families, replacement of kaccam with sreekariyam and linking money with ritual or introduction of money into the exchequer of the temple through lending activities.

**Explaining the Nature of Political Controls**

The three documents dealing with the temple of Tiruvāṟṟuvāi may broadly be taken to show some commonness as all of them deal with instituting rituals in the temple. But then, we also find in the documents, dissimilarities in the case of the place of the ruler, the nomenclature of the corporate body/ies managing the temple affairs, specification of fine in case of default etc. The dissimilarities may be attributed to the changing nature of the control over the temple and so too the attempt to control the people associated with the temple. In the first document the ruler’s name is invoked as a person who commands authority over those connected with

\textsuperscript{118} See M G S Narayanan., *Perumals of Kerala*, p. 177. The festivals and occasions for the payment of dues as given out in the documents are sankṛānti or viśu.
the temple, including the corporate bodies. In the second document reference to the ruler stands limited to the mention of his regnal year. However it emphasises the symbolic authority of the ruler over others appearing in the document. The third document is devoid of any reference to the ruler.

The categories and concepts figuring in the documents that are found relevant for evaluating the nature of control exercised among them are Perumān Aṭikal, urāṟ, nāṭṭāṟ, sabha, kaccam etc and so too the resources for the various rituals (See Table 3). The nature and degree of dissimilarity displayed in the three documents would prompt us to set aside the notions of a temple-centrality devised in the historiography which overlooked the historicity of the temple. Even within the time span of the Ceras variations could be seen.

Table 3. Rituals instituted the Tiruvāṟṟuvāi Temple
(as found in the inscriptions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inscription and Material</th>
<th>Valappalli Copperplate Inscription</th>
<th>Mercherry Illam Copperplate Inscription</th>
<th>Tiruvāṟṟuvāi Stone Inscription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of the doc.</td>
<td>c. 830 AD</td>
<td>861 AD</td>
<td>c. 13th AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefactor</td>
<td>Permān Aṭigaḷ</td>
<td>Sendan Sankaran of Punsei-ppadagaranan</td>
<td>(i) Vengadavan Nambi of Mecheri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Devan Narayanan of Ilamaṇ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression used for the deed</td>
<td>Kaccam</td>
<td>Kaccam</td>
<td>Sree kāriyam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate body/assembly mentioned</td>
<td>(i) Tiruvāṟṟuvāi Patineṭṭu nāṭṭāṟ</td>
<td>Sabha</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Valapalli Urāṛ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rituals instituted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muṭṭāppali (Daily Puja)</th>
<th>Āvaṇi Ēṇam celebrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Offer of feed</td>
<td>(i) Ney abhisheka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Lamp</td>
<td>(ii) Feed for 6 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Bhūta bali</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rituals in connection with Visu celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jetsamam celebrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Offer of feed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Lamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Bhūta bali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endowments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(i) Dry land yielding dānaras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Wet land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wet land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Money (42 achchu) entrusted with the priests |

Punishment (For the elite elements)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(i) Fine (in dānaras)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Loss of caste status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(i) Fine (in gold)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Not Applicable |

Punishment (For temple functionaries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fine (in rice out of the remuneration?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Not Applicable |

| Fine of double the defaulted amount |

Source: T A S Vols. I and II

Perumān Aṭikal

Notions of a centralised state have been rejected in historiography for several reasons, the substantiation for which have been drawn from the inscriptions and literature of medieval Kerala.119 It has been pointed out that the ruler did not possess direct authority over any considerable part of the territory outside the capital city of Makotai and his officials did not engage in the collection of revenue or carry out judicial or military manoeuvres.120 The contents of the available inscriptions from the Cera country are shown to indicate that all the inscriptions have been issued by the local chiefs except the Jewish copperplate of 1000 AD which has been issued by Bhaskara Ravi, the perumāl.121 Even in the latter case it can be argued that the perumāl issued the document in his capacity as the chief of

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119 See M G S Narayanan, Perumāls - - -, p. 75. Also his “State in the Era of the Ceraman Perumāls of Kerala” in Champakalakshmi et.al (eds.) State and Society in Pre- Modern South India, p.112 The reference is to the notion of a “Second Cera Empire” and that of a centralised monarchy visualised by Prof. Elamkulam Kunlan Pillai and discussed with profound eloquence in Kerala Caritratinre Irułatannya Etukal, ff.

120 See M G S Narayanan, Perumāls - - -, pp.77-78. It is pointed out that the titles used by the royal dramatist uses the titles ‘Keralacutamani’, ‘Mahodayapura Parameśvara’ and ‘Keralādhinādha’.

121 Kesavan Veluthat, The Political Structure - - -, p.75.
Kodungalloor, the only place over which he had direct authority. On the other hand the nāṭu-s are shown as having enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy including the right to alienate land without the sanction of the ruler and are argued as having been fighting against the combined Cola-Pandya forces to defend their frontiers. This would imply the appropriation of the state prerogatives of revenue and military powers by local rulers.\footnote{See M G S Narayanan, *Perumāls* - - -, p.75. Also his “State in the Era of the Ceraman Perumāls of Kerala” in Champakalakshmi et.al (eds.) *State and Society in Pre- Modern South India*, p.112.}

Moreover, most of the inscriptions including those issued by the local chiefs, are dated in the regnal years of the reigning rulers. This is taken to demonstrate the over-lordship of the rulers on the local chiefs that epitomises the feudal character.\footnote{Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure* - - -, p. 75. The Tharsappalli copperplate and the Mampalli Copperplates are two of the orders issued by the local chiefs. Of the two the former acknowledges the over-lordship of the Cera ruler while the latter dated in the Kollam Era—the first record of its kind—is said to have been issued by the ruler of Venad since the reigning sovereign was probably a minor at the time of issuing the document.} This would drive home the point that chronological time and historical time for the temple, people and the property are conceivable only in terms of the perumāl’s reign. By extending the temporal dimensions of the perumāl over the temple, a given geographical space and the people living therein, it combines these entities within the former’s power relationships. In other words it ascertains the symbolic power of the perumāl over the temple, deity, the surrounding spatial continuum and the people and property contained therein.

*Perumān Aṭikal* is to be understood as a position on which authority, physical might and divinity converged. The role of the ruler in the instituting of the rituals in the temple could be as an observer, originator, arbitrator and mediator, besides a number of possible intervening positions. His control over both the trustees and functionaries of the temple stand asserted through specified claims of fines. It has been observed that 37 inscriptions of the Cera period refer to fines imposed for various types of
offences of which nine inscriptions mention Perumān Aṭikal as the recipient of the fine along with certain others (See Table 4). It has been found that in all the cases Perumān Aṭikal occupies the prime position in the hierarchy. In yet another case we find the Perumāl himself in the corresponding slot.\textsuperscript{124} It is quite natural that the presence of such a person with authority is sufficient to ensure the acquiescence of the members present.

### Table 4  Share of the fine to Perumān Aṭikal
(as found in Inscriptions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Place of the Document</th>
<th>Date/Period</th>
<th>Agents to whom fine is to be paid and the Share</th>
<th>Proportion of Allotment of Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tiruvāṭuvāri</td>
<td>830 A.D.</td>
<td>(1) Perumān Aṭikal /100 Dinara</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2      | Trppangode             | 910 A.D.    | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /25 Kalanju<br>
|        |                        |             | (2) Alkoyil /12 Kal 5 kanam                   |                                 |
| 3      | Poranghattiri          | 910 A.D.    | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /100 Kalanu<br>
|        |                        |             | (2) Alkoyil/ 50 Kalanju                      |                                 |
|        |                        |             | (3) Tēvaţ/50 Kalanju                         |                                 |
| 4      | Trikkadithanam         | 988 AD/1004 AD | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /100 Kalanu<br>
|        |                        |             | (2) Natuvali/ 50 Kalanju                    | 4                               |
|        |                        |             | (3) Valkai Vali/25 Klanju                    | 2                               |
|        |                        |             |                                               | 1                               |
| 5      | Tiruvallavāl           | 11\textsuperscript{th} c. | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /50 Kalanu<br>
|        |                        |             | (2) Koyil/ 25 Kalanju                       | 2                               |
|        |                        |             | (3) Sabha/25 Kalanju                        | 1                               |
| 6      | Kaviyur                | 952 AD      | (1) Perumāl /50 Kalanju                      | 2                               |
|        |                        |             | (2) Natuvali/25 Kalanju                     | 1                               |
| 7      | Tiruvanmandur          | 973 AD      | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /100 Kalanju<br>
|        |                        |             | (2) Koyil/ 25 Kalanju                       | 8                               |
|        |                        |             | (3) Uralar/12 Kalanju 5 Kanam                | 2                               |
| 8      | Tiruvanmandur          | 973 AD      | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /100 Kalanju<br>
|        |                        |             | (2) Koyil /25 Kalanju                       | 8                               |
|        |                        |             | (3) Uralar /12 Kalanju 5 Kanam               | 2                               |
| 9      | Tiruvanmandur          | 10\textsuperscript{th} century | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /50 Kalanju<br>
|        |                        |             | (2) Natuvali/25 Kalanju                     | 2                               |
|        |                        |             |                                               | 1                               |
| 10     | Kumaranelloor          | 11\textsuperscript{th} c. | (1) Perumān Aṭikal /100 Kalanu               | Full                            |

**Source:** M G S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*.

\textsuperscript{124} The reference is to the Kaviyur inscription. See Index. B.6.
Benefactors

A basic premise of the studies on early medieval Kerala is that the benefactors or those instituting the rituals were individuals wielding authority. In the first document the person who instituted the ritual is the perumāl, although the land from which the income sourced belonged to some one else. In the second document the status of the benefactor is not mentioned. Nor is it possible to gather information about his association with the sabha. The third document makes mention of two persons from the two prominent Brahmin families—Illaman and Mecheri. Taken together one may safely consider that these two families had been managing/controlling the temple of Tiruvāḷḷuvāi and its properties for a few centuries. One has to bear in mind the fact that just before the region was being added to the kingdom of Venad, the family of Erathu Mecheri had been enjoying military control over such land divisions as Kizhakkumuri, Natuvilemuri, Matilbhagom, Thukalassery, Venpala, Kavumbhagom etc. All these places are located around the temple of Tiruvāḷḷuvāi. The two copperplate documents were held in the possession of Mēchēri Illam. This must have been in keeping with the prevailing custom of trustees keeping all the documents in safe custody.

Judging from the documents of the nearby places such as Perunna, Trikkodithanam and Tiruvanvandur, it could be argued that legitimacy had been sustained by many a politically significant person by instituting and perpetuating rituals in the temples. However there had been preconditions for a person to initiate rituals in a temple. This means that what enables and permits a person to initiate rituals or offer a gift/feed are equally entrenched in power relations. The Tiruvalla Copperplate gives a long list of persons such as Vira Cola—the Cola sovereign\(^{125}\), Kilan Aţiga\(^{126}\),

\(^{125}\) *TCP*, II. 99-100.
Iramavatuka Muvar\textsuperscript{127}, Eran Cankaran the \textit{naṭuvāḷi} of Puraikilnativ\textsuperscript{128}, Raman Kotavarman\textsuperscript{129} etc., all of whom are taken to be notable figures of the period in politics, or their consorts such as Raman Matevi\textsuperscript{130} or even merchants such as the \textquoteleft\textquoteleft vāṇiyān from Īlam\textquoteright\textquoteright\textsuperscript{131} who are seen to have instituted some of the rituals/ provisions like the perpetual lamp or oil, sandal paste, feed for the Brahmins etc. How is one to make sense of the benefactor of the ritual? The only possible deduction that could be drawn is a direct relationship between the institution of a ritual of perpetual nature in the temple and the elite nature of the benefactor. In other words over a period of time legitimacy for the elite status was being made use of by several grids of agents through the instituting of rituals.

**Proliferation of Rituals and Extension of Control**

The temple was a place for the performance of multifarious rituals by the worshippers and a site of power and an effect of power relations. The temple was also embedded in material processes—both physical and financial. Having looked at the procedures laid down in association with the institution of rituals in the temple of Tiruvāṟuvāi, it is possible for us to discern the elements of continuity and change in association with the institution and performance of rituals.

This was a period of temple building spree and a period of proliferation of temple rituals. Then over a period of three centuries, a wide array of rituals such as the \textit{muṭṭappali, Bhūtabali, vilakku, nivēḍya, oōṭṭu, koottu} etc in the temple came to be instituted. These rituals at the time of their inception were meant to be carried out with meticulous precision and without any hindrance. At the time of the inception of the rituals, assessments of the total expenses to be incurred in connection with the

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid, ll. 140-141.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid, ll. 150-151.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid, ll. 537-542.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid, ll. 537-542.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid, ll. 532-537.
\end{itemize}
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conduct of these rituals was made and endowments in land or gold were
also made to cover those expenses. In the case of the first two inscriptions,
those who managed the affairs of the temple and those who performed
those rituals were made parties guaranteeing continuation of the rituals.
Obstructions of any sort made by any one to the rituals or laxity shown by
the functionaries for the performance of the same were met with fine,
excommunication, loss of office etc.

The supervision/management of the temple with its rituals was a
serious business. Such elite bodies such as the urāṛ, nāṭṭāṛ, sabha etc did
it. Indications regarding the caste status of the above bodies can be drawn
from the prescriptions laid down against the offences of its members.
Obviously they were people of consequence who could cause obstructions
or do away with the rituals, had it not been for the kaccam or sreekariam to
which they were parties. These are apparently regulatory measures to
restrict and control. But this may be better construed as a mechanism to
pre-empt possible disruptions. In other words, there was an anticipated
disruption of the prevailing order.

It is significant that the three documents relating to the temple
provide a record of the sequential development of the rituals in the temple.
It is quite obvious that the temple of Tiruvāṛuvāi occupied a pivotal place
in the locality during the early decades of the ninth century. However the
addition of rituals with massive endowments in the nearby Viṣṇu temple of
Tiruvallavāḷ by benefactors drawn from a much wider horizon of political
and economic consequence suggests a definite shift in the emphasis
accorded to it. The muṭṭāppali of the first document was an every day
affair, while oottu prescribed in the second document was meant to benefit
only a few people that too, once in a year. Still further, the Bhūatabali,
ghee-lamp and nivēdyā of the latter document added to the pomp and
festivities, incorporating more and more expressions and manifestations of the puranic pantheon and rituals.

Gold coins figure in all the three inscriptions in different ways. It is the dinara in the first, pon palangāyu in the second and achchu in the third—in all the cases they are reckoned with as coins and not metals. But at the same time, the terms employed declare their changing features. The use of coins as a medium of exchange is a departure from the earlier practice of keeping them in private custody, and keeping them in hoards. While the reference to dinara points to the involvement in external trade, the term paļangāyu is expressive of its obsolescence. It had been in circulation both prior to and after the circulation of kāśu and therefore the historical need to rename the old coin as paḷam- kāśu. As we come to the third document, the achchu speaks aloud its potential for investment to fetch handsome returns. This is also expressive of the monetisation of the rituals by linking it to investment and interest. It has been pointed out that dinara was in use or was familiar in several other parts of India. It is further pointed out that gold and silver coins have been found in such great quantities in India that the chronology of the Roman emperors could be reconstructed with the help of the Roman coins in the Kerala hoards alone. It may also be presumed that the spice trade with the Western world had continued despite the decline of the Roman Empire as is indicated by the establishment of Christian, Jewish and Muslim settlements on the coastal line of Kerala.

In addition to the dispensing of paddy growing regions for the benefit of the ritual centre, there was the incorporation of the gold/cash yielding regions, work force and proprietary groups into the orbit of the temple and its rituals. Still further the money transactions involved in the

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conduct of the rituals reiterate the point that several economic activities and money transactions were involved in the conduct of rituals; this adds to the importance of the temple as a site of power and as a possible site to reformulate power relations among the people involved in it.

The instituting of a host of rituals in the temple was commensurate with the activation of a regime of power which identified and enumerated the objects to be venerated, determined their order of priority and classified various groups and their responsibilities in strict conformity with the pattern of social and religious organisation as laid down in the *purānic* religion.

What is to be underscored is that the proceduralisation of practices, the ordering of people along a certain hierarchy, investing of the people with responsibilities and obligations, the glorification of rituals and sanctification of their permanence, their binding to the written word, monetisation of the conduct of rituals etc. had been taking place and thus constituting the temple in the mindset.