CHAPTER IV

AS MINISTER FOR HINDU RELIGIOUS AND CHARITABLE ENDOWMENTS-1957-1967

"When many people appreciate me for having taken a small part in the renovation and development of our ancient temples, I feel I have not wasted my life" remarked Bhaktavatsalam in his book "Enathu Ninaivugal".

When Bhaktavatsalam was allotted the portfolio of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments in the K.Kamaraj Ministry in 1957 and later himself as Chief Minister in 1963, he registered the high watermark in the history of temple administration and development of temple affairs in Tamilnadu. His dynamic leadership infused a general revival in religious matters and produced a devotional renaissance in Tamilnadu.

Hailing from a Saiva Vellalar family, Bhaktvatsalam had his political as well as religious guide in his family itself. While his uncle Muthurangga Mudaliar was his political guru, his another uncle Evalappa Mudaliar was his religious guide. His family was noted not only for its tradition of Bhakti but also was connected with management of temples in and around Madras. So, Bhaktavatsalam was essentially a man of pious disposition and intensely religious by nature and family tradition. His political and religious lives both are inter connected. Whenever he visited places on political
works, he used to take the opportunity to visit the temples at that place. It was very befitting for a man of his calibre and thought to hold the post of Minister for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments. He evinced keen interest in the maintenance, renovation, and development of religious institutions. In the present day when great qualities like honesty, straightforwardness, love for justice, religious tolerance and love for humanity have become rare virtues, his noble ideals and thoughts and above all his pious nature were assets that strengthened the administration of temples.

**Bhaktavatsalam's views on Religion and Temples**

According to Bhaktavatsalam, temples are not only places of worship but also social centers.¹ Our ancestors, Pallavas, the Cholas, Pandyas, and Nayakas devoted part of their time for building of temples and their development. They had given those temples as a precious gift to us. It is our bounden duty to preserve them. Temples are not only abode of gods but they served as centres where schools were run, arts were developed, hospitals were run and at war times used as shelters.² Hence he was of the opinion that temples are for the welfare of the people. The revenues of temples should not be misused. The funds obtained from temples should be utilised for the welfare of the devotees.³ The Hindu

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² Ibid.
³ M.Bhaktvatsalam, *Samudaya Valarchi*, Valluvar Pannai, Madras 64, p.11.
Religious and Charitable Endowments should be managed in such a way that those who love religion and temples should not be hurt in any way. Even though the Government is secular, it is the duty of the government to protect the interests of all religions.

Americans going to Church on Sundays in spite of their busy schedule impressed him. The American half dollar note contains the sentence - "Believe in God". Bhaktavatsalam wanted Indians to learn from them.

In the Temple Administration Committee he wanted the Harijan, Backward Community people and others of various religious disposition and women to be a part. Such an impartial and broad-minded outlook could be a wonderful solution for present day intolerance and communal clashes.

Today dispute is going on regarding the language in which poojas should be performed at temples Bhaktvatsalam was of the opinion that 'Archani' is meant to sing the praise of the Lord and language should not be a matter of dispute. Thus, his noble ideas enabled him to perform memorable renewals of temples and charitable works. Excellent work was turned out in this field under his personal superintendence and control.

\[\text{References:}\]
\[\text{M.Bhaktvatsalam, Karuthu Kuvial, Palaniappa Bros, Madras, 1966, p.47.}\]
\[\text{M.Bhaktvatsalam, Samudaya Valarchi, op.cit., p.25.}\]
The first law for protecting the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments was enacted in the year 1925. At first a Corporation was created consisting of one president and four members. The law was enforced for the whole of Tamilnadu except Chennai city. In the year 1944, Chennai City was also covered under the Act. After the recommendation of Krishna Iyer, Special Officer and the recommendation of a committee headed by Venkataramana Rao, the Corporation was made a government department with one commissioner in the year 1951. For this High Court and Supreme Court judgments were scrutinized.

The Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act 1951 as amended by the Madras Act XXVII of 1954 and Madras Act of 1956, excluded the Kanyakumari District and Shencottah of Tirunelveli District from the purview of this Act till 31.12.1959. On January 1, 1960 the Act was repealed and comprehensive amending act called Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act XXII of 1959 was passed and brought into force. The excluded districts were also brought under the purview of the Act.

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7 Ibid.
The Appendix VI indicates the number of institutions brought under the purview of the Department during his time.

Renovation and Repairs of Old Temples

Temples are our rich heritage left behind by our ancestors. Their deterioration through time and weather and their physical disintegration through lack of care and attention are a serious setback to the cultural heritage of Tamilnadu. Our ancient kings have built these temples and their renovation is therefore the responsibility of future generation because they are monuments reminding our religious heritage to many more generations to come. Bhaktavatsalam realised this and he evinced a keen interest in renovation and preservation of ancient temples. But according to a High Court decision, the funds of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments could not be diverted for repairs and renovation of temples. So, the Government had to provide funds for renovation in the form of grant. These government grants were supplemented by donations from public.

Surplus funds from certain temples were also diverted for this purpose. Public appreciated the interest evinced by the Government in this regard. A bill known as 'Doctrine of Sypre' was introduced by him. According to this bill wealthy and rich temples can render financial help to
renovation of poor temples from their surplus funds.\textsuperscript{10} The grants by the Government acted as a fillip to private donation. Assistant Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner were advised to obtain monthly reports of work done and review them.

During the period from 01.04.1957 to 31.03.1958, a sum of Rs.4 lakh was granted for renovation of 62 temples.\textsuperscript{11} In the year 1958-1959, Rs.3 lakh was provided as grant\textsuperscript{12} and completely disbursed to 67 institutions which needed repairs, and renovation.\textsuperscript{13} In the year 1959-1960 large-scale repairs were done to 97 temples including Srirangam, Tiruchendur and Bhavani temple.\textsuperscript{14}

In the year 1960-1961, Rs.3 lakh was sanctioned towards temples in Thanjavur, Tirunelveli, South Arcot, Trichy, Coimbatore, Salem and Ramnad.\textsuperscript{15}

In terms of the bill of the Doctrine of Sypre, a provision was incorporated in the Madras Act of 1959, to create a new fund called "Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Common Good

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Administration Report of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department for the year 1957-58.}
\textsuperscript{12} G.O.No.2148, \textit{Home, dated 29.7.1958.}
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{14} G.O.No.1719, \textit{Revenue, dated 1.4.1960.}
\textsuperscript{15} G.O.No.1180, \textit{Revenue, dated 27.2.1960.}
Fund” out of contributions made by religious institutions from their surplus funds or private persons for renovation purposes. The renovation of Bhavani temple, 'Kumbabishekam' (Consecration Ceremony) of Palani, Tiruchendur, Tiruvengadu, Madurai and the 'Samprokshanam' of Srirangam temples were memorable events.

With the help of UNESCO ten temples were taken up for renovation. Repairs at temples of Rameswaram, Varadaraja temple at Kancheepuram, Jambukeswara temple at Thiruvanaikaval were taken up at a cost of Rs.10 lakh each.

**Verification of Jewels and Valuables**

The properties of temples are lands and jewels. These have to be kept safely, and revenue of the temples should not be misused. In order to ensure the safety of the jewels of the Gods, verification of jewels were conducted in temples at periodical intervals. Original appraisement of jewels was not made in some temples. In such cases, it was taken up. Thus in the year 1958-59, 32 institutions were visited and temple jewels were appraised. The appraisal scheme was modified and a new scheme was put into effect from November 1958. In the year 1960, 87 institutions were visited and

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17 M.Bhaktavatsalam, Bharata Panbu, **op.cit.**, p.18.
19 Ibid.
appraisal method helped in the matter of custody and preservation of jewels and prevention of frauds. Original appraisal was made in 8 temples in this year. Scraping of condemned jewels, melting of unwanted vessels or jewels, repairs and making of new jewels were also undertaken.

Area Committees

To increase efficiency and speedy disposal of matters relating to religious institutes, Government reorganised the department into five divisions as Madras, Cuddalore, Coimbatore, Salem and Kancheepuram.\textsuperscript{21} Five new area committees were formed in terms of the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act XX II of 1959 and brought into force vide G.O.No.3672 (Revenue Department) dt.5.12.1959. The government was empowered to appoint an area committee consisting of a Chairman and four members. To enlist the cooperation of non-officials in the administration and preservation of religious institutions, Advisory and Consultative committees were also formed.\textsuperscript{22} These committees were headed by the Home Minister as its Chairman and 15 other members. The committees offered suggestions for providing amenities to devotees, to augment the income of the temples, to propagate religious tenets of the temples and renovation of temples. The advisory committee was reconstituted under Sec.7 of Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable

\textsuperscript{20} Report on the Administration of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department for the period 1.4.59 to 31.3.60.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p.112.
Endowments Act 22 of 1959.\(^{23}\) In Area committees, which had the power to select the trustees for smaller temples, Bhaktavatsalam wanted at least one member to be a Harijan.\(^{24}\)

**Religious activities of the Department**

Festivals and special occasions in temples were supervised by the departmental staff to safeguard the *hundials* (a box kept in the temples to receive donations from devotees). As a result of this there was marked increase in income of temples numbering to 152 in 1957 – 1958 and 174 in the year 1959-1960.\(^{25}\) Similarly the department staff were deputed to attend auctions of temple lands to prevent frauds. As a result of such watchful activities rentals were secured in 56 cases. To improve the religious atmosphere *Thiruppavai* and *Thiruvambavai* conference were held and lectures and discourses were encouraged during temple festivals.\(^{26}\) This brought followers of different sects on the common platform of Bhakti. School children were awarded prizes for reciting sacred lyrics.

The *Dharma Peravai* conferences were held under the auspices of the Hindu Religious Board.\(^{27}\) This brought together the various *Matathipathis* to discuss matters relating to Hinduism. *Vidwat Sadas* were

\(^{23}\) G.O.No.1688, **Revenue dated 4.5.1963**

\(^{24}\) M.Bhaktavatsalam, Samudaya Valarchi, *op.cit.*, p.25.


\(^{26}\) **Madras Administration Report 1964-1965**, p.267

\(^{27}\) Dr.V.Raghavan, “Service in the Cultural Field” *Bhaktavatsalam 50 Years of Public Life*, Commemorative Volume published on the occasion of 76th Birthday of M.Bhaktavatsalam, Madras, 1972
held at Kancheepuram and all the Executive Officers of the temples were instructed to attend the sadas so that they could get better knowledge of the rituals of the temples. Thus 44 Executive Officers and 33 Executive Officers in the years 1964 and 1965 respectively participated in the Sadas.\textsuperscript{28}

Temples were used as venues for "Varavazhipadu Sangam" (Weekly meeting place of devotees). Small books containing Stalapuranas (history of holy shrines) and guidebooks were published and distributed to the public. A plan was proposed to write the history of district wise temples. Under this plan "Nellai Regional Temples History" was first published.\textsuperscript{29}

Marble slabs with inscription of sacred songs of Alwars, and Nayanmars were mounted on the walls of the temples for the benefit of the devotees.

A special monthly journal "Thirukkoil" was started by the Department from October 1958 with a view to spread religious and cultural awareness among people.\textsuperscript{30} Articles on various aspects of Hinduism, Hindu Religious Institutions and Hindu Saints by eminent authors were published

\textsuperscript{28} Madras Administration Report 1965, p.342
\textsuperscript{29} M.Bhaktavatsalam, Bharatha Panbu, \textit{op.cit.}, p.14.
in the journal. It also wrote about 275 places praised by *Thevaram* and 108 places sung by *Divyaprabhandam*.\(^{31}\)

Temple remains as centres for *Agamas* and performance of *poojas*. *Poojas* should be performed according to *Agamas*. Knowledge of Thevaram, Tiruvasagam and Divyaprabhandam is essential for *Archakas*. So to train the Priests performing poojas in temples, a number of refresher courses and training courses were arranged for the *Archakas, Oduvars* and Executive Officers. Refresher course for Saiva agama held at Tanjore and Trichy in the year 1957-58.\(^{32}\) In the year 1959 the *Oduvars* of Nellai district were given Saiva Agama Siddhantha training.\(^{33}\) Chennai Malleswarar temple and Chennakesava temples conducted Saiva Vaishnava Agama training course for Archakas and Gurukkal for 7 months in the year 1961.\(^{34}\) The South Indian Archakas Association conducted short-term courses for young members of traditional families. Convocation was also held for these condensed courses.\(^{35}\)

To improve the religious atmosphere, temples should be kept clean and several amenities for pilgrims and worshippers were provided. It was felt that increasing the facilities to devotees would increase the income of

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33 Thirukkoil, *op.cit.*, November 1959.
35 Dr.V.Raghavan, *op.cit.*
temple. Rest houses and sheds were constructed at Palani and Tiruchendur.\textsuperscript{36} Protected water supply was ensured. Temples were kept clean. Temple tanks were cleared of slit. Unwanted shrubs and plants were removed. The advisory committee was formed to make suggestion for providing amenities to devotees. Winch system at Palani Hills was introduced by Bhaktavatsalam. By means of the new provision incorporated into the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, Madras, the Board was empowered to remove encroachments at temples.\textsuperscript{37}

Bhaktavatsalam was of the opinion that temple was not a commercial place and there should not be shops at the temples which would spoil the serene atmosphere.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Tirumarai Archanai} was introduced in Tamil in the year 1961 though according to him Archanai is only to sing the praise of the lord and language should not be a matter of dispute at this place. The reason for demanding Tamil Archanai should not be out of hatred for Sanskrit language.

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\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{36} S.Amarnath, \textit{op.cit.}, p.62  \\
\textsuperscript{38} M.Bhaktavatsalam, Karuttu Kuvial, \textit{op.cit.}, p.64.
\end{flushleft}
Social Welfare Activities of the Department

Our ancient kings have built temples not only for the purpose of worship but also as social welfare centres. The surplus income received by a temple can meaningfully be spent for people's welfare by way of providing education, medical facilities, facilities for pilgrim's etc. Many schools, colleges and orphanages were run by religious institutions in the state. Bhaktavatsalam gave wonderful explanation for religion. "Religion is providing education and without education, how can one recite Devaram and Thiruvasagam?" So running of Schools and providing libraries by temples is absolutely social service. Similarly when people are hungry, how can they think of god? Hence providing mid-day meals to poor children is religion. Providing medical facilities by opening of hospitals also constitutes service to humanity.

Orphanages were run and maintained by temples like Vaitheeswaran Koil, Sikkal, Nachiar Koil Tiruchendur, Tirunelveli, Kallupath and Palani. Libraries functioned in temples. Temples provided midday meals for school children.

39 M.Bhaktavatsalam, Samudaya Valarchi, op. cit., p.30
40 M.Bhaktavatsalam, Bharatha Panbhu, op. cit., p.16
The Department contributed its share in various developmental schemes - like tree planting, co-operative farming, cattle wealth, mid-day meals, more milk day schemes, cultivation of vegetables, and wild life.

Surplus funds of religious institutions were invested in National Savings Certificates or Government securities. In the year 1958-59, Rs.12 lakh was invested in National Savings Certificate.\textsuperscript{41} In the year 1965 - Rs.13 lakh was invested in public loan raised by the Madras State Government.\textsuperscript{42}

\textit{Sidda Vaidya} centers and research centers were opened at Panpoli and Tirupugalur and rendered service to pilgrims.\textsuperscript{43} Medicine charts containing Sidda medicines were distributed to temples for free use of the public. Sidda Vaidya dispensaries were started at Tiruchendur and Vaitheeswaran Koil.

Temples ran hospitals. The Kanyakumari Devasthanam Board sanctioned grants for educational uplift, social and cultural advancements, economic betterment of Hindu Community.\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Madras Administration Report, 1958-1959, p.113
  \item Madras Administration Report, 1965, p.343
  \item Madras Administration Report, 1964-1965, p.267
  \item G.O.No 5188, Revenue, dated 17.12.1960
\end{itemize}
Lands belonging to the religious institutions were leased out to tenants co-operative farming societies. Such societies numbering 62 were formed in the year 1959-1960.

**Religious Education**

The Palani Andavar College of Oriental Arts and Culture was started on 13th April 1960.\(^{45}\) It was for the benefit of students who had an aptitude for religious studies. This was a unique institution first of its kind in India. The college provided a general education along with a moral and spiritual education.

Another college, Poompuhar Oriental and Cultural College was started on 21st September 1964.\(^{46}\)

Temples are centers of art. Under the temple atmosphere our old music drama dance, painting and sculpture developed. Bhaktavatsalam arranged for *Nadaswaram* training course at Swamimalai in 1958.\(^{47}\) With the surplus funds of Palani temple, in 1959, 3-year course for *Nadaswaram* and *Tavil* training started at Palani under the auspices of Palani

\(^{45}\) [Thirukkkoil, op.cit., May 1960, p.38]
\(^{46}\) *Madras Administration Report 1964-1965*, p.133
Devastanam.\textsuperscript{48} Thevaram School for Oduvars at Palani functioned satisfactorily.

Refresher courses were conducted for Executive Officers and Inspectors. They were given instructions on \textit{Agama, Siddhantha}, Temple Architecture, renovation and maintenance. In the year 1964 a training course was conducted at Tirupparankunram for executive officers and inspectors. Instructions were given on Agama, Siddhantaha, temple architecture, renovation and maintenance.\textsuperscript{49} In the year 1965 refresher course was conducted at Palani and Mayuram in June 1965.

**General Education**

Just as the Christian missionaries spread education along with religion, Bhaktavatsalam also wanted to provide education with the help of religious institutions.\textsuperscript{50} This was made possible at the time when he was in charge of both the Education and Hindu Religious Departments during the years 1957 to 1962.

\textsuperscript{48} P.S.Veerasamy Pillai, "Siranda Sangeeta Rasigar", \textit{Bhaktavatsalam Fifty Years of Public Life, Commemorative volume on the seventy sixth birth day of M.Bhaktavatsalam}, Madras,1972.

\textsuperscript{49} Madras Administration Report 1964-1965, p.267

\textsuperscript{50} M.Bhaktavatsalam, Karuttu Kuviar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.61
The Gandhimathi Ambal High School was established in 1963 with the help of Tirunelveli Nellaiappar Temple Devastanam.\textsuperscript{51} The Parasakthi College for Women at Thirukutralam was established in the same year with the financial help provided by the Thirukurralanathar Temple and many other temples and matts.

High Schools for Girls were run at Tirunelveli, Courtalam, Madurai and Rameswaram in 1963 under the auspices of religious institutions.\textsuperscript{52}

**Arts and Architecture**

Bhaktavatsalam inaugurated the Society for Development of Oriental Arts and Architecture in May 1958.\textsuperscript{53} It was intended to encourage Oriental arts and architecture and to start an institute under the auspices of this society. As temples represent grandeur of oriental architecture, the state should take all possible measures to preserve and renovate them.

The temple arts also received a fillip at the hands of Bhaktavatsalam. Sculpture occupied an important place of pride in the arts and crafts of Tamilnadu. The craft received a set back due to negligence. The vast majority of the sculptors deteriorated into ordinary stoncutters. To preserve this ancient art and to provide trained workers for renovation of

\textsuperscript{51} Madras Administration Report, 1964-1965, p.267
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Madras Information, June 1958
temples, a training school at Mahabalipuram was inaugurated on 11th March 1957 by Bhaktavatsalam.\textsuperscript{54} Twenty candidates were selected and they were paid stipends. An experienced sculptor was appointed as supervisor. The centre was established with a sum of Rs.26,600 at the beginning and a sum of Rs.35,842 was spent for three years. Government of India sanctioned Rs.4,442 for this scheme.\textsuperscript{55} This stands as a monumental testimony to his love for religion and tradition. The institution now has been elevated in the status of college affiliated to the University of Madras.

Bhaktavatsalam made a special appeal for provision of \textit{Kalyana Mandapams} in temples. If marriages are performed in temples it will generate income to temples as well as reduce the marriage expenses for economically backward people.\textsuperscript{56}

When the Land Ceiling Act was passed an amendment was made to the effect that the law would not be applicable to religious institutions.\textsuperscript{57}

The temple inscriptions reveal a lot of historical events and are source materials for historical research. Hence Bhaktavatsalam took special interest in the creation of a separate Department of Archaeology which

\textsuperscript{54} Madras Information, April 1957, p.16
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Thirukkoil, op.cit., September 1960, p.44.
\textsuperscript{57} Sa.Ganesan, "Oppatra Iru Panigal", \textit{Bhaktavatsalam, 50 Years of Public Life}, op.cit.
dealt with temple architecture and Epigraphical Inscriptions. He also took interest to appoint a qualified person to look after the temples from the epigraph and archaeology side.\textsuperscript{58}

All those interested in temples and traditional culture will feel immensely grateful to Bhaktavatsalam for the care and interest evinced by him in this field. His achievements in the religious renaissance of Tamilnadu are the crowning glories for his political life.

\textsuperscript{58} Dr. V. Raghavan, \textit{op.cit.}