

Temple Administration in Vijayanagar Empire

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Abstract

The temples in India stand for the cultural symbols which talk about the egalitarian principle of the Tamils. This symbolizes that all are born equal. The sculptures, paintings and artifacts of the temple tell about the daily life activities which reveal the historic resources of the early treasures. This speaks about the three aspects in Tamil language which are known to be literature, drama and music. The Hindu Religions and Charitable Endowments Boards as later formed and developed as a department entrusted with the responsibilities of maintaining the temples and also conducting the poojas and the festivals in keeping with the practices of the ancient culture and norms.

Key words : Temple, Administrative, Government, Social,

Introduction

The historic and artistic value of the temple is protected in such a way that are preserved for many centuries by our ancestors. This is taken as a noble task and also their responsibility. The government is maintaining these temples in a good condition through endowment and charities. The devotees who come to the temples are given with good infrastructural facilities. The department is also taking steps to provide numerous schemes for the temples. These devotees come during the festivals and occasions and sometimes in ordinary times too.

The Administration of Temple

An unique system is followed in the administration of the temple which is done on the social basis. But that is not constantly done and it changes according to the need. This is because of the religious life that we have in the society, which cannot be ignored.

The religious are connected to the belief system of the every individual.¹ This is also meant to be a thread to correct a person to his god that depends on the need of the self and the divine belief. This is how, the so called temple is the right place to connect and have a strong relationship of individual with god. Moreover, a religion is the superpower and depends on the

¹ Narayana, P.S., *Tamilnadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Manual*, Chennai, 2005, pp. 16-17.

beliefs of every human lives that is mingled with the supernaturalbeing. All the beliefs on beings superior to human being are comprehended in a single word called religion.

The Hindus believe that the temples are really important and the first place to learn their life lessons and those things shape the character, human life and mortal forms to have divine energy. By this way, temple is treated as a place to have in touch with both human and supernatural qualities which is felt to be a sacred one. This is also meant to be sacred ones because of the religious rites. This is a ground to establish communion with god, the Almighty. Hence the essential elements of religious are belief in an worship of God.

There are many numbers of temples with different art and culture, with different shapes for a wide range of gods and goddesses. They are Lord Siva, Lord Vishnu, Lord Murugan, Lord Vinayagar, Vishnu and Siva. But they are no such equal number of temples built for Brahma, who is meant to be the creator (God of creation). This difference is because of the belief system. Devotees of different forms get protection from specific gods. Yet, simultaneously, numerous folk and village deities also are having their own temples. The services to personal gods were worshipped by Hindu through poojas and rituals.

The Hindu Religious Endowments

The Collectors were directed to render exact details about the religious institutions and they were ordered to make direct enquiries about the endowments. The Collector had to report to the Board of Revenue about the details regarding religious institutions foundations, establishments, their Trustees, Managers or Superintendents along with the details of their appointing authorities. The Regulation of 1817 made East India Company as the successor to Hindu as well as Muslim rulers of India and the Company was to follow the policy of strict supervision over the native religious trusts and endowments. The following was the machinery formed to manage the Hindu Religious Endowments.²

1. The Board of Revenue
2. The Collectors (The Agents)
3. The Superintendent, Trustees and Managers (The Managerial staff)

The endowments were treated as the assets of the institution and the Collectors had to maintain all such details. He also prepared the guidelines for the collection with regard to endowments. The Collectors were directed to maintain detailed information such as their

² Fifth Report from the select committee on East Indian Affairs, Vol.III, Madras, 1812, p.157

nature, quantum and period. There were government granted endowments and endowments announced by the private philanthropists. The Collectors had to provide all the details about the assets of the institution, the financial as well as revenue management and the incumbents who were managing the endowments. The aim and objective of the regulation was mainly to safeguard the institution from irregularities, misappropriation and mismanagement. The Collectors had to keep a sound knowledge of the different endowments. The Collectors were instructed not to disturb any existing mode of administration and if any changes were to be made the Collectors should obtain the permission of the Board of Revenue.³

They were forbidden from confining themselves with the funds or other properties. For the benefit of the institution, they were to employ the usual ways. It was obvious that the role of Collectors according to the regulation of 1817 was a general superintendence and not a deep, devoted and detailed management²². The Collectors should appropriate lands and endowments for the specific purpose granted and should not resume even any part of it for the benefit of the government²³. The Regulation VII of 1817 clearly indicates the view points of the government with the temples. The facts relating to Temple of *Thiruchengode* as given below can be taken into account.

Paimayishi Account

This was meant for the measurement of temple and account of deities and images. It was prepared in 1819 and it consisted of all the measurements of the temples and the buildings along with the details of the deities maintained and preserved in the supervised the *Vijayanagar* Temple and had control over the entire staff of the temple. He prepared a list of all the servants of the temple along with their duties, descriptions and salaries. Importance was assigned to increase the income of the state from the temples. Much attention was paid to maintain the records regarding collections from the devotees either in the form of cash or kind. Proper accounts were maintained regarding the income and expenditure. The objects and materials donated by the devotees and philanthropists were preserved. The magistrates and police officials were instructed to have vigil over the pilgrims. Further, the *poligars* as well as *Zamindars* were directed to safeguard the pilgrims from the robbers. For the execution of such duties, they were given lands. In 1836 after the complete abolition of the *poligars*, regular police system was introduced to maintain law and order and also to protect the pilgrims. The

³ Varadhaachari, V.K., *The Law of the Hindu and Charitable Endowments*, Lucknow, 1977, p.267

Collectors were given in charge of noticing the activities of the *archakas* or priests and *goomastas* (Clerks).

All offerings of money were credited with the *Circar* accounts. The Collectors were allowed to interfere with the appropriation of funds of religious and charitable institutions under the control of *Zamindars* and others. At times of disputes among the local authorities of the temples also, the Collector was allowed to settle the cases.⁴

At the same time the interference of the Collectors which caused distrust and dissatisfaction. The Collectors were instructed to adopt only measures to preserve peace. If the Hindu temples were less important, the Collectors decided not to appoint any *goomastha* and such temples were kept under respectable natives.⁵

The Regulation of 1817 was in operation from 1817 to 1839. It was a period which marked the general satisfaction regarding the temples and their administration. The Hindu temples at that time were properly maintained and managed the defects and drawbacks regarding the temples. When they were brought to the notice of the Collector, subsequently they were rectified.⁶ The mismanagement of the temple funds was minimized. In general, the activities undertaken by the aliens regarding temple administration promoted the prestige of the British Administrators in the hearts of the natives.

The constant agitations of the natives compelled the government to change in its religious policies. Pilgrim taxes were abolished. The checking of the religious festivals by the officials of the Company was stopped. All the temple properties were converted into trusts. The Trustees were either elected or nominated by the British authorities from among the honourable and respected Hindus. The government decided to keep away from the religious activities of the subjects. Anyhow the government was to keep on preserving the revenue income.⁷

The withdrawal of all religious responsibilities by the government was opposed by the Board of Revenue, Collectors, officials as well as the natives. The Madras revenue authorities also opposed. It was argued that if the farmers were not endowed with facilities by the Managers of the religious institutions, the government could not interfere. Above all it

⁴ Board of Revenue Consultations, Vol.298, 24 December, 1801, Pp. 11861-11863.

⁵ *ibid*, Vol.311, 26 February, 1802, p.2094

⁶ *ibid*, Vol.573, 18 June, 1812, p.6349

⁷ *ibid*, Vol.606, 22 April, 1812, pp.3996-3801

was felt that the management of lands when transferred by the government would affect the temples and also the riots. The community interested in getting grants for the performance of service was to get that in the form of land. Hence the allowances hitherto offered for religious ceremonies were stopped from 1852 onwards. By a separate order in 1854 the Collectors received circulars regarding the stoppage of money allowances. The Government of Madras too withdrew the government interference in the management of native religious institutions. On the basis of the local conditions, popular views, opposition and to captivate the attention of the Hindus, the Court of Directors left the management of the religious institutions to the natives of the local area. Without affecting the customary payments the interference of the revenue officials were also allowed.⁸

In 1846 itself the Madras authorities were directed to repeal the Regulation VII of 1817 of the Madras Code. A committee consisting notable persons were also appointed which was entrusted with the power of superintendence of the religious institutions.⁹ The Collectors had the right to transfer the powers of the management of the temples. Further the people were unaware of the policies of the government with regard to temple administration. Hence the Collectors had to take severe steps to introduce changes. Only at that time the proposal of constituting a Managing Committee was issued and by that it was believed that administration would be purified. As this scheme would not solve the issues of the placement of the hereditary Trustees under authorities with more powers, the government was also unwilling to appoint ministerial staff as officer during the then existing problems. At such critical juncture when they wanted to appoint a *dharmakartha* to the specific temples such as,¹⁰ the problem of the *Jeeyar*, who claimed his superiority emerged. But the Collector was specific that the management would be handed over to the competent persons and the court also would protect the interests of the temple as well as the public. The government by its order dated 21 April 1843 pointed out that a responsible person who could execute his duties effectively can be appointed as a Trustee and he with good faith and satisfaction should work for the satisfaction of the large body of worshippers.

In 1860 a bill was introduced to appoint a Committee of Trustees. A Committee of Audit consisting of three to seven members was also appointed. A *panchayat* or a civil court

⁸ Board of Revenue Consultations, Vol.700, 30 November, 1815, p.14139

⁹ Ibid., p.14256

¹⁰ Ibid Vol.1013, 3 March 1825, pp. 1844-1850

was constituted to deal with problems relating to the rites and ceremonies of the Temples. The members of the *panchayat* were from among the Trustees. The Endowments were placed under the court of justice and it was more than legislation by the government. In 1863, the Act No XX of 1863 came into vogue with the certain provisions.¹¹ This Act was applicable to all the Hindu and Muslim religious institutions. Though this Act was a general one, it touched specifically upon the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments. It appointed a committee for supervising the Religious establishments and their management. The committee was empowered to look after all the properties of the religious institutions. The members were in office till their life time. But they were removed for their misconduct. Fresh elections were conducted for electing candidates to fill up the vacancies. The committee member cannot be a Trustee or Manager.

The Sullivan Committee of 1884 recommended the establishment of a Central Committee and District Committees. Among the members of the District Committees, 1/3 was nominated and 2/3 was elected. The Central Committee was to superintend and audit the District Committees. Hence the administration of the temple was not at all a uniform and appreciable one. The Trustees functioned under the District committees, which were the controlling and managing the assets and properties of the mutts. But they had no right to suspend the heads of the mutts. At this juncture, the Review Committee of 1893 also pointed that a overhauling change was needed and the administrative defects of the Religious Endowment should be rectified. By a bill introduced in 1893, the temples under hereditary Trustees were also placed under local Committees.¹²

Mutts

At present, there are 56 Mutts and 19 Specific Endowments attached thereto, under the control of this department. To ensure proper administration of these mutts the Commissioner is assisted by a separate Audit Section consisting of a Regional Audit Officer, two Audit Inspectors, and two Assistants in the Head Quarters.

Appointment of Gurukkal

Appar Swamigal conditions at Thirumalpuru, a Holy Saivaite temple with his songs. People who adopt the ideologies of saints as him are emphasized for a period for long time. It

¹¹ Temple Administrative Report, 2016-17

¹² Temple Administrative Report, 2018-19

makes clear that discriminating ideas should not be allowed in making poojas at the public worship places. Keeping aside the caste as a qualification is foremost. This social concept has been resolved by this government for implementation. Considering this, a government order was passed telling that all communities of Hindus can become Archakas of any temples of Hindu.¹³

Appointment of Trustees

Many means and ways for appointing trustees for genuine administration of the temples and religious institutions is provided by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act 1959. Trust Board schemes or hereditary trustees administrate certain temples and Religious institutions. According to the classification of the temples and powers provided on the Assistant Commissioner, the Joint Commissioner, the Commissioner and the government, they appointed trustees as per the provisions of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act. Every Board of trustees should carry of more than two and not more than five member of them one member must be from scheduled caste or scheduled tribe. It must also contain one woman member. Appropriately, non-hereditary trustees of three numbers shall be appointed by the Commissioner, Joint Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner to the Religious Institution as the case may be. This must depend upon the classification of the temple as per the provisions of the above mentioned act. The other two non-hereditary trustees will be selected by the Government. The government will appoint all the non-hereditary trustees of the temples that were published under section 46(iii).¹⁴

Annadhana Scheme

The Annadhana Scheme to provide meals everyday at noon for 120 devotees for no price. Exclusively, in the office of Assistant Commissioner, they have opened an account for Annadhana Scheme.¹⁵ They have received 1 crore for that scheme. Some donate Rs.2500/- for providing one day free meal, some donate Rs.3100/- for producing special day free meals and some donate Rs.15000/- as fixed from the accrued interest and they can provide meals on the day of their will cook named Thiru. Jeyakumar, J.Kalaarasi, Assistant are appointed for the preparation of the meals. Liquefied Petroleum Gas is installed in the kitchen with modernization. The kitchen is in the side of west. Those people who donate the mentioned

¹³ Notice Board Vijayanagar Temple, Madurai, 2018

¹⁴ Notice Board, Srivilliputhur Temple, Madurai, 2019

¹⁵ Field Study, Kitchen, Vijayanagar Temple, Madurai, 14 July 2019

amount above said that the temple authority had issued an Income-tax exception certificate which comes below the section 80G.

Thalavaralaru and Thalapuram

The temples publish THiruthalavaralaru and Thalapuram which make the public to gather knowledge about the history, Purana, architecture, the inscriptions on the stone and so on. It also contains the explanation about the special features of worshipping those certain temples. Some temples which have neither history nor Purana, pamphlets and brochures are published about their importance.

Setting up new libraries at temples

For the sake of the devotees, there came an order to begin libraries by using the funds of the temple at 114 major temples as only those temples are available with funds and space for construction.

Appointment of Nathaswara Artists in Temple

Playing of 'Nathaswaram' on all festivals and pooja is practiced as tradition in temples. As many temples could not accord for such music because they might have small amount of funds. Such that, they arrange for the employment of Nathaswara, Thavil and Thaala musicians in predominant temples by giving salary of Rs.1500/-, Rs.1000/- and Rs.750/- for a month respectively. A corpus fund of Rs.1 crore has been generated for the execution of the scheme.¹⁶

Family benefit fund scheme

Family benefit fund scheme was initiated for help the heirs of the temple employees who are dying in harness. Such that, the provision of money so far provided for the legal heir of the passed away as Rs.75000/- has been increased to Rs.1 lakh from 20.10.2008. A corpus fund of Rs.10 crores has been generated and the scheme is introduced from the accruing interest. Later this government started office and a sum of Rs. 2.03 crores was paid out to 278 heirs.¹⁷

Special Provident Fund Scheme

The scheme was started for the benefit of the employees in the temples who make an income of Rs.1 lakh and above a year. The additional gratuity payment of Rs.1000/- will be issued to the employees on their retirement down with the total subscription that they had done

¹⁶ Interview, Sivaraman, M.G., Nathaswara Vidhvan, Parthiban, G.V., Thavil Vidhvan, *Vijayanagar Temple*, Madurai, 16 November 2020

¹⁷ Property Register, *Vijayanagar Swamy Thirukoil*, 2016-17, Madurai.

during their service. They are also given with the interest that has been enhanced as Rs.5000/-. A corpus fund of Rs.10 lakhs has been introduced for the scheme that will be gained from the excess funds of wealthy temples.

Temples Employee's Welfare Fund Scheme

The scheme was introduced for the benefit of the employees who have income less than Rs.40000/- a year and those who receive salary of less than Rs.400/- for a month. Their salary outstanding will be paid with a corpus fund of Rs.5 crores that gains from the excess fund of *Vijayanagar Temple, Madurai*. The outstanding salaries of such employees are given annually from the accrued interest from the above mentioned fund. This scheme was extended to the employees getting income less than Rs.1 lakh for a year and income less than Rs.750/- and below a month. After this government had assumed office, an amount of Rs.98.02 lakhs had been provided to 3375 beneficiaries working in 2588 temples. The allowance for washing had been increased from Rs.20/- to Rs.30/- for a month for the temple workers.¹⁸

Pension Schemes

Pension for Archakars, Othuvars, Vedhaparayanars, Musicians, Arayars etc.

Archakar, Othuvar, Vedhaparayanar, Musicians, Arayars, etc in Temples who served for 20 years and attained 60 years of age receive a monthly pension of Rs.750/- through this scheme. So far, pension is being paid to 767 persons.

Village Poosaris Pension Scheme

The Government has sanctioned a monthly pension scheme of Rs.750/- for village Temple *poosaris* who have attained 60 years of age and have served more than 20 years in village Temples which are not under the control of the department. Under this scheme, 3,684 village *poosaris* are being benefited.

Pension Scheme for other Employees Serving in Temples

Pension Scheme has been implemented for the temple employees. The affluent temples have been permitted to join the Employees Provident Fund Scheme so as to receive the benefits like monthly and family pension retiring on superannuation. For the Temples which cannot afford to subscribe for the E.P.F. scheme due to poor financial position, a separate '*Departmental Pension Scheme*' has been evolved for providing a monthly pension of Rs.750/-. Under this scheme, pension has been sanctioned for 229 employees retired in the

¹⁸ Property Register, *VijayanagarSwamy Thirukoil*, 2016-17, Madurai.

year 2006 for 255 employees retired in the year 2007 and for As per the above verses of poet *Ayyan Thiruvalluvar*, this Government doing yeoman service for the people, ‘*does what it says and says what it does*’ has paved way for the benefit of the society by introducing several new schemes, in the temples under the control of this department.

Conclusion

The temple has its own administrative setup supervised by a board of trustees, namely *sthanapati*, *pujari*, and *bhandagarika* or a man trustee like pontiff of the *matha* to which the temple was affiliated. The temple had the privilege of using the standard of measures.

The Vijayanagara architects added their own touches as well – Virupaksha temple’s entrance features a massive *Gopuram*, a unique facet of South Indian temple architecture. The city, unlike those in North India, is walled off – with seven fortifications in total. Its streets were wide enough for multiple chariots, and it was known that chariot festivals were popular at the time. Though Vijayanagara is no more a city, it has long been host to the usual assortments that come with being a temple town; a bazaar, some shops, hotels. In the rush to conserve the site, the ASI evicted the bazaar and all its inhabitants; themselves all part of a historic culture that thrived in this land. Today, Vijayanagara represents the richest, surviving monument to South Indian architecture. Every one of its temples represents the confluence of the finest influences in India at their time of creation. Those who are fascinated by fractals – a topic with its own philosophy on life – will have much to be amazed by at these elaborate and ancient sites.

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