

CHAPTER-II

FORMATION OF DEVASWOM DEPARTMENT

The year 1811 is important in the history of temple administration in Travancore as it was the year in which the state government assumed direct management of 348 major and 1123 minor devaswoms on the initiative of resident **dewan**, Col. Munro, with the approval of the sovereign, Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai (1810-1815). The reasons stated by Col. Munro for assumption of such temples were many and manifold. The **sannad** written by him on 3rd **Kanni** 987 M.E (September 1811) was a clear evidence to substantiate the reasons attributed to his act of assumption of temples¹.

The Circumstances which lead to the formation of the devaswom department originated from the ugly state of administration of temples by the **uralars**, the temple trustees, that culminated into the take over of such temples by Col. Munro. He said, "The devaswom affairs in this country have long been the

¹ Col. Munro, Anu of Sannad addressed to the Nine Mukathu Sarvathikariakars, 987 M.E (A.D. 1811)

subject of my anxiety, because the landed properties of devaswoms are uncultivated and yield no revenue and on account of frauds, there are heavy arrears and defaults in ceremonies in the devaswoms. Frauds and discrepancies are taking place in the expenditure laid down for the devaswoms and in connection with **pattuparivattam** (cloth for the idol), **thiruvabharanam** (ornaments for the idol) and temple vessels²". He also pointed out that the temples were not being thatched or repaired from time to time and they were in a dilapidated condition. At this juncture, the rulers of the state had rigorously enforced the rights of **melkoyma** over the **uralars** (trustees) of the temples who were found guilty of misappropriation of temple properties and mismanagement of temple affairs. Whenever it was found inevitable the government did not hesitate to assume of the **melkoyma** right and interfere in the affairs of the temple in the event of disputes or fraudulent practices among the trustees. In A.D. 1898, the sovereign of the state replaced old trustees with new ones for the better management of the Arupukkara and Vennimala devaswoms³.

² Ibid., pp.1-2.

³ E.R. Travancore Appeal Suit No.136 of 1898 A.D, Fullbench of High Court (unreported).

The Hindu Religious Endowment Act III passed by Maharaja of Travancore empowered the **dewan** to collect the rents and other dues from devaswom properties⁴. The managers and **provartikars** who exercised vast powers during pre-Munro period were brought under the control of the **tahsildar**, who were again subordinated to the division **peishkar**. Each of the major devaswoms was looked after by a manager who was variously called **srikariakkaran**, **samudayams**, **melsamudayam**, **koyma** etc. in accordance with the local usage of each place. He was assisted by accountants and other subordinates. The minor devaswoms were managed by **provartikars** of the respective villages. The manager and **provartikar** were subordinate to the tahsildars who were in turn subordinate to the division **peishkar**. The overall control and supervision of the devaswoms were vested in the division **peishkar**.

In the long run, departmental system of devaswom management through government servants who were already overburdened with other official duties proved to be ineffective, unworkable and became a thorough failure. The tahsildar's visit to temples expected to take place once in a month was often confined

⁴ *The Travancore Devaswom Manual*, Vol II, pp. 581-586.

to **ulsavams** or annual festivals⁵. Likewise the supervision by the division **peishkars** was also more or less inadequate. M.K. Ramachandra Rao, who was appointed by the government to prepare and submit a report for the effective control of devaswoms, indicted the tahsildar with following remark in his report⁶. "The tahsildars have possibly enough to do with the revenue collection, revenue cases, **pokkuvaravu** cases, treasury and stamp work, encroachment cases, tour and judicial work. The administration of charities on the other hand is a branch of work, which is generally not noticed by the authorities. The tahsildar is bound by a circular to visit all temples and other such institutions in his jurisdiction at least once in a month . This is a duty more conspicuous in the breach than in the observance". This scathing remark shows how far ineffective and inefficient the devaswom administration was on the eve of A.D. 1900. In 1844, nine deputy tahsildars were appointed to assist the tahsildars in nine taluks in devaswom matters⁷. The nine taluks where the deputy tahsildars appointed

⁵ ***The Travancore Devaswom Manual***, Vol.II, Trivandrum, 1923, p.10.

⁶ E.R. Proceedings D.4905, dated 25 October 1912.

⁷ H.C.V.R., Order No.363, dated 3 Avani 1019 M..E(A.D.1844)

were Tovala, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, Iranial, Vilavancode, Chirayinkil, Kollam, Ampalapuzha and Vaikam. In 1848, the tahsildars were directed to inspect the serval **muris** (sub-division of a village) twice a year and to devote special attention and care to the maintenance and repair of temples ⁸. However the deputy tahsildar posts were abolished in 1849 A.D ⁹. The year 1856 witnessed two general administrative changes that had a bearing on devaswom administration. The state was divided into two divisions namely northern and southern divisions. The northern division was called Cherttala division which included Cherttala, Vaikam, Erttumanur, Piravam, Kottayam, Chenganasseri, Totupuzha, Minachel, Muvarrupuzha, Kunnathunad, Alannad and Paravur. The southern division was called Padmanabhapuram

division, which included Tovala, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, Iranial and Vilavancode. Each division was under the administrative control of **dewan** peishkar assisted by **peishkar**. The management of devaswoms and **uttupuras** and their maintenance and repair were brought within in the purview of **dewan**

⁸ H.C.V.R., Circular order No.5554, dated 17 Itavam 1023 M.E(A.D.1848)

⁹ H.C.V.R., Nitt. No.35, dated 22 Itavam 1024 M.E(A.D.1849)

peishkars¹⁰. Each district was under the administrative control of a **peishkar** who was responsible to the **dewan peishkar**. The tahsildars were empowered to evict those who encroached on pathways leading to temples and if they could not attend to the work, they could entrust the duty to the **provartikars**¹¹. In case of **virutti** lands (tax-free lands granted for service of the state), **pattom** on the respective lands should be levied and fact should be reported to the huzur office¹². The **provartikars** were to prepare and submit regular accounts relating to receipts and expenditure of the devaswoms¹³. In the A.D 1860 the two revenue divisions viz. Chertala and Padmanabhapuram were bifurcated to form the kollam and Trivandrum divisions respectively. Thus four revenue divisions came into existence namely Chertala, Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Padmanabhapuram¹⁴. This gave more convenience in the administration of temples of Travancore. Subsequently the tahsildars were given the power to receive

¹⁰ H.C.V.R. , Nitt No.87, dated 9 Dhanu 1031 M.E (A.D.1856)

¹¹ H.C.V.R. Circular order No.5745, dated 31 Karkatakam 1031 M.E (A.D. 1856)

¹² H.C.V.R. Circular No.9552, dated 25 Karkatakam 1034 M.E (A.D. 1859)

¹³ T.L.R.M. Vol.V. pp.550-552.

¹⁴ H.C.V.R., Nitt No.18, dated 1 Thulam 1035 M.E.(A.D.1860)

applications and give sanctions for the construction of the new temples or **pagodas** for public worship¹⁵. The **provarthi** officials supplied only paddy to the temples till the year 1874. But from 1874, they were put in-charge of supplying all provisions such as oil, fire wood, sandals, flowers etc for the daily use in temples and **uttupuras** and also undertaking maintenance work in both the institutions¹⁶. In 1861 A.D more powers were delegated to the division **peishkars** by the **dewan**. Such powers included the appointment of the **santikkar** and **kalakakkar** in temples¹⁷. They were provided with a remuneration not exceeding Rs.100/-. The person who attained superannuation were replaced consequently¹⁸. The **tahsildars** were empowered to pay advance money for the supply of provisions to the temples for **nityapuja**, during **ulsavams**, **bhadradeepam**, **murajapam** and other religious

¹⁵ H.C.V.R., Circular Order, No.5223, dated 1 itavam 1035 M.E.(A.D.1860)

¹⁶ **T.A.R.**, 1048-49 M.E,(A.D. 1873-74), pp.51-54.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ H.C.V.R., Huzur Sadhanam No. 525, dated 8 Vrichikam 1056 M.E (A.D. 1881)

ceremonies. In order to avoid chances of misappropriation of the funds, the tahsildars were directed to pay more attention to the preparation of accounts relating to advances and the recoveries made for such purposes¹⁹. In order to make the management of temple lands more effective, certain new rules were framed in 1887. According to these rules the tahsildars were relieved of the duty of supervision of temples from 1 **Chingam** 1063 M.E. (August 1888). But they continued to supply provision to the temples as per the existing usage²⁰. They should also supervise the **ulsavams** and other festivals in important temples under the direct orders of the division **peishkars** to manage the temple affairs²¹. Followed by this, the administration of devaswom lands was put exclusively in the hands of devaswom **kariakkar** and the administration of **sircar** lands alone was to be looked after by the tahsildars²². This paved the way for separating devaswom works from **sircar** works and this clearly indicated the initial phenomenon towards separating temple

¹⁹ Huzur sadhanam, No.7441, dated 3 Karkatakam 1056 M.E.(A.D. 1881)

²⁰ T.G.G., dated 1 Chingam 1063 M.E (A.D. 1888), p.881.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

administration from revenue administration of the state. On 29 **Medam** 1083 M.E (A.D. 1908) M.K. Ramachandra Rao submitted his report to the Government²³. The objectives of the report were to suggest improvements on the administration of devaswom and revision of their scale of expenditure. As regards the management of devaswoms and charitable institutions Rao was of the firm opinion that they should be relieved from the supervision and control of the tahsildars and **peishkars** and should be entrusted to an independent agency comprising of popular elements like village and talk boards. He put forth two suggestions of which one was for the organisation of a wholly separate department for devaswoms. He also suggested that such a department should have a commissioner in the status of **dewan peishkar** with three assistant commissioners and 14 superintendents with the necessary ministerial and menial establishments. The annual expenditure on account of the creation of new department was estimated to be Rs.47000/- ²⁴. The second suggestion was just an improvement on

²³ Report on state charities, Devaswoms and purificatory Ceremonies, dated 29 Medam 1083 M.E (A.D. 1908)

²⁴ Ibid.

the existing system of management of devaswom. The government found that the first suggestion was inexpedient to them in the prevailing context. However the recommendations of Ramachandra Rao were brought for a discussion of the **dewan peishkar** at a conference convened by the government. The opinion emerged in the conference was in favour of making improvement on the existing system rather than on the creation of a separate department. The government also felt it inexpedient at that time to incur a large recurring liability of about half a lakh of rupees per annum by creating an independent department. The government decided in bringing about the following improvements upon the existing system of the temple administration.

- (1) the appointment of stationary magistrates in some of the taluks where the work of tahsildars was heavy.
- (2) the appointment of deputy tahsildars as ex-officio head accountants to take up the treasury work in all taluks and thus relieve the tahsildars from monetary responsibilities.

- (3) the preparation by the dewan peishkars of the rules relating to the duties and responsibilities of the tahsildars and devaswom subordinates in respect of the devaswom administration.
- (4) arranging frequent visit by the tahsildars and supervise institutions and on the spot enquiry by the latter of the work done by the devaswom subordinates; and
- (5) enhancing the pay of the headman of the temple whether he be **srikariakkaran**, **anaval**, **samudayam**, **melmanusyam**, **koyma** or some such as the case might be, instead of increasing the number of staff by the appointment of managers or **amindars** as recommended by Ramachandra Rao. The enhancement of remuneration, the government hoped would inspire the headman to be really helpful to the tahsildar²⁵.

²⁵ E.R. Government order No.D4905, dated 25 October 1912.

The report of the devaswom **peishkar** was not immediately taken up as it was prepared roughly and required elaboration. However the separation of devaswom lands from **sircar** lands was effected on 16 August 1912. The process was difficult and therefore incomplete. The identification of both lands became impossible. However a list of devaswom lands in each **pakuthi** (Village) was prepared and it was made as accurate as possible with the help of settlement records²⁶. The revenue from the devaswom lands was credited to the head of 'devaswom' and separate **pattas** were issued for devaswom lands²⁷. Even after the formal separation of devaswom in 1912, the administration of devaswoms was still in the hands of the administrators of the land revenue department.

The question of the separating the administration of devaswom from the land revenue department was again gain momentum. That was due to an anomaly in the service condition and mode of recruitment of the staff for the land revenue department. Since devaswom lands were administered by the land

²⁶ E.R.G.O.No.L.R & F. 3831, dated 9 April 1912.

²⁷ Ibid.

revenue department, only caste - Hindus were appointed in the department. Non-Hindus and non caste-Hindus were excluded from appointment. Appointment was denied to them on the ground that they would not be permitted to enter the temples for their management. The aggrieved communities brought this inequality before the government and sought for redressal. To settle this issue and to relieve additional workload of the revenue staff, the government decided to constitute a committee to study the feasibility of separating devaswom from land revenue department. It also envisaged the formation of a separate department for the devaswoms of the state. The committee was come to be known as devaswom separation committee which was constituted on 3rd April 1920²⁸.

²⁸ E. R. Government order N0.D.952, dated 3 April 1920.

Working of the Devaswom Separation Committee:

In 1920, the government appointed a committee consisting of three officials and two non-officials both Hindus and Christians for considering the question of the separation of devaswom from land revenue department. This five-member committee ²⁹ analytically approached the problem and submitted the report to the government. The Government has put forth the following main points for expert opinion:

²⁹ Five member committee:

Official members

1. K. Ananthanarayana Aiyar
2. R. Krishna Pillai
3. John Kurien

Non official members

4. P.K. Narayana Pillai
5. J. John Nidiri

"1). What is the position of the Travancore government in regard to **sircar** devaswoms? Is it that of a trustee merely, or one involving greater responsibility, seeing that the devaswom land revenue was long ago merged in the general land revenue beyond any possibility of separation? Does not this complete merger render the state liable to maintain the devaswoms concerned, out of the public exchequer, in an efficient condition for all time?

2). Is it not feasible to separate the administration of **sircar** devaswoms and **uttupuras** from the control of the land revenue department, consistently with arrangement to safeguard the efficient management of those institutions and to ensure the maintenance of the constitution of the state, especially with reference to the ceremonies at the capital? If it is feasible what is the best means of effecting the separation?"

The preliminary meeting of the committee was convened on the 14th Medam 1095 (April 1920). All the five members were present for the meeting. The committee secretary entered the minutes of the meeting. They analysed the five terms of references made by the government for discussion, decision and report. The Committee conducted ten meetings. They examined all the old temple records in vernacular language regarding the temple trustees of the past. Their report consisted of three parts. The first part was the report proper, the second part was the statements bearing on the report and part three was an appendix which contained copies of the old records relied on the report. There was also a minority report by one of the members³⁰. The report was having far reaching effects on temple administration in Travancore.

The committee was unanimous in maintaining that the devaswoms were not confiscated by the state, that the assumption was made with the object of providing better management to the devaswom institutions in the state. The committee held that the merger of devaswom revenue with state revenue had inflicted upon the government the obligation to maintain the devaswom

³⁰ P.K. Narayana Pillai, **Minority Report**, dated 3 February 1921.

institutions forever. But the committee differed in their opinion regarding the relation between the government and the devaswoms. The majority found the state as the sovereign protector of the devaswoms and therefore accountable to none. The minority held the view that the assumption related only to management, the state was therefore a mere trustee in which capacity it had a legal obligation to maintain the devaswoms. Further, as the trustee had mixed up the trust property with his own, the expenditure relating to the devaswoms was a valid charge on the general revenues of the state. The advocate general of Madras to whom the whole report was referred agreed with the minority view. He advised the government to set apart the devaswoms from land revenue department for the betterment of the devaswoms. The advice was incorporated in the devaswom proclamation of 1097 M.E (A.D.1922) promulgated by Maharaja of Travancore on 30 Minam 1097 M.E (12 April 1922). The proclamation contained a schedule of devaswoms which were to be administered by the devaswom department. It provided for the constitution of a fund called 'devaswom fund'³¹. The contribution for the devaswom fund

³¹ Proceedings of S.M.P.A. of Travancore, 1924, p.17.

consisted of forty percent of the **ayacut** and **sanchayam** land revenue of the state. Consequently, the government provided with an annual contribution of sixteen lakhs of rupees towards the devaswom fund as compensation³². Other income for the devaswom included money obtained by the sale of movable properties of the devaswoms, voluntary contributions and offerings, interest on investments of devaswom fund and other incomes. However as stated in the government press communiqué of 1922, the legitimate income to which the devaswoms were entitled from all sources did not seem to have been taken into account for fixing the proportion of revenues³³. Under section 6 of the proclamation, all immovable properties belonging to the devaswoms would hereafter be deemed to be **pantaravaka** and dealt with as such. The devaswoms were denied the right to claim any land, even on temple premises because all of them became **sircar** lands. The inconvenience experienced by the devaswom department was removed when the sites of the temples, **nandavanams** etc were transferred to the

³² Devaswom, File No.D.Dis 611/1932 dated, 10 November 1932, p.1.

³³ E.R. Government Press Communiqué on the Devaswom Proclamation of 1097 M.E, dated 12 April 1922

respective devaswoms as **purampok** (governmental lands not assigned to tenants) by an executive order of the Government³⁴.

According to the proclamation, Rajaraja Varma became the first devaswom commissioner³⁵. It empowered him to create a separate department and he forwarded a memorandum containing the detailed proposals for the organisation of a devaswom department exclusively for the administration of temples³⁶. He also made proposals with regard to the appointment of a hierarchy of officers, their duties and powers etc in the devaswom department. He recommended for the classification of devaswoms with reference to their expenditure subject to the audit by the devaswom department officials. The **ezhuthitheeruvayilla** devaswoms were minor devaswoms for which no detailed account of expenditure was kept, but which were maintained out of fixed annual grants. **Ezhuthithiruvayulla** devaswoms referred to major devaswoms for which a detailed expenditure was kept. There was yet another

³⁴ Report of the High Level Committee, p.20.

³⁵ Travancore Government Letter No. R.O.C.,206 of 21, dated 13 April 1922.

³⁶ G.O. D.Dis No. 278/22/G.B, dated 11 July 1922.

classification of the sircar devaswoms, viz., into **pradhana** or cheif devaswoms and **keezhadu** or subordinate devaswoms based on the principle of the grouping several smaller devaswoms under one important and chief devaswom for the purpose of administration.

At the apex of administration stood the devaswoms commissioner who served as a link between the government and the devaswom. Generally members of the royal family were appointed as devaswom commissioners as evident from the appointment of Rajaraja Varma, being the first devaswom commissioner³⁷. The devaswom commissioner acted as the adviser to the government in matters relating to devaswom administration. He was also directly responsible to the government for the proper management and control of devaswoms, charitable institutions and **japadakshinas**. Generally he would be consulted in all matters affecting Hindu temples and also for giving permission to open new temples at various places³⁸. Thus the formation of devaswom department laid the foundation stone for further reforms in the

³⁷ Travancore Government Proceedings No..4905, dated 25 October 1922.

³⁸ Government order, R.O.C. No.206 of 21/G.B, dated 2 September 1922.

administration of devaswoms in Travancore. The devaswom department initiated many reformatory works. It had its impact both in the administration of temples as well as in the society. The temple administration became dynamic and the society was subjected to a revolutionary change.