

CHAPTER III

FUNCTIONING OF DEVASWOM DEPARTMENT

In pursuance of the devaswom proclamation dated 12th April 1922, the control of the **sircar** devaswoms which was till then vested with the land revenue department was taken away from that department and entrusted with the newly formed devaswom department. The devaswom department was given the power to administer not only the **sircar** devaswoms but also of **japadakshina** and **uttus** or charitable institutions. It did not include the SriPadmanabhaswamy temple and agrasala in the Thiruvananthapuram and the personal deposit devaswoms (unincorporated devaswoms) and their properties situated in and outside the state¹. Towards the close of 1925, the **dewan** was relieved of his duties and responsibilities in connection with the administration of devaswoms within the purview of the devaswom proclamation. The administration of devaswoms was directly entrusted to the commissioner who was made directly responsible to the sovereign except in certain important matters in respect of

¹ **T.A.R.**, 1930-31, p.223.

which the previous approval of the **dewan** had to be obtained². But with effect from A.D 1930, this arrangement was cancelled under the command of the Maharaja and it was decided to place devaswom department under the **dewan**, like other department of the government, with devaswom commissioner under him as the head of the department. The bifurcation of devaswom administration from the department of land revenue and entrusting with devaswom department also gave way to the creation of a devaswom fund, allotted it to each temple according to the **pathivu** fixed for the respective temple³.

The formation of a separate devaswom department did not in any way affect the revenue administration of the devaswom lands. The proclamation of 1922 had made it clear that the devaswom lands were treated as **pantaravaka** lands and the collection of revenue from them was made by the government from time to time. On 31st January 1923, the government permitted the commissioner to lease out the lands belonging to

² **T.A.R.**, *op.cit.*, p.232.

³ E.R.G.O No. Dis 335 of 22/G.B.

unincorporated devaswom on **kuttakappattam** for an indefinite period. The assistant commissioners of devaswom were also given power to do so, but only for a period not exceeding 12 years⁴. All **devaswomvaka** service lands were made **pantaravaka** property from 3rd June 1923. The entire land was divided as **pantaravaka**, **brahmaswom** and devaswom lands. The devaswom lands were exempted from taxation and such lands were known as **irayilli** (tax-free). The government was entitled to the extra assessment or **vilayartham** of such lands⁵. On 1st November 1924, the superintendents of devaswom were empowered to grant **kuttakappattam** leases for a period not exceeding three years. All departments including the devaswom department were given to lease out on kuttakappattam basis for all **tarisu**, **tanatuchitta** and **purampok** lads under their control⁶. On 30th July 1928, the government order to treat the **tanatuchitta** lands belonging to the devaswom department as **sircar** devaswom **purampoks** and the tax due there on to revenue department was treated as write off by the

⁴ G.O.R.Dis No.52 of 23/G.3, dated 31 January 1923.

⁵ G.O.R. Dis No.461/23/G.B, dated 3 June 1923.

⁶ G.O.no.1691 of 26/Revenue, dated 13 November 1926.

government⁷. The rules for the leases of personal deposit devaswom lands were amended so as to authorise the devaswom commissioner to sanction **venpattam** leases of such lands without an auction when it was found feasible and desirable⁸. This amendment was made by the government on the recommendation of the devaswom commissioner⁹.

With the separation of devaswoms from land revenue department and the creation of a separate devaswom department which began functioning in August 1922, drastic changes took place in the administrative machinery of the devaswoms, particularly on the establishment wing. The devaswom commissioner became the head of the department¹⁰. He was the adviser to the government in matters relating to devaswom and supervised and controlled the working of subordinate officers of devaswom department¹¹. He was directly responsible to the government for the proper management and control of the

⁷ G.O.R. Dis No 277/28/G.B., dated 30 July 1928.

⁸ E.R.G.O.Dis No.814/36/Dev., dated 5 December 1936.

⁹ G.O.ROC. No.7238/36, dated 17 September 1936.

¹⁰ Proceedings of S.M.P.A of Travancore, 1923, p.19.

¹¹ Government Order R.O.C.No206 of 21/G.B, dated 2 September 1922.

devaswom and charitable institutions. Below him, the devaswom assistant commissioners and superintendents were appointed for the proper and effective administration of the temples. The network of devaswom department itself was divided into two categories of the service namely establishment service and religious service. The establishment service was meant for management of temples and religious service was for the different works inside the temple such as the ordinary daily service called **nityanitham**, extraordinary ceremonies known as **masavishesham**, **attavishesham** and **ulsavams**. Under the **uranma** system no clear-cut distinction between staff of the two services could be identified. It was because the **uranmakkar** who lived on temple revenues themselves undertook one or other the of these services on receipt of fixed income¹² . However, 12 officers belonging to both categories of services were well known; such as **uranmakkar**, **melkoyma**, **koyma**, **melsamudayam**, **samudayam**, **akattemanusym**, **puratemanuayam**, **pattali**, **kanakkam**, **masapati**, **tantri (santhi)**,

¹² V. Nagam Aiya, Report on the Census of Travancore, 1891. Vol.I, p.333.

purattesanthi (kalakam),. But in the later stage the devaswom administration was divided into devaswom establishment servants and temple servants. In the establishment wing, there were five categories of staff and under religious administrative side also five categories staff¹³ functioned below the authority of division **peishkar**. The officers and office bearers of the religious services were left undisturbed at the initial stage of the assumption of devaswoms. Yet later two types of employees came into existence. Additional staff was appointed for its efficient administration¹⁴. For administrative convenience the state was divided into four devaswom districts namely Suchidrum, Trivandrum, Ampalapuzha and Vaikam. The four districts were again subdivided into eighteen groups. Each of the four district was placed in charge of an assistant commissioner and each of the eighteen groups was to be

¹³

Division Peishkar

Estabslihment

1. Tahsildar
2. Provatikar
3. Manager (Srikaryam)
4. Pillay (Accounts)
5. Shroff (Cash keeper)

(Travancore Devaswom hand Book, 1923)

Temple service

- Santhi,(Santhikars)
 Kalakakkaran (Store Keeper)
 Vilakkuveppu
 Ambalavasis
 Achimar (Nair women sweepers)

¹⁴ Legislative File No.D.Dis. 276/1946, dated 18 July 1946, p.3.

administered by a superintendent¹⁵. The office of the devaswom commissioner assistant devaswom commissioner and superintendents had their own separate establishment of administrative staff. In view of importance and large-scale expenditure of devaswoms at Cape Comerin, Suchindrum, Tiruvattar, Haripat, Amapalapuzha, Vaikam and Errtumanur, resident managers were appointed in each of these temples. In addition to this, the devaswom department had to carry on **maramath** works such as construction and repairs of temple buildings and thier appurtenances. Technically qualified persons were appointed for that purpose. **Aminadars** were appointed and one each was attached to the offices of the assistant devaswom commissioners¹⁶.

Though the separation of devaswom was effected from land revenue department, the properties mixed with government were not restored to the devaswom department. Hence the government gave an annual contribution of 16 lakhs of rupees towards the

¹⁵ Legislature File No. D.Dis. 138/1933, Vol.VIII, 7 August 1934, p.20.

¹⁶ Ibid.

devaswoms fund as compensation¹⁷. As the devaswom were further classified into major, minor and petty on the basis of their annual expenditure, the government allocated each devaswom a share from the devaswom fund. In 1936, under this classification there were 155 major, 355 minor and 945 petty devaswoms in Travancore¹⁸. The major devaswoms were authorized to spend an expenditure of Rs. 1000/- or more, minor devaswoms between Rs.100/- and 1000/- and petty devaswoms below Rs.100/-. The table showing the expenditure to devaswoms and other charitable institutions from 1812 to 1932 (every ten years) gives a picture of gradual increase from year to year.

¹⁷ Devaswom, File No. D.Dis. 611/.1932, dated 10 November 1932, p.1.

¹⁸ T.K. Velu Pillai, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.253.

Year	Devaswoms Rs.	Charitable Institution Rs	Total Rs
1812-13 ¹⁹	292060	193904	485964
1822-23	564887	226081	709068
1832-33	517357	267392	784749
1842-43 ²⁰	531870	297991	829861
1852-53	521581	303297	824878
1862-63 ²¹	533401	341529	874930
1872-73	532716	359980	892696
1882-83 ²²	532030	378431	910461
1892-93	531345	396882	928227
1902-03	530659	415333	945992
1912-13	529974	433784	963759
1922-23 ²³	771483	407568	1179051
1932-33	728603	470686	1199289

Source: ¹⁹. H.C.V.R., Tiratt No.22 of 987 M.E(A.D.1812)

²⁰. Political Consultations, vol.349, A.D 1842, FF.167-168.

²¹. Political Consultations, vol. 566, A.D.1556, F.54.

²². T.A.R. A.D 1922, p.13.

²³. Ibid., p.19

Pathivu in respect of two major devaswoms viz. the Aramboli devaswom in the Suchindrum district and Kaviyur devaswom in the Ambalapuzha district were revised during the year, involving an additional annual expenditure of Rs.11116/-. In 1931 proposals for the revision of **pathivus** of two other devaswoms viz. Samburvadakara and kaduthuritti were under scrutiny when the year closed²⁴. The renovation and reconstruction of temples were being systematically carried out every year. It was done according to an approved scheme from funds specially allotted for the purpose and the work was entrusted to the maramat department. A sum of Rs. 280000/- had been allotted for the year 1930-31. Petty construction and repair works to temples were carried out by the officers of the devaswom department. Another item of expenditure incurred by the devaswom department was for the conduct of several extraordinary ceremonies like **astabandha kalasam**, **dravyakalasam**, **balabimba pratishta**, **navikarana kalasam**²⁵. Every year some of the extra-ordinary ceremonies were conducted in certain temples.

²⁴ . **T.A.R.**, 1930-31, pp.233-238.

²⁵. Proceedings of the Government of Travancore, op.cit,p.12.

In Travancore the personal deposit devaswoms were unincorporated religious institutions which came under the government management and control at different times and under varying circumstances²⁶. The accounts in respect of them were not merged in the general devaswom accounts but maintained separately and independently. They had personal deposit accounts with the government treasuries. The total number of these institutions were fifty seven of which twelve were in the Suchindrum district, fourteen in the Trivandrum district, four in the Ambalapuzha district, twenty five in the Vaikam district and the remaining two under the direct control of the devaswom commissioner. In 1930 -31, the government had spent about Rs.58000/- for various temples when the management of such temples were taken over by the government. In Perumanam devaswom, **uchapuja** service was conducted by the Travancore government by virtue of the right of take over of the management of that temple. The renovation work of the Mannadi temple in the Pattazhi devaswom for which an estimate for Rs.7600/- was sanctioned. The renovation of temple tank and repair to the **vilakkumadam** attached to Turavur devaswom was completed. The

²⁶. T.K.Velu Pillai, *The Travancore State manual*, vol.I, p.559.

surplus funds of these devaswoms aggregated to Rs. 4.5 lakhs at the close of the year²⁷. The **sripandaravaka** and **agrasala** were outside the control of the devaswom department. They were directly under the supervision of the government. The former related to the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple. The **agrasala** attached to this temple dealt with daily feeding of the brahmins. The expenditure under these two items was not included in the expenditure controlled by the devaswom department headed by devaswom commissioner.

The devaswom department not only concentrated in the general administration, devaswom land revenue etc but also paid attention in the management of income and expenditure of the devaswoms. It also worked for social and cultural causes and for the development of the society. Soon after the formation of a separate devaswom department, the government felt the need for codifying certain devaswom rules, proceedings, statutes and general reports. The devaswom commissioner was assigned to take up the work. He prepared a devaswom handbook, which was published in

²⁷ **T.A.R.**, 1930-31, p.236.

1923²⁸. Yet the inversed volume of work of the devaswoms necessitated the modification of the devaswom handbook. So the government took up the task of compilation of a well-planned and comprehensive manual for the department. In 1930, a full time officer with sufficient experience was deputed to take up this work with the assistance of two clerks and a typist²⁹. The work was completed in 1932 and it served as systematic and effective guide to the subordinates of the department and as a text book for the devaswoms. In 1938, the printing of volume II of the devaswom manual was taken up and the work made good progress during the year. Large-scale devaswom maps of the state were printed and supplied to the assistant commissioners as a guide for their inspection work³⁰.

In 1922, a special officer was appointed for the verification of **thiruvabharanam** ³¹. The verification, custody and utilization of

²⁸ Legislature File no. D.Dis. 138/33, vol.VIII, dated 7 August 1934, p.3.

²⁹ Legislature File No. D.Dis 138/1933, vol.III, dated 7 August 1934, p.3.

³⁰ **T.A.R.**, 1937-38, p.222.

³¹ Legislature File No. D.Dis.138/1933, op.cit., p.3.

thiruvabharanam and other valuables in temples are some of the important items of work relating to devaswoms. Later the number of special officers were increased to five, one in each for the four devaswom districts and also one already sanctioned for verification work in the major devaswoms containing valuables for which the value exceeded above of 10000/- In 1937-38 an officer and two accounts were newly appointed in the office of the devaswom commissioner to deal with and expedite disposal of reports of the **thiruvabharanam** special officer. The following table shows that the work made good progress after various steps had been taken for the effective functioning of the concerned department³².

Items	No. Verified in 1937	No. Verified in 1938
Thiruvabharanams	4645	5053
Bharanipatrams	9363	12780
Pattuparivattams	1419	704
Other miscellaneous valuables	941	1469

³² **T.A.R.**, 1937-1938, p.219.

To keep the devaswoms in the proper perspective, the authorities inspected them frequently. The commissioner inspected the offices of assistant commissioners and verified the records and accounts³³. The assistant commissioners inspected the records and accounts of the superintendents office and sent their reports to the commissioners. The superintendents in turn inspected minor and major devaswoms within their jurisdiction and sent their inspection reports to the assistant commissioners³⁴. The inspection notes were prepared in Malayalam for the convenience of rectifying the mistakes without delay. Therefore, the inspection helped to minimise the irregularities existing in the devaswoms.

The devaswom department took steps for training the **santhikars** inorder to perform **pujas** and related rites regularly in the temples as per the customs and usage³⁵. The daily pujas like **abhishekom**, **navakom**, **nivedyom**, **sribeli**, **namaskaram** etc could be done properly only with proper training. Similarly

³³ **T.A.R.**, 1924-1925, p.90

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ T.A.S., vol.IV, p.29.

nirmalyam, ushapuja, uchapuja, pantheeradipuja, athzhapuja, deeparadhana etc. could be performed only on the basis of **agamie** principles and **mantra-trantra vidhikal**³⁶. The **melsanthi, kizhsanthi** and **trantri**³⁷ were the members of the priestly class having the sole responsibility for conducting the **pujas** and rituals as per the principles laid down in **sastras**. Specific qualifications were also prescribed for the **santhikars**. They produced certificates from **tantries** and **pushpanjali swamigals** at the time of recruitment³⁸. But these certificate holders had neither the knowledge of sanskrit nor able to pronounce even the **mantras** correctly. Hence Sree Mulam Popular Assembly and local press repeatedly urged the importance of appointing qualified men to conduct **puja** services as prescribed by the **sastras**. The assistant devaswom commissioners also discussed this matter at a special conference held for this purpose and a detailed scheme was prepared and submitted to government for approval. Consequently, Sree Chitrodaya Devapuja Patasala was

³⁶ Proceedings of the Maharaja of Travancore No.D.1748,dated 11th May 1909.

³⁷ T.A.S., vol IV., p.29-30.

³⁸ Devaswom, File No. D.Dis.5607/1911,dated 4 October 1911, p.i.

started to impart proper training to the **santhikars**³⁹. A separate syllabus was also prepared for **santhi** School. The secretary of the **tantric sabha** supervised the teaching and conducted examination for the **patasala**⁴⁰. In 1932, the government increased the pay of **santhikars** who were employed to conduct **pujas** in minor and petty devaswoms⁴¹. In 1935, nambudiri boys were selected to study **vedic dharma** and they were appointed in the religious services of the state⁴². Higher salaries were provided to the employees of the devaswom department with a view to achieve greater efficiency in administration. The standardisation of **paditharam** for purifactory ceremonies in temples was discussed and passed at a conference in which thirteen tantries were present on invitation. The **paditharams** were intended to be applied to the temples governed by the **malaya tantram** as opposed to the **paradesa tantram** and fourteen **devas** (deities) common on the west coast⁴³. For the purpose of prescribing **paditharams**, the devaswoms were

³⁹ Legislature File No. R.Dis.218/1935, dated 12 October 1935.

⁴⁰ Administration Report of the Devaswom Department for the year, 1932-33, 1934, pp.12-13.

⁴¹ T.A.R., 1928- 1929, p.240.

⁴² General, File No.R.Dis. 1793/1935, dated 8 November 1935.

⁴³ T.A.R., 1930-1931, p.232

classified into five grades. The several rites that have to be performed in the course of purifactory ceremonies in the temples were also classified. The articles to be used in each rite as well as **dakshina** to be paid therefor was also fixed⁴⁴. These proposals were approved in general by **tantries**.

In Travancore the temple was a multifaceted institution. Besides **pujas** and festivals, periodical religious discourses and **harikatha** were conducted in them⁴⁵. A separate fund was allotted for religious discourses during annual and occasional ceremonies in temples. The public in general and the Hindus in particular appreciated these discourses and thus it became an integral part of certain important devaswoms. Holding of religious conventions in important centres like Neyyattinkara, Trivandrum, Kollam, Alleppy and Kottayam contributed much towards the religious awakening among Hindus⁴⁶. Separate budget was sanctioned to purchase books to constitute a religious library was also a landmark step

⁴⁴ T.A.R., op.cit., p.233.

⁴⁵ T.A.R., 1925-1926, p.159.

⁴⁶ **T.A.R.**, 1932-1933, p.218.

taken towards the development of cultural side of Hinduism. The Sri Chitra Central Hindu Religious Library which was opened at Trivandrum in 1112M.E(A.D.1937) carried on very many activities. Great facilities were afforded to the reading public by the addition of 843 religious books newly purchased for the library over and above the 1525 books which it already possessed at the beginning of the year. Fifteen magazines and journals were also subscribed for⁴⁷. A library and lecture hall at Nagercoil was established in Suchindrum division. The opening of two new religious libraries one at Thattarambalam and the other at Kottayam was sanctioned by government during 1944⁴⁸. A large number of religious discourses were held in the library halls. The public evinced great enthusiasm and keen interest and they zealously co-operated in the endeavours of the department by making free gifts of books to the library and sometimes giving religious discourses without payment. An honorary curator was appointed for the library, he compiled a book entitled Geetha Samgraha, the first part of which was

⁴⁷ **T.A.R.**, 1937-1938, p.220.

⁴⁸ **T.A.R.**, 1944-1945, p.167.

published during the year 1938⁴⁹. The institution might well be said to have become a center of religious learning at the capital. In addition to the Sri Chitrodaya Devapuja Patasala, the **veda patasala**, at Trivandrum continued to work satisfactorily with seventy four pupils and two aided **vedic** schools at Thirperunthura and Mankompu were stopped since the institutions were not working properly. The **Thevara Patasala** at Suchindrum for teaching the recitation of devotional songs, was also established⁵⁰. To encourage the indigenous arts like **kathakali**, **chakkiyar kooth** etc the experts were invited to perform these arts in large devaswoms⁵¹. Thus temples in Travancore served as transmitting stations of knowledge which by and large awakened the Hindu society of the state. In 1933, the devaswom department organised **bhajana** parties from, among the worshippers in temples for singing devotional songs during **puja** hours⁵². Special **bhajana** parties were also permitted to sing on **virshika vritham** and other

⁴⁹ **T.A.R.**, op.cit., p.220.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Legislature, File No.D.Dis.138/1933, Vol.VIII, dated 7 August 1934, p.11.

⁵² Legislature, File No. D.Dis. 138/33, Vol.III, dated 7 August 1934, p.9.

special occasions⁵³. The chanting of **keerthanames** and devotional hymns in temples created a spiritual atmosphere.

Social Reforms:

The devaswom department had taken keen interest to eradicate some of the evil practices existed in Travancore from time immemorial. Due to the growth of new temple culture, the government adopted such measures with immediate effect. The low caste Hindus were not permitted to enter the temples and temple roads. Unapproachability, untouchability, pollution were but different aspects of the social evil of casteism followed by the caste-Hindus for Travancore. There occurred a prolonged agitation for temple entry and social status. The notable event of the period was that the government had appointed a committee known as Temple entry enquiry committee to consider the question of temple entry to **avarnas** which ultimately paved the way for allowing all sections of the society to enter all temples and temple roads of Travancore without any distinction of caste, creed or colour.

⁵³ Ibid., p.10.

Slavery in the form of **uliyam** and **virutti** services was yet another social evil perpetuated by the devaswoms, to which unprivileged and underprivileged classes were subjected to. **Uliyam** meant as compulsory labour for the government without any remuneration⁵⁴ and **virutti** constituted a kind of service **inams** and **virutti** holders set apart for the service of devaswoms and **uttupuras** had to render obligatory services which generally consisted in 'supplying at certain fixed prices, vegetables etc' ⁵⁵. The people engaged in **uliyam** and **virutti** services were poor peasants belonging to the backward and depressed classes. The temple authorities treated them like slaves and the slightest flaw or disobedience on their part was met with severe punishments. The **viruttikar** attached to Sri PadmanabhaSwamy temple at Trivandrum had supply curd for ceremonies in the temple at Paravur, a place near Kollam. During extra-ordinary ceremonies like **bhadradeepam**, **lakshadeepam**, **murajapam**, **triumasam**, **tulabharam**, etc. the obligation of husking paddy and supplying the rice to the temple fell upon the **viruttikar** of Kollam. This was because nearly 3000 brahmins had to be fed freely during all days

⁵⁴ A.Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, p.322.

⁵⁵ V.Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.III,p.335.

of the **murajapam**. Some of the **viruttikars** had to carry brahmin guests from Kollam to Trivandrum in palanquins in order to facilitate their participation in **murajapam** ceremony. The daily allowance paid to this servile labour was on **itangali** rice per head⁵⁶. **Ezhavas** were bound to supply firewood for the famous temple at Vaikam and for **uttupuras** attached to it. No remuneration either in cash or kind was given, nor was any land assigned to them as in the case of others under **uliyam** and **virutti** services. The **viruttikar** at Haripad had to render free personal service to the subrahmanya temple festivals. Apart from rendering free physical labour, sometimes the duty of the **uliyam** and **virutti** holders included the performance of **velakali** during festival days in temples. The performance was to be made twice a day during evening and night. It had been calculated that nearly 300 **viruttikars** engaged for such performance, 200 of them at SriPadmanabhaswamy temple at Trivandrum and 100 to do the same in the SriKrishnaswamy temple at Amapalapuzha⁵⁷. To escape from this slavery and oppression from the authorities, some of

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ E.R. File No.48, Devaswom Department Records, A.D. 1907, p.8.

the **viruttikars** belonging to the depressed classes converted to christianity⁵⁸. They began to abstain from works and seek protection from court of law. On one occasion the **viruttikar** in the Ampalapuzha temple refused to conduct **velakali**. In 1814 Col.Munro, the **dewan** of Travancore partially relieved them from their work. Another government order issued in April 1880 relieved the **viruttikars** of Trivandrum, Neyyattinkara and Nedumangat taluks from the burden of supplying provisions for the **Isvaraseva** ceremony in temples⁵⁹. In October 1883, **dewan** Ramayyangar appointed a committee to study the various problems relating to the **uliyam** and **virutti** service holders and to report the government defects of the system. The majority of the committee members recommended the immediate abolition of the system. **Dewan** Rama Rao issued a notification in April 1888 relieved all **virutti**, **uliyam** holders from the obligation of rendering personal service to devaswoms and **uttupuras**⁶⁰. On August 7, 1893 the

⁵⁸ E.R. File No. 60, Devaswom Department Records, A.D. 1910, p.11.

⁵⁹ T.G.G., dated 7 May 1880, p.127.

⁶⁰ Revenue Settlement Final Report, Vol.VI, p.169.

uliyam and **virutti** services were abolished⁶¹. However, it continued in some parts of Travancore in one way or other form.

After the formation of the devaswom department the seedlings of this evil system lost their roots completely from the soil of Travancore.

In some shrines dedicated to Bhagavathy, the custom of sacrificing goats and fowls was prevalent. In some part of the state, even the cow was slaughtered and sacrificed to minor deities. Protest meetings were arranged against this practice by the public. So the government decided to put an end to this practice and issued an order dated 9th March 1925⁶². Cucumber took the place of the animal victims in the ritual⁶³.

Another age old custom prevailed in Travancore was a practice that **savarnas** who crossed the sea did not enter the temples or their being prohibited from entering the temples. This custom became out of practice as the caste Hindus freely enter

⁶¹ ***The Acts and Proclamations of Travancore***, vol.I, p.211.

⁶² Devaswom File No. R.Dis. 343/25, dated 22 August 1925, p.1.

⁶³ ***Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee***, 1932, p.90.

temples for worshipping⁶⁴. Abolition of **purappattu** was another remarkable work of the devaswom department. In Shertala temple during **ulsavams**, particularly on the **puram** day, obscene songs used to be sung by **karakkars** of the place in the belief that the deity's blessings could be won thereby. This was a long-standing practice. The government stopped this custom by their order dated 9th March 1927⁶⁵.

Another important step taken by the government and implemented by the devaswom department was against the **devadasi** system in temples of Travancore. Though initial steps were taken in 1925, it was finally abolished in 1931⁶⁶. In time immemorial, the Travancore temples had the practice of observing **devadasi** system. The **agama** works which prescribes temple rituals and ceremonies refer to **nruttam** or dancing as a part of temple ceremony⁶⁷. The first epigraphical record about the

⁶⁴ *Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee*, op.cit., p.252.

⁶⁵ Proceedings of the Government of Travancore, ROC.No. 344/25/G.B, dated 9 March, 1925.

⁶⁶ Devaswom, File No.D.Dis. 611/1931, dated 5 September, 1931.

⁶⁷ *Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee*, op.cit., p.90.

devadasi system in Kerala was found in the Chokkur temple at Neleswaram in Kozhicode taluk⁶⁸.

The term **devadsi** simply meant 'the maid of God', which was also interpreted as to mean a maid servant to provide pleasure to the deity by dancing before them. Those 'wives of Gods' enjoyed a daily allowance of rice, monthly wages, **kachapuram** (cloths), **kutimana** (house site) and other perquisites⁶⁹. Later some of the **devadasis** became rich and gave a portion of their earnings to the temples. This practice was prevalent in almost all major temples of south Travancore, in Sencotta and a few temples of Ampalapuzha, Karthikappalli and Cherttala taluks⁷⁰. Like the **devadasis** attached the temples of east coast, women dedicated to temple service known as **kudikaris** had been doing several items of service in some of the important temples in Suchindrum district and Trivandrum district. The first attempt by the government to restrict

⁶⁸ Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, **Keralachritrattile Iruladanja Etukal** (Mal), p.75.

⁶⁹ E.R.,G.O. No.372, dated 15 August 1931.

⁷⁰ **Census Report of India 1901**, Vol.XXVI, Travancore, Part.I, p.277.

devadasi system came in 1909 when the division assistant of padmanabhapuram division rejected the application of a nair girl below 16 years to become a **devadasi** in Suchindrum temple on the ground that the Travancore penal code made it punishable to dedicated girls below 16 years of age to a temple⁷¹. Another application was also rejected in 1910 on the same ground. However, the government allowed the children of **devadasis** above the age of 16 years, if they had already undergone the sacrament of **talikett** as per **marumakkatayam** custom⁷². In 1921, the government decided to prohibit any further recruitment of **devadasis** either by way of adoption or by free choice. The final discontinuance of the system came into effect from 1st Chingam 1106M.E (A.D 1931) when all the remaining **devadasis** were relieved of their duties in the temples of Travancore⁷³. Some of their duties were transferred to temple employees like the **ambalavasis**

⁷¹ **Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee**, p.125.

⁷² E.R.G.O.No.2634/D., dated 26 Mithurnam 1086 M.E(A.D.1911).

⁷³ E.R.G.O.Dis.No.293 of 21/G.B, dated 23 may 1921.

and the **devadasi** system was finally abolished in 1931⁷⁴. The social reform movement undertaken by the government through devaswom department by way of purification of the Hindu community had its repercussion for a social change in Travancore, which led to the popularisation of temple worship in Travancore.

⁷⁴ Devasowm, File No.D.Dis.611/1931, dated 5 September 1931.