



CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH TRAVANCORE (1729 - 1936)

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ABSTRACT

The Oottupura building is found on the west bank of the Kuzhithurai River. The building is in the form of a hall which appears sufficient for 300 students to sit for an University examination. This structure is located in the Vilavancode village of the Vilavancode Taluk. This area comes under the Palace ward of Kuzhithurai Municipality. On the northern side of Oottupura the south faced Kuzhithurai Gramam is located. Thus the Gramam and the Oottupura are divided by the road leading to the temple on the east.

KEYWORDS: *Oottupura building , Kuzhithurai Municipality , granite construction.*

INTRODUCTION

The Oottupura at Kuzhithurai was located in such a way as to enable the Brahmins to go there with a maximum walk of forty feet distance. The Kuzhithurai, Oottupura building has the size of 150' length and 30' width. The eastern end of the building, was used as kitchen and the work area. The rest of the hall was used as the dining hall. It is a granite construction with tiled roof and sufficient space is left on the wall sides for the maximum flow of light and air. It is a very strong construction with less appearance. Good quality timber and better workmanship were the specialty of this structure. This in turn reduced the maintenance expenses considerably. The area found on the west bank of the Kuzhithurai river is submersible. Hence the Temple and the Oottupura buildings were constructed by granite with very strong foundations. The Gramam on the other hand was developed as an elevated track and so the Brahmins inhabitants were less bothered of flood which has its occurrence then and there in the place.

BENEFICIARIES

Dispensation of charity has been guided by consideration of various natures. Charity in the State of South Travancore had been looked upon more as a religious duty than as a social obligation. A deep rooted feeling of this nature was found on the part of the ruling families and the aristocracy of the olden days. This gave rise to the establishments of charitable institutions all over the Brahmins and gruel (Canjee) to the Non-Brahmins poor. From this, it is clear the charity practiced by the administration and aristocracy was opened to all. Besides this, there were water sheds where drinking water on highway was freely given to way-farer during the hot season. Even the animals were not exempted from availing the charity dispensed by the state and the local agencies. Accordingly there existed certain institutions for the supply of fodder to stray cattle. From this, it is clear that both Brahmins and Non-Brahmins were benefited by the charity practiced by the state and the aristocracy. However, the Oottupura at Kuzhithurai was purely meant for the Brahmins.

Brahmins numbered about 150, enjoyed sumptuous meals everyday. Rice with two or three vegetables, curry, butter and pickle



and sweet for the meals were provided by the Oottupura. Doles of rice and provisions were being given to certain families and individuals from the Oottupura. These families and individuals lived around the Gramam and served the Brahmins at various capacities like cleaning their streets and courtyards and throwing their wastes to distant places. After taking stomachfull of tasty food from the Oottupura, old Brahmins men and women used to take doles of rice outside to exchange for betel leaves for chewing purposes. Some people belonging to the lower strata of the society like Kappallis kept the betel leaf and arecanut at the post office junction round about a few distance from the Oottupura. They would be anxiously waiting for the Brahmins with doles of rice. At the same time the exact people who cultivated the betel and arecanut were not permitted to do so. The smell of the curry and the vegetables cooked in the Kuzhithurai Oottupura tickled the nostrils of the poor way-farer going along the sub-path road. The poor people like the Nadars, Ezhavas, Parayas and Pulayas were fated to feel the smell from a stipulated distance, while communities like the Chekkalas and the Chakravar were privileged to go up to the entrance of the Gramam to smell the taste.

The state met the entire expenditure of the Oottupuras. Taking advantage of this Brahmins travelers and Brahmin Pandarams also ate at the expense of the Oottupuras. As far as the Oottupura at Kuzhithurai was concerned, it was situated in a central place. Those Brahmins who were going- to places like Suchindram and Kanyakumari would be getting down at Kuzhithurai on their way to the east and west. Then they would be taking bath in the Kuzhithurai River and worshiping in the Temple on the bank of the River. After these formalities, they would get into the Oottupura and eat at the state expense. Pandarams also availed themselves of this service. The entire work in the Oottupura was done by the cook and Sunday staff. They were paid by grants and money. Thus the Oottupura and the Oottupura center at Kuzhithurai area were beyond the reach of the ordinary sections of the society.

Administration and expenditure of the Oottupura institutions became a source of criticism in the long run. This criticism was mainly because of the absence of facilities for a systematic control over the administration and expenditure of the institutions. Hence there arose the necessary for the reorganization of the state charities. Hence in 1905 the state appointed the Melezhuthu Pillai, Chenpakarman Pillai for examining the existing system and compiling a comprehensive scale of expenditure for Devaswams and Oottupuras. Following that in 1907 the high court judge Ramachandra Rao was selected for the special work, and he submitted his report in 1908.

In the light of the report of Ramachandra Rao in 1908, a conference of the Peishkars (Tahsildars) was held in the secretariat presided over by the Dewan. The views of the Peishkars were considered and it was resolved to address the matter to the government. In accordance with the recommendations of the committee it was decided to rewrite the rules and regulations of the state charity institutions. In view of reducing the state expenses on this charity service, it was thought of closing down such institutions which did not serve the purpose. The immediate step taken was the selection of the allotment usually. Provided under daily meals. As a consequence of that the item "Anchusadya" automatically ceased along with the abolition of daily meals. Along with that control of Mofussil Oottupuras, Thaneer Pandals, grant to charitable institutions outside states were entrusted with the Devaswam Commissioner. To reduce the expenses further that of the Highness Sri. Mulam Thirunal were abolished.

MANAGEMENT

The Oottupuras were under the administrative control of the Devaswam Commissioner. There in the spot they were managed and supervised by the Taluk Devaswams under the control of the local tahsildar. The establishment in each of the Oottupura consists of:

A Bharippukaran or superintend had to supervise the cooking and serving arrangements and to see the suppliers.

A Mandapapillai or accountant whose duty is to write an account of the number of Brahmins fed and the quality of rice and other provisions consumed daily in the Oottupura.

Perezhuthu, another servant employed for taking a list of the names of the Brahmins who daily came to the Ootupuras from the north and south.

One to four Brahmins were employed to cook various items of food on sufficient allowance for each month.

Besides a Dubash was employed in some of the Oottupuras to interpret the Malayalam language to the Northern Brahmins.

Some petty servants such as storekeepers, watchmen, sweepers etc. were paid very meagerly but all were supplied with boiled rice.

A huge amount on these institutions were spend in order to please the Brahmins. The poor dumb, sick and the blind of the Non-Brahmins were also provided with gruel in the conjee house found at the capital. Besides this, all the Oottupuras dharma conjee was always supplied to the sudras and the poor people. The standard expenditure of these came to about 85,000 rupees per annum, which in due course appeared as a great drain on the state finance. Hence during the time of the great Dewan Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer the Oottupuras came to be closed down. After the abolition of this system in Travancore, the Oottupura buildings were left abandoned. But unlike the other Oottupura buildings, the Oottupura building of Kuzhithurai came to serve the purpose of a college.

CHATRAMS IN SOUTH TRAVANCORE

Inns and shade giving trees existed throughout in India till the recent past. The absence of modern conveyance facilities caused hardships to the travelers. In the course of their journey they had to take rest under the tree shades and get themselves relaxed by staying a night in an inn. It was the major service of the ancient kings of India to plant shade giving trees on both sides of the highways and constructing inns in the important places. In the princely state of Travacore. Banyan trees were planted on the road sides for the benefit of the pedestrians. Ambalams were set up in most part of the country to enable the wayfarers to take rest at the day time as well as during nights. Quite against of these, chatrams were established in the taluk, regional and district headquarters for the night stay of the government officers, Brahmins and other dignitaries. Accordingly there existed a chatram at Kuzhithurai. It was in the form of a modern traveler's bungalow with all facilities. In the beginning there was no kitchen in the Chatram for the use of the Christians and Non-laste Hindus.

In 1916 the Dewan Peishkar prepared a plan and two estimates for Rs. 911/- and Rs. 393/- towards the construction of a separate kitchen in the Kuzhithurai Chatram for the use of Christians and Non-Caste Hindus. When it was sent to the Maramat Chief Engineer for necessary action, only Rs. 762/- and Rs. 769/- were sanctioned. The separate kitchen arrangement should be made by acquiring the required plot of ground away from the temple. The Maharaja was pleased to sanction the two estimates as reduced by the Maramat Sub-Engineer.

The chatram with Separate kitchens for the Caste-Hindus and other social groups was difficult to be established in that manner. That was mainly because of the necessity on the part of administration to use the building as a court house. In the beginning one of the rooms had been reserved for the use of the travelers and the chatram watcher was also allowed to continue at the chatram. Later on, orders had been issued to the Tahsildar to hand over the above room also for the use of the Magistrate court. He was also directed to auction away the articles of the chatram if any and appoint the watcher as a part time peon.

Conversion of the chatram into a court building posed certain problems and it was asked to stop the work already started to convert the chatram into court. In the mean time, the Chief Engineer was asked to inspect the building to know the strength and submit the report in time. Accordingly he inspected the building and found that the building was quite useless. It is stated that any expense for its renovation was a mere waste of government funds. Hence it was suggested to construct a fresh building and asked to stop the repair work if already started. Finally it was decided to construct a new building for the court and leave the chatram for the use of chatram.

For a long time from its very formation the chatram was under the control of the Land Revenue Department. Under such a condition it was thought that there was no need for a chatram in Kuzhithurai. Hence the Maramat Department was permitted to hold the VilavancodeMaramat section office in the wing

of the chatram building. The rest of the portion was allowed to be utilized as a rest house. Accordingly the department took charge on 25-03-1936. For repairing the building and for constructing a compound wall an amount of Rs. 1,620/- was sanctioned. At the time of transfer of control there was no watcher to look after the building, but only a sweeper at Rs. 2/- per month. Later on, a watcher was appointed and a maintenance grant of Rs. 188/- per year was also sanctioned. Thus for a long time chatram functioned like a modern traveler's bungalow with no access to local people.

CONCLUSION

During the reign of Marthanda Varma, who took several measures for the social service by introducing Oottupuras, Chatrams, Thanneerpanthals etc, in South Travancore. For this purpose, then authorities of the Devaswom Board spent huge amount. But, the caste discrimination existed in the above institutions. It is proved that the Caste-Hindus were considered where as the downtrodden Hindus were neglected during this time.

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