CHAPTER II

ADMINISTRATION OF MINORITY RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN KERALA

Even in the early history, Kerala became the meeting ground of all the major Indian religious and philosophical systems as well as the important world religions. In addition to the native religions like Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism, religions like Christianity, Judaism and Islam also struck root in the state.

In spite of the predominance of the Hindu religion, Kerala under all its rulers, was free from inter-religious conflicts (Prestler;1987:341). The rulers of the state followed a liberal policy of religious toleration as is evidenced by their grants of land for the establishment of places of worship to the Christians, the Jews and the Muslims (Menon.S;1996:163). The religious outlook of the people was so eclectic that no religion was considered inferior to another.

The rulers and the elite from all communities in Kerala gave donations for construction and maintenance of places of worship of all religions in the state during the period of monarchy (ibid:164). The places of worship and religious institutions of non-Hindu faiths were respected by all and allowed to function without any interference by the rulers (ibid:163). This chapter deals with the study of the historical evolution of the administration of the minority places of worship in order to understand to what extent their administrative practices were adopted by managements of Hindu temples.

Administrative Practices of Churches

Christianity was introduced to Kerala in the 1st century AD - three centuries before it gained official recognition in Europe or became an established religion in Rome (Damodaran;1996: 181). The Christians were known as Saint Thomans in the state (ibid:182). It is widely believed that apostle St Thomas landed in a place called Maliankara in central Kerala (ibid:183). In the year 345 A D, the Christians in Kerala coast were reinforced by an influx of Syrian immigrants consisting of 400 Christians from 72 families belonging to seven tribes in Baghdad, Nineveh, and
Jerusalem under the leadership of the merchant Thomas of Cana (ibid:184).

The Tamil ruler during the period welcomed the Christians and gave them the facility to construct churches so that they could settle down in the state. During the age of the second Chera empire (800-1100 A.D), Christians gained prominence as a business community (ibid:109). The rulers of the Chera empire were pleased with the role of Christians as traders. In 844 A.D, emperor Sthanuravi conferred several important rights and privileges on Christians of Quilon (Danvers;1982:210). The ruler gave money for the construction of Tazhakad church in 885 A.D. During the period of the Tamil rulers, the Christians were treated on equal footing with the Hindus and assigned important place in the economic and social life of the land (ibid:226).

In the course of centuries, Christianity made rapid progress in Kerala and the Christian churches became well established institutions in the country. The early Christians known as St Thomas Christians were called Syrian Christians because they followed the Syriac liturgy (Menon.S;1996:108). The Latin Christians missionaries who visited Quilon in the medieval period introduced Latin rites for the first time in Kerala. The arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 marked the beginning of the growth of Latin Christians in the state. The establishment of political influence by the Portuguese helped the Latin Christians to emerge as an important constituent of the Christian community. The Latin Christians grew in Kerala in the coastal areas and many of them became fishermen. (ibid:109).

Many Latin churches were built during the period of the Portuguese rule in the state (ibid:110). It should not be imagined that the Portuguese followed a policy of generous toleration towards other Christian churches and their followers in Kerala (ibid:111). The St Thomas Christians of Kerala, who followed the Syriac liturgy which was anathema to the Portuguese, made them start a vigorous campaign of latinisation and in the process many monasteries and seminaries were founded (ibid:111).

The work of St Francis Xavier and the synod of Diamper in 1599 played an important part in the latinisation of the church (ibid:112). A section of the Christians thus came under the jurisdiction of the papacy. After the synod of Diamper, Arch Bishop Menezes accompanied by five Jesuits visited all the important churches and left for Goa in 1599 (ibid:112). The result of formation of the synod was that the age old connection of the
Kerala churches with the patriarchate of Babylon was severed and the supremacy of the Roman pontiff over the Kerala churches was established.

The monarch of the princely state of Cochin K T Rama Varma in 1599 announced that he had no role in latinisation, as he was not a Christian (Ward and Corner; 1997:120). He followed a policy of neutrality in the religious affairs of non-Hindus. The Portuguese were given freedom by the ruler to control the churches during the period. The success of the synod of Diamper in the latinisation of churches was short lived. Differences between the Syrian Christians and the Portuguese authorities ended in a quarrel between them in 1653. The appointment of European Latin Bishops to the Syrian Dioceses of Angamaly by the king of Portugal in 1653 was resented by the Syrians though they had acquiesced to it under pressure from the synod of Diamper.

The Syrians badly felt the need for a bishop of their own group. In 1653 the Jacobite patriarch of Babylon sent a bishop named Ahatalla in response to a request by the Syrians. The Portuguese detained him at Mylapore on his way. This caused a revolt by the Syrians known as Coonan cross. This event marked the turning point in the history of the Christian churches in Kerala, as it led to the emergence of two distinct sections among the Christians namely Romo-Syrians and Jacobite Syrians. Both the sections constructed churches for worship and the ruler of the princely state supported the construction of the churches by both the sects generously in 1654 (ibid:121). This was done to create harmony among the Christians.

In the course of centuries, Christianity made rapid progress in Kerala and Christian churches became established institutions in the country. After the decline of the Portuguese power in the state, Kerala was under the rule of Dutch from 1663 to 1814 (Galliti,et.al;1950:255). A part of the Christian church which was under the Pope of Rome was freed from Roman influence during the Dutch period and made independent under local bishops (ibid:226). Episcopal succession came to be received through the Jacobite patriarch in Antioch (Menon.S;1996:308). This resulted in the construction of many Jacobite churches in the state. By the end of the Dutch rule, the state had different sections of Christians namely Roman Catholics, Jacobites and the St Thomans. And all of them had their own churches. The rulers of the princely state gave freedom to all the sects to own and manage their churches in accordance with the systems they had - like the Pope controlling Catholic churches from Vatican.
In the beginning of the 19th century, when the British power established itself in Kerala, the Church Mission Society in London began work in the Syrian churches. For some time, there was close co-operation between the Syrian priest and the Church Mission Society Missionaries (CMS). By the mid 19th century, the CMS broke off their connection with the Syrian bishops and the CMS churches began to work on their own. It was on their initiative that the Anglican Church came into existence in Kerala. Some of the priests of the Syrian church who had come under the influence of the CMS missionaries advocated reforms which included the replacement of Syriac by Malayalam as the language of worship in the Syrian church. The proposals were not favoured by the bishops and clergy of the Syrian church. The result was the emergence of a new church known as the Marthoma Syrian Church as distinct from the Jacobite Syrian church, the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

By the end of the 19th century, the churches in Kerala came under the influence of foreign churches and eventually they split themselves mainly into five branches. They are Roman Catholic (having 3 different rites namely Syriac, Latin and Malayalam), Jacobite Syrian, the Anglican, the Marthoma Syrian churches and the Nestorian. In addition, there are also a number of minor missions and churches deriving inspiration from some foreign churches and other organizations. The rulers of the princely state maintained the policy of non-interference in the conflicts that took place between various denominations of Christianity and the colonizers. Even after the splitting of the churches into different denominations, the rulers maintained neutrality and extended equal support to all. The most important aspect of the relationship between the state and the Christian churches during monarchy was that there was no state intervention in the religious affairs of the Christians. It is argued that the rulers of the princely state were Hindus and they did not want to create a feeling of insecurity for the minorities. But, for the first time, places of worship came be recognized as “organizations”. Due to this influence, Hindu temples also came to be recognized as organizations; sometimes they were looked upon as autonomous organizations not coming under the authority of the monarch. It can be stated that these developments can be considered as the early forms of secularism - separation of state from religion.
Jews

Apart from the Christians, the Jews also were a part of the civil society in Kerala from very early days. Ten thousand Jews came to Kerala and settled at a place called Cranganore, a coastal town in 68 A.D (Balakrishnan P.K; 2003:110). The Jewish settlers, like the Christians who preceded them, achieved of economic prosperity, and secured several valuable privileges from the native rulers (ibid:111). The Jewish copper plate grant of emperor Bhaskar Ravi Varman dated 1000 A.D records the royal gift to the Jewish chief, Joseph Rabban and is one of the several rights and privileges in perpetuity. The ruler of the Cochin state donated money for the construction of the Jewish synagogue at Mattancherry in 1567(ibid:112). The Jewish shrine was managed by a body elected by the community until 1947 (ibid:113). The second Jewish synagogue was constructed by the community in Chenthamangalam in 1859(ibid:114). It was also managed by the committee elected by the community until 1947. There is no record about any third Jewish synagogue in the state. After independence, both the synagogues were brought under the management of an independent trust founded by the Jews. After the birth of the Jewish state in Israel in May 1948, majority of the Jews of Kerala migrated to Israel. According to the census of 1991, there are only a hundred and twenty Jews in Kerala (ibid:120). All of them are traders in Cochin. The Jewish synagogue at Chenthamangalam has not been in service since 1991. The Kerala rulers prior to independence adopted a policy of non-interference in the management of synagogues. The state government after independence continued the policy. Jewish places of worship came be recognized as “organizations”. They were looked upon as autonomous organizations not coming under the authority of the monarch and created political space for themselves.

Islam

Islam also found its way into Kerala at an early period of its history. The religion of Islam was introduced here by the Arab traders in the 8th century A.D (Venkitaramanayya; 2001:187). There were not many Muslims in the state until the 9th century A.D. Narayanan (1969) states that there is no evidence of the existence of a mosque before the 9th century. Malik Ibn Dinar, a Saudi Arabian with his family visited the coast of Kerala with the objective of spreading the religion of the Prophet in 1824. He was received at Cranganoor by the ruler of the Chera dynasty Cheraman Perumal
The first mosque was built in Cranganoor as a gesture of hospitality by the ruler in 1825 A.D. (ibid:198). Dinar and family visited other parts of Kerala and established more mosques (ibid:200).

In the course of centuries, Islam made progress as a religion and today numerically the Muslims are next to the Hindus, one of the most important communities in the state. The progress of the faith was, in many respects, due to the tolerant policy pursued by the rulers of Kerala. And this was particularly so in North Kerala where the Zamorins of Calicut patronized Islam in many ways (ibid:270). The Muslims were a major power to be reckoned with in Calicut in the days when the Zamorins were in power. They commanded the confidence of the rulers and had great influence in their court. The Muslims were given special and favoured treatment by the Zamorins for reasons of enlightened self-interest. The Zamorin’s navy was manned by Muslims. The heroic exploits of the Kunjali Marakkars, the Admirals of the Zamorins, in their fight against Portuguese expansionism form an important chapter in the history of Kerala. The Muslims of Malabar, otherwise called the Mappilas, were so intensely pro-Zamorin that the Zamorins had even issued an order that in order to get sufficient number of Mappilas to man their navy one or more male members of the families of Hindu fishermen should be brought up as Muslims (ibid:271).

Narayanan (1969) argues that this accounts for the relatively high proportion of Muslims in the population of the Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala. Because of the patronage of the ruler of Malabar many mosques were built in the state. The Raja of Malabar donated funds for the maintenance of the mosques. The management of the mosques was given to the Muslim priests or popularly known as Mullahs. With the support of the monarchs, the Mullahs developed the mosques at different stages of Kerala history. Even after independence, the mosques are controlled by the priests appointed by the wakhf board, a statutory body of the state that oversees the assets of Muslim charity. The day to day management of the mosques is separated from the wakhf board.

In the relationship between the state and the management of Muslims’ places of worship, the wakhf board is an important aspect. Wakhf board is a body appointed by the state for the management of the properties of Muslim places of worship. The incomes from the properties are managed by the board which is constituted by the central and state government. The composition of the board is: two are elected by the Muslims from among the
Members of Parliament elected from the state, two are elected by the Muslims from among the Members of state Legislative Assembly. (Whakf act; chapter 3:21). The Whakf board has jurisdiction only over the lands, buildings and endowments of the mosques. The mosques - sacred area – themselves are managed by a committee elected by the Muslim congregations of the mosques.

Though the Wakhf board is a statutory body, it has no right to appoint the spiritual leaders – the Mullahs – of the mosques. Neither the monarchs nor the elected government after 1947 made an attempt to disturb the system whereby the administration of properties is by the Whakf board leaving the entire sacred area to the religious leaders of Muslims.

Necessity of establishing a separate body – the Wakf Board, a Mugal legacy – for the management of the assets of mosques – the places of worship – can be considered as a sort of precedent that rulers – monarchs, or British officers – perhaps had taken into consideration while dealing with management issues of Hindu temples.

**Jainism**

The Jain religion came to Kerala in the 3rd century B.C. during the time of Chandragupta Maurya (321-297 B.C) (Menon.S;1996:95). Jainism grew in Kerala until the 4th century A.D. Many of the Hindu monarchs of Kerala were not great patrons of Jainism. There were several Jain shrines and temples in ancient Kerala. According to the Malayalam work *Kakasandesham*, the Brahmins never used to enter Jain temples. The decline of the Jain population by the 10th and 11th centuries led to the conversion of many Jain shrines to Hindu temples. By 1589 the Jain population in Kerala was almost nil and the only Jain temple that existed at that time in Wynad was handed over to the family of Gowdas and they continue to manage it even today (ibid:96). With the emergence of Kochi as a trading centre, businessmen from Gujarat migrated to the city. Some of the Gujaratis of Jain faith constructed a Jain temple in Fort Cochin in 1982 (ibid:97). The temple is owned and managed by the Jain family trust in Kochi. The state during the pre-independence period and the post-independence period facilitated establishment of Jain temples in the state but did not interfere in the management of the assets of Jain temples (ibid:98).
Buddhism

Like Jainism, Buddhism held its sway in Kerala in the ancient period. Buddhism was introduced to Kerala during the reign of Ashoka in the 13th century B.C. (Shanku Aiyer; 1961:183). The Hindu rulers of ancient Kerala followed a policy of enlightened religious toleration and they patronized Buddhist temples without reservation. The Buddhist religion began to decline from the 8th century B.C onwards. Menon S (1996) opines that Buddhism finally disappeared from Kerala in the 3rd century A.D. (343). Many prominent Hindu temples of the present day are believed to have been at one time Buddhist shrines. Large number of Buddha images in the southern districts of Kerala clearly indicates the prevalence of Buddhist faith in this area. According to the 1991 census, there is not a single Buddhist shrine existing in the state (Jaishankar; 2000:151).

From the above discussion, it is evident that religious tolerance practiced by the ruling elite in Kerala provided fertile ground for various religions to strike root and flourish. Religious tolerance – non-interference, autonomy, separation of state and religion - the seeds of secularism were sown in the early days. It can also be said that organization aspects of religion – symbols of organized religion, developed over the centuries. Some of these aspects were perhaps imbibed by Hindu temples in the late 19th century under the guidance of rulers. From the Mugal heritage, preliminary features of the jurisdiction of the sacred and the profane also emerged.

EVOLUTION OF TEMPLE ADMINISTRATION IN KERALA

The evolution of temple administration in Kerala is inextricably linked with the evolution of idol worship in the mountain ranges situated in the west of the Sahyadri that define and demarcate the state from the rest of India. Contrary to popular belief, it was not the Brahmins who pioneered idolatry in Kerala. The credit for that goes to the original residents, the indigenous adivasis of the state. A brief over view of the evolution of temple administration from the tribal beginnings to the contemporary scene is discussed in the following pages.

Tribal Beginnings

The Vedic religious ritualism was sacrificial in nature and had yajnas (invocation of fire) at its centre (Fuller; 1984:5). The Vedic period in Indian
antiquity could roughly be ascribed to a couple of millenniums prior to the first millennium B.C. Venues of Vedic yajnas were temporary shelters that were consigned to the flames at the end, and had nothing to do with the elaborate and often magnificent architectural edifices now known as the Hindu temples. Now there is an elaborate theory called Tantra that guides the practice of idolatry, but the origin of idolatry could be easily traced back to the tribal practice of holding the tribal totem in high esteem (Madhavan; 1985:21). Kerala was originally peopled with tribes. Even at present, there are 37 tribal groups called Scheduled Tribes (listed in the Constitution of India) in Kerala. Images of the deities were made of clay or stone, and these were placed at convenient places for the people to worship (Narayanan; 1969:43). There were no definite rituals or prescribed invocations and chanting associated with the idol worship of the tribal people. In all probability the worshipping was both spontaneous verbal sounds and non-verbal, that is to say, body movements offered as a gesture of reverence. The absence of material offerings to the deity characteristic of the earliest phase of worship had precluded the need for elaborate administrative arrangements for managing the places of worship.

That situation lasted till the 2nd century A.D., by which time worship had become a matter of considerable significance as to warrant the setting up of vast areas of land for activities connected with worship. Once idol worship started and the property got associated with the practice of idol worship, it became necessary to have custodians to protect the property. It must well have been the tribal chiefs who would have demarcated, in piety, sufficient land for the place of worship. Having created a property, not only to house and protect the idols, but also to provide sufficient space for people to assemble for festivities associated with the worship, it may have become necessary for chiefs to appoint guards and managers, to protect and care for the public property. It is also possible that the idea of owning private property was not familiar to the tribal people. Men who were entrusted with the upkeep of the place of worship, by virtue of the honour attached to the administration of the place of worship, acquired power. This was the embryonic beginnings of the administration of temples in Kerala, even though early places of worship were a far cry from the temples of today.

Of all the Kerala tribes, Paniyar happens to be the largest group, and they built the largest number of temples in the early period of the history of temple building. Members of this tribe live even today in the hill valley areas of the district of Wyanad and eke out a living through manual labour.
Pathiyar is the smallest tribe in Kerala, and they manage three temples. A list of temples belonging to the tribes of Kerala is given in the table no: 2.1

### Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of temples under Tribes</th>
<th>Number of temples under non tribes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Thiruvanathapuram</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Iduki</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Allapuzha</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Thrichur</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Malapuram</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Wayanad</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Kasarkode</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>506</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Censes Study: 2001 – Directorate of Censes Operation Kerala)

**Tamil Contribution**

Kerala had no separate cultural or linguistic identity of its own until around the 11th century A.D (Mohan Kumar; 2004:11). Tamil kings who were ruling what is now Kerala were great patrons of temples. It was under the patronage of Tamil rulers that the earliest non-tribal temples were built in Kerala. The non-tribals who built the early temples were mainly settlers from places beyond the Sahyadri. Architectural forms of the temples of Kerala attained their present state of the art during the epoch of Tamil dominance over Kerala. The system of temples surrounded by spacious premises is the norm one can find in the state now. This had its genesis under the patronage of the Tamil rulers. The systems of worship and rituals were also codified by the Tamil patrons. These rituals were of a routine
nature. Being matters of daily routine, it became mandatory to have permanent functionaries and administrators. Tamil rulers had appointed full time employees for the purpose.

It is to be noted that the administrators appointed by the Tamil rulers were not exclusively from the Brahmin community. There were non-Brahmin administrators as well (Menon, S; 1967:12). The administrators had the freedom to manage the temples in whichever manner they wished provided the code of conduct was practiced both by worshippers and the priests. Art, in all its diverse forms, was creatively utilized for attracting the people. Music, sculpture, dance, painting and a host of performing art forms were patronized as a gesture acknowledging divinity and spirituality in art forms. Certain tribal forms of worship continued to be part of temple worship. The sacred groves called kavu in Malayalam, are one of the vestigial practices that continue to be part of worship. The sacred grove of Ochira near Kayamkulam is an example. Mannarsala near Harippad is yet another example. In addition, small sacred groves belonging to old households are innumerable and they dot the state. However, there is no denying the fact that the new mode of temple worship had become the standard form followed by all the sections of the Hindu population.

Under the liberal dispensation of the Tamil rulers, new forms of worship were introduced. In course of time, the institution of temples became somewhat complicated as to warrant some administrative reforms. Thus administrative authority and religious authority were bifurcated. The religious authority was considered as controlling the sacred area of religious practices. The administrative side of the institution of temples was concerned wholly to be non-religious. This bifurcation was done by King Kulasekhara of the Chera dynasty in the 9th century A.D. It was he who authorized a few Brahmin families to have absolute control over the rituals connected with temple worship in his kingdom (Narayanan; 1969:44). Till that time the decisions on the rituals were also the prerogative of the administrators.

The Brahmins were vested with the power to supervise and appoint priests in the temples. The priests so appointed were from their own caste and often from families. Thus, a rigid caste system associated with the place of worship came to be institutionalized by the 12th century.
In this, lower castes like Ezha vas were excluded from temple entry and worship. For example, in the famous Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala, the high priest is selected on a yearly basis, but on no count can a non-Brahmin get selected to that post. In Sabarimala, the caste rigidity has withstood the changes of not only the social reform movement spearheaded by savants like Sree Narayana Guru, the spread and prowess of Christianity but also the red turbulence of Marxist politics (Barnet, Marguerite Ross; 1976:24). Non-Brahmin people trained in the Tantric ritualism from Brahmanic institutes of repute are not accepted when it comes to places of worship like Sabarimala.

The rigid caste system and the hereditary monopoly of the Brahmin family in the priesthood of temples is a contribution of Tamil rulers in the 9th century. The irony of the matter is, in Tamil Nadu, the situation has changed after independence. Kerala continues the same system introduced by Tamil rulers. In spite of the professed atheism of some of the Tamil politicians, they have seen to it that temple management is done not on casteist lines but on lines that are more in tune with the changed times.

The systematic development of temples as social institutions in Kerala started in the 12th century. Right from that period, the priests were privileged to receive fees called dakshina for the religious rituals officiated by them (Fuller, 1984:21). Thus the priestly caste came to have great vested interests in holding on to their privileged position as the sole custodians of the sacred area of temple worship. Even when these custodians became corrupt and profligate, the privileges of priesthood could not be taken away from them (Prestler;1987:143). Such was the sanctity accorded to the tradition by the faithful.

The Role of Ooraalaars as the Administrators of Temples

The successors of King Kulashekara continued the practice initiated by him, and by the 12th century A.D, Namboothiris (Kerala Brahmins) took control of the sacred area in the management of temples (Narayanan; 1969:51). However, the non-sacred area remained under the control of the administrator appointed by the rulers to manage the wealth and administration of the temple. The administrators enjoyed the benefit of controlling the funds, the lands of the temple and the appointment of the temple staff. The division of management into sacred and non-sacred area established dual control in temples by the Namboothiris and the administrators (Raja Raja Varma; 1940:54).
The basic text dealing with all matters related to the temples, especially the performance of poojas, is ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ written by Narayanan Namboothiri in 1426 A.D (ibid:58). The author acknowledges in the preamble that it was a text evolved by a group of Namboothiris to consolidate and institutionalise their newly gained control over the sacred area of the temples. ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ continues to be the authoritative text giving guidelines in the conduct of the poojas in temples. Many judicial verdicts on priesthood and practices of poojas were on the basis of the guidelines given in the book. And ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ is an important text guiding the administration of temples in Kerala till today. (Remesan; 2004:24)

The timing of the composition of the book, its contents, especially those establishing the hereditary rights of Kerala Namboothiris to conduct poojas, leaves no doubt as to its intentions. It established the Kerala Brahmin control over the sacred area of temples once and for all. Until 1426 A.D, Tamil, Tulu Brahmins and tribals offered poojas in temples (Ramaswamy;1994:23). The acceptance of this book as the guarding principle by the statutory bodies for managing temples, the Government and the public has enabled the Namboothiris to enjoy hereditary rights over rituals in temples in the state.

The monopoly of Namboothiris in the sacred area of temples led to the continuation of the system of separating the sacred from the non sacred area; priesthood became an important source of revenue for them. The priest, in order to attract more and more devotees for improving the revenue insisted on the development of the infrastructure (Stella;1992:32). The administrators developed the infrastructure for the devotees as insisted by the priests. This opportunity also developed into the acquisition of wealth by the administrators.

The role of administrators gained greater respect in the society over time and they enjoyed many privileges. The 13th century A.D. witnessed another crucial change in the system of administrators. Realizing their importance in the society and also to encourage donations of land to temples, Cheraman Perumal who was ruling central Kerala comprising of Kodungaloor, North Paravur and Trichur in the 13th Century A.D., made such donors their administrators. (Narayanan;1969:68). The feudal chiefs took this as a privilege and became administrators of many temples by
The system of the management of temples by the Ooraalaars spread from central Kerala to other parts of the state by the 15th Century. This innovation in the administration at once achieved twin purposes. First, many people came forward to donate land in order to become “Ooraalaars” of temples, and thus many new temples came to be built. Second, the system prescribed that only a person who had made a personal contribution of land to temples could become one. In this way, not only did the monarch gain control of lands, administrators, but also of temples.

The 16th century witnessed the growth of Ooraalaars both in numbers and power. Since they enjoyed many privileges, such as making rules and regulations for managing their temples, the custody and management of funds and the appointment of temple staff, Ooraalaars gained the respect and confidence of people in the area around temples. Devotees entrusted Ooraalaars with the funds for conducting poojas. These funds donated by devotees for conducting poojas at regular intervals came to be known as endowment. Endowment is the wealth of the temple. The temple and its wealth together are known as Devaswom. The Ooraalaars had to treat Devaswom separate from their personal wealth.

Devaswoms gained an important place in the economy those days. The rulers recognising the access of Ooraalaars to the people around temples and their ability in managing endowments, appointed them as land tax collectors in their areas. By the 17th century, the land revenue of the rulers of Kerala was collected through Devaswoms. For that purpose, the land was divided into Devaswom land and land belonging to the rulers. Devaswom lands were those under the temple administration. The lands belonging to the rulers were directly under the administration of the monarch. The Ooraalaars became the local feudal chieftains of their area by virtue of their strength as tax collectors and the newly established relationship with the state administration.
To motivate Ooraalaars in the collection of land tax, the rulers shared a portion of the tax collected with them. This made them wealthier. The rich Ooraalaars became chieftains in their areas by virtue of their wealth and power to fix and collect land tax. The 18th century A.D. witnessed the growth of Ooraalaars into militant chieftains commanding a strong army of servants and wealth even posing threats to the kings. (Menon.P; 1937:42) Ooraalaars belonged to the upper caste namely, Brahmins, Kshathriyas, Nairs, Pothuvals, Warriars, and Marars. The Brahmin Ooraalaars controlling both the rituals and administration of temples were given a title Aaddyan, meaning ‘noble’ by the rulers (ibid:43). In contrast, others’ control was limited to the non-sacred area of the temple and did not enjoy the status conferred by the title.

**Challenge by Ooraalaars to the Rulers**

During the 18th century A.D., the present region of Kerala, comprised of three kingdoms, Venad or Travancore in the south, Cochin at the centre and Kozhikode also known as Malabar in the north were ruled by three different princely families. Ooraalaars, by virtue of their wealth and the army under them had great social influence in all the three princely states; their ability to provide warriors to the rulers during emergencies also increased their influence (Menon.S; 1967:365). The Zamorin Raja, the ruler of Kozhikode defeated the ruler of Cochin in the early part of the 18th century A.D. with the help of the Ooraalaars of Cochin. The Zamorin Rajas’ political sovereignty over Cochin continued till 1762 A.D, when Cochin entered into a treaty with Travancore for protection against the invasions from Kozhikode (ibid: 366).

**Chart 2.1**

Map showing princely states of Kerala in 18th Century A.D.

Source : (Menon.S, 1967 *A Survey of Kerala History*
Viswanathan Printers (P) Ltd, Chennai: page 240
The ruler of Cochin immediately after signing the treaty with Travancore, confiscated the properties of those Ooraalaars loyal to the Zamorin Raja. The temples owned by them were brought under the (government) *Sarkar* of Cochin. For the first time in Kerala, temples were brought under the control of the state. (Menon. P; 1937:52) The year 1762 is very important in the evolution of the administration of temples in Kerala as it marked the beginning of direct state control over temples. The take over of temples by the ruler of Cochin gives us the clear understanding that the objective was to contain threats to the throne from the Ooraalaars.

Subsequently, several other minor temples were also taken over by the Cochin government. This was done as a precaution so that the owners of the temples would not develop into strong Ooraalaars who can, then pose a threat to the rulers. Instead of stating the real reason, temples were taken over on the ground of mismanagement (ibid:53). Thus, a large number of temples came under the management of the state. The ruler of Cochin created a separate division in the state administration for the management of the temples known as Devaswom (Jaya Sankar; 2000:9). The ruler paid special attention to this department. The lands around the temples coming under the *Sarkar* were attached to the *Sarkar* for the revenue; the revenue - ‘Pathivu’ in Malayalam - was used to manage the day-to-day affairs of the temple. The revenue from those lands were collected through the *Kariakkars* - administrators appointed by the ruler (ibid :11).

Like the rest of Kerala, many temples in Travancore state were under the management of Ooraalaars. The Ooraalaars of Travancore also, like their counterparts in Cochin, gained wealth and power by virtue of their control over temples (Panickker;2004:231). They laid down rules and regulations favourable to their own interest and the temples were managed accordingly.

They acquired personal wealth by virtue of their control over temples and misused their authority as the collectors of tax. It is generally held that Ooraalaars mismanaged the temples neglecting the interests of both the devotees and temples. Colonel Munroe, who was the British Resident of Travancore, took over 1471 important temples in 1811 A.D. through a royal proclamation (Menon.P; 1937:214). The take over of temples was by virtue of the ruler’s inherent right as the spiritual head of the state. The reasons stated in the royal proclamation for the take over were that the Ooraalaars failed to cultivate the lands of the temple, did not properly share the tax
collected properly with the state, did not provide the required facilities for the devotees and misused the temple funds for personal gain. The take over of temples was meant to curb the status and power of Ooraalaars.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Kozhikode, known as Malabar region, was a part of Madras Residency under the British rule (Logon, 1887:374). The region was governed by the rules and regulations prevailing in the Madras province. The Ooraalaars in the Malabar region continued to manage the temples without any state interference. There was no direct take over of temples by the state as was done in the case of Cochin and Travancore states. The rulers of Kozhikode never felt that the Ooraalaars were a threat to their authority. The reason for the Ooraalaars not becoming a threat to the rulers of Kozhikode like their counterparts in the Travancore and the Cochin states is explained by the history of Malabar region.

The Malabar region was invaded by the rulers of Mysore, Hyder Ali and his son Tippu Sultan, in 1773 and in 1788 (Menon.S; 1967:301). The princely states of Kozhikode were brought under the rule of Tippu Sultan from 1788 to 1792. During the Mysore occupation of Malabar under Tippu Sultan, many administrative changes were introduced. One of the changes was the replacement of Ooraalaars as collectors of land tax by a centralized revenue department (ibid :302). The Ooraalaars were thus confined to their role of administering the temples under them. By losing the authority to collect tax on behalf of the government, the Ooraalaars became ordinary persons with religious duties and they could never grow into militant chieftains like their counterparts in the Travancore and the Cochin states.

After the retreat of Tippu Sultan in 1792, Malabar came under the British rule (ibid: 311). The British administrators continued the same administrative and political system in Malabar introduced by Tippu Sultan. Hence, the Ooraalaars in Malabar could never grow into local chieftains posing threats to the rulers. However, the British introduced regulations on the management of temples in 1792 (Fuller; 1984:82) protecting the right of the Ooraalaars to continue as the administrators of temples. The autonomy of religious institutions in the Madras state continued throughout the British period.

Colonel Munroe, who was the British Resident of Travancore, was also appointed as ‘Diwan’ of Cochin in 1812 A.D (Menon.A; 1995:117). Munroe took the initiative and introduced his Travancore model of reforms of temple administration in the state of Cochin also. Munroe took over the
management of many temples in Cochin and got them under the Sarkar control. Those temples, along with the other temples already under the Sarkar management, had to depend on the government for funds. Munroe standardized the administration of Travancore and Cochin by attaching state controlled temples to the land revenue department (ibid: 113).

There were many more temples under the management of Ooraalaars. The ruler of the Travancore state wanted a provision other than the royal proclamation to take over the temples (Pillai;1940:209). The Travancore state government introduced the Hindu Religious Endowment Regulation Act in 1904, empowering it to assume the management of private temples whenever necessary (Remesan; 2006:28). The objective was for the government to be able to take over temples whenever it became necessary. With the help of the legislation, many temples were taken over by the government in subsequent years. A royal proclamation of Srimoolam Thirunal Rama Varma Raja on 12th April, 1922 prescribed the formation of Devaswom fund and a separate department for the efficient management and control of those temples under the government (Pillai; 1940:211). This was an important step in the evolution of temple administration in the state because it gave autonomy to the Devaswoms. The type of state take over and the subsequent control over temples was somewhat similar to what had happened in the United Kingdom at the time of Henry VIII th when Angelical church was brought under the monarchs, a development contrary to what was happening in the Catholic church in Vatican.

The objectives of the take over of the temples by both Travancore and Cochin are clear from the timing of, the person who initiated and the reasons for such take over. The timing was in the 18th century A.D when the Ooraalaars’ prowess grew out of proportion and posed a threat to the throne. Colonel Munroe’s initiative in bringing major temples under the state control leaves no doubt to believe that the revenue from temples to the state was very important. The authoritarian control and mismanagement of temples by Ooraalaars neglecting the faith and interests of public were the reasons stated in the royal proclamations for the take over of the temples both in Travancore and Cochin (Leena More;1999:126).

Jayshankar (2000) observes, only temples with properties were taken over by Colonel Munroe in both the Travancore and the Cochin states (222). Only 263 temples with properties were brought under the control of the state in 1812. Many temples like the Perumanam temple in Trichur district were
left out because they did not own lands earning revenue. In Cochin, the revenue of the temples taken over merged with the state revenue (ibid:42). The 1811 royal proclamation that took over temples in the Travancore state stated that only temples with properties were brought under the state control (Aiyer;1958:652). It stated that 4765 temples including the famous Kanyakumari temple were not taken over because they did not have lands earning revenue (ibid: 652). In Travancore, interestingly the land revenue department managed those temples. Madhava Rao, who assumed office as Divan of Travancore in 1858, observed in his memorandum on abolition of taxation in kind, that the revenue from Devaswom lands in the Travancore state was Rs 4,30,000/- (ibid:654). It should be noted that it amounted to 30% of the state revenue in 1858. In both the cases, it is inferred that Munroe’s main aim was to convert the income of the temples as revenue of the state. After Munroe’s period, the rulers of Travancore and Cochin separated the temples from the state Revenue Departments and brought them under separate Devaswom Departments (ibid: 655). The chief of Devaswom department was appointed from among the royal family members and trusted lieutenants of the rulers. Devaswom Department enjoyed great importance during the period of princely state under the British rule. It is evident that, the rulers managed temples with great care (Pillai;1940:212) both to prevent challenge to the authority of the rulers and for the control over temple revenue.

Legislations on Temple Administration prior to Independence

The history of legislations related to administration of temples in Kerala started in the year 1817 in the Malabar region which was a part of the Madras state (Remesan; 2004:30). The policy of the Madras state under the British was different from that of Travancore and Cochin. Policy of the Malabar province allowed private temples in those days and introduced legislation known as the Madras Regulation VII in 1817 in order to exercise some control over the management of private temples and their affairs. In the above law, provisions were made to supervise the management of temples and their endowments. However, it was repealed by the government on public demand from England. Many British social workers and politicians opposed this move on the ground that it was not sufficient to regulate all the aspects of temple management and a new law was introduced in 1863, empowering the state government to regulate the management of private temples. That law was also repealed by the government on the ground that religion is a private affair of the citizen and it should not be a
subject of supervision by the government (ibid:31). In this way, Madras state desisted from introducing laws on regulation of temples in the province until the demand for reforms in the administration of temple were made by the Mylapore group in 1925 (Fuller;2003:37).

The most important feature of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Act 1927 was that it gave the government only supervisory power over the temples in the region and the government had no powers over matters of faith, which was considered as sacred. It was amended several times by the Madras government. (Madras Act-I of 1928, V of 1929, XI of 1931, XI of 1934, XII of 1935, XX of 1938, XXII of 1939, V of 1944, and X of 1946) Such amendments were made before independence (ibid: 35). Unlike the Travancore and the Cochin states, all these amendments were for introducing reforms in the nature and practices of government supervisions over the affairs of the temples and not related to the take over control of the temple administration and assets. The ownership of the temples in the Malabar region throughout these days continued to be in the hands of private individuals. The basic objectives of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Act 1927 and its amendments were, 1) for improving the existing systems of supervision of the endowment funds of the temples, and 2) to provide state funds for the temples in cases of financial crisis.

The state of Travancore introduced the first legislation in 1904 known as the Hindu Religious Endowment Regulation Act, empowering the government to assume the management of private temples whenever necessary (Remesan; 2004:34). Until then, government interventions in the affairs of the temple were through royal proclamations. Thus, in course of time, large numbers of private temples were taken over by the government in stages (Aiyer; 1958). It is stated that, 125 temples having properties were brought under the control of the Devaswom department in 1912. Temples which did not possess lands were not taken over (Ibid: 657). Again in 1914, deriving power from the same law, 24 temples were taken over (Ibid: 657). These temples acquired properties after 1912 (Ibid: 658). It is inferred that only temples with properties were taken over by the state of Travancore.

The princely state of Cochin also introduced a similar law in 1907, and took over many private temples on different occasions. Both the princely states had the same policy on temple administration. The revenue from the temple was the main consideration for taking over assuming the management of temples by the state.
It is argued that, Colonel Munroe, who was the advisor to the ruler of Travancore in 1811 and the Divan of the princely state of Cochin in 1812, set the precedence of taking over of temples having properties in both the states in order to augment state revenues. Travancore and Cochin continued the policy of Munroe and merged the revenue of the temple with that of the state.

In 1922, a law was passed in the Travancore state assembly creating a separate department of Travancore Devaswom under the direct control of the ruler (Pillai;1940: 49). The law gave the ruler the authority to control the affairs of the temples under the Department of Travancore Devaswom, without requiring any further legislative sanction; this meant that, the ruler was empowered to issue ordinances for taking over of temples, creating endowments, abolishing practices and customs, introducing reforms and appointing administrators without getting these passed by the legislative assembly (Ibid: 50). Thereafter, the state did not enact any further law till 1947. The rulers of the princely state of Travancore introduced two important social reforms in temples deriving authority from this law. The first reform was introduced in 1925; Sethu Lakshmy acting as the Regent of the Travancore state, as Sri Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma was a minor, abolished the Devadasi system and animal sacrifices in the temples under the Travancore Devaswom. In 1936, Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma introduced the social reform of temple entry to all the sections of the Hindu society. Until then temples were not open to backward castes like Ezhava, untouchables and tribals.

In the princely state of Cochin, a similar law which gave the ruler the authority to control the affairs of the temple had already been put in place in 1916. It empowered the ruler to control temples under the Devaswom Department without getting decisions approved in the legislative assembly (Menon.S; 1967: 352). This authority was used by the ruler of Cochin evidently for taking over private temples. The main difference between the rulers of Travancore and Cochin in introducing the same type of authority for gaining control over temples is that, the ruler of Cochin did not introduce social reforms like the abolition of Devadasi systems and animal sacrifices as was done by the ruler of Travancore.

It is to be noted that, in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, the British introduced a policy under the rule of Colonel Munroe of
taking over the temples with properties in order to ensure steady revenue for
the state. It also brought an end to the prowess of militant “ooralaars” who
controlled temples. In the Malabar region, the British policy on the temple
administration was different. The temples in that region were never taken
over from private individuals. The argument is that, the revenue of the
temples in the Malabar region was negligible because the “Ooralaars” were
not appointed as collectors of land tax as was done in the Travancore and
Cochin states (Menon.S; 1967: 314). The temples in the Malabar region did
not have properties as was the case in Travancore and Cochin states. In fact,
many important temples including the Sree Krishna temple in Guruvayoor,
were provided financial assistance by the government to meet the day to day
expenses during the pre-independence days (Namboothiri;1969:54). Since
there would be no augmentation of the state revenue, the British did not take
over the temples in the region.

The British government was more interested in the natural
resources of Malabar like spices, and timber which had economic value and
yielded more revenue for the government (Radharishnan;2006:87).Though
the temples were not taken over by the state, many reforms were introduced
in the Malabar area, which was a part of the Madras Province until 1956.
Fuller (2003), commenting on the modernity and traditionalism in South
Indian temples, has stated that many of the reforms in temple administration
in the Madras province during the independence struggle were influenced by
the strong social and cultural movements such as the anti-Brahmin and
Dravidian movements that developed along with the national movement
(38)ii. Those reforms were implemented in the Malabar region also which
was a part of Madras province during that period (Remesan; 2004: 36).
Such reforms were absent in the Travancore and Cochin princely states
mainly because there were no social and cultural movements in the early
decade of 1900 in these states.

And, in Travancore and Cochin, the leaders involved in the
national movement were not associated with any religious or social reform
movements. Many of them like E.M.S. Namboothiripad and A.K. Gopalan
were communists. In those days, the non-communist leaders like K.P.
Kesava Menon and Panampilly Govinda Menon were not actively involved
in religious matters like their counterparts in the Madras province. It is
argued that no effort was made by these leaders to bring about changes in
the laws regulating temples or temple administration.
Sree Narayana Guru, who withstood the onslaught of atheists and socialists, is the only exception because he wanted to introduce reforms in temple administration. He established many private temples to break the monopoly of the upper castes in owning and managing temples. Ignoring the protests from various sections, he continued consecration of temples (Sanu;2001:87). Since the political space in those days was occupied by the socialists and the upper caste elite, the principles and reforms introduced by Sree Narayana Guru did not find a place in legislative activism. The assemblies in Travancore and Cochin States did not amend laws allowing untouchables to enter temples nor allow non-Brahmins control the sacred area.

Balakrishnan (1992) observes that, Kerala politics during the days of the independence movement was dominated by the leaders belonging to the upper caste elite. Though the communist movement gained momentum in the late 1940s, it did not have an identity as a political party. The communist leaders like E.M.S. Namboothiripad and A.K. Gopalan were working in the Congress party and formed a separate special group known as leftists. Their interest was mainly to introduce state ownership in business and agriculture. They did not support the move of Sree Kumara Asan, a disciple of Sree Narayana Guru to introduce a law ending the monopoly of Brahmins in performing temple rituals.

The contrast between the Malabar region and the Travancore - Cochin states is that in the former, state intervention in the temple administration was influenced by the social and cultural movement that took place in the Madras Province; whereas in the latter, such an influence was not reflected. It is evident that the revenue of temples was one of the main reasons for state intervention in temple administration in Travancore - Cochin states, though mismanagement and many other reasons were cited.

**Post independence period**

After the country attained independence, many changes were introduced in the administration of temples in the state of Kerala. The Travancore and Cochin states were integrated on 1st July, 1949, on the basis of a covenant signed by the then rulers of those two princely states (Menon.S; 1967 :325). In pursuance of this covenant, Ordinance 1949 and 1950 were promulgated which were followed by the Hindu Religious Institutions Act of 1950. Consequent on this, the administration and control
of the temples under the rulers of these states were transferred to newly created statutory bodies known as Travancore and Cochin Devaswom Boards (Remesan; 2004:37). The Travancore Devaswom Board had its jurisdiction in the Travancore area and the Cochin Devaswom Board in the Cochin area. It is this act which continues to be in force even today.

The most noteworthy feature was that there were two types of temples in Travancore-Cochin areas. One was, temples owned and managed by the statutory bodies, while the second was owned by private individuals. The private temples in the Travancore-Cochin state had independent status regarding governance. They were outside the ambit of the Devaswom Boards – state control.

Even after independence, the Malabar area remained a part of the Madras province, which already had Hindu Religious Endowment Act 1946. The main object of that legislation was to consolidate the laws regulating the administration and governance of Hindu Charitable institutions and Endowments in the state. According to the law, a Hindu charitable institution is defined as religious institutions such as Hindu temples, Maths and any other form of Hindu religious places of worship having formal organization. The same law defines Endowments as property belonging to or endowed for the support of temples, Maths or other forms of places of worship.

The 1946 law was replaced by the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act 1951 and it is in force in the Malabar region even today (ibid: 38). All the temples in the Malabar region, irrespective of the type of ownership, are under the purview of this law. There are no statutory body owning and managing temples in the Malabar area. Unlike the private temples in the Travancore-Cochin state, private temples in Malabar do not have independence of governance. They are subject to supervision by the state. Their accounts are audited by the Hindu Religious Charitable and Endowment Department. The utilization of their funds requires the approval of the same department.

One of the differences in the relationship between the government and the temple managements in the Travancore-Cochin and the Malabar regions is that, private temples in the Travancore-Cochin area were outside the ambit of the government control; second chapter of the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act, 1950 states that the
authority to administer temples under it vests with the statutory bodies namely the Travancore and Cochin Devaswom boards. In the Malabar region there is a common standard for all the temples that is there is no statutory bodies owing and maintaining temples but all temples are under government supervision.

Rulers of Travancore and Cochin were given the option of retaining their family temples under their ownership and management at the time of transferring private temples to Devaswom Boards. The ruler of Travancore retained Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple at Thiruvananthapuram under his control. The ruler of Cochin decided not to retain his family temple of Sree Poornathrayeesha at Tripunithura. From 1947 to 1956, the state was known as Thirukochi state (Travancore Cochin State). The ruler of the Trirukochi, known as Rajapramukhan was the formal head of Thirukochi the governor was appointed in 1956. Rajapramukhan was a part of the law making body at that time. His option to retain Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple outside the ambit of government control was incorporated the law. Further, Rajapramukhan also made all private temples outside the ambit of the state so that no one will question his retaining control over the Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple.

To substantiate the fact that the ruler of Travancore influenced the decision to keep the private temples outside the ambit of state control, there was a statement by the then Chief Minister Narayana Pillai in the Legislative Assembly in December 1950 to this effect. To quote Pillai, “My government is proud of accommodating the view point of the ruler of Travancore for keeping the private temples outside the control of the state” (Barnett; 1976:94).

Parameshwaran opines that the growth of the social movement under Sree Narayana Guru paved the way for the proliferation of private temples in the state (Parmeshwaran; 1980:40). This was also one of the reasons for keeping the private temples outside the ambit of state control.

Sree Narayana Guru initiated a major social movement in Kerala in the first half of the 20th century. Sree Narayana Guru, who was also the spiritual leader of Kerala, consecrated many temples. Sree Narayana Guru was a strong advocate of social equality. He opposed the monopoly hereditary rights of the Brahmin priests to perform temple rituals. Instead of rejecting Brahminic practices of temple rituals, Sree Narayana Guru
advocated their adoption by the backward castes (ibid:59). He organised members of the Ezhava community to form Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) aimed at ending social inequalities. As a result, the Ezhavas and other backward communities started learning Sanskrit, began using Sanskrit mantras and used Sanskrit rituals of worship in temples. Instead of Brahmins, backward communities themselves performed poojas in the temples established by Sree Narayana Guru.

Ezhava community, which formed 27% of Kerala population at the time, was strongly influenced by Shree Narayan Guru. They were in favour of keeping private temples outside the ambit of state control even today. Though, many socialists like A.K. Gopalan were in favour of discarding religious practices, they had to respect the preferences of Ezhava community in the state.

Pulayan Mahasabha is an important backward class organization of Pulayas started by Aiyyankali in 1906. The objective was to end the slavery of the Pulayas. Most of the Pulayas were peasants. Population of Pulayas was less than 7 % (Menon: 1967). Aiyyankali focused on mobilizing peasants to demand social equality was not interested in bringing about reforms in Hindu Temples. After independence, Pulaya Mahasabha supported Communist movement and totally disregarded religious practices. Many socialists like A K Raghavan, a Pulaya opposed religious practices and influenced Pulaya youth not to practice religion. After 1956, peasant movements declined and many Pulaya youth got employment in government and in the Middle-East. They continue to be non-religious and show no interest in reforms in temple practices.

State Formation and administration of temples

The state of Kerala formally came into existence on 1st November 1956, with a governor as its head (Menon.S;1967:381). Under the state reorganization Act of 1956, four southern taluks of Thovala, Agatheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavankode and a part of the Chenkotta Taluk were separated from the Travancore state and included in the neighbouring Madras state. The district of Malabar from the Madras state and Kasarkode taluk of south Canara from the Mysore state were added on to Travancore-Cochin to constitute the new state of Karalla (Remesan; 2004:47). The temples in the regions that went to Madras state were deleted
from the list of the Travancore Devaswom Board. The acts and regulations which were in force in the above regions continued to be followed even after they had become a part of the newly constituted Kerala state. The Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act was adopted in the Travancore-Cochin area and the Malabar Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act was adopted in the Malabar region.

After the formation of Kerala state in 1956, the administration of temples was based on the respective laws governing that region. Travancore and the Cochin Devaswom Boards are the statutory bodies in Travancore and Cochin area. Guruvayoor Devaswom and the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department are the statutory bodies in the Malabar region. To understand the difference in nature of relationship between the state and the management of the temples, it is necessary to examine the formation of state, the laws prevailing in the respective regions, the organizational structure, constitution, and the period of origin of each statutory body.

**The Travancore Devaswom Board**

The Travancore Devaswom Board was formed on 1st July, 1949 (ibid: 48). The administration of all the temples, their properties, funds, endowments and institutions which till then were owned and managed by the ruler of the princely state of Travancore became vested in the newly constituted Board, except for Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple in Thiruvanathapuram. After the formation of the state of Kerala, the Travancore Devaswom Board continued the administration of temples under it in the same way as it had done during the earlier days. It was an important stage in the relationship between the government and the management of temples which marked the beginning of temple administration under an autonomous statutory body.

The Travancore Cochin Hindu Religious Institution Act was adopted in 1956 as one among many laws adopted during the early days after the state was formed. (ibid :51) It was subjected to many amendments during the tenure of the first elected state government. Main features of the earlier laws were retained. The temples of the Travancore Devaswom Board are situated in the area which belonged to the former princely state of Travancore. The Act has no jurisdiction over private temples.
As per Section III of the Travancore Cochin Hindu Religions Institution Act 1950, there are three members in the Travancore Devaswom Board. Two are nominated by the council of Ministers who are Hindus. The Hindus among the Council of Ministers are empowered to nominate one of the members as its Chairperson. And one can be nominated by the Kerala Legislative Assembly. Any person, including a woman, who is a Hindu, thirty five years of age and a permanent resident of the state of Kerala can become a member of the Board (ibid: 57). The Act gives enormous powers to the Chairperson.

There is no reservation for women on the Board. The Travancore Devaswom Board has so far nominated a lady member only once in 1969 to the Board. Justice Janaki Amma, a retired Justice of Kerala High Court submitted a memorandum to the Honourable Chief Minister of Kerala in September 1982, demanding a reservation for women in the Boards. Though K. Karunakaran, the then Chief Minister of Kerala, accepted the demand; but it has not been implemented till today.

All expenses of the temple organization have to be approved by the Board and the policy formulated by it regarding the recruitment, training, placement and norms of employment has to be followed by all the employees. The Board meets at least twice a week. Many matters relating to the day to day management and policy matters are also decided in the meetings. The revision of the pay scale of employees, granting of funds to temples for festivals, rituals, and renovations, appointment of priests and other employees, their transfers, investment decisions approved by accounts and budgets are some of the important matters which the Board can decide.

The Travancore Devaswom Board has two sections namely, Establishment Section and Temple Section. The Establishment section is in-charge of the administration whereas the Temple Section deals with the routine rituals and functions of the temple. The Temple section comprises of the priests and other temple functionaries. The Devaswom Board manages this section in accordance with the practices followed in temples and under the instructions of the Tantri Namboothiri the head priest who is the final authority on matters of the temple rituals.

The Establishment Section is divided into four sections - Department of Administration, Department of Finance, Department of Maintenance and
the Stores Department. The functions of the Department of Administration are planning, maintaining public relations, personnel management, office administration, preparation of various reports, assisting the Board, taking care of legal matters, etc. The Finance Department manages accounts, revenues, and assets of the Devaswom Board. The Finance Department prepares annual budget for the next financial year.

The Board used to submit the budget to the rulers of the Travancore before Kerala was formed. The practice came to an end when the Governor became the formal head of Kerala. The Finance Department has to prepare the accounts of the actual receipts and payments. During the pre-independence days when the monarchs were in power Devaswom Officials in-charge of accounts of each temple used to present the accounts in front of the deity of the temple before the close of the temple at night. After the transfer of power from the rulers of the princely state in 1947, this system was discontinued. The Act does not specify that the accounts should be published. The Board has the discretionary power to decide whether to publish the annual accounts or not. The essence of modern financial management of publishing accounts has not been adopted for public scrutiny, neither are the accounts placed before the Legislative Assembly. After formation of Kerala, the system lacks in transparency.

The Maintenance Department is in-charge of the maintenance of the buildings under the Travancore Devaswom Board, the structures of the temples, construction of new temples and buildings. The Department is headed by a qualified Civil Engineer reporting directly to the Deputy Commissioner. The Stores is another important Department of the Travancore Devaswom Board. The temples have valuable collections of gold, silver, copper, and brass jewelry, pooja vessels and other items. These have been collected over the years by accepting the offerings of individual devotees to the temple. Since the assets run into crores of rupees and the Board is free to use it for different purposes such as making ornaments, pots for rituals, and also auction it, there is a need for transparency and accountability in all the dealings of all valuables. There is a need for the transparent management of valuable metals. The Stores Department was organized by the Travancore Devaswom Board after the transfer of authority from the rulers of princely state in 1949. Until then the nominee of the ruler, the Commissioner of the Devaswom managed the valuables and funds.
Chart 2.2
Organizational Structure of Travancore Devaswom Board. as on 31st March 2006.

The structure of the organization of the Travancore Devaswom Board is a typical line and staff one. The direct line is with the Board at the top. The President is the chief of the Board managing the day to day affairs of the organization. He is assisted by a Secretary whose function is advisory in nature. In the line hierarchy the Commissioner who is a Kerala State Civil Service person not below the rank of an Under Secretary is next to the Chairman of the Board. The Secretary and the Commissioner have equal ranks in the organization and both report to the President.

There are eighteen Assistant Commissioners on the Travancore Devaswom Board (Travancore Devaswom Manual:29). The senior most among them is appointed exclusively for the purpose of managing the Ayyappa Temple at Sabarimala. The remaining seventeen Assistant Commissioners are in charge of Divisions and manage temples in the

(Source: Field Survey)
AC - Assistant Commissioner
DO- Devaswom Officer.
different districts of the Travancore region. The Divisional Offices are in Thiruvananthapuram, Attingal, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Alapuzha, Kottarakara, Neyyattinkara, Ettumanur, Vaikkom, Tiruvallur, Kannankulangara, Sherthalai, Thrikaryur, Vashapally, Haripad, Iduki, and Varkala. In Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta and Iduki divisions, there is one Assistant Commissioner in charge of one district. In other districts, there is more than one Assistant Commissioner for each district.

There are ten to twenty Devaswom officers under one Assistant Commissioner. Each Devaswom Office manages temples under his jurisdiction. The number of temples under a Devaswom Officer varies from office to office. The Ambalapuzha office in Alapuzha district is the largest with 59 temples and Chenkotta in Thiruvananthpuram district is the smallest with 14 temples. There were 240 Devaswom Officers and 2190 temples under the Travancore Devaswom Board as on 31st March, 2006.

The organization was directly under the control of the ruler until 1949. And, the ruler appointed the Devaswom Commissioner, the Secretary and the Deputy Commissioner and they worked directly under ruler. During those days, the Commissioner was appointed by the ruler mainly from among the members of his family or those close to his family (Aiyer;1958:672). This indicated the importance attached to the post of the Commissioner in those days. After the constitution of the Board in 1949, the President of the Board became the most powerful authority of the organization. He was nominated from among persons of political and social standing in the state. The Commissioner was appointed from among the senior State Civil Servants not below the rank of Under Secretary (Travancore Devaswom Manuel:31). Both the Deputy Commissioner and the Secretary were selected purely on the basis of seniority in the Devaswom services during pre and post 1949 (ibid:32).

The Secretary of the Board convenes its meetings, maintains the minutes, circulates the resolutions to the division heads and acts as a link between the Government and the Board. (Jayashankar;2000:50) The Secretary does the staff function whereas the Commissioner is in the line executing the Board’s decisions. The Secretary has no administrative powers. The entire day to day administrative authority is vested with the Commissioner. In his absence, the Deputy Commissioner acts as Commissioner.
The Travancore Devaswom Board had the power to undertake different projects prior to 1949. The Board undertook construction of bridges, charitable hospitals, educational institutions, roads in and around temples. It published devotional literature during those days. It also undertook renovation of temples which did not belong to the Travancore Devaswom Board for temples which were unable to do it on their own for financial reasons. Grants were given by the Board to individuals needing financial help for medical treatment, learning music, and for higher education of the children of the employees of the Devaswom. The Travancore Devaswom Board currently runs three arts and science colleges, two schools, three hospitals and one music college (Travancore Devaswom Manuel: 147). After the formation of the State of Kerala, establishing the music college at Vaikom was the only project undertaken by the Board. The policy of the government of Kerala was not to invest temple funds in social sector projects. It is evident from the statement made by E.M.S. Namboothiripad, the first Chief Minister of Kerala in the Assembly in 1957, “The role of religion in social life of Kerala should be minimized and so religious institutions like temples must keep away from the field of education”. The Communist government did not want to invest temple funds in the social sector projects (Balakrishnan; 2004: 47).

The Cochin Devaswom Board

Like the Travancore Devaswom Board, the Cochin Devaswom Board was also formed on 1st July, 1949 (ibid : 51). The Travancore – Cochin Religious Institutions Act 1950 governs both the Travancore and the Cochin Devaswom Boards. All the temples which were owned and managed by the ruler of the princely state of Cochin until 1st July, 1949 were brought under the administration and management of the newly constituted Cochin Devaswom Board. Unlike the ruler of Travancore, the ruler of Cochin did not retain the ownership and management of his family temple, the Lord Poornathrayeshya Temple of Tripunithura (Ragendran; 2000: 92). The temples of the Cochin Devaswom Board are situated in the area which belonged to the former princely state of Cochin. The organization and management of temples both private and those owned by the ruler under the Cochin Devaswom Board are similar to those under the Travancore Devaswom Board.
The constitution and the structure of the Cochin Devaswom Board is the same as the Travancore Devaswom Board with three members. The Cochin Devaswom Board had a lady member only once in 2001. However, like the Travancore Devaswom Board, the Cochin Devaswom Board also has not had a lady chairperson so far. The number of temples under the Cochin Devaswom Board is 413.

The temple staff comprises of priests and other functionaries. The service conditions of both the establishment and temple sections of the Travancore and Cochin Devaswom Boards are similar to the state government employees. This is because both are governed by the same Travancore-Cochin Religious Institutions Act 1950.

The number of Assistant Commissioners in Cochin Devaswom Board is five. The Devaswom Officers under each Assistant Commissioner is similar to that of Travancore Devaswom Board. There are five Divisions controlled by five Assistant Commissioners, namely Trichur, Thiruvillamala, Kodungalloor, Chittoor, and Tripunithura Divisions. The Trichur Division is the biggest in Cochin Devaswom Board having 29 Devaswom Officers and Chittoor is the smallest with eleven Devaswom Officers. The Cochin Devaswom Manuel states that, the Cochin Devaswom Board also has three educational institutions - two colleges, one higher secondary school, and two hospitals. Cochin Devaswom Board manages a teak estate at Thirruvilwamala (Cochin Devaswom Manuel:342).

The Guruvayoor Devaswom Managing Committee

The famous Sree Krishna temple at Guruvayoor was administered under the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, 1951 until 1978. A separate Guruvayoor Devaswom Act 1978 was enacted to administer the temple. A statutory body which owns and manages the temple and its twelve other sub temples came into being on 29th November, 1978. The administration, control and management of the Guruvayoor Devaswom is vested in a committee known as the Guruvayoor Devaswom Managing Committee (Jaya Sankar;2000:190). The composition of the Managing Committee consists of three permanent and six government nominated members. Head of the royal family of Kozhicode, head of the Mallisseri Illom or Mallisseri Brahmin family at Guruvayoor and the Tantri Namboothiri (the controller of rituals of the temple) are the three permanent members of the committee. Of the other members, one is a representative of
the employees of the Devaswom nominated by the Hindus among the council of ministers, one shall be a member of Scheduled Caste nominated by the Hindus among the council of ministers. In all, there are nine members on the managing committee. There is no reservation for women in the managing committee.

The managing committee appoints an officer of the government not below the rank of a Deputy Collector, as the administrator of the Devaswom. The Administrator is a full time officer of the Devaswom and is the chief executive officer managing all the affairs of the temple in accordance with the provisions of the Guruvayoor Devaswom Act of 1978. There is a Commissioner under the Administrator. The Deputy Commissioner assists the Commissioner. Under the Deputy Commissioner, there are different heads controlling finance, maintenance, livestock, establishment, and routine functions of the temple. All the rituals of the temple are decided by the Tantri. (ibid: 69).

Chart 2.3
Organizational structure of the Guruvayoor Devaswom as on 31st March 2006

(Source: Field Survey)
The chairperson of the managing committee is elected by the members of the Committee. The officers and other employees of the Devaswom are appointed by the managing committee. Ten percent of the posts in each grade is reserved for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. Among the statutory bodies managing temples in the state of Kerala, the Guruvaoyoor Devaswom is the only one which follows the national reservation policy. However, reservation is not applicable in the appointment of priests and temple functionaries like musicians, decorators, etc.

**Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department**

The temples in Travancore Cochin are divided into two categories namely, the temples owned and managed by the statutory bodies and the temples owned by individuals. In the Malabar region, there are no state owned temples. All the temples are owned by private individuals but are regulated by the state. The State Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department supervises and controls the temples and its endowments in the Malabar region of Kerala.

It is the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act 1951 which governs the administration of temples in this region. The Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act was in force in the Madras province when the Malabar region was part of it. After the formation of the Kerala in 1956, the law was adapted by the newly formed state for the administration of temples in Malabar region (Remesan;2004:63). The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department was formed in 1956 to regulate and control temples in the Malabar region (ibid: 64).The Malabar Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act continues to be in force even today and has its jurisdiction in the Malabar area. The area comprises of the districts of Kasargode, Kannur, Wynad, Kozhikode, Malappuram.

Remesan (2004) commenting on the reforms of Devaswom laws states that even the name Madras was changed to Chennai, and appropriate amendments were made to all the laws in Tamil Nadu. But in Kerala, even after repeated demands for the reformation in Devaswom laws by various commissions, not even the name has been changed. In the Malabar region, despite the advice of the State’s apex court, the Madras Hindu Religious and
Charitable Endowment Act 1951 continues to govern all the temples and other Hindu Religious Endowments under the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department. Unlike the Travancore and the Cochin Devaswom Boards, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department does not own and manage temples in the Malabar region. In this region, all temples are owned by individuals, caste organizations, and charitable trusts. But all the temples in the region, irrespective of who owns them, are under the control of and are regulated by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department under the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act 1951. The Department oversees the accounts, use of funds of the temples. The organizational structure of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department is under the Minister of Devaswoms. The Commissioner, who is a Kerala State Civil Servant is the head of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department. There are six divisions under the Deputy Commissioner, and each division is headed by the Assistant Commissioner. Kasargode district has two divisions. The remaining four districts have one division each.

Chart 2.4
Organizational structure of The Hindu Religious And Charitable Endowment Department as on 31st March 2006

AC : Assistant Commissioner
(Source: Field Survey)
One area committee is constituted for each temple situated in an Assistant Commissioner’s division. The Assistant Commissioner is the chairman of the area committee. The committee consists of three to five members. The administrative orders passed by the Commissioner are statutory in character and the area committees are bound to abide by them. In the absence of the Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner will be the authority in charge. (ibid: 67)

**Governance in Temples in Kerala**

The four organizations described above have historically evolved as inter-mediaries between the state and the temple managements. The tables 2.3 and 2.4 highlight the differences between the three statutory bodies.

### Table 2.2 Governance of Temples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name of the Statutory Body</th>
<th>Act Governing State of Origin</th>
<th>Area were Operated</th>
<th>Type of Temples governed</th>
<th>Nature of Administration</th>
<th>Control Over privat temples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Travancore Devaswom Board.</td>
<td>TCHRI Act 1950. Travancore- Cochin State</td>
<td>Travancore Temples owned by the Board.</td>
<td>Own &amp; Manage Temples</td>
<td>Outside the ambit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Cochin Devaswom Board</td>
<td>TCHRI Act 1950. Travancore- Cochin State</td>
<td>Cochin Temples owned by the Board</td>
<td>Own &amp; Manage Temples</td>
<td>Outside the ambit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Hindu Religious &amp; Charitable Endowment Dept.</td>
<td>MHR 7 CE Act, 1951. Madras (Tamil Nadu)</td>
<td>Malabar All temples in In the region</td>
<td>Supervision &amp; audit of accounts</td>
<td>All temples in the region governed by the Act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Field Survey)

It is evident from table 2.2 that there is no uniform one law governing all the temples in Kerala. The Travancore and the Cochin Devaswom Boards are the only statutory bodies owning and managing temples under one common law. This is because these two were formed in the former Travancore-Cochin State, prior to the formation of Kerala. The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department to control temples and their endowments in the Malabar region came into being after the formation of the Kerala state. Instead of legislating a common law for the regulation of temples at the time of the formation of Kerala, the then Government, decided to adapt the laws and regulations which were in force at that time.

Both the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religion Institutions Act and the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Acts started governing temples from the time of the formation of Kerala state. But the Guruvayoor Devaswom Act was passed in 1978, twenty two years after the formation of Kerala. With the emergence of the Guruvayoor Devaswom, owning and managing the Sree Krishna temple and its sub temples at Guruvayoor, the number of statutory bodies controlling temples rose to four.

Both the Travancore and the Cochin Devaswom Boards are autonomous bodies. They are free from government directions for taking decisions and are constituted under the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act of 1950. The Guruvayoor Devaswom is a committee and not a Board. The difference between a committee and a board is that, in a committee there is at least one elected member; whereas in a board, all are nominated members. The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department is directly under the government, is not autonomous. It supervises and conducts audits of accounts of all the temples in the Malabar region; whereas, the other three statutory bodies own and manage temples. The Travancore and the Cochin Devaswom boards and the Guruvayoor Devaswom managing committee do not supervise, regulate or control private temples.

The Malabar Hindu Religious and charitable Endowment Act, which regulates and controls all temples irrespective of whether they are private or not, has jurisdiction only in the Malabar region of Kerala. Since there is no other law in the state to supervise and regulate private temples in the Travancore and the Cochin regions, all the private temples are outside the ambit of state control.
During the reorganization of the states in 1956, many parts of Kerala were added to the neighbouring state of Tamilnadu. Unlike the Kerala state, Tamilnadu government brought all the temples under the jurisdiction of a common law. The political and social conditions that prevailed in the state of Kerala were different from those of Tamilnadu. In Kerala, there was no demand from the people for regulating private temples. Fuller opines that, the absence of a movement similar to the Rationalist, Dravidian, anti-Brahmin movements in Tamil Nadu is the reason for the absence of public demand for regulation of temples. So the private temples in Travancore and Cochin area after the reorganization of the states continue to remain outside the ambit of state control.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Name of The Body</th>
<th>Government Nominated Members (General)</th>
<th>Government Nominated Members</th>
<th>Permanent members</th>
<th>Nominated By Employees</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Travancore Devaswom Board</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cochin Devaswom Board</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Guruvayoor Devaswom Committee</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hindu Religious &amp; Endowment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: - Field Survey)

TDB-Tavancore Devaswom Board, CDB-Cochin Devaswom Board, GDMC-Guruvayoor Devaswom Managing Committee, HR&CE- Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department.

In the case of the Travancore and the Cochin Devaswom Boards, government nominates the members. The laws governing both the Boards were legislated prior to the formation of the Kerala state. There was no reservation for the backward castes at the time of formation of the Devaswom Boards in 1949. It continues to be the same even today. In the Guruvayoor Devaswom Managing Committee, reservation is applicable only to the managing committee and the establishment section; reservation does not apply to the temple section which comprises the priests and temple functionaries.
The difference between the Guruvayoor Devaswom Managing Committee, the Travancore Cochin Devaswom Boards and the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department is evidently seen in the composition of the members. The political and social scenario that prevailed at the time of the constitution of these bodies have reflected in its constitution. In 1978, at the time of the constitution of the Guruvayoor Devaswom managing committee, Kerala witnessed many social changes. Among the most important was the growth of caste organizations like Nair Service Society (NSS), Sree Narayana Dharma Palana yogam (SNDP), Yogakshema Sabha, Kshatriya Sabha and Pulayamaha Sabha. Karunakaran, the then Chief Minister of Kerala and also a prominent leader of the Indian National Congress was the main architect of the Guruvayoor Devaswom managing committee. He was very careful in safeguarding the interests of all the castes in the state, and it is reflected in the constitution of the committee. Karunakaran stated that, his Government had taken care of the national policy of protecting the rights of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes while framing the new constitution of the Guruvayoor Devaswom Committee.

The Malabar region where the regulation of temples is under the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment department, has the Commissioner as its head appointed by the Government. Like those of the Travancore and Cochin Devaswom Boards the constitution of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment department has never been subjected to any change since its adoption in 1956. It was adopted in 1956 at the time of reorganization of the state-Malabar was a part of the Madras state and the act was enforced at the time of reorganization for the region. The state of Kerala has not introduced any change in the laws governing the administration of temples in the region till date.

Devaswom laws continue in the same form as was prevalent at the time of the reorganization of the states. The state has had elected governments with the Marxist Communist Party and the Indian National Congress leading it alternatively. Both have desisted from introducing changes in Devaswom laws. Balakrishnan commenting on the communist rule in the state says that, the compulsion of the coalition in the state forced political parties to keep away from reforms in Devaswom laws. This is because, in both the Indian National Congress led coalition and the Marxist Communist Party led coalition, there were and are caste dominated political
groups. Understandably, the issue was not tampered with, lest caste hostility is stirred.

**Temple Administration in Kerala Politics**

The first elected government in the state of Kerala in 1957 was led by the communist party under the Chief Ministership of E.M.S. Namboothiripad. (Menon.S:1967:452) It had the distinction of being the first democratically elected Communist government in the whole world. The declared policy of the Communist party was to keep religion and temples out of the public domain. The government under Namboothiripad did not introduce any change in the laws governing the administration of temples. One of the election promises of the Communist party in 1957 was that, the report of the fire that destroyed the Ayyappa Temple at Sabarimala would be published soon after the formation of the government (Balakrishna;:2004:47). But the report was not published as promised. The reason for not publishing the report can be inferred from the statement made by Namboothiripad in the assembly that year – “placing such a report would hurt the feelings of different sections of the society”. It is evident that even the communist Government did not want to enter into controversies which would have political and communal backlashes (Shrikanth:2005:72).

The first Communist ministry, however, had a short life. It was dismissed by the President on the ground that the law and order situation had deteriorated following a movement jointly organized by the Nair Service Society (NSS), an upper caste Nair community and Christian organizations against the Communist Government on the ground that individual freedoms were restricted by the government (Fuller;1984:204). The Nair-Christian combination in the state posed a formidable challenge to the growth of Communism. The temples are places of worship of Hindus and any change in the laws would generate resentment towards the government from different castes. Though the Communist party was again voted to power in 1957, 1987, 1997 and 2006, they had learnt a bitter lesson from the experience of 1957 (Sreekanth:2005:231). Realizing the strength of the caste groups in the state, the Communist Party decided to keep aloof from taking any action that would hurt the feelings of different communities. The Communist governments opted to maintain the statues-quo in the area of temple administration.
After the fall of the Communist government in 1959, the state witnessed a period of political instability till 1967. Though four elections were held and governments were formed, they fell in quick succession and the state was placed under the President’s rule on two occasions. This instability was another reason why the status-quo continued in the area of temple administration (Radhakrishnan:2005:121).

The Congress led coalition ministries were formed in 1961, 1964, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1991, and 2001 in the state (Gopi Krishnan:2004:129). The Congress ministries enjoyed the support of two caste parties namely the National Democratic Party (NDP) and Socialist Republican Party (SRP). The NDP is the political outfit of the Nair Service Society and SRP that of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP). Both these caste organizations were opposed to the regulation of private temples by the government in the Travancore and the Cochin areas. This was because many of the private temples in this area are owned by the members of these two prominent caste groups (Parameswaran; 2006:160). According to the 2001 Census, the Nairs constituted 21% of the Hindu population, whereas the Ezhava constitute 27% (Sreekanth; 2004:91). No political party can afford to antagonize such big vote banks. The only move for reforming the laws of temple administration in the state was made in 1991 during the period of the Congress ministry, when it was proposed to set up a Malabar Devaswom Board similar to those of the Travancore and Cochin Devaswom Boards (Ramakrishnan;2006:301). The private temples which are outside the ambit of the state control in the Travancore and the Cochin areas remained untouched in the new proposal. However, even that move was dropped because of the opposition from the leaders of the Nair Service Society (The Hindu;10th August 2006).

The growth of the BJP, Viswa Hindu Parishad and the Hindu Munnany in the eighties and the nineties had its impact in the state politics of Kerala. In 1987 and 1991 general elections to the state Legislative Assembly, the BJP secured 8% and 12.5% of the total votes respectively (Jaya Prasad; 2005:44). It was in 1987 that the Viswa Hindu Parishad and the Hindu Munnany joined the agitation against the construction of a Christian church at Nilakkal, near the Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala. The issue was finally settled in the same year at an all party meeting called by Karunakaran, the then Chief Minister of Kerala. The issue gave sufficient opportunity for the growth of the Viswa Hindu Parishad and the Hindu Munnany resulting in religious polarization which helped the BJP gain an
electoral presence of 12.5% vote share for the first time in the 1991 elections (Sreekanth;2004:98). Thereafter, the state under the political combinations of both Congress and Communist parties took special care in supporting temple activities to avoid giving opportunities for the growth of politics of religion. This is an important aspect of the relationship between the state and the temple managements (ibid:109).

Both the Marxist Communist (CPI-M) and Congress parties took serious note of the growth of politics of religion and it was evident in the statements made by its leaders after the general elections. E.M.S.Namboothiripad of the Marxist Communist party cautioned the public and political parties about the danger of using religion for political gains. Karunakaran of the Congress stated after the 1991 elections that political parties and religious organizations should not be allowed to take advantage of religious sentiments (Balakrishnan;2004:102). The Communist and the Congress governments after the 1991 elections did not initiate any move to alter the existing rules and regulations regarding private temples in the Travancore and Cochin area in order to avoid being accused of having used religious sentiments for political gains.

Temple administration passed through different stages of development; and today it has two important systems, namely temples owned and managed by the state through statutory bodies, and the system of temples directly regulated by the state in the Malabar region. In the former, private temples are outside the ambit of state regulation in those areas which were formerly under the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. The rise of Oraalaars in power and status, and their subsequent conflicts with the rulers were important factors that shaped the relationship between the temples and the state. The reign of the British and the invasion from Mysore also had an impact. The laws introduced by the Madras state, the administrative reforms of Colonel Munroe, the formation of the Travancore-Cochin state in 1949, the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956 and the political situation thereafter have contributed in shaping the relationship between the state and temple managements.

**Role of Brahmins in Temple Administration**

Brahmins continue to control the sacred area of temples even after independence. All the temples under the Travancore Cochin Devaswom Boards, the Guruvayoor Devaswom Managing Committee and the Hindu
Religious and Charitable Endowment Department have Brahmin priests and Tantri Namboothiris. Brahmins gained hereditary monopoly for performing poojas (worship) in those temples during the period of the monarchs who ruled Kerala. The monarchs of the princely states accepted ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ as a classic text guiding rituals in temples. According to the book, the sacred area comprising rituals is the monopoly of the Brahmins. Installation of idols, consecration of idols, dates and times of poojas, steps to be followed during poojas, seasonal utsavams (special rituals), rituals connected with special offerings, mantras to be recited, musical instruments to be played at specific times, almost all the aspects of worship are decided by Brahmins. The public and the administration of the temples in the pre-independence period also accepted their dictat. After independence, all the three wings of government - the executive, the judiciary and the legislative wings continued to accept ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ as the authoritative book based on which decisions were taken. As a result, even today the Brahmins continue to enjoy the monopoly hereditary right to perform rituals in temples.

The non-Brahmins, in spite of having knowledge and skills are not given the opportunity to perform rituals as priests in the temples owned and controlled by the statutory bodies of the state. And, the ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ has not provided any provision for it. Consequently, in the relationship between the state and the management of temples in Kerala, the Brahmins have an important role. The sacred areas of many temples are under their control. There are many private temples in Travancore and Cochin areas where the priests are non-Brahmins. Many such temples belong to the backward castes such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They do not follow ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’, but follow the rituals and practices laid down by those who consecrated the temples. The state does not interfere in the sacred or non-sacred areas of administration of private temples. This is one of the important factors that influence the relationship between the state and the temple managements.

Secondly, at the time of the formation of Kerala state in 1956, although all the laws which were in force were changed by the democratically elected government, the laws and regulations regarding temples that were in force in the Travancore Cochin states and the Malabar region were adopted without much alteration. The laws governing temples were allowed to continue and operate as they where prior to the formation of the state. Because of that, the state has two different types of regulations. In
the Malabar region the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act continues to operate where as in Travancore Cochin area, the Travancore Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act governing only temples under the statutory bodies operates. As a result, in the Travancore Cochin area, there are temples owned by the statutory bodies and individuals. The private temples in the Travancore Cochin area are not governed by either central or state laws. They are outside the ambit of state regulation. In the Malabar region, though there is no statutory body owning temples, all the private temples are under the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act. Their activities are supervised by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department. Consequently, there is no restriction in building and establishing temples in the Travancore and Cochin areas; in Malabar region, however, private temples can be built only with the permission of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department.

Thirdly, the government after the formation of the Kerala state in 1956 did not introduce any reform in the sacred area of temples. The customs and traditions followed during the period of monarchs are continued till today. The ruling political parties desisted from tampering with religious sentiments because it may result in communal clashes destroying existing religious harmony. However, many non-Hindu devotees cannot enter temples like Guruvayoor and ladies between the age of ten and fifty are not permitted in the Sabarimala Temple even today.

Foot Notes

1 Thanthra Samuchaya written by Narayanam Contains 12 Chapters. The first three chapters deal with the temple architecture. The next four chapters deal with the rituals to be performed in the temples. The three chapters which follow define the procedure of the installation of idols (images) and reinstallation. The last two chapters describe the relationship between the Tantri Namboothiri, priest and the rituals. It also lays down the procedure for the appointment of priests, eligibly criterion and functions to be followed in temples. This book is accepted as the constitution of the rituals and practices in temples by the honourable High Court of Kerala.

The text, ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ which, in 1427 was not so much written as collated. The history behind the origin of this book was that the Zamorin of Calicut having an altercation with Chennos Narayanan Namboothiripad, a famous scholar and poet whose family served as Tantri Namboothiri’s in many of the ruler’s temple, the quarrel culminated in an angry Zamorin wanted punish Chennos Narayanan Namboothiripad and having to seek indirect way of doing so, since punishing Namboothiri’s was forbidden in those days. Since Chennos Narayanan Namboothiripad was a great scholar, he ordered him to write a book on the prevailing system of Poojas, well aware of the belief that even the slightest mistake was made, the writer would be cursed.

Chennos Narayanan Namboothiripad, called all the important Tantri Namboothiris known to him and clarified the points he wanted to write. He wrote the ‘Thantra Samuchiya’ and contrary to the expectation of Zamorin it was accepted by all the Brahmins. As far as Guruvayoor is concerned the ‘Thantra Samuchiyam’ is followed like in most of their temples of Kerala. Considering that the present Tantri
Namboothiri’s of Guruvayoor temple descend from its author, it could hardly be otherwise

With a view to introducing reforms in the administration of temples, many eminent legislators like C.P. Ramaswami Iyer and S. Krishnamoorthy were behind the reform movements of the early 1920. Other leaders followed the initiative taken by them and introduced several reforms in temple administrations prior to independence. This is evident from the number of bills introduced during those days in the Madras legislative assembly.

The covenant is the agreement entered into by the rulers of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin for the formation of the united state of Travancore and Cochin on 1st July, 1949. The agreement is with the concurrence and guarantee of the Government of India. It was signed by Rama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore, and Rama Varma, Maharaja of Cochin. The Article VIII of the covenant specifies the agreement on the transfer of the temples under the rulers of Travancore and Cochin.

Endowment – Refers to religious endowment which means, all property belonging to or given or endowed for the support of temples or given or endowed for the purpose of any service or charity of a public nature connected therewith or any other religious charity; and includes the institution concerned and also the premises thereof, but does not include gifts of property made as personal gifts to the archaka, service holder or other employee of religious institution.

The Government of Mr.E.M.S.Namboothiripad was dismissed in 1959 by the President on the advice of the Union cabinet of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru the then Prime Minister of India. One of the serious allegations made by Mrs.Indira Gandhi, who was the president of the Congress party during those days, was that the Communist government neglected the religious interest of the Christian community and the upper caste Nairs. Both Christians and Nairs were socially and politically strong enough to control the political arena in the state. That was the reason why Communist party in the latter years never took a stand against the interest of these two groups.