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THIRUMALIRUNJOLAIMALAI

(SRI ALAGAR KOVIL )

STALA PURANA

By

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WITH A FOREWORD BY

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## FOREWORD

How one wishes that our Stala Puranas were written by men who had more confidence in truth and depended less on pious propaganda ! Yet this form of literature has served as one of the means whereby the culture and traditions of our land have been preserved, and the struggling historians of India are grateful even to the authors of these local exaggerations for furnishing some glimpses into the past which it is the Historians' work to unravel. The public, especially, the devout and the scholarly owe a deep debt of gratitude to Sri K. N. Radha Krishna who has spared no pains to bring out this valuable book on the famous Alagar temple near Madura. It is a matter for congratulation that in spite of difficulties the compiler has gathered a great deal of information which may help those who apply advanced methods of research in the work of diving into the past of a country wherein the muse of history has been sadly neglected in the past. Sri Radha Krishna has increased the usefulness of his publication by the inclusion of many very interesting plates and a plan of the temple topography. Alagar temple and the temple at Srirangam are two ancient pagodas of the South which served as forts as well as places of worship. The tradition of 'Padinettampadi Karuppan' in the Alagar temple unfolds to us a grand achievement of compromise. Our forefathers knew how to gather people to their standard. The Kallars were made the guardians of the fort of Alagar temple. The sacred ash distributed in this Vaishnava temple shows the possibility of catholicity that were foreseen long ago in spite of severe sectarian divisions.

Sri Radha Krishna has asked me to write a foreward. I can see no reason or merit in me for this request except that the Alagar temple was opened to the Harijans along with the other great temple in Madura dedicated to Sri Meenakshi Amman, and I am mixed up with this movement of reform.

31st January 1942.

C. Rajagopalachari



PREFACE (p.vii-xii)

(p.viii) Yet by far the most valuable and of immediate Practical value to the Devastanam would have been the Koil Olugu and the various other Devastanam records which went into the custody of the East India Company when the Government of this part of the country and the administration of this Devastanam was assumed by the Government in 1799. When the Government divested themselves of the administration of this Devastanam, these Records were not restored back to the Devastanam. While the restoration of the records would have been of incalculable value and benefit to this Devastanam and and their retention by the then Government could have been of no practical use to them their non-availability now is the more regrettable and unfortunate. And consequently I had to get on with the preparation of the history of the Stala without the help of these valuable and important records.

(p.xii) The major portion of the photos published in the work has been taken by Sri Muthayya Pillai, a popular artiste of Madura who has taken much interest in their neat and careful execution. For reproduction in this work, Sri Vaduvure K. Duraiswamy Ayyanger, our popular Novelist and Research Scholar has been kind enough to place at my disposal certain valuable sketches of the ancient Egyptian Emperors etc. wearing the Vaishnavite caste marks and published in his "Long Missing Links". I am much indebted to him for this valued help. The blocks have almost all been prepared by the Sri Vivekananda Press of Madura to whom also are my thanks due for their neat prompt and attractive execution.



(H. 59-71) The East India Company -1801-1817.

When Mr. Hurdis the 1st Collector of the Madura Country took charge of this District he simultaneously also assumed the Trusteeship of this Devasthanam in 1801, and then again as Trustee under Regulation 17 of 1802. With unflinching energy and with the greatest devotion he tried to evolve and restore some order and form where utter confusion and chaos erstwhile prevailed in this ancient but ramified and complicated religious institution. Though valuable materials were available for his help in the vast inscriptions in this temple to restore perfect order and form in the Temple administration, still, considering the vast work that lay before him when for the first time he took up his charge of this Madura country and also the administration of this temple on behalf of the British Government, he without going into the details, carried on as it were a sort of summary administration of this temple which apparently was all that was possible at such a time and under such a situation and circumstances. The credit of reducing in a way to record the pre-existing customs and practices to be observed in the temple and the services therein and the emoluments attached thereto though at least in a fragmentary way were all his own. And the records and settlements and orders of Mr. Hurdis form as it were the MAGNA CHARTA of this temple.

The Board of Revenue - 1817-1863.

Guided by these orders, settlements, and records of Mr. Hurdis, was the administration of this temple carried on by the succeeding Collectors of this District till 1817 when the management was assumed by the Board of Revenue who carried on the administration from 1817 till 1863 when the administration of Religious institutions were handed over to the temple Committees under Act XX of 1863.

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The Temple Committees - 1863-1929

When the change in the management and handing over charge of the administration to the Temple Committees took place in 1863 by some great and unforeseen misfortune or misadventure certain initial errors were committed, which created a deal of chaos, and confusion in the administration of the Shri Kallalagar and other Devasthanams. When the Government divested itself of its position of Trusteeship from itself and delegated its functions to the temple committees, which newly created bodies having had no part or lot in the temple administration or in the knowledge thereof for such a long spell of 63 years as stated above, knew practically nothing of the complicated details of this administration in the absence of Records of the previous Administration. Some of the chief initial errors were as follows :-

- (i) Non-Delivery of the Devasthanam Records.
- (ii) Non-Delivery of the Devasthanam Villages.
- (iii) Depriving Lord Alagar of the Service Inam Villages and the issuing of the Title deeds in the name of the Service Holders instead of in the name of Lord Alagar.
- (iv) The Governmental appropriation of the Peruppu.
- (v) The gradual interference with and final assumption by the Government of Lord Alagar's Hills.

Non-delivery of the Records of the Devasthanam:

If those valuable records of this administration were handed over to the Committee, these would have gone to show:-

- (i) The properties which the Devasthanam possessed.
- (ii) The incomes derived and derivable from them.
- (iii) The administrative correspondence, proceedings, orders etc., that would go to establish not only the rights of the temple but also its liabilities to those that may have to do anything with this temple whether



they may belong to the establishments or outside agencies and which would act as it were the established Debutter law on the customs, usages, samoradayams etc, etc, of this ancient temple (iv) The various peculiarities and importances of ceremonials, festivals and nityappadi rites and observances followed and given effect to in the worships connected therewith (v) The history of the Shri Kallalagar Devasthanam Temple so far as could be gathered therefrom. <sup>0</sup> Absolutely of <sup>0</sup>an interest or use to the Government, while they are the life fountain as it were to this administration. It goes without saying that especially in cases in which the rights of the temple and the obligations of those connected with the temple come into operation it has now become so easy for the obligors, to make light of the temple's rights, to suppress their duties or obligations to the irreparable detriment of the Devasthanam, resulting in the impoverishment of the temple's possessions, wealths and incomes and in ineffectiveness of the services and inefficiency in control and in irreligious irreverence in the mind of the temple coers and also in a consciousness of pitiful impotence to do any effective good in the mind of the administration. Is it not just and necessary that this temple should be restored all the documents referred to above, before utter ruin overtakes such ancient shrines like these, in these days of irreligious irreverences and iconoclastic movements ?

Resultant confusion :-

The non-possession of these important records have also been the cause of very great confusion in the administration of this Devasthanam besides causing untold losses, sufferings and hardships, as noted hereunder :

(1) Trespasses and occupation of temple properties galore.

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<sup>0</sup> The administrative records of this Devasthanam during the Governmental management thereof from 1801 to 1863 A.D. are



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(ii) Even the daily routine of duties by the temple subordinates are sadly neglected and could not be enforced with rigour and discipline in the absence of records that would help or support a disciplined administration.

(iii) The administration is in complete oblivion as to what are all its properties, what are all their rights and obligations, what are all the income and expenses of this institution etc, in short, what all they own and what all they are bound to protect. It would be extremely painful reading to note that it was in ignorance of these things, <sup>this</sup> institution has lost a good deal and its very existence has been seriously jeopardised. The three outstanding instances are:- (a) The partial divestment of the Manibham villages (b) The loss of the Hafta Devastanam villages and (c) The assumption and annexation of the Sri Alagar's Hills which is the Great Temple sung of by the saints.

Service Manibhams :-

In this institution, the deity has been endowed with extensive villages out of the income of which the services of the temple were maintained — the service holders to enjoy the income so long as they did their duties properly and so long as they fulfilled the required conditions for service. The service holders were called Nirvahamdars. These service holders or Nirvahamdars took full and ample advantage of the confused condition of affairs when the management changed hands from the Government to the Committees and began to lord over the temple administration trying to appropriate to their personal uses these religious service inam lands which were granted by the ancient kings and pious worshippers to this temple which was the absolute grantee, rent free either partially or wholly. When Mr. Hurdie assumed charge of the administration, he for the sake of convenience, devised a novel idea of handing over the villages belonging to the Devastanam to the Service Holders along with Pattayams detailing the conditions of Service and

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enjoyment of the Holding which arrangement could at best be a temporary one and which could neither bind Mr. Hurdie himself nor his successors nor this institution for ever. The conditions imposed by Mr. Hurdie are in each case that the land will be liable to resumption or zufti the moment it is found that the services were not performed either properly or not at all or that such manibhams are in any way alienated, and at the same time entailing loss of office and their supersession.

During the Inam settlement, proper materials having not been probably and possibly placed before him, the Inam Commissioner, issued the title deeds of these lands and villages, not in the name of this temple and the deity thereof who were the grantees thereof and for whom they were endowed but issued them in the name of the oft changing service holders. This was against the principle enunciated in the preamble to Reg. VII of 1817. The appointment or recognition or continuance in office of the various service holders ultimately rested with the temple administration, the service holder for the time being being allowed the license to enjoy the income alone of the properties—the ultimate right, title, and interest in the endowed lands and villages always resting in the temple or the deity. Ignorance of this basic principle and non-representations of these rights by the then Devasthanam administration might have been responsible for the wrong and illegal and unjust procedure involved in the issuing of the title deeds in the names of the service holders.

This irregular procedure of depriving the Devasthanam of its right to have the Title Deed in its own name and issuing it in the name of the Service Holder has been found to create many an anomaly and a dead-lock. The right of the Service Holders in these Inam villages was but a privilege to enjoy the income only in lieu of salary. Their rights would have to be recognised only thus far and no further. But the mischief that is wrought now by the grant of the T.D. in the name of the Service Holders is incalculable and needs no elaboration.

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Of course when proper materials were placed before the Inam Commissioner for rectifications of such mistakes they were no doubt rectified, by them, by cancelling the Title Deeds issued in the name of the Service holders and reissuing the Title Deeds in the name of the Deity as was done in the instance of the Coimbatore Devasthanam Committee which has been restored by such rectification of the Inam Commissioner's mistakes, the rights of the temple administration to resume the lands in cases where it comes to their notice that the service was not rendered or that the manbhams were alienated (vide G.O. No-164 Rev. Mis. dated 16-2-1893) wherein, in no uncertain language the Government has laid out after a very deep deliberation, the wholesome principle that "the Servants of the Temple should not be treated as independent inamdars." This power (Powers of Resumption etc.) also should be restored back to the Devasthanam and the R.D.O's Powers of interference removed."

Appropriation of the Villages of the Devasthanam - Lord Alagar's Temple: now practically a Landless institution.

This great and ancient institution is second to none in all India in point of sanctity and popularity. But one would be surprised to see that such a mighty institution possesses practically no immovable property worth the name excepting a few acres of land and a few buildings which altogether may not fetch even one or two thousand rupees per annum.

Lord Alagar's ancient possessions:- Ancient inscriptions and records show that this Devasthanam owned very vast estates and a large extent of lands extending for miles and miles to the north of the Vaigai. The famous Sri Alagar hills area where the Temple is situate belonged to Sri Alagar. Innumerable villages once under the possession and enjoyment of the Devasthanam are no longer so now. Constant changes in the ruling



dynasties of the Pandya Nad and the intervening anarchies and civil wars had contributed in no small measure to the dwindling of the vast and extensive domains of Sri Alagar into the present interesting ruins of the ancient Fort of Alagapuri with its still mighty and extensive walls and debris. Little by little gradually all the vast estates of Sri Alagapuri inclusive of certain rich and fertile villages, some scores in number and producing enormous revenues, were forcibly taken hold of by daring and adventurous and impious usurpers, some of such confiscations having been made by the Nawab Chanda Saheb, Barkat Ali etc. Latterly of course Nawab Wallajah's Amaldar or general Md. Yusufkhan, saw the monstrous injustice of this deprivation and confiscation of the villages of this ancient Devasthanam and tried to ameliorate in a small measure the grievous injustice perpetrated to this and certain other ancient shrines and attempted to substitute for these confiscations a money payment of Ch. 12000 for the Paditharam expenses of this temple in Fasli 1176 which Nawab Wallajah afterwards reduced to 6000 Ch. P.A. ~~Mr. Hurdie's assumption, enquiry and findings.~~

Mr. Hurdie's assumption, enquiry and findings.

When the British Government assumed charge of the Administration of this province and simultaneously with that the administration of the Sri Kallalagar and other institutions also, on 31-7-1801 by the terms of a treaty between Nawab Wallajah and the East India Co., the 1st administrator Mr. Hurdie scrutinized the justice and propriety of the confiscation of these extensive villages and the grant of a money equivalent of 12000 Ch. at first and then the reduction of the same to 6000 chakrams etc., as stated above and came to the following findings and conclusions viz :-

(1) That the villages belonged to the Sri Kallalagar etc., Pagodas and that they were enjoyed by them was ~~un~~ unquestionable.



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(ii) That they were confiscated by the preceding Governments and that they were never restored was also true.

(iii) That Mohamed Yuseof Khan first fixed a commutation of 12000 ch. in Fasli 1167 in view of the loss of the confiscated villages to these Pagodas.

(iv) That the Nawab Wallajah subsequently reduced them to 6000 chakrams in F. 1175.

(v) That these 12000 and then 6000 chakrams were at first paid from out of the Wallajah's coffers.

(vi) That subsequently Md. Yuseof Khan struck upon the idea of meeting these 6000 chakrams not from the Nawab's treasury but from levying and exacting a quit-rent or poruppu. (but really reviving the Devasthanam's poruppu due to it from its service-holders) upon the rent free service manibham lands endowed to the temples and allotted to the temple servants for their maintenance so long as they were rendering their services properly.

(vii) That this poruppu levied and collected from the service Manibham villages of Lord Alagar was paid back ~~the~~ to the Paditharam expenses of Lord Alagar's temple.

Mr. Hurd's proposals on the above findings and conclusions

Having arrived at the above findings and conclusions Mr. Hurd came to the decision that the grant of 6000 ch. where 12000 was previously granted, was unfair and that the grant of 12000 ch. P.A. should be again restored for ever, under certain restrictions and that the villages and their Revenues should be permanently annexed to the Circar. Mr. Hurd opined that "this proposed sum would amply suffice if properly expended for the performance of all necessary services and ceremonies. And on the other hand, there would not be any superfluous funds at the disposal of the Church (Devasthanam) out of which Brahmins could pay for their indulgence in their habitual vices"

Mr. Hurd further opined :-

"That the poruppu ought not to be held to be part of the Jama, because it was always paid back to the Hafta Devasthanam as soon as collected, in order to provide for the paditharam expenses, the burden of which fell on the circar

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when it first assumed all the lands of the Hafta Devastanam". Hence he thought it advisable therefore to omit this item in his Jamabandi statements and which he did and was continuing to pay back to the managers of the temples for application to the paditharam, the poruppu (now reduced during Mr. Hurdis' time to ch. 5506-7-12) collected from the Service Holders or Sibbandi Manibham villages"—a policy of robbing Peter to pay Peter himself,

Government Order dated 3-1-1803 re: the restoration of the villages.

But with these proposals of the Collector Mr. Hurdis, the Government did not agree; and so the Board of Revenue wrote back to the Collector on 3-1-1803 stating that the assumed Devastanam villages must be given up to the pagodas. They added in their memorable communication :-

" The subject of the Devastanam lands is of great importance to the happiness of the people, and the attention paid to the interests of the pagodas by the immediate officers of the Government has been attended with the beneficial consequences to the religious establishments in the different parts of the Peninsula. The Governor-in-council being therefore desirous, that the ceremonies and festivals of the temples at Madura should be re-established by the appropriation of the former funds for their support, has been pleased to direct, that you proclaim the restoration of the lands resumed from the pagodas by the Late Government"

How strong are the orders of the Governor in council and how just and liberal their judgment and how explicit and peremptory their orders were could be judged by the wording of the above orders. But unfortunately these orders were issued to an Officer who held strong contrary views and prejudices in the matter. Mr. Hurdis was practically the 1st Collector of the Madura country as it was then known. Evidently he thought that his views and conclusions were not such as could be so lightly ignored or set at naught, by the orders of the Board of Revenue and any, even by the orders of the Governor-in-council.



Government Order not given effect to

In the result he did not obey the orders above referred to and did not proclaim the restoration of the resumed villages as per the Governor-in-council's order of 3-1-1803.

It should be also remembered that there was no effective voice to be raised in support of the interests of these Devastanams. For, the Government itself as loco parentis was administering these Devastanams as Trustees and if any justice had to be done, it must depend upon the good sense and conscience of the Collector-Trustee, and nobody else.

Collector Mr. Parker's proposal dated 14-4-1849.

Then on 14-4-1849 Collector Mr. Parker made a proposal to the Government for restoring about 22 out of 56 villages belonging to the Sri Kallalagar and 6 other Devastanams. But nothing came of this proposal.

Collector Mr. Clarke's proposal dated 12-3-1859.

Again, on 12-3-1859 Collector Mr. Clarke made a recommendation in pursuance of the proceedings of the Board of Revenue, under order dated 26-2-1859 upon an order from the Government, wherein he stated that not only all the assumed Devastanam villages should be restored back to the Sri Kallalagar and other respective Devastanams to whom they severally belonged but also the surplus revenue which the Government had collected and of which they were accountable to the Sri Kallalagar etc. Devastanams should also be handed back. This surplus according to Mr. Clarke amounted in 1859 to Rs. 13,32,269 and odd in favour of these Devastanams during their period of management after deducting the amount of the annual allowance paid since 1802 and after meeting all expenses incurred in repairs and other charges.

After stating what Mr. Hurdie had done in this matter and the proposal of Mr. Parker referred to above, Mr. Clarke observes that "he (Mr. Parker) appears to have over-looked one very material point in the consideration of this subject viz; the order of the Government ~~to~~ proclaim the restoration of these lands whereby it appears to me

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they gave up altogether any right which they may have derived from the Mahomedan Government in these lands and constituted themselves simply the Trustees of these endowments, on behalf of the pagodas.

"I therefore," wrote Mr. Clarke "conceive that we are morally as well as in strict justice bound to restore the whole of the villages with their immense revenue of Rs. 73,336--14--8--to the pagodas "

But little was done upon this report and recommendation of 12-3-1859 of that generous-minded Collector Mr. Clarke up to this year of Grace. And this great and ancient institution has to rest content with the Dastic or annual allowance of about Rs. 5000-00 sanctioned on 28-1-1802 in lieu of the vast and fertile villages about 58 in number assumed by the Government.

#### Resumption of poruppu.

As mentioned already the service-holders were given the privilege of enjoying the income of the Manibham villages in lieu of salary. Among other conditions attached to these manibham holdings such as spiritual, canonical, educational and physical qualifications and due and faithful and obedient services, there was an additional liability on the part of the Manibham holder to carve out a portion of the income of these mauibham villages and remit it to the Treasury or Amisham of Lord Alagar for the general expenses of the temple, and known as poruppus already x stated. This poruppu from the Devastanam land which was always (from time immemorial) going into the coffers of the Devastanam was latterly and illegally diverted to the Government treasury without understanding its nature, origin, rights, customs and practice. When the Government were managing this Devastanam, their agents were collecting these for the temple during the 63 years of their management. When afterwards they divested themselves of their control over this institution, they did not restore these Devastanam poruppus to the Devastanam itself and appropriated the same to the Government Treasury, and what was all along and hitherto collected for the temple, thus came to



be diverted to the Government treasury quite ignorant of their origins. How and when, during the Government's Trusteeship this diversion happened, we are not now in a position to state accurately, But it must have been somewhere between 1801 to 1863 during which period the Government were acting as Trustees of this institution.

Appropriation of Sri Alagar's Hills" by the Government.

Another equally important item of property also which we have lost very recently, is the famous " Sri Alagar's Hills" otherwise known as " Then Thiruppathi " These Hills were till 1886 in our absolute possession and enjoyment. But by some greivous error the Government annexed these Hills. The enjoyment of Sri Alagar Hills by the Devasthanam has now practically vanished except in respect of a few items as per G.O. No. 2111 Ms. Development, dated 25-2-1939. The Government which managed the Hills as the Trustees of the Temple till 1863 and which handed over the Trusteeship to the new body of Trustees under Act XX of 1863 cannot with any consistency annex these Hills and thereby attempt to extinguish the proprietary rights of the temple to the Hills. Now the Temple administration also failed to advance their claim to these Hills when the Government attempted at annexation remains a mystery.

The Hindu Religious Endowments Board

After the advent of the H.R.E. Act and the Board constituted thereunder, the Temple committee of this Devasthanam was abolished in the year 1929 and the administration of this Devasthanam is now directly under the aegis of the H.R.E. Board itself.