



A Comparative Study – Lord Jagannath Temple and T.T. Devasthanam

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The idol worship is an integral part of Hindu Religion. The scholars have traced worship of idols in Temples, even in 4th or 5th century B.C.¹

Hindu law confers the status of a personnel - on Gods worshipped in temples, capable of holding and enjoying property. They are perpetual minors. Only in an ideal sense, the property can belong to them. But, the possession and the management of the same lies with a person or body of persons, variously known as Sebayats, Marfatdars, Managers or Trustees.

In the temple, the divine is always potential, but only on occasions it is manifested. Rituals and ceremonies are essential to promote such manifestation of the divine. Infact, the priesthood of a temple is resident in order to maintain the continuous presence of the Lord.²

Thus, the administration of a Temple consists of two categories of personnel, i.e. managerial and priestly order.

Vishnu, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, is the presiding Deity, both in Tirupati Temple and Jagannath Temple. These two Vishnu Kshetras are sacred and celebrated historical temple towns, known all over the world, where only Hindus are allowed.

Lord Tirupati Venkateswar Temple was patronised by the south Indian Kings like, Pallavas

(9th Century AD.), the Cholas (10th Century AD.), the Pandyas and the kings of Vijayanagaram (14th to 16th Century AD.).

The Tirumala Tirupati region was conquered by the Sultans of Golkonda, by about the middle of the 17th Century and remained under Muslim Rule for about a century and a half. This was a period of confusion, chaos and disorder and there was practically no Government worth the name in this region. The Hindu Empire of Vijayanagaram had vanished and various interested parties like Qutub Shah, the Mughals, the Nizams, the Marhattas, the Nawabs of Arcot, Hyder Ali, the English and the French, entered the arena and added to the confusion and misery of this area.³

The present Temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri was constructed in the first quarter of the 12th century A.D., during the reign of the King Choda Ganga Deb (1078-1147 AD.), the most prominent ruler of the Ganga dynasty.⁴ Choda Ganga Deb, was the son of Rajasundari, daughter of Kulotunga Chola, the Raja of Kanchi.

His great grand son Anangabhima Deb III (1211-1238 A.D.), completed the Temple, prescribed elaborate rituals and constituted 'Chattisa Nijog', i.e. 36 categories of ritual functionaries.⁵ He dedicated his entire empire and



declared it as ‘Purushottam Samrajya’ and designated him as ‘Rauta’ or a servant of Lord Purusottam.⁶

Such ‘Servant’ or deputy theology of Orissan Kings crystalised in ritual system of Sri Jagannath Temple, wherein annual Car Festival, the Gajapati King sweeps the Chariots before multitude of devotees, called ‘Chhera Panhara’ which exhibits the height of religious humility and casts a halo of reverence around the ‘Personnel’ of the Raja, and confers a dualistic role on him as the Supreme Administrator of the Temple and first among the Temple functionaries as the ‘Adya Sevak’. The ritual relationship of Lord Jagannath with the Gajapati Kings of Orissa is so inextricably blended, even legislation could not disturb it. On the other hand, He continues to be the hereditary Chairman of Sri Jagannath Temple Managing Committee.

The last Hindu ruler of Orissa, Mukund Deb was killed in the battle of Gohiratikiri, near Jajpur by Kalapahada, the General of Suleman Karani in 1568 AD. The Temple was under Afgan rule from 1568 to 1590 AD., when Raja Mansingh, the Army General of Akbar defeated Afgan and included Orissa in Mughal empire. The Muslim rule continued till 1751 A.D., when Marhattas took over administration of Sri Jagannath Temple. During this period the temple was invaded many a times by Muslim Subedars and deities were removed to different hideouts for safety. Thus, the period from 1568-1751 A.D. was a period of anarchy, which is comparable with the contemporary period of Tirupati Temple under Muslims.

After the Mysore wars, the company tried to restore order in the Carnatic region. The successors of Mohammed Ali opposed it. But the company forced the Nawab to retire on a pension and took over the administration of the Temple in

1801 A.D.⁷ In the year 1803, the Collector of Chittor, within which district, Tirupati is situated had sent a report to the Board of Revenue, Fort St. George, giving a full account of the institution, together with schedules, showing the Pujas, expenses, extent of lands etc., known as Statton’s Report, on the Tirupati Pagoda. These reports, though small in volume are in the same lines as the earliest report submitted to the British Government on Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri by Mr. Grome and Mr. Garrett. British rulers controlled the management of the institution till a set of rules for the management of the temple and the servants attached thereto, were framed in 1821 A.D. known as ‘Bruce’s Code.

In case of Sri Jagannath Temple for the first few years the East India Company followed the same system as the Marhattas, who had annually made up the difference between the receipts and the expenditures of the Temple. The result was that, there was a deficit every year, which the company had to make good. In 1806 A.D. the Government decided to get rid of the minute supervision of the Temple, which this system involved and by Regulation IV of 1806, the superintendence of the Temple was vested in an assembly of three Pandits, nominated by the Collector of Pilgrim Taxes and appointed by the Government. By Regulation IV of 1809, the assembly of Pandits was abolished and the management was made over to the Raja of Khurda, who was appointed hereditary superintendent. He was not granted, however, supreme authority, but in order to prevent any abuse of power on his part, three of the principal servants of the Temple were appointed to assist him. They were not to be removed from their office, except with the sanction of the Government and were required to report to Government any cases, in which the Raja issued orders inconsistent with recorded rules and institutions of the Temple.



The Raja received a fixed allowance on the understanding, that the sum allotted shall be spent wholly for the maintenance of the temple.⁸

From 1803, when the British Government began to manage the Temple, a Parichha was kept in charge of the management and in 1805 the Collector was authorised by the Board to receive applications from the Parichha in connection with the administration of the Temple. Mr. C. Grome, Collector of Jagannath (known as such in revenue records), prepared the first report in 1805, which virtually served as the basis for the subsequent policy formulations.

Due to change of policy of the British Government not to interfere into the management of the Hindu Temples, by an Act (Act-X, 1840), in 1840, the Company abolished the Pilgrim Tax and vested the then Raja of Puri, with full authority in regard to the management of the Temple and its properties. This act forbade the Temple authorities to impose restriction of any kind upon the pilgrims for admission into the Temple and performing ceremonies free and the right of free admission and free worship became a recognised privilege of the General Body of the Pilgrims.

In case of Tirupati Temple, in pursuance of the change of the policy of the British Government, not to interface with religious institutions of the natives, the management of the Tirupati Devasthanam was transferred in the year 1843 by a Sanand to the then head of the Hatiramji Matha, Tirupati, who was styled as - Vichara Karta and began to manage the Temple and its connected institutions and after him, the successive Mahantas did the same. During this period of management by the Mathas, suits in the civil courts were filed at various periods safeguard the funds and property of the institutions and the District Court had settled a scheme of management which was amended by the High Court, but even

then, the litigation and agitation by the people against management of the Mahanta continued. The scheme proceeding had also gone to the Privy Council on appeal. In the year 1927, the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act was passed and the scheme settled by the district court and as amended by the Appellate Courts was deemed as a scheme framed under the said Act. Even after that there were persistent complaints against the Mahant. The scheme framed and as amended by the Privy Council was found to be defective and the Madras Act referred to above was not found adequate to carry out necessary requirements. Therefore a special Act called the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam Act was passed (Madras Act XIX of 1933). According to the said Act the Temple of Venkateswar and its connected endowments and Temples vested in a committee of 7 members and a Commissioner appointed by the Provincial Government, it further provided that the Government while appointing members of the committee should take the Mahant of the Hatiramji Matha, if willing to serve, to be taken as a member. Section 13 of the said Act stipulated that the Mahant, if a member of the committee was to be the President for a period of 3 years. An advisory council was constituted with the hereditary Sebaks and hereditary Archakas and other Sebaks for advising the committee in religious affairs and another committee consisting of the representative of the tenants of the Temple lands for advising the committee for management of estates.

The Temple was managed in accordance with the said Act, till 1951 and superseded by the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act of 1951. With the constitution of a separate province of Andhra Pradesh, the said Act was redesignated as 'The Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act 1951', which was



repealed by the Andhra Pradesh Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions & Endowment Act, 1966 (No. 17 of 1966). The said Act came into effect from 26th January 1967 to achieve the objective of an integrated enactment applicable to the whole of the state of Andhra Pradesh in respect of all the Hindu Public religious institution and public charitable institutions and endowments in the state.

The Temple of Lord Venkateswar Tirupati had the statutory control of the above Act till 1979, when it was considered expedient to formulate a special Act in view of importance, wealth, and to cover some decisions criticised in public regarding Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam management's compromise with hereditary Archakas (Mirasi) to pay several lakhs of Rupees towards 'Homasesa' (Residuals of Sacrificial Fire) with retrospective effect from 1974. This decision of the management provoked bitter public criticism. Thus, a special Act (Act 20 of 1970) was enacted, which provided for constitution of a Trust Board of not more than 13 members, with Executive Officer and Commissioner of Endowment as Ex-Officio members. In previous Act, they were not members. The management board assumed full power of decision to enter into compromise with any body, including Mirasi Archakas and Mirasidars (the owner of hereditary functionaries of the Temple).

This Act continued to be in force till 1987, when it was found defective in many ways. Most of the powers are, in real terms of operation, concentrated in and around the Executive Officer. By being a member of the board of management he acted both as prosecutor and judge in the same matter as the Board is to review the actions of the Executive Officer. There was no provision in the Act for alteration of religion of 'Dirtam', which is very important for administration. There was

no provision to initiate surcharge proceedings against the Executive Officer or the Officers concerned on Audit Reports. An anomaly existed in Section 31 of the Act, which provides for the Executive Officer to complain about any encroachment and also make an enquiry and pass orders on his complaint against which, there is no provision for appeal. The greatest anomaly was contained in Section 15, which empowers the Commissioner of Endowment, who is a member of the Board, to tender proposal for supersession of the Board.

To streamline the administration of Tirupati Temple and to tide over the statutory difficulties, the state Government appointed a 3 member Commission, with retired Chief Justice of Andhra High Court, as its Chairman. The Commission submitted its report on 28th February, 1986.

The Commission recommended two vital things among other recommendations. First is the enactment of a law, that enables every Hindu irrespective of caste, including Scheduled Castes and Tribes, to become eligible for the selection to the office of priesthood, provided he is qualified in respective Agamas, Puja Vidhana according to Sampradaya and strictly adheres to the code of conduct prescribed therefor. The selection shall be strictly on the grounds of merit, ability, character and qualification.

The second important recommendation, is to formulate a common Act for all the religious and charitable institutions of State, including Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam, by repealing this special Act of 20 of 1979 and reviving the Act 17 of 1966, with incorporation of a separate provision of Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam. The Commission felt the necessity of an intermediary authority between the Government and the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam Management Board.



Pursuant to above recommendations, the State Government of Andhra Pradesh, repealed this Special Act of 1979 and incorporated special provision (chapter XIV) in the general Act of Andhra Pradesh Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowment Act, 1987 and came into force on 23rd May 1987. This Act envisaged a Board of Trustees, constituted by the Government for the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam, consisting not more than 13 members, including the Chairman to be appointed by the Government. There shall be a person belonging to the Scheduled Caste and one woman member in the Board. The Executive Officer shall be the Ex-Officio Member Secretary and the Commissioner of Endowment, shall be a member Ex-Officio. The Board shall exercise the General Superintendence and control over the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam and empower to fix the 'Dittam' in the temples. The term of the Board is for a period of 3 years.

The most revolutionary and controversial provision in the Act, is the abolition of hereditary rights of hereditary Archakas and other functionaries of all religious institutions and endowments. It is said to be in tune with the instructions of Government of India, the Ministry of Law and Justice, dated:- 6th October, 1972, to all the State Governments to make suitable amendments to their existing laws or make new laws for abolishing hereditary priesthood and make all Hindus, including Dalits, eligible to be selected or appointed for the office of priesthood in Temples, which would be a great step for social reform. The Act further declare, any usage or practice relating to the succession to any Officer, service or post in Temple Establishment to be null and void. It also extinguished all rights and emoluments of any nature in cash or kind or both accruing to any Officer, or service on a hereditary basis. All the hereditary functionaries of the

Temple establishment shall continue to hold such office or post on payment of only emoluments and shall comply with the conditions of service contained in Section 35 of the said Act.

The validity of the aforesaid provision of abolition of hereditary rights was questioned by the hereditary functionaries of the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam in a writ petition (No. 6403/87, in the Andhra Pradesh High Court) and direction was sought for maintenance of the status-quo which was allowed. The matters instituted in Andhra Pradesh High Court was transferred to the Supreme Court by the latter's decision, dated :- 22.05.87.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court, in a case of A.S.Narayana Deekshitulu, Petitioner Vs. State of Andhra Pradesh and Others, Respondent, challenges the constitutionality of Andhra Pradesh Act as violative of Act 25 of the Constitution, relating to the Religious Freedom (AIR 1996).

The Hon'ble Court has observed in the Para 120 of the Judgment, that the hereditary rights as such is not integral part of the religious practice, but a source to secure the services of a priest independent of it. Though performance of the ritual ceremonies is an integral part of the religion, the person who performs it or associates himself with performance of ritual ceremonies, is not, therefore, when the hereditary right to perform services in the Temple is terminable by an owner for bad conduct, its abolition by sovereign legislature is equally valid and legal. The apex court upheld the legislative competence to take away the hereditary right as such.

The administration of Sri Jagannath Temple, came to a crisis in 1877, when the Raja had, by the neglect of his duty as Superintendent, been the indirect cause of serious loss of life on the occasion of a Festival 'Govinda Dwadashi'. This again succeeded by the trial and deportation



of the Raja for murder on 8th April, 1878. The sentence brought about a very anomalous state of things, as under Act X of 1840, the superintendence of the temple remained with the Raja, even after his deportation.

It was contemplated to repeal the Act X of 1840 and to amend Section 539 of the Civil Procedure Code to bring any trust created for religious purposes within the preview of that Section. The intention of the Government was to declare the Office of the Superintendent of the Temple vacant and to appoint new trustees to function according to a scheme of management. A civil suit was filed in the Court of the District Judge, Cuttack in 1868, which was hotly contested and ended in a compromise, the superintendence of the Temple was vested in the grand mother Surjyamani Pata Mahadei and guardian of the minor Raja, Mukunda Deb. Such compromise further provided for appointment of a competent manager till the minor Raja comes of age.

Raja Mukunda Deb, assumed the power of Superintendent from 1897-1926. On 28th October, 1901, an accident occurred inside the Temple, in which two persons were trampled to death and several other seriously injured. It was urged upon the Government of Bengal to introduce reforms by way of a Legislation or a Civil Suit, since it is not possible to bring the Raja under the provisions, if the Penal Code or to enforce his personal responsibility in any other way, when a bad accident happens within the temple precincts involving loss of life of people. The civil litigation as such being slow, costly and with uncertain results, and in face of sad experience of the past and the above legal status of the Raja, it was considered not acceptable to the authority.

Several attempts were made to bring a comprehensive legislation for formation of the

honorary committee, with the Raja as a titular head. A draft bill was submitted to Government of India in 1881, which was not approved by the Government, due to peculiar relationship of the Raja with Lord Jagannath. Government was reluctant to be dragged into direct opposition to Hindu feelings in a matter, in which any real improvement might prove to be impossible.

The Raja was persuaded to appoint a Manager (A Deputy Magistrate on deputation), to manage the Temple and endowed estates.

The successors of the Raja Mukunda Deb, proved equally ineffective and public agitation mounted.

In view of grave and serious irregularities in management of the affairs of the temple and its properties and to provide better administration in supersession of previous laws, regulations and arrangements and having regard to the ancient customs and rituals of the temple, the Puri Sri Jagannath Temple (Administration) Act 1952, was enacted. According to the provisions of the said Act, a Special Officer was appointed, who prepared the Record of Rights, containing traditional Nitis and Rituals, with the traditional privileges of hereditary Temple Functionaries. On the basis of the report of the Special Officer, a comprehensive legislation called Sri Jagannath Temple Act 1954 was enacted.

According to the Section-6, of the said Act, a committee consisting of 12 members was formed. The Raja of Puri, is the hereditary Chairman of the said committee, the Collector as the Ex-Officio member and Vice-Chairman, the Administrator, appointed, under Section-19 is Ex-Officio Member Secretary, the Commissioner of Endowments appointed under the Orissa Hindu Religious Endowment Act 1 of 1951 is Ex-Officio member.



One person to be nominated by the State Government from among the persons entitled to sit on the Muktimandapa. Four persons to be nominated by the State Government from among the Sevaks of the Temple. One person representing the Mathas and other institutions connected with the Seva Puja and Nitis of the Temple, to be nominated by the State Government and two persons to be nominated by the State Government from among persons, who do not belong to any of the categories above as members. No person, who does not profess the Hindu Religion shall be eligible for membership.

The committee can co-opt members not exceeding four, from among the persons not indicated above.

If at any time, the Raja of Puri happens to be a minor, in the opinion of the State Government, suffers from any of the disabilities covered by Section-10, thereof, the duties of the Chairman shall, during such minority or so long as such disability lasts, be exercised by a person professing the Hindu Religion, when the State Government, may by order, specially appoint in that behalf.

Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri is one of the four important Dhams of the country, the other three being Badrinath, Dwarka and Rameswaram. Entire Hindu community of the country, is interested for its proper maintenance. Government of Orissa had set up a commission of enquiry, with Justice B.K. Patra - a retired Justice of Orissa High Court in the year 1977. After probing into details of administration of Puri-Temple, he tendered very valuable recommendations. Eminent witnesses before him (like Late Dr. Radhanath Rath and Dr. H.K. Mahatab) have opined that the members from Sevak community do not take an objective view of several

problems, except their own Nijoga and hence, their views are one-sided. Some are of opinion (by Dr. H.K. Mahatab, Ex-Chief Minister of Orissa) that the non-official members should be independent minded people, not affiliated to any political party. He suggested a small committee consisting of the Governor, Chief Justice and Chief Secretary of the state for selection of members of the Managing Committee. The Commission was of the opinion that the Collector is the only person, who can efficiently control the administration, but this being not done the administration is left to work without exercise of any control over him. The Government should not be influenced by any consideration other than the suitability as the members.⁹

In the same year, a High Power Committee, under the Chairmanship of the Governor of Orissa was set up to suggest measures for improvement of administration of the Temple. It has also tendered the identical opinion of politicalisation of Temple Management and too much State interference.

The most vital recommendation of both the commission and the committee was rethinking on hereditary rights of Sevaks in lieu of compensation and their rationalisation of the basis of basic minimum need of Sevaks for rituals of the Temple. But, such necessary recommendations have never been implemented due to lack of political will.

Out of the four Dhams in India, Jagannath Dham is foremost and known for lord Vishnu's 'bhojan kshetra'. The King is the lowest servitor as a sweeper of the Chariots of the Lords, nowhere found in India. Sri Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan are four fold God heads, worshipped on one pedestal, called 'Ratnavedi'. Their wooden idols, renewed



periodically between 8-19 years, according to Lunar Calculation, when an extra month of Asadha comes. The Car festival of Lord Jagannath is now popular all over the world, where the great Lord comes down to the street to meet the commoners, who can touch, embrace and offer their devotion. His 'Mahaprasad' is 'Annabrahma', which is taken together by Brahmin even with a scavenger. The Deity and His Mahaprasad transcends all barriers of caste, creed, colour and religion. Such elements of universal humanism are unknown and unparallel in any shrine of the world. His abode is variously known as Srikshetra, Nilachal, Purusottam Kshetra, Sankha Kshetra etc.

The cult of Jagannath constitutes an eclectic system, which has assimilated many creeds and sects with divergent philosophies. Monism of Shankar, qualified dualism of Ramanuja, Bhakti Cult of Madhava, Nimbarka and Ballabhacharya, Achintya Veda of Sri Chaitanya have merged in all comprehensive cult of Jagannath and enriched it. Three major systems of Hindu Religion in India relating to Saiva, Sakta and Vaishnava are represented in the holy trinity of Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath.

There are 307 Mathas and Ashrams at Puri, belonging to different sects of Ramanuja - Ramananda, Nimbarka, Vishnu Swami, Madhava, Goudiya and others. Even non-Hindu devotees like Santh Kabir, Haridas, Jaban Salabega and Sikh Guru Nanak have their Mathas in Puri. Most of them have ritual relationship with Sri Jagannath Temple.

Such Monasteries came into existence at different points of history, centering around Sri Jagannath Temple, to propagate their philosophy. They have contributed much towards the growth of a composite and all comprehensive cult of Jagannath and unequivocally accepted Him as the God Absolute or 'Paramabrahma' - Purusottam.

Administration of a temple is an integral part of the cult. Under independent Hindu Kings, the administration was central and authoritarian. With the abolition of kingship, the traditional system was disturbed.

Under the Foreign Rulers and in a democratic system, the administration assumed new dimensions. In case of Jagannath Temple, the traditional system still continues, which got degenerated with the passage of time. It needs reforms, which presupposes a strong political will. The hereditary Pandas and Archakas, pilgrim guides or Jatri Pandas, have developed vested interest with consequential dissatisfaction and exploitation of pilgrims. It is high time, that the administration of Temple should be reoriented to cater to the present need of pilgrims and devotees. Both the Commission of Enquiry and High Power Committee have suggested reforms with a note that all that is necessary is the determination to implement them. Implementation of some of the suggested reforms may be met with resistance from those whose interests are likely to be adversely affected. But, I hope and trust that in the interest of the fair name of this famous institution and interest of the thousands of pilgrims who visit the shrine everyday, Government would not hesitate to bring about certain necessary changes in the system of administration to ensure that Nitis are performed regularly, that the finances of the Temple are placed on a sound footing and that the economic condition of the Sevaks actually doing the Seva of the Deities is improved.¹⁰

Since independence, there has been considerable socio-economic changes and changes in our attitude towards religion and religious organisations. It has to be studied, if the democratic and socialistic ideas have invaded into the traditional administrative philosophy of the Temples.