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History of Kanyakumari Devaswom Board

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Abstract

The Devaswoms in Kanyakumari District have a distinct and interesting story of their own. For long time this was under the control of the Ays. The Ays ruled over an extensive area stretching from Nagercoil in the south to Thiruvalla in the north including the Sahyadri ranges. Ptolemy refers to the region from the Baris (Pampa) to Cape Comorin as Aioi, where the chieftains of the Ay Clan ruled. Karunandadakkan (857-885) was one of the important Ay rulers. The kingdom now extended approximately from Trippappur in the north to Nagercoil in the South and continued to have its capital Vizhijam. On the evidence of the Huzur office plates, it is inferred that he also bore the name Sri Vallabha. The document bears ample testimony to the keen interest evidenced by Karunandadakkan in the promotion of religion and learning.

Keywords: Devaswom, Devaswom Board, Kanyakumari, Temple Administration, Travancore, south Travancore, Proclamation

Introduction

Kanyakumari district is concerned, as in other parts of Tamil Nadu, here too epigraphic evidence about temples and their maintenance have come up only from the sixth century AD onwards. There are a lot of references about the people of Nachilnadu (Kanyakumari) and their religious practices in the sangam Literature. They like the people of other parts of ancient Tamilakam, worshipped Siva, Murugan, Varunan, and Indiran. The Devaswoms in Kanyakumari District have a distinct and interesting story of their own. For long time this was under the control of the Ays. The Ays ruled over an extensive area stretching from Nagercoil in the south to Thiruvalla in the north including the Sahyadri ranges. Ptolemy refers to the region from the Baris (Pampa) to Cape Comorin as Aioi, where the chieftains of the Ay Clan ruled. Karunandadakkan (857-885) was one of the important Ay rulers. The kingdom now extended approximately from Trippappur in the north to Nagercoil in the South and continued to have its capital Vizhijam. On the evidence of the Huzur office plates, it is inferred that he also bore the name Sri Vallabha. The document bears ample testimony to the keen interest evidenced by Karunandadakkan in the promotion of religion and learning. It is said that under his reign a lot of temples were constructed throughout his kingdom including Nanchilnadu. He established here a *Salai* (Vedic College or University) in which arrangements were made to give free boarding, lodging and tuition to 95 sithars, all of them being Namboothiris. Perhaps, Karunandadakkan himself was the founder of the famous *Kandalur Salai* as well.

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate origin of Travancore Devaswom Board
2. To sketch origin of Kanyakumari Devaswom Board
2. To analyse Devaswom Board Act
3. To sketch the structure of Devaswom Board
4. To analyse the activities of Kanyakumari Devaswom Boards

Research Methodology

The methodology adopted in the present study is analytical, descriptive and interpretative reflection. In the preparation of the present study the following sources including both *primary* and secondary sources.

Temple under the Yohakkars

The Yohakkars enjoyed enormous power. They maintained the temple, gave paddy for the day-to-day *puja* in the temples, which was collected from the tenants. The 'Kaimukku ordeal' was conducted at *Suchidram* (Thanumalaya Temple) with the presence of the Yohakkars. The temple 'Locker' was opened in the festival times to take out '*Thiruvabaranams*' (Jewels) only after getting the consent of Yohakkar.

Proclamation of 1811

The Yohakkars or Samudhayams, the Oorlars or Karakkars with the passage of years, abused the Devaswoms and misused their properties. Mismanagement and maladministration of the Devaswom affairs and misappropriation of the Devaswom funds become the rule. The faithful and honest fulfillment of the noble and benevolent desires of the forefathers who founded the Devaswoms becomes an exception. In brief a state of anarchy was prevailed. During the reign of Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bai, Col. Munro, the British resident in Travancore accepted the Dewanship of the State in 1810. A shrewd statesman and an able administrator he saw the gross neglect duty and the moral and intellectual degeneration of the class of persons in charge of the Devaswoms and their properties. Mismanagements and the political pretensions of these people urged him to set right the military affairs of the country. On the 3rd Kanni of 987 Malayalam Era (1811) he issued an executive order declaring the assumption by the state 348 major and 1123 minor Devaswoms movable and immovable. These major Devaswoms as they have detailed accounts of expenditure and the rest "*No-Ezhuthutheeruva*" Devaswoms. Further, the properties of these Devaswoms were treated as Sirkar (Government) properties and the income there from and the expenditure in the Devaswoms was mixed up with State Revenue and Expenditure. They were on the account called "Incorporated Devaswoms". Again as they were listed in the schedule to the subsequent proclamations, they were also denoted as "Scheduled Devaswoms"

Devaswoms under the Revenue Department

The Devaswoms assumed by the Sirkar were managed since 1811 by Revenue Department. In the following years also more Devaswoms were assumed exercising the *Melkoima* right of the Sovereign. In 1904 (Malayalam Era 1079) a regulation was passed laying down the procedure to be adopted for raking over by sirkar of the Devaswoms. The management of the Devaswoms by the Revenue Department created many difficulties and in the year 1922 (M.E.1097) the

Devaswom proclamation was promulgated and a separate Devaswom Department was brought into existence. With the passing of Interim Constitution Act of 1948, the Devaswom were reserved exclusively for direct administration by His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, who administered the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple direct and the other Devaswoms through the Devaswom Department under a Devaswom Commissioner appointed by him. Till 1922 the cost of administration of the of Devaswoms was under taken by the Sirkar through the Revenue Department and the annual contribution to be given to the Devaswom in lieu of all the claims had to be settled and the same was fixed at Rs.51 lakhs as specified in the proclamations of 1947. Also the “Devaswom Surplus Fund” constituted as per section 2(ii) of an Amendment proclamation, 1122(1947). The annual surplus in the Devaswoms was added on to this Devaswom surplus Fund.

Travancore Devaswom Board

The drawn of independence saw sweeping change in the political map of India. The cry for popular rule echoed in the princely states, Rajas and Maharajas had to concede the aspirations of the people. And also farsighted statesman. As he was, Sardar Vallabai Patel by patient persuasion in most cases shows of strength when necessitate had succeeded in clubbing territories of the Rajas and Nawabs. The Rajas were made to forego their '*Rajyams*' in lieu of privy purpose or pension. According the states of Travancore- Cochin were merged into one state and on the eve of this merge as per the cotenant entered into by the rulers of Travancore and Cochin with the Government of India, the Travancore Devaswom Board was constituted to administer the Devaswom in the Travancore area.

Act XV of 1950 Travancore- Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act

In the covenant entered into by Rulers of Travancore and Cochin, Provision has been specially made for the administration of the temples both in Travancore Cochin. The temples both incorporated and unincorporated which were under the management of the ruler of Travancore, were for the first time, brought under to control of a statutory body known by the name of the 'Travancore Devaswom Board' with effect from the first day of August, 1949, and a sum of 45lakhs was allotted to the Board annually for the administration of these temples. In Act 7(2) – Travancore Devaswom Board shall consist of three Hindu members, one of whom shall be nominated by the Ruler of Travancore, one by the Hindu among the council of Ministers and the third to be elected by the Hindu members of the Legislative Assembly.

Act XV of 1950 enacted with a view to make for the administration supervision and control of incorporated and unincorporated Devaswoms and of other Hindu Religious Endowments and funds. This came into force on 16th April 1950. In section 15 of the Act it has been laid down that 'all rights, authority jurisdiction belonging to exercised by the ruler of Travancore prior to the first day of July, 1949 in respect of Devaswoms and Hindu Religious Endowments shall and be exercised by the Board. Thus under this Act, the Devaswom Board vested with unfettered power in the matter of administration of all Devaswoms their properties and funds and the

actions of the Board were not subject to any supervision control or direction from any appellate authority.

Kanyakumari Devaswom Board

In 1956 November 1 the Indian States were re-organized on linguistic basis. The Tamil speaking majority taluks of Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode, in the southern Travancore. Were merged with TamilNadu. On 1st November 1956, a separate funds as Kanyakumari Devaswom Fund constituted by the Madras Government and the Commissioner, HR and Department, was appointed as one man Board to administer the Devaswoms in the Transferred Territory. The share of the Kanyakumari Devaswom Board on the consolidated Annual grant of 51 lakhs was fixed at Rs. 13.5 lakhs and this amount is being given by the Tamil Nadu Government since then. The formula for this division is as below. The annual grant was Rs. 51 lakhs regarding portion ratio fixed as per the actual expense in the year proceeding 1956 was Rs.37.5 and 13.5 as Travancore Devaswom Board respectively.

The Tamil Nadu incorporated and Unincorporated Devaswom Act was passed in the year 1959- Madras Act30 of 1959 and the first Kanyakumari Devaswom Board was constituted on 1st April 1960 when the said Act, the president of the Board and one member is nominated by the Government of Tamil Nadu while the member is the nominee of the ruler of Travancore.

The Act of 1959

The provisions of the present Act of 1959 are, as compared with those of Act XV of 1950, retrograde in nature. In the latter Act the power, status and authority of the Board have been wanting only reduced with the result that it has to work almost as a subordinate institution under Commissioner for Hindu Religion and Charitable Endowments. The Act of 1959 has given that power the Government. According to the former act decisions are taken by the Board by a majority of voters and in case of equality of voters, the present will have casting vote, but in the new Act in case of equality of votes, the matter has to be referred to the Commissioner, HR and CE whose decision shall be final.

The act of 1959 came into force on 1st April 1960. The first Kanyakumari Devaswom Board was constituted with K.M.Boothalingam Pillai as president and A. Brahamandaswamy and R.N.Krishna Iyer as members. The first two persons were nominated by the Government of Madras as per the provisions of the above mentioned in the Act R.N.Krishna Iyer was nominated by Ruler of Travancore as per the Act.

The duties of Board were to supervise and administer the Devaswom Management of properties and proper conduct of festivals etc. major works, renovations and substantive improvements were taken place in many temples. As per Act of 1959 the Kanyakumari Devaswom Board enjoyed enormous powers and administered the temples in a regular manner.

Group wise Temples Under K.D.B. Administration							
S/N	CATEGORY OF TEMPLES	KANYAKUMARI DIST.				TIRUNELVELI DIST.	TOTAL
		BOOTHAPANDY	NAGERCOIL	PADMANABHAPURAM	KUZHITHURAI	SHENKOTTAH	
1.	INCORPORATED TEMPLES	66	94	116	94	88	458
2.	PERSONAL DEPOSITED TEMPLES (UNINCORPORATED)	6	3	2	2	5	18
3.	SANKETHAM TEMPLES (UNINCORPORATED)	1	2	8	1	-	12
4.	SREEPAADAM TEMPLES (UNINCORPORATED)	-	-	2	-	-	2
5.	ADDITIONAL TEMPLES	-*	-*	-*	2*	-*	2*
6.	GRANT IN AID TEMPLES	3	15	20	26	-*	64*
7.	ANNUAL GRANT TEMPLES	-	4	-	-	-	4
TOTAL KDB TEMPLES:		73	99	128	97	93	490
TOTAL GROUP TEMPLES:		76	118	148	125	93*	560*

*Note: Correction will be possible by further studies

Conclusion

The first three boards from 1960-1969 the administration as somewhat good, adequate resources at the command of the Board with the receipt always above expenditure with even marginal surplus. The second Board was in power from 1963-1966. Under that period they took keen interest in developing higher education in Kanyakumari District. They started a Women’s College at Kuzhithurai (Vilavancode Taluk) in 1965 by name Sri Devi Kumari Women’s College. At first it was started as an intermediate College. They started a Devaswom High School at Mandaikkadu. Now it has been upgraded as a Higher Secondary School. Third Board continued the steps taken by the previous Board in the field of education. They regularized the administration of all the temples and had a close touch with the educational institutions which were started earlier by the Travancore Devaswom Board and the previous Boards. At last the Government introduced a Bill in 1974, stating that the Kanyakumari Devaswom’s administration was incorporated with the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board and it has been called the Act of Tamil Nadu 1974.

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