



# SWETHARANYESWARAR TEMPLE ADMINISTRATION THIRUVENKADU IN BRITISH PERIOD

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## Abstract

*Thiruvengkadu is a village located in newly formed Nagapattinam District in Tamil Nadu in 1991. The famous Swetharanyeswarar Temple is situated in Thiruvengadu. This ancient temple is mentioned in the Sangam literature epic Silapathikaram as Neduvelkunru. The place has also been well known as for the Buda temple, which is located in the same hill. According to the census report of 2011, the district had a population of 11,884. In ancient days, Thiruvengadu was known as Thiruvengadu and was one of the most historical locations in Tamil Nadu. The place was also known as Thiruvengadu. The temple enshrines the Swetharanyeswarar Temple (man-woman) manifestation of Lord Siva, representing the unity of Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati is enshrined in this revered hill temple of great significance, accessible by a motorable road; this is an ancient temple mentioned in the sangam Tamil work, Silappadikaram as Neduvelkunru*

**Kew words:** Temple Administration in British, The Hindu Religions and Charitable Endowments Boards, modern period in the Madras Presidency.

## Introduction

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.

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 in Early Days**

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. 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 beliefs of every human lives that is mingled with the supernatural being. 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. Thus the temples emerged due to the concentration of mind of the devotees in realizing the infinite. Many of the Hindu Kings, rulers, emperors, traders and craftsman, merchants, nobles, land owners, the common folk and also travellers and the visitors who come occasionally have given generous gifts and endowments to build numerous temples that have sponsored and patronized temples. The National department of Archaeology and Epigraphy and various publications like Archaeological Reports on Epigraphy, various inscriptional evidences documented by the State Tamilnadu, and the publication with few South Indian Temple Inscriptions have drawn the attention of various people. Many devotees have donated to the temples for various religious purposes like the cattle, money, land and other form of properties.

This is donated to celebrate the festivals in the temple annually, and to build the residences, halls, orchards, groves, gardens and rest houses. This seems to be the most important one to have relationship with temples and devotees. The complex served as feeding house and offered *Vidhyadhana* and education.

Agreements were made between the state administration and the temple official's finance for some public works such as cultivation and irrigation infrastructure. The arrangements were available made often. The uncultivable lands of a temple were assigned as tax free lands (Irayili lands) which favoured the reclamation of lands by riots. The temples were the primary non state agencies which played a dominant role

in agriculture. The monetary endowments were created to replace the land endowments.

The authorities of the temple could not administer the villages that are far away from the temple. Hence, the endowments, which provided a consistent income was the wealth set apart for religious and charitable purposes. The system and structure is properly maintained during British colonised India. This is an ideal and acceptable opportunity for the British East India Company. This is an easy one to contact with the people through temples which made them to establish the company in a firm way. This type of system or the customary practices happened till the closing of Eighteenth century. The creations of the British administration were made during the start of modern period in the Madras Presidency.

### **From 1789 to 1863**

In 1789 when the Board of Revenue was constituted in Madras, the temple administration also fell under the control and the British rule which asserted its supervisory powers over religious endowments. The Board of Revenue undertook all the temple lands granted to them by the rulers, affluent persons and devotees. The income from temple lands became the properties of the Board of Revenue. The disputes and problems which prevailed within the temple left for the arbitration of the state. The people also welcomed the intervention of the Board in the problems of the temples and maintenance and development of the temple. Though the East India Company took control overall the temples, it never desired to destroy the temples or to deviate from the *Brahmanical* customs and traditions which were observed in the temples. The District Collector's suggestions and recommendation were considered with regard to temple administration. Even financial assistances were rendered for the maintenance and upkeep of the temple. Even though the British Authority did not take up the administration into its hands, it appointed one *Aurmanee* to look into the various aspects of the temple<sup>11</sup>. They even allowed advances to the temples for the repairs, upkeep and general maintenance along with the conduct of periodical festivals.

The Collectors were vested with rights to enquire the misappropriation of the temple fund and they were granted the right to take an action against those corrupt people as per the Regulation XXXIII of 1802. The Collectors were provided with the discretionary powers for the summary disposal of the cases pertaining to temples. The Collectors were given the responsibility to deal with cases as received in the form of complaints and petitions from the public.

When the temples collected more money from the pilgrims for the execution of *sankalpa*, the *sircar* interfered and fixed the amount which in turn enhanced the income of the temple. The authorities were expected to be cautious while accruing and conducting enquiries. When the Bengal Regulation was adopted in Madras, it is obvious that the alien rule was keen on adhering to a uniform administrative policy. On that basis, pilgrim's tax was introduced on the devotees.

Regulation of XIX too informed that the income from the endowments both religious and charitable could also be appropriated. It was further decided that all the endowments should be utilised as intended by the donar through his deed. To provide due appropriation of the endowment, Act No XIV of 1814, did not allow the government to claim any jurisdiction over the internal management of the institutions. The Regulation of 1817, pointed out that all the endowments made for the religious institutions should be under the effective control of the Board of Revenue with powers of superintendence.

It was also decided that all the public religious centers should be maintained by the government to suit the utility needs of the governments. In case of dilapidated and worn out conditions of the buildings the Board of Revenue was authorised to dispose of the property in the manner as it deemed fit. The Board of Revenue also enjoyed the right to prevent the endowed properties being appropriated for private use. Further the Board was allowed to manage all the endowments in accordance with their conditions and nature. To carry out such activities, the Board of Revenue was permitted to appoint local agents or to empower the Collectors to deal with them.

### **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.

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 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.

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 management. 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 government. The Regulation VII of 1817 clearly indicates the view points of the government with the temples. The facts relating to *Ardhanareesawara Temple of Thiruchengode* as given below can be taken into account.

**The Thittam** : For preparing *Neiyvedya* and *Prasadam* for the Lord and Alwars, the provisions for ghee and rice were stipulated.

**Kaingaryam** The duties and salaries of different types of servants- A Ranga Rao (*Serishtrar*) and A.Subbarao(*Jahrhildar*) prepared the list.

**Code** : The Collector of *Salem* prepared the codes of conduct for having an objective form of administration of the temple and that came into effect on 25 July, 1821.

**Sawa** : It was a vivid description of the different aspects of the temple.

**Jauabpath** : This Statement prepared in 1819 contained details about the temple properties, income, expenditure, assets and liabilities, religious services and endowments etc.

### Paimayishi Account

His 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 *Thiruvengadu* 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 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.

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 such unnecessary appointments were avoided mainly to reduce expenditure of the temple. The year 1833 was a significant one in the religious history of the Indian sub-continent. It witnessed a transition in the religious policy of the East India. Thus the company felt that it would not be amiable and favourable to them to interfere in the *Devasthanams* and temples which had only a meager and low income.



## Conclusion

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. 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 Court of Directors vehemently opposed the involvement of the company's servants in the activities of Hindu Temples and idolatry. They directed the servants to give up their contacts either with Muslims or the Hindus. It cannot be denied that the influence of the Christian Missionaries stressed such conditions. It is also worth to note that the Christian Missionaries were forbidden from obtaining rent

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