CHAPTER-5

TEMPLE AND SOCIETY (CIRCA 1000-1800 A.D.)

During the centuries after circa 1000 A.D., secular donors, Brahmanas and kings added to the growing network of temple administration and land control by more gifts of land in places within the temple villages and outside the boundaries of temple villages in more extended networks of temple estates. The Srirangam temple can be said to have represented, or to have constituted, as a single entity the diverse peoples whose worship it attracted. Temple worship involved the complex transactions of a body of worshippers and the God of their devotion; there was selection of who could offer worship and who could receive the fruits of worship. The last were usually transvalued substances such as food offered for the sustenance of the God or clothes for his or her adornment; these were returned to devotees as prasad (God’s grace). Eligibility to give to and receive from a God, and the order in which giving and receiving occurred, was monitored by priests and devotees, for such transactions defined an entire community and the ranking of persons and groups within it.

As a matter of fact, the temples received its patronage from many quarters—royalty, political chiefs, landlords of all varieties, trading groups—in short, all those who were of any consequence in society. This patronage included gifts of substantial resources including land and gold, protection of those resources and those who managed it including the premises, and other kinds of services. Naturally, all these groups also benefited from this patronage tremendously. As a
matter of fact, what emerges from all this is the clear cut function of the temple as an institution, i.e. integration: economically through the redistribution of accumulated resources; socially, through the incorporation of diverse social groups into one community of worship, and politically, through the conferment of ritual prestige to sovereigns and local elites. The various forms of integration initiated by the temple are classified succinctly by Carol A Breckenridge: The cultural form of the gift (to temples) and its ritual actualization permitted the vertical incorporation of the political order while the technical (and material) context of the gift accomplished the horizontal incorporation of disparate agricultural localities into agricultural and urban networks.

Horizontal incorporation, in Breckenridge’s phraseology, refers to the creation of economic ties between different regions of a territory through resource redistribution. Revenues from a village in one region would be sent to a temple, which might then invest these revenues in agricultural development elsewhere or lend this money to another village for its use. In this way, temple donations often indirectly enhanced agricultural prosperity. By implication, the process of horizontal incorporation fostered the social integration of people from various geographical areas. Hence, the effect of these donations would be to bring pastoralists and many other communities into the web of the temple’s socio-economic network, just as the gift of land would have the result of causing the temple to establish links with individuals who performed agricultural and associated tasks.

In fact, temple patrons were ranked vertically, partially on the basis of their relative munificence, and this ranking was expressed in the public rituals of the
Festivals were particularly significant in this regard, for it was on such occasions of procession with the deity that prominent patrons were most publicly rewarded with temple honors. This hierarchical function of the temple was especially crucial for kings, whose role as patrons of religion was the source of much of their authority. In the absence of an extensive bureaucracy and strong central army, the medieval south Indian monarch relied on the moral ascendancy attained through lavish gifting to religious institutions for his legitimacy, rather than on overt domination. Locally dominant groups supported the religious networks created by the kings because of the prestige they derived from doing so; along with the king, the local elites manipulated the powerful symbolism of religious gifting to enhance their claims to superiority.

An understanding of social relations in the period of our study inevitably leads to deep understanding of a few paradigms that need to be elaborated on the basis of temple records available from the Sriranganatha temple at Srirangam. These are:

1. The understanding of the village community as it evolved from the Chola times to the Vijayanagara times and various relations that existed therein. It also necessitates an understanding of social relations that existed within a particular village community or between various communities through the references available in the temple records;
2. Peoples expression of their allegiance to a particular community or caste and understanding of the intensity of it;
3. References to caste conflicts etc. i.e. between Valangai (Right-hand castes) and the Idangai (Left-hand castes);

4. References to inter-relationship(s) of various social categories within the temple complex and outside of it;

5. References to co-operation and conflicts in the temple management;

6. References to gender categories and sensitivities therein;

7. References to the role of the State or the king or the royal officers in supervising such relations, wherever and whenever there was a real need or perceived one etc.

There is no doubt that the village community is the most important component of any study on social relations in ancient and medieval period and south Indian society is no exception. The majority of villages in Chola times were non-brahmadeya and in most cases, they had an assembly called Ur, which was generally composed of landholding cultivators. As they formed the basic productive class of the entire society, the Chola ruler’s chief concern must have been to exercise control over them. The brahmadeya village must have been in minority and were granted to Brahmins by the king. The grantees lived in them and dominated the other non-Brahmin population. As the Brahmins themselves did not engage in the cultivation of land, two distinctive strata must have been formed in the communities of these villages: ‘landholders’ and ‘cultivators’.

The Brahmin residents formed an assembly called ‘Sabha’ for their village administration. This assembly looked into many affairs of the village, for
example, cultivation, irrigation etc. One must also note the fact that because the brahmadeya villages were established by royal orders and they flourished under royal protection, there must have been close connection between the grantees and the rulers. One can also assume that the brahmadeya village must have played a crucial role in spreading Brahmanical ideas among the residents of non-brahmadeya villages and in maintaining social order in the locality.

As a matter of fact, in pre-modern south India, one can perceive an interesting pattern of oscillation between caste and community in creating, establishing and claiming an identity. This is based on the fact that there is a huge difference in which our inscriptive and textual traditions present the south Indian society till the Vijayanagara period. There is no doubt that in pre-Vijayanagara times, that is in early medieval inscriptions, neither caste nor community, with the exception of the brahmana and some sectarian groups, is emphasized as a determinant in people’s relationships with the temple; the arena in which such identities were indeed built up. It is the occupational background that is invariably mentioned. On the contrary, in the textual traditions from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries, caste and community are important categories and predominant issues in their ideological expressions. By the time one comes to the Vijayanagara period, these two become major categories, both in the inscriptive records and the textual traditions as makers of identity and organizing principles in society and polity. This was due to the fact that during this period, the Varna order is not only re-asserted as the norm but practiced consciously and religious community identities get consolidated.
It is important to note that inscriptions from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries in the Siva and the Vaisnava temples in south India follow a particular format in which the donor (with the exception of the brahmanas and royalty) are mentioned by their names, pre-fixed by the place name, family (kudi) name and personal name, with hardly any indication of their caste and ritual status. The only means of determining such identities is through suffixes like bhatta (Brahmana), velan (agriculturist), kon (cowherd) and so on. The nature of the functions is implied in terms like Siva brahmanas (Saiva priests), Vaikhanasas (Vaisnava priests), and occupational names like kaikkola (weaver), manradi (cowherd), and vaniga (trader). These occur as donors or suppliers of items of ritual requirements viz, food, dress and ornaments etc for the deity. The deity maintained his sovereignty through a growing paraphernalia of servants and functionaries for managing, accounting and protecting endowments. In this context, the barhmana sabha, mulaparisad and committees for specific functions are visible as participants in a whole series of authority and service relationships with the transcendental sovereign. It can be said that the society presents itself as organized around the temple, through a variety of economic, ritual and administrative activities. In these centuries between 7th-13th, the terms vaisya and sudra are conspicuously absent. In contrast, the Vijayanagara inscriptions from 14th century onwards clearly recognize the caste and ritual status of the different groups in temple service—as donors, functionaries or suppliers of ritual items. For example, the traivarnika (vaisya) status of the Cettis is a common occurrence in temple
inscriptions. The institution of feeding houses (Ramanuja kutam for example), where both the brahmanas and the sudras are fed out of the temple endowments, is recorded in some Vaisnava temples, sudras were now especially included apart from the pardesis. It is suggested that under the leadership of the early acharyas, and in response to the presence of powerful non-brahmanana local interests, brahmana authorities may have succeeded in realizing in practice the ideal of inclusivism by allowing and enhancing participation of sudra in administration and ritual life of the temple. The sattada Srivaisnavas (non-brahmanas given ritual functions in the temple) figure in considerable numbers in temple rituals and other functions. Besides, by the Vijayanagara period, the protection of the endowments to the temple by the local religious groups like the Srivaisnavas is no more invoked. Rather, the administrators like the sthanikas and sthanattar are entrusted with such protection. It should be noted that in the inscriptions from the pre-Vijayanagara period, this pattern of cult leadership and domination by temple affairs by particular figures is not reflected.

The inscriptions from Srirangam temple tell us that it was the individual identity that was significant for the devotee, for his connection with the temple was ‘direct and personally forged, rather than being mediated through his membership of a particular caste or family. This is different during the Vijayanagara period which was marked by acquisition of exclusive privileges, honours and service rights as a member of a religious community that was conspicuously visible in temple inscriptions.
By the end of the 11th century, the religious communities, especially the Srivaishnavas reoriented their community base and structure against the context of social and political changes. The gradual marginalization of the brahmadeya, the exhaustion of their institutional capacity to integrate and consequently, the rising importance of the temples had institutional ramifications for these communities. It is true that the Srivaishnava tradition did not assume much of ideological importance or significance during the Cholas, but it became a major component in the larger ideological constructs of the Vijayanagara period. The sense of a community of devotees emerges strongly in the Vaisnava hymns. The image of a community supersedes that of a social hierarchy which is based on caste, with the bhaktas sharing love and devotion to Vishnu and his sacred shrines. The importance of the guru in mediating between God and the devotee is stressed in the texts of both the sub-sects, the Tenkalai sect of Srirangam in particular. The concept of the guru or leader emerged in the personality of Ramanuja. The most important legacy he left was the decisive link between temple control and sect leadership in the form of the acharyas or preceptor. The re-organization of worship and administration at Srirangam—the Koyil of the Srivaishnavas—is a major theme of the temple chronicle or Koyil Olugu. It must be mentioned that none of the acharyas, including Ramanuja, finds mention in inscriptions till the Vijayanagara period. Hence, one is forced to rely on the textual tradition for the evolution and organization of this community.

The growth of urban centers and intensification of mercantile activities led to rising importance of the nagarams, merchants, craftsmen and weavers, especially
the kaikkolas that altered their relationship with the nadus. Hence, the rising social importance of the various non-Brahmana groups led to a movement towards a higher caste status, especially the claims of the artisans to a twice-born caste status. The existing social structure weakened and led to the crystallization of the non-Brahman communities into a dual vertical division of the Valangai (Right hand castes) and Idangai (Left hand castes), within the traditional structure of the caste society. However, the Velalas and the Brahmanas remained outside this dual division.

Having said this, one may now get to a clearer understanding of the Valangai and Idangai caste divisions in south Indian society. Valangai means ‘right hand’ and Idangai ‘left hand’. The division of society into Valangai and Idangai in south India is noticed from about A.D. 1100 onwards in inscriptions of the Cholas and the Vijayanagara period and in British records later. The current understanding of this division among most scholars is that the agricultural jatis or castes were grouped under Valangai and the non-agricultural castes, like artisans and traders, under Idangai. The latter were the Pancala, Kamala, and also Saliya and Kaikkola (weaver). They also occasionally used the Rathakara designation, claiming that honourable status according to later Vedic sources. It is also believed that these jatis usually belonged to the lower sections of the caste hierarchy.

This division is especially important in understanding south Indian society, where one recognizes the polarization of brahmana and non-brahmana and the absence
of *ksatriya* and *vaisya* as a regional version of the system. It is visible in the inscriptional records from the 11th century onwards, but hardly recognized in the Sanskrit textual tradition of the south. It is significant that the two divisions appear at a point of time when expansion of agricultural activities and people into new tracts or frontier zones like the forest and hilly regions takes place, or when people of these tracts are assimilated into the agrarian society and when the diversification of economic activities brings into existence a variety of economic, ethnic or occupational groups, not already aligned with one or the other, and who have thereby to be given space within the framework of the traditional norms of the social organization, helping potential alliances at the supra-local level. This happened clearly from the 12th century A.D., and intensified under the Vijayanagara, two periods of change in society and economy, due to intensive urbanization, when supra-local formations became necessary. These two divisions were generally low in ritual status i.e. below the brahmanas and the dominant landowning or agricultural groups like the *velalas*, *velamas*, and later, *reddis*, *kampulu*, and *okkalu* but above the outcaste (*pancama*). Importantly, these two groups also shared common status and symbols in religious contexts i.e. in temple rituals and activities, where they were ranked as equals. They observed caste norms in their own localities, but became transformed into *Valangai (Valankai)* or *Idangai (Itankai)* i.e. altered for joint action supporting religious institutions. Changes in south Indian society due to intense urbanization and the importance of urban artisans and merchants in the Vijayanagara period led to
more frequent conflicts for enhanced status and subsequent royal intervention in resolving them.

In this context, we get many important details from the temple records at Sringam about the prevailing social relations and the role of the temple or its management or even the village assembly in dealing with them.

During the reign of the Chola king Kulottunga I (A.D. 1070-1122), the succor extended by the temple treasury for rehabilitating a village that had suffered destruction in a conflict is recorded in an inscription which refers to a clash between the Right and Left hand castes in the 2nd year of the king’s reign resulting in the burning down of the village Rajamahendra-chaturvedimangalam, destruction of its sacred places and looting of its temple treasury and the images by robbers. The treasury advanced funds to the *Sabha* which undertook the work of rehabilitating the village and renovating and re-consecrating its temple. A marginal note engraved on the top left corner of this record is of considerable significance. It states that this kalvettu (inscriptions) belonged to Rajamahendra-chaturvedimangalam which according to the main inscription, was situated in Nittavinodavalanadu. This latter division comprised parts of the present Nannilam and Papanasam talukas of the Tanjavur district and as such the village about fifty miles away from Srirangam. The reason for engraving this record so far away from Rajamahendra-chaturvedimangalam is inexplicable, particularly because it was done in the 11th year of the king’s reign when, unlike in the second year of his reign when his political control was almost established over the entire Chola
territory and as such could have chosen a place nearer to the village for recording the transaction. The clash between the Right-hand and the Left-hand classes alluded to in the inscription was probably an offshoot of this feud.

In fact, right in the beginning of Chola rule during King Aditya’s reign (circa 871-907 A.D.), an inscription records a decision of members of the Perungurisabha of Srirangam disqualifying persons who were not residents of the village from holding the devadana and other lands from the 5th year onwards of the king’s reign and stipulates a fine of 25 pon on the pandaravariyam and the karanattar who violated this decision. This makes it clear that residents of a specific area around the temple had started asserting more for their own privileges and did not want to share it with anyone at all costs. Many times the temple also served as bank to those people from the community who needed it but in case of default, somebody would mediate i.e. either the king or the assembly. Another inscription from Kulottunga I’s reign refers to an enquiry into and the settlement of arrears by Rajendrachola Muvendavelar, the arrears amounting to 940 kasu by some individuals to temple treasuries. One of the individuals (name lost) also served imprisonment.

Another inscription records the repayment with interest of a long-standing loan raised by the sabha of Chandralekhai-Chaturvedi-mangalam (the modern Sendalai) from the treasury of God Ananthanarayanasvamin at Srirangam. Though the details of the transaction are unfortunately lost due to the damaged state of the record, this much can be gathered that the loan was raised in the 10th
regnal year of Madiraikonda Parakesarivarman i.e. Parantaka I (c. A.D. 917) and discharged in the 10th year of the reign of Kulottunga I (c. A.D.1080) an interval that stretched over a period of more than a century and a half.  

Brahmanas seem to have enjoyed a lot of respect in south Indian society. During the reign of Hoysala king Ramanatha, one inscription purports to be an order of the deity ratifying the proposals made in the 9th year of reign of Viraramanathadeva by Echi-Bhattan of Kausika gotra, the Kudinir-savasi of the palace (araimanai) who, along with the other temple servants made a representation to the God in respect of the Lakshminarayap-purumal temple situated in Bhadrakara-chaturvedimangalam that (1) as a protective measure, a row of house sites all around the temple be given to deserving Brahmanas, (2) that some more lands from Gunasila-chaturvedi-manglam be acquired and endowed to the temple to augment its income from the existing endowments which was found to be inadequate for maintaining worship and offerings in it, for which purpose Echi-Bhattan deposited 7500 kasu in the temple treasury. This record is a very good example of a society that prided itself in giving respect to learned Brahmanas.

So was the respect for the Srivaishnavas serving in the temple. The Srivaishnavas are a distinct Vaisnava community in south India confined to Tamil Nadu and southern parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The community considers Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi as their supreme Godhead. They are divided into two sects—the Vadakalais and the Tenkalais. The Vadakalais
represent the Sanskritic tradition. Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu is their institutional center and Vedanta Desika (A.D. 1268-1369) their spiritual perceptor. They give preference to the Sanskrit Vedas over the Dravida Vedas i.e. the four thousand Tamil hymns of the Alvars. Therefore, they are considered Brahmanical and conservative in their outlook. The Tenkalais, on the other hand, represent the Tamil tradition. Srirangam in Tamil Nadu is their center and Manavala Mamuni (A.D. 1370-1442) their religious leader. Since the Tenkalais regard the Dravida Vedas as their scriptures, they are considered to be more broad-based than the Vadakalais and have had a large non-Brahmana following. In an inscription during the Vijayanagara king Achyutadeva Maharaja (A.D.1529-42), it is recorded that the village Uttamasili which was formerly granted to the temple of Ranganatha at Srirangam as Tiruvidaiyattam for the God, having been included as non-tenure village in Tiruchchirapalli-usavadi at a later date was subsequently re-granted to the temple to provide for feeding the Srivaishnavas on the evidence of an old copper-plate grant produced by Singarachar, the agent of Kandadai Ramanuja- Ayyangar to Visvanatha-Nayaka (the officer-in-charge) of the Tiruchchirapalli-usavadi. It, along with many other inscriptions of this nature, prove beyond doubt that the Srivaishnavas enjoyed tremendous social respect and privilege.

The queens seem to have enjoyed a lot of freedom and privileges to move on their own as is evident from some inscriptions in Kulottunga’s time period. One inscription registers a gift of money for bringing land in Vilanadu in Pandikulasani-valanadu under cultivation by Tennavan-Madeviyar, the queen of
Rajendradeva, (Kulottunag I), towards provision for offerings to the God on the 5th day of Masi 37. During Vikrama Chola (A.D.1118-35), another inscription registers a gift of 3 ma of land bounded by the Jayangondasolan-tirunandavanam on the west, Rajadhirajan-tirunandavanam on the north, Alappirandan-tirunandavanam on the east and Kaveri on the south by Tillaiyalagiyar, the mother of queen Araiyanulagudaiyar lalias Ologa (Loka) Mahadeviyar to Kandadai Tiruvaranga-narayan Sri Sadgopan for a flower garden in her name and for her own welfare, at the instance of Kalivalam-udaiyan Tiruvayikkulam-udaiyan, the Srikaryam of the temple 38. Another inscription from a time period a little later than this records an endowment of 100,000 kasu to the temple by Deviyar-Somala-deviyar for a lamp and a flower garden. 50,000 kasu out of this endowment is said to have been contributed from the treasury of the queen Somaladeviyar and the balance by Padinenvishaya-Brahmachakravarttigal of Vangippuram and Tannantulaydasar, a dasa-nambi, in equal shares of 25,000 kasu. The former amount was kept apart for the supply of ghee for the lamps and out of the latter, two plots of land 8 ma in extent for a flower garden for 20,000 kasu and 3 veli for 30,000 kasu for maintaining four gardens for the upkeep of the garden were purchased 39. It seems to have become a general practice that queens shared a respectful space with the kings and the other members of the royal household. This is evident from an inscription of a much later period i.e. during Vira Narasimha II (A.D. 1220-38), a Hoysala ruler, when an inscription registers a gift of 40,000 kasu by Devaladeviyar probably identical with Somesvara’s queen, daughter of… adavvai, towards the purchase of lands for running a service of
offerings of food, sandal paste, musk, civet, etc., to God Ranganatha and two other gifts of 10,000 *kasu* and 5,000 *kasu* by Bharadvaji Andan Sirandan Bhattan and Aritan Sri Govindaperumal *alias* Vedanerikattinan Brahmarayan respectively towards purchase and maintainance of garden lands for offerings of garlands to the God. It also mentions Rangaya Dandanayakkar, brother of Bhujabalabhima Kesava Dandanayakkar, as a *Mahapradhana* of king Vira-Narasimha and probably as related to Devaladevi.

In turn, these palace women seem to have enjoyed a lot of respect and legitimacy from the common people. A record engraved on the temple walls from the period of the Hoysala king Somesvara (A.D. 1233-67) clearly proves it. It is partly covered up under the floor. It registers a gift of land for a *gosala* (*tirukkosalaippura-iraiyili*) by one of the palace officers (*araimanai-pradhani*) of Puttur in Tulumandalam (name lost), for the welfare of the chief queen (*pattattup-periyarasi*) Vijvala-Mahadevi. The gift is said to have been approved by Jatavarman Vikrama-Pandyadeva in the 4th year and 270th day of his reign at the instance of Annan Vanadhirajar and the gift land seems to have formed part of Vikramapandya-chaturvedimangalam in Pandimandalam evidently named after the Pandya king. The title Jatavarman is obviously a mistake for Maravararman since no Pandya king bearing the title Jatavarman and the name Vikramapandya is known to have existed during this period. On the other hand, a Maravarman Vikramapandya is known to have commenced to rule from c.1249 A.D., with whom this Vikramapandya may be identified.
There seems to be a very cordial acceptance of *pardesi-savasi* merchants and those who were associated with temple affairs. A record from the reign of Hoysala king Ramanatha (A.D.1254-95) records a gift of gold by Sahala-Bhatta, son of Ahala-bhatta, of the Sakala *gotra*, who belonged to the community of *Paradesi-savasi* merchants, for offerings during one service in the temple and for supplying garlands to God for his own merit and that of his son 42. Another inscription during the period of Vijayanagara king Achyutadeva Maharaja (A.D.1529-1542) records that *Avasaram* Mallarasayyan, son of *Anatalai* Sankarasar, having found that some of the *Tiruvidaiyattam* lands lying waste had now begun to yield more than the expected yield due to the broadening of the *Peruvalavanvaykkal*, arranged for offerings of 67 dishes of food both to the God Ranganatha and the Goddess Nachchiyar in the name of the king, queen Varadachchi Amman and prince Venkatadriraya. The dishes are allotted to the night feeding at the choultry of Sankarasayyan, to Brahmanas, Sudras and Pardesis 43.

A very important inscription from the time of Maravarman Sundara Pandya I tells us very clearly about how some unrest had crept into the affairs of the temple leading to some unsavory relations between some social groups. It necessitated strong administrative action and that was what the Pandyan ruler had taken through the appropriate administrative bodies. It records that when the temple managers colluded with the *Ottar* in misappropriating the temple funds and thus a large assembly comprising of all the administrative bodies met at the west *Triruvidi* of Rajamahendran Tiruvidi and resolved that the executive functions in
the administration of the temple must be entrusted to individuals carefully selected, excluding the defaulters responsible for the misappropriation of temple funds, by rotation. Each individual or body may perform the function for one year. The individual must be selected on the occasion of Sripushpayagam.44

Two inscriptions dated in the tenth year of the reign of Sundara Pandya I refer to the arrangements made for the proper management of the temple affairs after the profuse grant of lands and gold bestowed on the temple by the king. First inscription is an order containing instructions to Vanadarayar, apparently a royal officer that the work-load in the temple which was borne by only one group (kottu) of officials in the temple should now be extended to members of the other groups and also stipulates further that the Ariyar and Ullurar may be engraved from the month of Avian in the work of guarding the gold treasures of the temple, evidently the accumulations due to the benefactions of this king.45 Another inscription from the same period of this ruler refers to the endowments of lands and distribution of work in a clear-cut manner such as the gilding of the vimanas, the Sundara-Pandyan madil, gopura a palanquin and ornaments caused to be made by the king. It states that formerly the endowments were looked after by ten persons representing the Kovanavar and that as the endowments have now increased due to the benefactions of the king ten persons selected from all the kottus including the Kovanavar should manage the property. The ten persons are to be selected as follows: 2 from Kovanavar, 2 from Bhattagal Srirangamaraiyor, 1 from Todavattutumaraiyor of the sabha, 2 from talai-iduvar, 1 from vassal Ariyar and 2 from aratta (aratta) mukki-anukkar who are tending the gardens.
Kurukulattaraiyan, the headman of Mattur was the Srikaryam officer on the occasion. This order is said to have been issued at the instance of Sriranganarayanadasan, Kurukulattaraiyan, the headman of Mattur who was the Srikaryam officer, the kovanavar and the Kudavar. Tirumantira-olainayakam Kannudaiyan Pallavan Vilupparaiyan of Puduchcheri figures as the signatory of the record. Of these groups, the function of Kovanavar, appears to be a general duty of supervising the worship. Srirangamaraiyor and Todavattu (for Todavatti)-tumaraiyor (clean Brahmanas clad in white) are evidently the names of two classes of Brahmanas, the distinction between the two being not clear. The former were apparently members of the sabha of Srirangam. Talai-iduvar evidently refers to the people engaged in supplying flowers and garlands. Vasal Ariyar, as the term indicates, seems to refer to a group of northerners who had guard duty at places of entrance into the temple. Arattamukki-anukkar, as the record itself describes, were engaged in tending the flower gardens. Aratta-mukki is one of the titles of Tirumangai-alvar and anukkar means close servants or attendants. While these six groups were represented in the body of ten persons continued according to these inscriptions, it will be interesting to note that there were other groups of servants such as Sri-bhagavata-nambimar vinnappam-seyvar, Nambimar and Sripadantangam Nambimar, who, though nonetheless intimately connected with the affairs of the temple, went without representation.

An inscription with no date but in the characters of 13th century AD. purports to be an order issued by God Ranganatha directing a council of 23 members of whom ten are to be selected from out of the kottu of the temple, four from the
sanyasins and desantris, five representing the 18 mandalas and four representing the Chera, Chola, Pandya kings and the Kshatriyas of the north, to appoint a sanyasin versed in the Vaisnava lore and with the interest of the temple at heart and belonging to either Pangayachchelviyur alias Vellarai or Parantakachaturvedimangalam alias Salagramam or the Nalayiravar-Brahmadeyam in Pandi-mandalam, to took after the properties of the temples situated in several places, with provision made for his maintenance.

It also interestingly mentions the appointment of armed Velaikkaras to help the sanyasin in discharging their duties. The elaborate arrangements made in this record indicate the complexities in the administration of the temple arising out of the accumulating wealth and expanding services. The creation of a pontificate whose name or designation is not given seems to have thrown the traditional seats of power represented by Ramanuja into the background.

The Pandyan ruler Manavarman Kulasekhara II’ reign (circa 1314 A.D.) notes a tough action taken by authorities against two very powerful social groups notably Ariyars and the Kaikkolas. An inscription records the remittance into the temple treasury by Srivaikundadasan a sum of 2,200 panam, part of which was realized as cost of lands in Jagadekavira-chaturvedimangalam sold to certain bhattas of Ravivarma-chaturvedimangalam, part towards temple services and the rest by way of fines collected from the Ariyar and the Kaikkolas. The amount so remitted was earmarked towards the purchase of a palanquin, an aureole, etc. for the temple.
It is to be noted that during the 13th century, the southern peninsula began to undergo an urbanization driven by the development of larger temples and chiefly fortifications. By the 16th century, the forces tending toward greater urbanization were crowned by the cumulative impact of Vijayanagara rule. In these numerous new towns of the Vijayanagara period, a major redefinition of ‘lower orders’ occurred, this having to do with the division of right and left castes. In the emerging social process, the left division of castes in the Vijayanagara domains suffered the historical disadvantage of being marginal to the dominant rural-centered society in which they lived. But the inscriptions at the Srirangam temple show no evidence of granting more privileges to one group or denying it. Thus, in all probability, both groups, by the Vijayanagara period, had access to same privileges like holding processions and displaying emblems etc.

As a matter of fact, the role of temples during the Vijayanagara period was more complex than as simple imperial symbols. More than mere architectural constructions and places of worship, it is evident by now that the south Indian temples had been sites of political and ideological contestation among imperial, local, and religious elites during the Vijayanagara period. Donations of land, goods, and currency were recorded on copper plates and temple walls, and were a medium of competitive display, wealth generation, and legitimation among these various participants. The construction of large temple complexes during the Vijayanagara period was typically sponsored by royal donations and/or donations by local rulers appointed or acknowledged by the emperor, though they did not always reciprocate this acknowledgment.
In addition, numerous other individuals and social groups (including agriculturalists, artisans, and temple women, among many others) also made donations to temples. In such an environment, the symbolic meaning attributed to temples and temple construction was not necessarily either simple or univalent. In fact, Vijayanagara imperial investment in major temple centres was clearly high, particularly during the early 16th century Tuluva period, a time of overall imperial success and wealth.

War and conquests many times led to large scale migration of people from one part of the country to another, and to new adjustments in economic and social relations. One very important instance of this was the coming into the Tamil country of numbers of Telugus and Kannadigas with the extension of the Vijayanagara empire, and perhaps of the Hoysala power earlier. They must have come in as officers and soldiers upholding the authority of the rulers and their migration was doubtless encouraged by grants of land and other concessions at the expense of the people of the conquered territory. Royal patronage of learning, the arts, and religion were other causes of similar movements.

There are two important points to be noted concerning the deities that were elevated in status during the Vijayanagara period. First, all were fierce Gods, with attributes of warriors and protectors and were explicitly linked to the militaristic qualities of Vijayanagara. At the imperial capital, Gods such as Virabhadra and Bhairava are often depicted near gates to the city and in association with fortifications, highlighting their role as fierce defenders of the city and empire.
Second, the marginal populations from which these deities were drawn, especially the pastoralist communities of the inland southern Deccan, had come to play a very important role in Vijayanagara military and political structure. These groups (and specific individuals within them) experienced enhanced social and economic status throughout the Vijayanagara period in consequence of their loyalty to the state, and the elevation of their traditional deities both acknowledged and accommodated the empire’s dependence on them. In sum, in the religious realm, decisions made and practices carried out at the Vijayanagara capital and by Vijayanagara elites did impact non-elite segments of the empire. They did this not by attempting to transform beliefs, but by responding to existing beliefs held by various important segments of Vijayanagara’s population—that is, by accommodating, incorporating, and elevating existing local beliefs, and deities, and the populations that worshipped them. While massive gopura and temples to various deities may not have served as a distinctive or significant identifier of Vijayanagara among non-elites, they did create a highly visible setting that made political authority visible in daily life of urban dwellers and pilgrims.

Patronage of religious institutions was a crucial source of social prestige and political legitimacy for prominent individuals and was additionally a means for them to allocate surplus resources in the locality to those institutions and social groups that supported them. Many of the political leaders of the interior had only recently risen to dominance, chiefly through military ability, and depended to a large extent on the greater might and prestige of their overlords—whom they often honored in their inscriptions—to bolster their tenuous positions of power. The
diffusion of donative activities in the hinterland was therefore a result not only of the dispersed settlement patterns but also of the fragmentation and instability of political power in this situation of flux 54.

As a matter of fact, the Vijayanagara Empire of south India between 14\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} centuries spanned a vast area and incorporated diverse ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic and political groups. Such groups included imperial elites and institutions, regional elites and polities, and temples, as well as some of the diverse occupational, linguistic, and religious communities who lived within the territories claimed by Vijayanagara rulers. The assumption of the centrality of particularly Hindu and Islamic religious identities has been critiqued by several contemporary historians who have questioned whether or not these identities existed in any meaningful way prior to British colonialism. For example, Talbot has argued that during the Vijayanagara period, the terms Muslim (or “Turk”) and Hindu were significant as oppositional conceptual categories, but had referents linked to geography and ethnicity, rather than solely religion 55. The Vijayanagara period provides clear evidence for the existence of social affiliations and social action among non-elites that transcended caste and village boundaries in significant ways. The creation of a Vijayanagara imperial identity entailed the symbolic and material incorporation and reformulation of goods, practices, and cultural values from across their territories. The resultant distinctively “Vijayanagara” creations were redistributed throughout the polity and formed a shared substratum within a highly diverse and highly complex society 56. In fact, in the religious realm, decisions made and practices carried out at the Vijayanagara capital and by
Vijayanagara elites did impact non-elite segments of the empire. They did this not by attempting to transform beliefs, but by responding to existing beliefs held by various important segments of Vijayanagara population i.e. by accommodating, incorporating, and elevating existing local beliefs, and deities, and the populations that worshipped them. By examining the groups involved in donations to the temple and the claims donors made about themselves in the inscriptions, one can identify various levels and categories of social affiliation and social action operative throughout the imperial period. Vijayanagara local affiliations were defined along several cultural dimensions, including geography (from village/town to region), occupation, caste and social status, and language. Both place of residence and occupation of individuals or collectives are frequently noted in inscriptions documenting temple donations or other transactions.

The expansion of the temple is so profusely illustrated by the inscriptions of this period that one is compelled to feel that the pomp and splendour of this period is but a very true reflection of the pomp and splendour of the Vijayanagara masters. Evidently, the Vijayanagara kings and their subordinate officers were more inclined towards Vaisnavism. The gifts or donations, the feeding of Srivaiishnavas, the festivals, the building activities, the founding of new religious institutions inside the temple, the endowments for various services afford clear proofs of the interest evinced in the temple by the royal masters and their highly placed subordinates. Arjun Appadorai has made important reference to the importance of temple during Vijayanagara period in an asymmetrical relationship that developed between the Vijayanagara rulers and the sectarian leaders. While
the leaders conferred honour as well as resources in the form of gifts to the latter, the latter only rendered honour and not material resources. Despite such asymmetrical relation, the state preferred to gift to the temples for two reasons. First, the state was not interested in investing directly in the irrigation activities, for that required additional responsibility of labour and financial management. The sectarian leaders with their social influence could harness the labour potential and control them. Two, gifting to the temple and its functionaries was an act of merit that was inevitably recorded in the inscriptions. However, the underlying motive was to gain access to the temple and be part of the ritual set-up that included other social groups, over which the rayas and chiefs wanted to assert their control. Therefore, the temple and its functionaries were instrumental in legitimizing the political authority, which otherwise would have been difficult. Festivals and pilgrimage became the occasions when such a ritual association was enacted.

At the outset, it was Vijayanagara ruler Devaraya I’s (A.D. 1406-1422) reign that witnessed the full restoration of the previous land-grants and some privileges to the local sthanikas at the instance of Uttama Nambi and the latter was honored by the king with gifts of golden parasol, necklace, bracelets, etc., in appreciation of his services for the temple. This paved the way for the growing influence of Uttama Nambi on the affairs of the temple, to such an extent that we do not hear much in the inscriptions about the time-honored institution of the hereditary acharyas. This is most probably due to the fact that the material progress of the temple could not be attended to by the religious heads. Uttama Nambi was evidently the name of the family as two persons father and son, are both called
Uttama Nambi. Thus the new family of Uttama Nambi appears to have sprung up sometime in circa 1413 A.D. and the title was held hereditarily. The respect for Uttama Nambi is apparent from another inscription during the same ruler. At the same time, there seems to be complete dissociation of the officials from the participation in temple festivals. It states that endowment of 80 pon was made for conducting certain festivals to the God in the name of the king. Having been found inadequate, the king increased the endowment by an addition of 55 pon. It was stipulated that there should be no official participation in the management of these festivals, the conduct of which was entrusted to Uttama Nambi.

Another inscription is a royal order to Sriranga-Narayana-Jiyyar, Uttam-Nambi, and the Sthananikas of the temple that on the representation made to the king by Uttama Nambi, a royal gift of land in the four villages Sundakkayi, Govattakkudi, Todaiyur and Karungulam, was made to Uttama Nambi and his brother Chakraraya for a service instituted in the temple in the name of Devaraya Maharaya I. Uttama Nambi and the brother were made the agents (karttas) of the temple, exempted from the payment of the jodi on the granted lands and remunerated in cash and in kind, in addition to an eighth share in the contributions to the temple from these villages.

As the temple was growing bigger and bigger, both in terms of its architectural munificence and religious importance, the disputes outside the temple complex were bound to emerge. In an interesting case during Achyutadeva Maharaja (A.D.1529-42), an inscription mentions that in the course of a dispute between the
Temples of Srirangam and Jambukesvaram, it was stipulated that while the Ambira-Tirtha in Chembiyanallur in Vadagari-Malanadu belongs to God Ranganatha, the village also must go to the God 62.

In another interesting case during King Sriranga (A.D.1572-85), one of the inscriptions seems to record some assurance given to the five artisan classes of Melaimuri and Kilaikmuri in the Malai-nadu ‘on the northern bank’ to set right their grievances which had compelled them to emigrate 63. There is no gainsaying the fact that these grievances must have been growing for some time and the extreme action taken by these artisan classes must have a consequence of it.

During King Venkata (A.D.1586-1614), patronage from merchant class was quite forthcoming. It also indicates that this group was upwardly mobile with the increasing pace of urbanization in society and claimed a space in the ritual set-up through donations to the Srirangam temple. For example, an inscription registers a gift of money by Paramesvaran, son of Manga-setti, a merchant of Srirangam, for offerings to the God when halting at the Vitthalarajan-mandapa in the Saluvanayakan-toppu, when the deity is taken in procession to Uraiyr on the 5th and the 6th days of the Brahmostava festival 64.

There is no doubt that the expanding temple must have had its problems of administration or management and the social relations must have got strained within the temple owing to this. According to the Koyilolugu, it appears that there were more than one occasion when the lapses of administration had to be rectified only by the sacrifice of a few Ekangis or Jiyars by falling from the high tops of the
gopuras. Though this practice was no doubt popular in the south, only one inscription dated in circa 1610 A. D. from the reign of Vijayanagara ruler Venkata II (A.D. 1586-1614), records the honors conferred on the image of one Periyalvar who fell down from the gopura in protest against the lapses in worship to the God ⁶⁵.

Thus, in the end, it is clear from the perusal of all these records on the walls of Sriranganatha temple at Srirangam that the period of our study witnessed tremendous changes in social relations in many respects and evolution in many others. The ritual space came to be shared by more and more people permitting patronage and legitimation as a core principle that was shaped by those in power to further enhance it. Besides local, there were many references to trans-local ties that shaped into a network of exchanges and control, providing a strong support base for the regional kingdom to strengthen and legitimize itself further.
Endnotes


9 Noboru Karashima, *History and Society...*, op.cit..


11 Ibid., p.236.


14 Ibid.


16 R. Champakalakshmi, *Religion...*, op.cit.

Ibid.


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Appendix-1, no.1 /2.

28. Ibid, no.1 /1.

29. Ibid., no.2 /7.

30. Appendix-3, no.1 /2.

31. Appendix-2, no.1 /1; no.1/6; no.1 /14.

32. Appendix-7, no.6 /1.

33. Appendix-2, no.1 /10; also Appendix—3, no.3 /9.


35. Appendix-11, no. 6/19.

36. Ibid., no. 6/33.

37. Appendix-2, no.6/1.

38. Ibid., no.6/2.

39. Ibid., no.6/3.

40. Appendix-8, no. 2 /1.

41. Ibid., no.3/1.
Appendix-9, no.1/2.
Appendix-12, no.1/10.
Appendix-4, no. 4 /1.
Ibid., no.1 /5.
Ibid., no. 1 /6.
Ibid., no.6 /1.
Ibid., no. 1/10.
Ibid.
Ibid.
K.A. Nilkanta Sastri, *A History of South India, from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1955, see Chapter XIII.
Cynthia Talbot, ‘When Queens…’, op.cit.
Carla M. Sinopoli, ‘From the Lion Throne…’, op.cit., pp. 364-398.
Appendix-11, no.5 /21; no.5 /27.
Appendix-10, no. 1/3.
Appendix-11, no. 1/4.
Ibid., no.1 /6.
Ibid., no.1/19.
Appendix--10, no.1 /11.
Appendix-11, no.5 /73.
Appendix-12, no.1/16.