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Ritual authority and power structure in sankethams with special emphasis on Koodalmanikyom Temple.

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Temples in Kerala have historically played a vital role in shaping power dynamics, influencing both religious and political spheres. The interactions with power within temples are intricately connected to the region's social, cultural, and political structures. The Brahminical temples reflect a unique blend of religious legitimacy, social hierarchy, and administrative autonomy. The temple and the state were related in the early medieval period and both derived support from each other. While the state patronised the temple, the latter lent considerable legitimacy to the former. The temple gradually started appropriating the role of the state in numerous ways, assuming administrative, judicial and fiscal functions.The Koodalmanikyom temple is a notable example of how ritual authority was converted in to actual political and economic power within this frame work.The Sanketham of temple-controlled land,resources and customary rights in addition to regulating worship and upholding the sanctity of rituals.

The Sankethams was quasi autonomous territory consisting of several village so organised around a Brahamnical temple.The Sankethams existed in many parts of Kerala in medieval times.The Vanjeri Grandhavari, which was preserved in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts in the Vanjeri Illam, located in the Trikkandiyur Village, Tirur Taluk, Palghat District of the Kerala State covers roughly three and half centuries from 1541 A.D. to 1886 A.D., during which period the Sanketams were common in Medieval Kerala. An analysis of the Grandhavari demonstrates that the Sanketam had to rely on the neighbouring chieftain in whose territory it was situated in order to

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establish and implement rules of conduct for the Yogam, the executive meeting of the Sanketam, to maintain law and order within the Sanketam.[1]

K.P.Padmanabha Menon has described the sanketham as a defined territory over which no king has any power to wield temporal authority within the boundaries of the sanketham of a devaswom. According to him there were independent republics free from the control of kings from.The king had only the position of protector. And even to this post of the protector any king could be selected, whether or not he is the actual ruler of the territory in which the Sanketham is located. The temples developed in to powerful states during the medieval period had their own territorial jurisdiction in what is known as sanketams.The landed Brahmanas of each Ur constituted an oligarchic corporations.[2] The Sanketam attached to the temple developed and became powerful in the 11th and 12th centuries and its authority weakened due to the invasion of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and later on with the establishment of British power in Kerala.Two different types of Sanketams ,namely Kshetra sanketam and Grama Sanketam are said to have existed .The Grama sanketam was a sanketam of one of 32 settlements ,while the kshetra sanketam was that of fresh settlements around the temple However there was no difference between the two.[3] The temples had a significant role in the integration of the society .It was a feudal oriented caste-ridden society where the temple and their sankethams emerged themselves as the makers and breakers of all social justice.

Each important temple had within its jurisdiction a well defined territory called sanketam managed by the Uralar. The sanketam was almost a state within the state with its own organs of government and the ruling sovereigns had no effective control over them.some of the temples were even soverign states with a well defined territory of their own called Sankettams [4] They also provided the rulers with a safe place or sanctuary for asylum during times of war and internal disorder. In view of the importance of temples the rulers of the age sought to acquire melkoima rights over temples situated in territories over which they had no political jurisdiction. The Rajas often resorted to intrigues and counter intrigues in their attempts to obtain melkoima rights over such temples situated outside their political domains.The temple of Peruvanam, Koodalmanikyam ,Vadakkumnathan ,Annamanada are few

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temples truly reflects this poltical encounter. Historic temples like Koodalmanikyam, Peruvanam, Vadakkunathan, and Annamanada are important hubs of custom and social power in Kerala. These organizations amass wealth, land, and cultural prestige. Each temple is a microcosm of Kerala's larger power structure since control over ceremonial rights and administrative positions frequently reflects caste and class distinctions.

Sankethams has described as independent jurisdictions possessed beyond the control of the sovereign or local chieftains who were simply protectors of these jurisdictions.They governed and administered the temple grounds with the assistance of this secular monarch. [5]The formation of a feudal power structure in medieval Kerala, where the Sanketam played the function of a feudal chieftain and the Sanketam benefited from a somewhat higher position because of religious support, did not alter the organization's fundamental nature as a feudal structure. Namboothiri Brahmin's economic hegemony and ideological legitimization had made them a determinant force of political authority.The very existence of such an extraordinary Corporation is called in question on the ground that no trace of any sanketam exist in the present day. Mr. J. C. Ramyngton, arbitrator in disputes between the States of Travancore and Cochin regarding the exercise of sovereign righs within the limits of the lands attached to the temples, rejected the existance of indepandent sanketams[6]

The temples of Modern type arose in Kerala round about A.D.750.The Dravidian gods and their shrines (kavus) gradually lost their importance.[7] The Kulasekhara period (800-1100)is perhaps the most eventful in Kerala history for the diffusion and consummation of temple design.The period marked the emergence of temple complexes under Brahmin guidance in all parts of Kerala.People from all walks of life from ruler down to the common man vied with other to endow these temples with properties and the management of the temples and its properties placed on a regulated footing.[8]Originally sacred groves known as Kavus existed in the places where temples stand today. These groves were not only places for the worship of fierce local deities but also functioned as centres where community disputes were addressed. Over time, the Brahmins rose to prominence and temple institutions gradually emerged, marked by the consecration of Shiva, Vishnu, and Shakti. Along

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with, Jaina and Buddhist Viharas also appeared. In the couse of time the system of took shape. These sanketams were the organized versions of the earlier tharakoottams and the Jaina-Buddhist Viharas. The village-temple councils (grama-kshetra sabhas) transformed into sanketams, and it was mainly through these sanketams that Brahmanical authority became firmly established.[9] A large number of temples in Kerala were sovereign states with a well - defined territory called Sanketham and well defined organs of the government.The area under the temple ranged from a few acres to hundreds of square miles.[10]

In the State of Cochin, at Irinjalakuda, there is an ancient and important public temple, known as the Koodalmanikkam temple. It was richly endowed, and owns immovable property in the States of Cochin and Travancore and also in Malabar in British India.[11] Being in an important Brahmin settlement and one among the four Talis, Irinjalakuda enjoyed a higher position and it was strengthend by Koodalmanikyam temple. The Irinjalakkuda Grama is one of the foremost among the four premier Gramas of Kerala. This Grama is also known by the name of Sangama Grama", this being but the Samskritised form of the former. The Grandhavaris gives a list of information about Irinjalakuda temple, its prosperity and popularity, its tradition and position as one of the important temples in Kerala.The administration of temple was performed by both Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The Uralars were the Brahmin functionaries. Pothuval and Varier were the two important functional categories in the non-Brahmin order. The Thachudaya Kaimal was a non Brahmin office associated with koodalmanikyam temple. Despite the hegemony of Brahmin in the temples, we have stray incidents were the non-Brahmin exercised managerial control both in external and internal affairs of the temple. The earliest reference about the installation of Kaimal found in the agreement of 517 between the Uralars and Raja of Onattukara. Accordingly Kaimal was appointed for the supervision of the construction of sree-kovil [12]

The appointment of the Kaimal was not a mere secular act, but a religious function performed with pomp and ceremony. The avordham consisted of several processes. Avaradham literally means to install or to ordain a person to a position .This system existed in kerala form the olden times onwards mainly conducted on the installation of chiefs, kings, special ruling officials, feudal families and persons charge of temple

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administration. The ceremony is known in different names according to different positions and regions. The avarodham of royals are commonly called as Ariyittuvazhcha or Kireedadharanam. The avarodham of Kavalappara Moopil Nayar called as Tandettam. And Koodalmanikyam temple had Tachudaya Kaimal avarodham, it was called as Jathakavarodham and this was conducted by the Azhvancheri Thamprakkal.

The office of the Thachudaya Kaimal became a source for long standing conflict between the kingdoms of Travancore and Cochin. When the treaty of 1765 AD was signed between Travancore and Cochin the managerial rights over the temple came in to the hands of Travancore. A part from the prestige and financial control, the right for installation of Kaimal gave some special significant for Travancore.[13] Treaty obligations made Cochin Darbar totally helpless, and state had to remain a silent spectator to the powers of Travancore through a nominee in a prestigious temple located in her soil. It was a unique and unusual event in the region's religious history for Śudra to be ceremoniously promoted to the rank of supreme religious authority and to assume control of a temple that was previously run by Brahmin trustees.The consecrated carpenter became converted into a consecrated manager which completely changed his function from supervising temple construction into managing temple funds.From a secular point he owed his position partly to the initiative taken by the Yogam and chiefly to his selection by the Travancore chief. The influence of Thachudaya Kaimal Sthanam is evident from the conflict between the Travancore and Cochin.The temple lost many of their previous authorities with the changing scenario.

It was during the administrative period of last Thachudaya Kaimal that the Kerala Land Reforms Act came into force. As a result, the land of Sree Koodal Manikyam, which was spread across the Thrissur, Ernakulam, and Palakkad districts, passed into the hands of the occupants. Consequently, the Devaswom's income significantly decreased, making it difficult even to meet daily expenses. This financial crisis naturally created an administrative crisis for the Devaswom. A few employees were laid off from the Devaswom. The employees protested this decision and even resorted to strikes.The administrative crisis of the Devaswom came to the notice of the government, and the Koodal Manikyam Devaswom Act was formed in 1971 to resolve

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it. As per the Koodal Manikyam Devaswom Act of 1971, the Government of Kerala vested the administration of the Koodal Manikyam Devaswom in a Managing Committee. The Sree Koodal Manikyam Devaswom Managing Committee was formed. The Sree Thachudaya Kaimal was the first Chairman of the Koodal Manikyam Devaswom Managing Committee. However, the Koodal Manikyam Devaswom Act of 1971 was amended in 1976, according to which the Thrissur District Collector became the Chairman of the Managing Committee, and the Thachudaya Kaimal was made a member of the Managing Committee.[14].After the formation of the Kerala state the government issued several Ordinances which curtailed several powers of the temple.The Koodalmanikyam Devaswom Act of 1976 made drastic changes in the administration of Koodalmanikyom.There appointed a committee with District collector of Thrissur as its Chairman.[15] The temple is now under the Cochin Devaswom Board and and Thrissur District Collector is the administrator

Kerala's spiritual, social, and political sectors have historically been greatly influenced by the office of the Thachudaya Kaimal, which is closely associated with the Koodal Manikyam Temple. The Kaimal functioned as the supreme ritual authority and exercised considerable influence over temple management. This position held decisive power over temple lands, taxation, customs, and festival activities. Shifts in this authority mirror the wider changes and reform movements that transformed Kerala society. These social developments affected the dominance of temples and the positions connected to them. The Thachudaya Kaimal's administrative authority gradually decreased with the implementation of constitutional changes and the creation of Devaswom Boards. Despite these changes, its cultural and religious value remains unaltered and preserve its deep religious and cultural relevance.

End Notes

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