CHAPTER - I

ORIGIN OF TEMPLE ADMINISTRATION

In Travancore, the temples were usually called as Devaswoms. The term devaswom is literally attributed to deva or deity and is commonly used to denote temples¹. In Tamil devaswom called it as devasthanam (devar + thanam), devar means heavenly immortal and thanam means charity or donation. In Malayalam the word devan denotes divine power and sworn which has been derived from Sanskrit means property². In Travancore, Hinduism was the established religion³ of the state and the temples made their appearance only from the first century of the Christian era. These temples were noted for their immense resources in the form of movable and immovable properties. These temples had come into existence in three different ways. The first category of temples were

² Sreekanteswaram Padmanabha Pillai, Sabdatharavali (Malayalm Lexicon), 1989, p.1749.
founded by the Travancore sovereigns themselves. The second category of temples consisted of those that came under the possession of sircar through conquests and annexations. The people especially, the local chieftains and uralars who were mostly namboodiri brahmins established the third category temples.

In A.D 864 Karunantatakkan, a king of Travancore, built the Parthivasekhharapuram temple and endowed it with massive lands as gift. The Krishnaswamy temple at Neyyattinkara was built by the sovereign in A.D.1757. The Anandavlliswaram temple at Kollam was founded by the sovereign in A.D.1757. Similarly the temples at Thiruvanathapuram, Padmanabhapuram, Tripparappu and Vadasseri were founded by the sovereigns themselves.

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5 M.R.Granthavari, No.72 of 972 M.E.(A.D. 1757)
6 M.R.No.6, Nitt, dated 1 Chittirai, 981 M.E.(A.D. 1806)
The Karikot temple in Totupuzha came under the Government control in A.D. 1777\textsuperscript{8}. Tiruvalla temple was brought under \textit{sircar} management by the Saktemukham agreement executed in A.D. 1752\textsuperscript{9}. The Nellayakat Bhagavathy temple at Kuttattukulam was surrendered to \textit{sircar} by its owner, a nambutiri brahmin\textsuperscript{10}. In the same way the \textit{melkoyma} of temples in the conquered territories automatically passed into the hands of Travancore sovereign. The Travancore rulers never destroyed the temples of the conquered territories, yet protected them and worshipped them. The sovereigns also had enriched the temples in the conquered territories with public money and about thirty-eight such temples were maintained by Travancore \textit{sircar} in this way. In due course all the temples of Travancore set in the tradition of being administered by the \textit{urlars} or \textit{karakkars}. They become the hereditary trustees of the temples who managed the affairs of the temples and conducted \textit{pujas} and festivals. The king or the ruler generally contributed wealth to the temples in the form of land and

\textsuperscript{8} H.C.V.R. Tiratt No. 3 of 952 M.E. (A.D. 1777)

\textsuperscript{9} Devaswom Separation Committee Minority Report, 1921, p.14.

\textsuperscript{10} H.C.V.R. Tiratt No. 25 of 973 M.E. (A.D. 1798)
other things. The people also denoted freely to the temples. In the long run the uralars not only administered the temples but also exercised judicial and executive powers. Sometimes the temple trustees were chosen through election. Nomination of the uralar by the kings who built and endowed the temples were not rare. Whether elected or nominated, they were mostly nambutiri brahmīns. In the medieval period they were called as sabhaiperumal, sabhayrayar, parutaiyar\textsuperscript{11} etc. In those days, in many temples uralar sabhas were in existence. In some temples there were other councils like tavapotuval and tavamanitan. In certain other temples the administration was in the hands of sabhapotuval and samanjitan. The sabhapotuval was in charge of the movable and immovable properties of the temples and the samanjitan was in charge of the temple accounts\textsuperscript{12}. The uralars or uranmakkar were also identified as taravatis who were members of the tharakuttams or village assemblies\textsuperscript{13}. In some other cases the temples were administered by a synod of priests\textsuperscript{14}. They

\textsuperscript{11} Kerala History Association,  \textit{Kerala Charitram (Mal)}, Vol.II, p.93.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{T.A.S.}, Vol.IV, p.10.

\textsuperscript{13} Chelanat Achutha Menon,  \textit{Kali Worship in Kerala}, p.24.

\textsuperscript{14} T.K.Velu Pillai, Travancore State Manual, Vol.IV, p.245.
managed the temples either directly or through their delegates called **samudayams** or **manushyams**. Each devaswom had a territorial jurisdiction called **sankethan**. All matters civil or criminal, social or religious were adjudicated and executed by the yoga consisting of **uralars** or **karakkars** or **yogakkars**\(^1^5\). They enacted rules and laws for their administration often independent of the king\(^1^6\). The king or the ruler seldom interfered in the affairs of the temples. The number of **uralars** varied from temple to temple. It ranged from one to twenty. They managed the affairs of the temple with great powers. In some temples there were councils known as **sabha** and the manager was called **potuval** or **sabhapotuval** who was appointed by the sabha to look after the administration of the temples. But the rulers had the overall power in the administration of the temples through an officer called **koyma** or **melkoyma**. The land was left under the protection and control of the **uralar**\(^1^7\). Since the **uralars** being mostly high caste brahmins, they did not care to maintain and cultivate the lands for

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\(^{15}\) Kerala Society Papers, Vol.II, Series.8, p.97.


themselves. Hence they leased lands to tenants for cultivation\textsuperscript{18}. The rents collected periodically from the tenants became the revenue of the devaswoms.

The earliest known record relating to the revenue from devaswom land was an inscription of the 11th century A.D. found in the Kanyakumari temple. If shows that in the \textit{devadanam} village of Kanyakumari there existed several taxes like \textit{kumara}, \textit{kachanam}, \textit{minpattam}, \textit{elavanipattam}, \textit{attupattam}, \textit{tarakuli}\textsuperscript{19} etc. The tenants who committed offence of non-payment of taxes or other fraudulent activities were punished. In 1561 A.D, a tenant called Kannan Anandan was dismissed from service for mixing chaff with the paddy supplied to the Suchindrum temple\textsuperscript{20}. In the same year, another tenant, a cowherd was fined for mixing water with the milk that he supplied to the temple\textsuperscript{21}. Similarly penalties were imposed on the tenants who defaulted payment of temple dues. The lands given as gift to temples were exempted from the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{T.A.S.}, Vol.III, pp. 164-165.

\textsuperscript{20} K.K.Pillai, \textit{The Suchindrum Temple}, p.154.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
tax\textsuperscript{22}. Remission of taxes was also granted for poor yield and crop failure of wet lands\textsuperscript{23}. In 1721, the Maharaja himself insisted on the payment of thirty \textit{panams} on \textit{devadayam} lands\textsuperscript{24}. As per the land revenue settlement of A.D. 1738, King Martanda Varma (1728-1758) ordered for survey and accounting of revenue and cesses falling under \textit{devadayam} lands and service \textit{inam} lands and an \textit{olugu} (list of holders) was prepared\textsuperscript{25}. Martanda Varma carried out an important reform in respect of revenue administration. It was the framing up of \textit{pathivu kanakku} (fixed items of expenditure) for devaswoms, \textit{uttupras} (feeding houses for brahmins). A \textit{sircar} tax called \textit{melvaram} was levied on devaswom lands\textsuperscript{26}. The lands donated by \textit{madampimars} to religious and charitable institutions were recognised as inalienable \textit{inams}\textsuperscript{27}. The lands given as endowment to temples were registered in the name of respective temples. If a land held on \textit{otti} (mortgage), then the \textit{sicar} imposed a

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{T.L.R.M.}, Vol.I, p.300.

\textsuperscript{23} M.R. Account No. 6 of 914 M.E(A.D. 1739)

\textsuperscript{24} T.L.R.M., Vol.IV, p.82.

\textsuperscript{25} M.R.No.41, Settlement of 914 M.E(A.D.1739)

\textsuperscript{26} A.T.R., No.25, Ayakkett of 926 M.E(A.D.1751)

\textsuperscript{27} H.C.V.R., Variyola No.33, dated 30 Aadi 926 M.E.(A.D.1751)
light tax on it\textsuperscript{28}. The \textbf{matilakam} record of A.D. 1765 shows that on the lands granted as gift to brahmins within the Suchindrum temple \textit{sanketum}, two taxes called \textit{melvaram} and \textit{ancali} were charged and the same was sent to the temple and \textit{sircar} accounts respectively\textsuperscript{29}. Remission of taxes on devaswom lands was granted on the same principles applicable to \textbf{pantaravaka} lands\textsuperscript{30}. Later a separate account was introduced for devaswom lands and revenue from them was entered separately\textsuperscript{31}. Subsequently the \textit{pattam} lands of tenants died without heirs were restored to the head of the devaswoms and kept for devaswom use\textsuperscript{32}. Thus the temples were made prosperous through various kinds of gifts and donations received both from the ruler and people for their proper maintenance and effective functioning. The Kantiyur temple inscription of A.D. 946 indicates that the sovereign allotted the

\textsuperscript{28} A.T.R., Vilaniper No.40 of 926 M.E(A.D.1753)  
\textsuperscript{29} M.R.Tiratt No.7, dated 26 Avani 940 M.E(A.D. 1765)  
\textsuperscript{30} S.T.R. Sadhanam No.18, dated 18 Masi 945 M.E(A.D. 1770)  
\textsuperscript{31} A.T.R. Sattavaryola No.1, dated 11 Aani 948 M.E(A.D. 1773)  
\textsuperscript{32} H.C.V.R. Tiratt No.24 of Ettumanur Mukham dated, 971 M.E(A.D. 1796)
revenue income of that area for the expenses of Kantiyur temple. The King Baskara Ravi Varman donated the land around the Trikkotithanam temple for its use. The people's contribution to temples was also not rare. In A.D. 1802, one Suppan Pattar purchased 700 para of wet land and gave it to Aranmula temple as gift. The sircar also exempted it from taxation. Thus, through so many means enormous wealth accumulated to the temples of Travancore. The hereditary trustees of the respective temples got a free hand in handling this wealth. This paved the way for misappropriation and mismanagement of funds by the trustees and it became the rule of the day. It is indicated that the autonomy in temple administration enjoyed by the temple trustees induced them to indulge into corruption and anti-temple activities. In the absence of absolute royal control, the various temple administrators not only misused their powers but also used the resources of the temple for meeting their selfish ends. They not only abused the temple funds but also maltreated the movable and immovable properties of the temples. In course of time much of the temple


funds went into their pockets. As a result, they virtually became the owners of the temple lands and other properties. Not only that indifferent and negligent attitude of the temple trustees affected the temple administration to a large extent especially in the conduct of pujas and other ceremonies of the temple. Since the income of the temples decreased considerably, the daily pujas and nithyanidanam of some temples were not totally held. The people viewed it as a great sin and feared that they would be subjected to the anger of the deity. As the temples failed to maintain divinity and sanctity in their functioning, the people sought for the immediate intervention of the ruler in this matter. They urged the Maharaja to take appropriate steps to make sure that temple rituals were conducted promptly without any interruption. During the accession of the Martanda Varma to the throne of the Travancore in A.D.1729, he checked the influence of the priestly class. Till the end of the 18th century, the temple administrators including the priestly class continued their mismanagement. The people’s demand to remove the ugly state of temple affairs sounded so loudly that the sovereign could not keep silence any further. So in 1811, Col.Munro, the resident dewan of Travancore, took a
drastic step of taking over the management of 348 major and 1123 minor temples through an executive order. The assumption of management of the temples by the Government was with a view to better management and maintenance of such temples and their appurtenances in good condition. So in the beginning Munro kept separate the state ayakkett accounts from devaswom properties and revenue income from them. The abstract accounts of 996 M.E.(A.D.1821) showed that lands were newly purchased for the assumed devaswom with devaswom funds. The collection of dues of the devaswoms from the tenants were also properly done. The government acted more or less in the manner of a trustee. It was also justified that the Hinduism being the established religion of the state, the state was bound to maintain devaswoms even if they were not taken over by the government. The government also realised the obligation for maintaining the temples assumed from

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36 Col.Monro, Anu of Sannad, 987 M.E(A.D.1811)

37 M.T.R., Tiratt No.29 of the 996 M.E(A.D.1821)

38 M.T.R., Tiratt No.6,dated 14 Makaram 987,(A.D.1812)

39 T.A.R., 1873-1874, p.46.

40 Devaswom Separation Committee Minority report, 1921, p.31.
the trustees\textsuperscript{41}. Hence the devaswom lands assumed by the sircar
were held on trust\textsuperscript{42}. A Tiratt of 984 M.E (A.D. 1809) shows that
government had 1569 devaswoms under their direct management. Another Tiratt of the same year showed the detailed account of
paddy and money expended upon the 1569 temples for the conduct
of pujas and festivals. The total amount expended for the
devaswoms annually from the exchequer in 1812 was Rs. 28,2060.
Moreover the government contributed annually a sum of Rs.193914
for the expenses of 1569 temples\textsuperscript{43}. Subsequently a committee of
officials and non-officials was appointed by Col. Munro to review
and revise the scale of expenditure in all the devaswoms. They
assessed the income and expenditure of all devaswoms and decided
to revise the pathivus based on it. In 1820, the revision of pathivus
for temples and uttupuras was revised by a government order.
Apart from the income from landed properties, the temples received
contribution from the government and the public by way of
kanikka, nadavaravu and vazhivadu. The records from 987 M.E to
993 M.E (A.D. 1812-1818) showed that the income from devaswom


\textsuperscript{42} T.L.R., Vol.XVII, p.184.

\textsuperscript{43} Devaswom Separation Committee Report, 1921, p.25.
properties was steadily increasing\textsuperscript{44}. This brought the temples with a surplus fund. The government statement of A.D. 1904 indicated that the surplus amount could be utilised for other purpose other than daily \textit{puja} and ceremonies in the temples\textsuperscript{45}. However there was a mixed effect after the assumption of the temples by the government, in relation to the income and expenditure of each temple. The income of the Valiasalai temple at Thiruvananthapuram was very considerable before it was assumed by the \textit{sircar}\textsuperscript{46}. The cash income from the famous Aranmula temple had declined to nearly half during the period from A.D.1902 to 1906\textsuperscript{47}. The reason attributed to this phenomenon was that the government started to treat devaswom lands like \textit{sircar} lands and devaswom fund as \textit{sircar} fund. In course of time most of the devaswom lands came to be recorded in the \textit{sircar} accounts as

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
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Year & Rupees \\
\hline
1902 & 911 \\
1903 & 940 \\
1904 & 921 \\
1905 & 843 \\
1906 & 493 \\
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\textsuperscript{44} E.R. Devaswom File, ROC. No. 206 of 21/GB.


\textsuperscript{46} Krishna Rao, \textit{Selections from the records of Travancore}, p.73.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}
government lands. Consequently, revenue from devaswom lands collected and credited to the public exchequer started mixing with state fund. Since the revenue from the temple lands got mixed up with state revenue, there prevailed a lot of confusion in proper accounting and auditing. As days went on, the devaswom revenue became indistinguishable from general revenues. This again made the sovereign to think about further experiments in the temple administration of the state which paved the way for the formation of devaswom department.