

Guruvayur

BY

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To the people of South India Guruvāyūr is a heaven on earth. The stories which associate it with the Pracetās of the *Bhāgavata*, the image with Sutapas and Priṣṇi, Kāśyapa and Aditi, and Vāsudeva and Devaki, and its installation with Guru, the preceptor of the celestials, and Vāyu, their messenger, are recent inventions, intended to explain and augment the sanctity of the temple.

Early History

The earliest reference to Guruvāyūr is to be found in a Tamil invocation in which the Lord is addressed as *Kuruvayūram-pumumparperumāle*, O, Lord of the Celestials, residing at Guruvāyūr. In the Malayalam *Cakṛavākasandēśa* of the early sixteenth century, the bird which carries the message is told that beyond Mammiyūr is a place called Kuruvayūr, *Kuruvayūrenrupērāmpṛadēśam*. Even as late as A.D. 1637, some fifty years after the famous *Nērayaṇīyam* was composed, the Lord of Guruvāyūr is referred to in the temple records maintained in the Kōleḷuttu script as *Kuruveyūr Tēvar*. As the short *a* is also pronounced as short *e* in these parts there is no doubt that the *Kuruveyūr* of the temple records is only the vulgar variant of the *Kuruvayūr* of the Tamil invocation and the Malayalam *Sandēśa*. How the place came to be called *Kuruvāyūr* is any one's guess: in early Dravida, *Kuruvai* means the sea, and in those days the village might have been situated near the sea, which must have since receded.

With the growing popularity of Sanskrit under the aegis of the Zamorin, notably by the annual *Paṭṭattānams* or literary and philosophical competitions held at Kōlikkod (Calicut), the fashion grew to Sanskritize even Dravidian place-names. Thus Kūdallūr became Sangamapuri, Mēlputtūr Uparinavagrāma, Kāṇṇankuricci Kāśyapakṣetṛa, and Pālghat Kṣīravana(?).

Perhaps it was the author of the *Nārayaṇīyam* himself who was responsible for associating Guru and Vāyu with this village near the sea. Never has a change so small produced a result so auspicious and happy. By lengthening the short vowel in *Va*, he gave the temple a sanctity all its own, as founded by Guru and Vāyu, which no temple however holy or hoary can claim. And his *Nārayaṇīyam*, in which the Lord is often addressed as *Gurupavanapureśa*, is an authority which the devout will never challenge.

We do not know when Guruvāyūr came into existence. It is quite possible that Koreoura, Brahmagara, and Arembour of Ptolemy (A.D. 150) are the present Guruvāyūr, Brahmadeśam and Arimpūr. Neither Nammālvār nor Tīrumangaiyālvār has sung about Guruvāyūr, though they have praised Tīrunāvāyi. It is quite possible that Guruvāyūr had not then become famous enough to attract them, if it had already come into being.

In the temple records that have escaped the iconoclastic fury of Tipu Sultan and the voracity of the white ants, Guruvāyūr appears as comprising the five *Deśams* or villages of Guruvāyūr Tiruvenkatam, Mammiyūr, Tāmarayūr and Añjiyūr, and the subordinate *Dēvasvams*, or shrines, of Edattedam, Añjiyūr, Tāmarayūr, Srikanthapuram, Maṇṇūr, Kulikkāḍ, Tattamangalam, Ayyankulaṅgara, Ciṅgaṅkāvu, Nārānankulaṅgara, Kuruvāyūr-kulaṅgara, Mammiyūr, Tirutti, Tiruvenkatam, Pāluvāyi and Marutayūr. Guruvāyūr itself was subordinate to Tṛkkunāvāyi, the Kuṇavāyilkottam of the ancient Tamil writers, the *Guṇaka* of the mediaeval *Sandēśas*, and the Tṛkkaṇāmatilakam or Matilakam of the English and Dutch records. Before the Mysorean invasions, more exactly before A.D. 1763, the present Cāṭṭukulaṁ had been included within the limits of Guruvāyūr, and it was in this tank that the *Āraṭṭu*, or ceremonial immersion, of the deity at the close of the annual festival had taken place.

We do not know how many *Illams* or families of Brahmins there were at Guruvāyūr at the beginning. According to tradition there were seventy-two houses. At any rate the Brahmins were so numerous as to require four *Otikkans*, or priests, to minister to their religious needs. Some of them followed Āśvalāyana, others Baudhāyana, still others Kauṣitaka.

It is not known how and when Guruvāyūr became supreme over the other four *Deśams* or how and when Trkkuṇavāyi happened to establish its authority over Guruvāyūr. It is possible that the four *Deśams* merged with Guruvāyūr in a peaceful synoecism, and for prudential reasons they commended themselves to the protection of their stronger and more powerful neighbour.

The greatness of a temple is due to the faith of its devotees. The earliest of these great devotees of Guruvāyūr was Cempakaś-
seri Nampūtiri. His family house stood in Mammiyūr, a little to the west of the Nārāṇaṅkuḷaṅgara Bhagavati shrine. He had no heirs, and he made over all his property to the Lord. He died in the solar month of *Kanya* (*Virgo*) on the day of *Magha*, or tenth asterism. As his heir, the Lord still performs in the temple the annual *Śrāddha*, or ceremony in honour of the departed, the Perumpallī Otikkan, his family priest, being feasted as the distinguished guest.

Another of these early devotees, whose devotion helped in the making of Guruvāyūr, was Desavarma Nampūtiri. Like Cempakaśseri, he also gave away all his property to the Lord. And as his heir, the Lord still performs his *Śrāddha* on the day of *Magha*, in the solar month of *Kumbha* or *Aquarius*, though before the Mysorean occupation it had been performed on the last day of the dark fortnight of *Vriscika* or *Scorpio*.

Popular imagination, very fertile in matters of faith, has not failed to associate the great *Śaṅkarācārya* with the temple. It is said that it was he who assigned the responsibility of conducting the *Navami Viḷakku*, or the celebrations of the ninth day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Vriscika* or *Scorpio* to the chief priest, the *Daśami Viḷakku* of the next day to the Zāmorin, and the famous *Ekādaśi Viḷakku* of the following day to the chief of Ceraḷayam, though the earliest date for the Zāmorin and the Raja of Ceraḷayam is some three centuries after the great Vedantin. It is even believed that he composed the *Govindāṣṭaka* and the *Bhajaḡōvindam* during an annual festival he attended, and the opening in the roof over the north-west corner of the court-yard was made to enable him to come down and worship the Lord during the annual *Utsava* or festival!

Though Śaṅkarācārya could not have visited Guruvāyūr, the association of the temple with Vilvamaṅgalam I cannot be rejected as pure folklore. The original seat of his family was Panniyūr, from where his ancestors fled to Parur during the *Kur-matsaram* with its neighbour Śukapuram. He was a contemporary of Jayadeva, the author of the *Gīta-gōvinda*. An indefatigable wanderer, Vilvamaṅgalam I must have met Jayadeva during his pilgrimage in North India. At any rate, he must have been responsible for instituting the singing of *Aṣṭapadi*, as *Gīta-gōvinda* is called, in Kerala. Perhaps, the installation of the present image, carved out of black antimony brought from China, was performed by him.

The war between the Zāmorin and the Vellātri or the Raja of Vaḷḷuvanād for Tirunāvāyi tended to promote the importance of Guruvāyūr. The temple of Tirunāvāyi was greater and more ancient. Its annual festival was celebrated for thirty days, beginning from the *Puṣya* or eighth asterism in the month of *Makara* or *Capricorn* to *Magha* or tenth asterism in the month of *Kumbha* or *Aquarius*. And the festival of the *Mahāmāgha* year, that is, the year in which Jupiter resides in the sign of *Simha* or *Leo*, drew pilgrims from all parts of Kerala, as the waters of the Bhāratappuḷa on which Tirunāvāyi stands were supposed to become sanctified by a mystic flow from the holy Ganges (Ganga) in the north. The war for Tirunāvāyi lasted long, and the devotees on the other side of the river began to prefer Guruvāyūr.

The Zāmorin was not content with the expulsion of the Vellātri from Tirunāvāyi. He carried his arms across the river and southwards also as far as Cochin, and became the *Mēl-koyma* or sovereign protector of both Trkkunāvāyi and Guruvāyūr. In course of time he also became a devotee of Guruvāyūr, and his subjects naturally followed him, visiting Guruvāyūr in large numbers.

The income derived from the offerings enabled the temple authorities to construct the eastern and western *Gōpurams* or ornamental gateways and encase the flag-staff in gold. The *Cakṛa-vākasandēśa* refers to the towering *Gōpurams* embracing the skies and the flag tossing to and fro in the wind at the top of the golden flag-staff (Sl. 35 and 36).

Though Guruvāyūr had been a small village from the beginning, it lay in a deficit area. The increasing influx of pilgrims made it more and more difficult for the temple authorities not only to feed them, but even to arrange for the various offerings to the Lord in rice as desired by the devotees. A fortunate coincidence led to an easy solution of what might otherwise have remained a baffling problem. The chief priest, Cennamaṅgalam Nampūtiri, was also the domestic chaplain of the Zāmorin. And in the course of his conquests the Zāmorin had driven a wedge through the centre of the fertile Palghat District as far as Poḷlācci. At the instance of Cennamaṅgalam, the Zāmorin secured the Vermānūr (Perumanūr) *Dēvasvam* in the present Paṛakkulam near Kunisseri—and the *Cerikkal* of Vallappanād sometime in the fifteenth century. The temple records show that every year some 300 to 500 *Potis* of paddy were taken to Guruvāyūr from here at the astoundingly low transportation cost of one *Fanam* or 28 N.P. per *Poti* as head load.

In A.D. 1638 the central shrine was rebuilt. In the following year, a grand rite called *Viśvabali* was performed. Its object was to propitiate all the spirits, good and bad, for the welfare of the world as a whole, *Sarvalōkahitāya*, as the *Viṣṇusamhita* says. Though the accounts of only one *Viśvabali* have come down to us it must have been a quin-quennial or decennial affair, as the records expressly state, “as formerly performed and found in the older *ōlas* or palm leaves” in which the records were kept. Compared to it the annual *Utsavabali* is indeed insignificant. The former requires five days, while the latter is performed in the course of a single day; further while the latter requires only 32 measures of rice, the former cannot be performed without 3636 measures of rice, 1245 coconuts, 4302 plantain fruits, 325 pounds of jaggery, 100 measure of fried rice, 100 measures of bran, and 50 measures of *ghi*!

The Guruvāyūr Saints

By the end of the sixteenth century Guruvāyūr had become the most famous place of pilgrimage in Kerala. Among the devotees of the Lord, five stand foremost: Pūntānam (A.D. 1547-1640). Mēlputtūr (A.D. 1559-1625), Vilvamaṅgalam II (A.D. 1575-1660), Kuṛūramma (A.D. 1570-1640), and Prince (afterwards Zāmorin) Mānavēdan (A.D. 1595-1658).

Pūntānam and Mēlputtūr were contemporaries. These were their family names. The personal name of Mēlputtūr was Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭatiri; that of Pūntānam is unknown.

No two devotees could be more sharply contrasted than these. One was weak where the other was strong. The family of Pūntānam did not enjoy the privilege of studying the Vedas, while the teaching of the Vedas and the Mīmamsa was the hereditary right of Mēlputtūr. Pūntānam had no formal education, while Mēlputtūr had an elaborate and systematic education under the most learned teachers of the day. Pūntānam's knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre, and his devotional outpourings were all in Malayalam. Mēlputtūr held Malayalam in contempt, and his contributions were all in Sanskrit. Pūntānam was an embodiment of devotion, pure and simple; Mēlputtūr's forte was encyclopaedic. Pūntānam was the saint of the masses; his appeal was to the heart. Mēlputtūr evoked the admiration of the learned and aristocratic few; his appeal was to the head.

Pūntānam was born in A.D. 1547. At the age of twenty he married the heiress of Pūntānam and left the paternal roof to live with his wife in her house. For a long time the couple had no children. Like many others in the same plight, Pūntānam began to propitiate the Lord of Guruvāyūr. At long last, his prayers were answered, and a son was born in A.D. 1586.

But unfortunately he resolved to perform the *Annaprāśan*, or ceremonial giving of the first rice, of the new-born in his own house, instead of at Guruvāyūr in the presence of the Lord as he was in duty bound. The little one died an hour or two before the ceremony! Left in the kitchen, it managed to get too near the fire, and was burnt to death. Crazy with grief, Pūntānam came to Guruvāyūr to recover the child that he had lost by prayers as in the Pauranic story *Kumārāharaṇam*!

By this time Mēlputtūr also had come to Guruvāyūr to get rid of his rheumatism by prayer. He made fun of Pūntānam's 'murder' of Sanskrit, and like others doubted also his sanity. Gradually illumination came to the bereaved father. He realized:

With Little Kṛṣṇa dancing in our hearts
Why need we little ones of our own?

(*Jñānappāna* or *Song of Wisdom*, ll. 288-289)

The *Jñānappāna* or *Song of Wisdom* in Malayalam is Pūntānam's personal testimony to the ancient wisdom of our Ṛṣis. In simplicity and force of diction no less than in the truths proclaimed, only the Bible in English comes near it. Forged in the furnace of the heart there is not a single word in it that does not have the true metallic ring.

According to the popular story, Mēlputtūr, proud of his learning, would not deign even to look at the *Jñānappāna*. In his contempt he asked Pūntānam to learn the *Vibhaktis*, or declension of nouns in Sanskrit, before attempting to write anything. But the Lord would not allow his devotee to be so rudely insulted. Next day, when Mēlputtūr sat down on the platform facing the Lord to pour out his daily *Daśaka* in His praise, he found himself unable to utter even a single word, not to speak of a *Ślōka*. Not only that, a small boy, not yet in his teens, and not seen also till then at Guruvāyūr, appeared there, and seating himself before the Bhaṭṭa (tiri), began to point out mistake after mistake in the *Nārāyaṇṇāyam*, one mistake in the first *Ślōka*, two in the next, and so on cumulatively in each successive *Ślōka*. This strange spectacle of a puny lad correcting the learned Bhaṭṭa (tiri) soon attracted a large crowd. The Bhaṭṭa (tiri) naturally lost his nerve and began to perspire in sheer despair. By the time the lad had reached the tenth *Ślōka* and picked out ten mistakes, the Bhaṭṭa (tiri) realized who the lad was. Before he could fall at His feet, He had disappeared. Only an incorporeal voice was heard; "Pūntānam's *Bhakti*, or devotion, is more pleasing than Mēlputtūr's *Vibhakti*, or grammar." The story of the lad and the incorporeal voice must certainly be an invention. It however reflects the opinion of the people at large about the two devotees.

Pūntānam spent his time in reading the *Bhāgavata*, singing the Lord's glories in Malayalam, and exhorting the people to repeat His name as the easiest and shortest way to salvation. He maintained his robust health for a long time. Even in his eighties he used to go to Guruvāyūr for his monthly *Bhajan*, walking the whole distance of not less than 100 kilometres. Once, however, on his way he was set upon and seized by robbers, who appropriated his ring and threatened to kill him for not bringing more

for their benefit! Bereft of all hope, with the ruffian's knife pointed at the throat, Pūntānam cried out:

With what haste You went to Draupadi's rescue,
With what haste You rushed to the elephant's rescue,
With that haste, O, Lord, come to my rescue.

And the Lord seemed to come! Just at that moment the miscreants desisted a party of the Zāmorin's soldiers coming towards them and at once took to their heels, leaving the despoiled ring on the spot. After making arrangements to take Pūntānam, who had fainted, to Guruvāyūr, the commandant marched off with his Nayars to Cāvākkād, with Pūntānam's ring. Next day, the captain went to Guruvāyūr and entrusted the ring to the chief priest to be given to Pūntānam when he came there. No wonder when Pūntānam received his ring from no other than the Lord's chief priest he came to believe that it was no other than the Lord Himself who had come to his rescue!

We do not know when exactly Pūntānam died. He composed his Malayalam *Bhāṣākaṇṇāmṛta*, entirely different in scope and treatment from Vilvamaṅgalam I's Sanskrit *Kaṇṇāmṛta*, in his ninety-second year. The *Ānandanṛttam*, or Dance of Ecstasy, is his last contribution to Malayalam-devotional literature.

This is not the place to discuss Pūntānam's place in the history of Malayalam language and literature. Suffice it to say, as a writer of pure Malayalam he stands next to Ceruṣṣeri only, and Kunjan Nampiyār, the famous satirist, derived his language, though not his ideas, from him.

The importance of Pūntānam in the religious history of Kerala cannot be exaggerated. Śankara's appeal was more to the head than to the heart, and he spoke in a language which only the learned could understand. Cēramān Perumāḷ and Kulasekharālvār appealed to the masses in their own language; but they belonged to an entirely forgotten past, when Malayalam had not come into being. Pūntānam was the first and also the greatest of Malayalam saints. Further, like the Nāyanārs and Ālvārs, he emancipated religion from the shackles of ritual and made it a living force.

Mēlputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa(tiri) was born in A.D. 1559. Intelligent and versatile, he fell a prey to rheumatism. And as a last resort he came to Guruvāyūr in A.D. 1586. He sought the

Lord's favour by describing His incarnations in a series of *Daśakas*, each consisting of ten or twelve *Ślokas*, almost all of them ending with a prayer to the Lord of Guruvāyūr to free him from the ailments that afflicted him. At last, on the hundredth day, when he also completed his grand work, he found himself fully restored to his former *Āyurārōgyasaukhyam* or life, health and happiness. The letters—*Ā-yu-rā-rō-gya-sau-khyam*—represent also the Kali day—1712210—according to the *Ka-ṭa-pa-yā-dī* method of expressing numbers, corresponding to August 23, 1586.

The *Nārāyaṇīyam*, in praise of *Nārāyaṇa* by *Nārāyaṇa*, spread the Bhaṭṭa (tiri)'s name far and wide. Princes and nobles of Kerala, every one of whom knew Sanskrit in those days, vied with one another for the honour of entertaining him as their guest. His fame even induced Bhaṭṭoji Dikṣita to start on a trip to South India to pay his respects to the author of the *Nārāyaṇīyam*. But before he reached Kerala, *Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa* had left this mortal world.

It is difficult to find in the history of any literature, sacred or secular, an author so prolific, facile, and many-sided. There is no subject to which Mēlputtūr has not made some contribution. Religion, philosophy, grammar, ritual, love, and even chess, have received his attention. In literary gymnastics and jugglery he was a past master.

The *Nārāyaṇīyam*, not to be confounded with the work of the same name by a Telugu author, is his *magnum opus*. To a world hard-pressed for time, and therefore in search of a short cut for everything including salvation, it is a boon. It offers the sacred *Bhāgavata* in a nutshell.

It is even more. It is a graduated course in god-realization. Each one of the hundred *Daśakas* is a milestone on the road to realization. With the last, we may be able to see the Lord Himself, and exclaim with the Bhaṭṭa (tiri) "*Agre paśyāmi. . . . Him I see before me.*"

In the *Nārāyaṇīyam* we have also an effective method of faith cure. Almost every *Daśaka* concludes with a prayer. By reading them only at a single sitting for a number of days, we can fully recover our *Āyurārōgyasaukhyam*, or health and happiness.

The greater the faith, the quicker the recovery. As Jesus said to the blind, "According to your faith, be it unto you".

To Guruvāyūr also the *Nārāyaṇīyam* is of the greatest importance. No work of this magnitude has ever been dedicated and addressed to any deity in any temple in India. Even if Guruvāyūr disappears as Dvāraka has done, the *Nārāyaṇīyam* will create a Guruvāyūr in the heart of every one who reads it.

Kuṟūramma was born in A.D. 1570 in the village of Paṟūr, near the house of Vilvamaṅgalam. Older than the monk, Vilvamaṅgalam II, she was his cousin through her mother. And until the very end she maintained in her relations with him the happy and innocent freedom of her girlhood days. Her maiden name was Dhatri; she became Kuṟūramma or the lady of the Kuṟūr family, in Adāṭṭu in Trichur by marriage.

"See-Him-we-must" is the only song of hers that has so far been discovered. On the model of Pūntānam, every word of it is instinct with devotion, and proclaims her irrepressible passion for the divine vision. And see Him she did! She even treated Him as her son, played with Him, chid Him when He was naughty, and cried when He disappeared in sulk. It is to Pūntānam and Kuṟūramma that we owe the conception of the Lord of Guruvāyūr as *Unnikṛṣṇa* or *Bālakṛṣṇa*, though all formal worship is offered to Him as the all-pervading Mahāviṣṇu, with four hands and with Dhara or Goddess of Wealth and Śrī or Goddess of Prosperity dependent on Him.

The popularity of the *Nāma Japa*, or repetition of the holy name in Kerala, is also due to them. Vilvamangalam II did not approve his cousin's *Nāma Japa* always, in season and out of season, without any regard to external purity. Once, happening to see her doing it while in her season, he said "Not now please". At once came the reply, "Can you give a guarantee that Yama, or god of death, will keep away from us while impure?"

Vilvamangalam II was born in A.D. 1575. He became a Sanyasin. Like Vilvamangalam I he joined the Tekke Matham at Trichur. Like him he went to Brindavan. Like him also he was able to see the Lord whenever and in whatever form he wished. There is no great temple in Kerala from Trivandrum to Talipparampa and Triccambaram that has not some story to tell about him.

Prince (afterwards Zamorin) Manavedan was born in A.D. 1595. He does not seem to have come into contact with Mēlputtūr. Nevertheless, the *Nārayaṇīyam* exerted a profound influence on him. It fanned his innate devotion to white heat and provided him with selected incidents to present the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa in a series of dramas.

Vilvamangalam II took a paternal interest in Manavedan. He enabled him to obtain a vision of the Lord as Balakṛṣṇa and helped him in the preparation and staging of the dramas. Collectively called *Kṛṣṇagīta*, the series was completed in A.D. 1653. The prince came to the *gadi* in A.D. 1655 and died three years later. His remains are enshrined in the Zamorin's palace at Guruvāyūr. Every day a lamp is lighted at sunset before the mausoleum as befitting the saintliness of the deceased. And every year after the dramas are staged in the temple, they are staged in the palace also, the stage facing the monument as a mark of homage to their author, the *Bhaktiscakṛī* or emperor-devotee.

Later History

With the beginning of the eighteenth century evil days came upon Guruvāyūr as upon Kerala in general. In A.D. 1716, during the course of the war with the Zamorin, the Dutch raided Guruvāyūr. They stripped the flag staff of its gold casing, plundered the underground cellar containing the treasure, and set fire to the *Paṭiṇṇāre Gōpuram* or western gate-way. But thanks to the *Ēkadaśi* and *Utsava* collections, the losses were soon recouped, and the *Paṭiṇṇāre Gōpuram* was rebuilt in A.D. 1747 by Panikka Viṭṭil Itṭirāricca Menon.

In the next war between the Zamorin and the Dutch (A.D. 1753-1758) the latter occupied Trkkunāvāyi in 1756 and desecrated the temple. The Zamorin however recovered it in A.D. 1757. But the Brahmins who had fled at the approach of the Dutch refused to come back and purify the temple. So the Trkkunāvāyi *Dēvasvam* was dissolved, and the Zamorin succeeded it as the *Mēl-Eṭam* of Guruvāyūr and became its supervising trustee as well, in addition to its *Kōyma* or protector.

In A.D. 1766 Haidar Ali captured Kolikkod (Calicut), and his forces occupied Cāvakkāḍ and Guruvāyūr. He spared the

temple for a ransom of 10,000 *Fanams*, which the Vatakkeppat Vāriyar paid on its behalf. On account of the general insecurity caused by Haidar's invasions, the flow of pilgrims almost ceased, and it became impossible to bring rice from Vermānūr (Perumānūr). The tenants also began to withhold their annual payment. In this extremity, Srinivasa Rao, whom Haidar had appointed Governor of Malabar, came to the rescue. He persuaded his master to grant a *Dēvadaya*, or free gift, to the temple in A.D. 1780.

The princes of the Zamorin's family would not however tamely submit to the Mysoreans. So Tipu Sultan, who had succeeded Haidar, came down to Malabar in A.D. 1789 to stamp out all resistance, and convert the Hindus to secure their loyalty. Hiding the *Mūla-vigraha*, or image of stone, under the ground, Malliśseri Nampūtiri and the Kakkād Otikkan took refuge in Ampalappuḷa with the *Utsava-vigraha*, or image which is taken in procession during the festival.

Tipu plundered the temple and set fire to it, but a timely rain saved it. The images, which were left behind in the smaller shrines were all reduced to fragments by the Mysoreans. But Tipu's days in Malabar were numbered. Assisted by the princes of the Zamorin's family, the English drove him out. On March 28, 1792, he ceded Malabar to the victors.

Malliśseri Nampūtiri and Kakkād Otikkan returned with the *Utsava-vigraha*. The *Mūla-vigraha* was brought back from its place of concealment, and re-installed with the Zamorin's help on September 17, 1792.

During the Mysorean occupation, culminating in Tipu's *jihad*, the old order completely changed in Guruvāyūr as elsewhere in Malabar. Many families perished; many families left the land never to return; to preserve life and property, many families embraced Islam. The very few that returned found their houses and lands either ruined or occupied by strangers. For want of funds no attempt was made by the temple authorities to renovate the ruined shrines and restore these *Kīl-eṭams* or subordinate *Dēvasvams*. God Ayyappan of Āñjiyūr ceased to come for his *Ārāṭṭu* or immersion in the temple tank on the day of *Ārdra* or *Tiruvātira* (sixth asterism) in the month of *Kumbha* (*Aquarius*). Likewise the five

Bhagavatis also ceased to celebrate their *Pūram* festival in the month of *Mina* (Pisces), on the day of the eleventh asterism, and come to Guruvāyūr for immersion in the tank and worship in the temple.

Though worship in the temple was resumed in A.D. 1792, it was not easy to carry on. The tenants, most of whom were now Muslims, would not pay rent. The *Dēvadaya* confiscated by Tipu could not be easily recovered from his successors, the English. The Zamorin's position also remained uncertain till A.D. 1805. And he had the same difficulties with his tenants as the temple.

Fortunately, the Uḷanād Panikkars became the unofficial advisers of the Zamorin and looked after his interests in the temple as elsewhere. For nearly seventy five years, from 1825 to 1900, they retained his confidence. As devoted as Cempakaśśēri and Deśavarma, under them the wounds inflicted by the Mysoreans gradually healed. They not only declined to receive any remuneration for their services but even made large contributions from their family estates so that the daily worship and the annual festival might be properly conducted. They began their management with an *Aṣṭabandhakalasa* or refixing of the image, though on a small scale. In A.D. 1836 a native of Travancore re-erected the *Dīpa-stambha* or pillar of lights, under the flag-staff. In A.D. 1841 the Government of Madras restored the *Dēvadaya* resumed by Tipu Sultan. In the following year, as evinced by the inscription *Bhūpalairvenajādyaih*, the *Kīlakke Gōpuram*, or eastern gate-way, was rebuilt.

In A.D. 1859 the temple authorities embarked upon an extensive building programme. The central shrine and the platform, or *Mantapa*, facing it, were covered with copper sheetings and a permanent flag-staff with a bell-metal covering was set up. In A.D. 1892 another building programme was launched. The *Curampalam* or the colonnaded hall all round the central shrine, the *Vīlakkumātam* or the gallery of lights, the *Kūttampalam* or the dancing hall, and the *Śāstha* shrine were roofed with copper sheetings, and the eastern court-yard was covered with a tiled roof. So ample were the temple funds and so willing was the Zamorin to supplement them from his own estate that the organised theft of A.D. 1893, continuously carried on night after night

for how many days the Lord alone knows, did in no way interfere with the progress of the work.

The present century opened with a series of reforms. Sri Konthi Menon, who became Manager in A.D. 1900, was as devout as the Panikkars. He divided the work of the *Devasvam* into a number of departments to secure responsibility and efficiency. By a rigorous *quo warranto* he compelled every usurper to restore the Lord's lands. The *Kīl-śantis*, or subordinate priests, had to give up their right to a perpetual service tenure. He did everything in his power to keep the temple and its environs clean, neat and decent. He reconstructed the *Pattāypura* or granary, and set up the big bell to ring the hour as the clock strikes. In A.D. 1911 a grand *Aṣṭabandha kalāśa* refixing the shaking image was performed and the worships were made more punctual and imposing.

In A.D. 1916 the Court of Wards assumed the management of the Zamorin's Estate, which included Guruvāyūr. Uniformly courteous and considerate, its representative, Mr. (afterwards Sir) J. A. Throne, I.C.S., continued and completed the work of Konthi Menon. With the rendition of the Estate in A.D. 1928, the Zamorin once more became responsible for Guruvāyūr. Two years afterwards the High Court of Madras framed a scheme for the temple and the rights of the Zamorin were more clearly defined.

Only once a year, the *Avārnaś* or low caste people were admitted into the temple to make their obeisance directly in front of the Lord's image. After the last worship at night, of the *Ekadasi* festival, generally in December, the temple was thrown open to them. On November 1, 1931, Sri Kelappan started a *Satyāgraha* to secure this privilege for them on all days for all worships. But he could not control the unruly crowds. The temple was closed, and the mystic worships were conducted in the *Otikkan Matham*. The High Court upheld the rights of the temple; the *Satyāgrahis* withdrew; and worship was resumed in the temple on January 28, 1932.

In A.D. 1933 the *Kerala Sanātana Hindu Sabha* was organized under the auspices of the *Dēvasvam* to educate the people in the true ideals of the Hindu *Dharma*. After an exhaustive consideration of every relevant aspect, the Maharaja of Travancore threw open

all the temples of his state to *Avaṛnas* in A.D. 1936. This lead took the wind out of the sails of the no-changers. At last, on June 1, 1947, the *Avaṛnas* were allowed the free entry which till then the *Savaṛnas* or caste Hindus alone had enjoyed.

With the opening of the temple to all Hindus without any distinction of caste the flow of pilgrims began to steadily increase. On January 30, 1952, was completed the ceremony of casing the flag-staff in gold, at a total expenditure of Rs. 21,457-39, the donation from the devotees for the purpose amounting to Rs. 31,168!

Functionaries: (a) External

Before the British occupation, Guruvāyūr was a temple state, though subordinate to *Tṛkkunāvāy* till A.D. 1757. The Lord was its head, though He functioned through the *Yogam*, *Ūrāḷar* and the *Manuṣam*. At the close of the worship every night, the *Tirthola*, or holy palm leaf containing the accounts of the day, was read before Him. Nothing was done except in His name. Deeds and documents were executed by the *Samudāya Manuṣam* with the consent or by the order of the governing committee of *Ūrāḷar* sitting in session, in the name of the Lord of Guruvāyūr: "*Guruvāyūr Tēvartirunāl perāl ūrāḷar uḷḷirunnu tamutāya manuṣam...*" was the invariable formula. The Lord was also lessor and lessee, landlord and tenant. As landlord He even owned slaves!

(a) *Yogam*: The *Yogam*, or assembly, consisting of the heads of the Namputiri families, believed to have been originally seventy two in number, met once a year, appointed the governing committee or *Ūrāḷar*, and decided all matters of common interest. In course of time, many families became extinct. In the seventeenth century there were only seven, and they constituted both the *Yogam* and the *Ūrāḷar*. Now Malliṣṣeri is the only survivor, and his family has survived only by adoption. After the dissolution of *Tṛkkunāvāy*, the Zamorin became the supervising trustee as well.

(b) *Ūrāḷar*: The *Ūrāḷar*, literally governing committee of the village, corresponding to the *Ūrālum Gaṇam* of the Tamilnad inscriptions, were originally elected by the *Yogam*. With the gradual extinction of the original families, they became hereditary. But for the dissolution of *Tṛkkunāvāy* in A.D. 1757, and the assumption of its powers as *Mēl-Etam* or over-lord by the Zamorin, Malliṣṣeri would now have been the sole *Ūrāḷan*,

(3) *Samudāya Manuṣam*: *Manuṣam* literally man or representative of the *samudāya* or corporation, the *Samudāya Manuṣam* was the chief executive. He was appointed by the *Ūrālar*, and he held his office during their pleasure. He formally entered on his duties after receiving the *Idāṅgaḷi* or small measure, and the keys of the *Bhaṇḍāram*, or treasury, from the senior-most *Ūrālan* seated on the *Maṇṭapa* or platform facing the Lord.

(4) *Paṭṭar*: The word *Paṭṭar* here is not a caste name but an official designation, being a contraction of the formal *Paṭṭōla Kāryakkār*, corresponding to our chief secretary and keeper of records and correspondence. The *Moḷiyakattu Paṭṭar* was the chief secretary of *Guruvāyūr*. The *Cāvakkāḍ Paṭṭar* was the permanent representative of *Tṛkkunāvāyi*, stationed at *Cāvakkāḍ*. The *Kanṭiyūr Paṭṭar* was the chief secretary of *Tṛkkunāvāyi*, sent from there to conduct the annual festival and inspect the accounts. The families of *Moḷiyakam* and *Cāvakkāḍ* disappeared during the Mysorean occupation. The *Kanṭiyūr Paṭṭar* alone survives now as the chief secretary, not of *Tṛkunāvāyi*, but of *Guruvāyūr* for all ceremonial purposes.

(5) *Pura-Kōyma*: From *Pura* outside and *Kōyma* ruler, the *Pura-kōyma* enforced the orders of the *Ūrālar* and the *Manuṣam* and protected the temple and its environs against aggression from outside. He was distinct from the *Aka-kōyma*, from *Akam* inside and *Kōyma* or ruler, corresponding to the *Śrīkāryam* of the Tamil temples, and *Paṭārar-Tiruvāḍi* of the Travancore inscriptions. The *Vanneri Nampiti* was the hereditary *Pura-Kōyma*. He was the head of the *Akampati*, or escort, of the Lord when He went in procession for His *Ārāṭṭu*, or ceremonial immersion, at *Caṭṭukulam*, receiving an honorarium of 40 *Faṇams* for his services. Before the *Tantri* formally inaugurated the festival, the *Pura-kōyma* had to declare that the festival could be safely conducted, that is, the law-and-order situation was perfect.

(6) *Mēl-Kōyma*: The *Mēl*, or over-all, *Kōyma*, or ruler, was originally the Cera emperor at *Kodungallūr*. After the destruction of *Kodungallūr* by the *Cōla Rājarāja I* in A.D. 1005 the most powerful of the local chiefs, *Perumpaṭappu* (Cochin) or *Vellātri*, became the *Mēl-Kōyma*. Finally, in the fourteenth century, the *Zamorin* became its sovereign protector when he conquered *Cochin*. As has been already mentioned, after the dissolution of *Tṛkunāvāyi* in A.D. 1757, he became the supervising trustee also.

The temple records mention only a few offences against the Lord, and the offenders were not too strong for the *Pura-Kōyma* to invoke the aid of the *Mēl-Kōyma* to punish them.

(7) *Annual review of the Administration*: At the end of every year there was something like a review of the administration. As the Lord Himself was the head of the state, His government should be ideal, and none of His subjects should have any grievance. So before the flag was hoisted for the annual festival and before it was hauled down at its close, the *Paṭṭar* called out three times "Has any one any grievance"? If anyone came forward, his complaint had to be heard and disposed of before proceeding further. The memory of this custom is still preserved not only in the call being made but also in a quaint ceremony in the course of the *Ārāṭṭu* procession.

Till A.D. 1763, the *Ārāṭṭu*, or ceremonial immersion of the image at the end of the festival had taken place in *Cāṭṭukulaṁ*. Since this year, when its environs and approaches were occupied by the Cochin Raja, the *Ārāṭṭu* is being performed, as now, in the tank immediately to the north of the temple. Every year, as the Lord is coming for the immersion, He stops at the north-east corner of the bank, where stands an *Attāṇi* or porter's rest. All the tom-toms cease, and for a few seconds absolute silence is maintained. Then a member of the *Kanṭiyūr* family comes forward and says "We have no grievance". The tom-toms and the trumpets are immediately resumed and the procession moves to the bathing *ghat*.

The *Kanṭiyūr Paṭṭar*, as has been said, has been the hereditary chief secretary of the Lord since A.D. 1757. One of the *Paṭṭars* was murdered, while the procession was going on, at the spot marked by the *Attāṇi*. The festival and everything connected with it was suspended. As the British had by this time established their supremacy, the Lord could not punish the guilty then and there through the *Pura-Kōyma* and the *Mēl-Kōyma*. These could do no more than hand over the murderer to the police. Thus satisfied, the *Kantiyur* family declared their satisfaction, and the suspended festival was continued and completed.

Functionaries: (b) Internal

Temples are built for the welfare of the people. The priest consecrates the image with the words: "*Lokānugraha hētvārtham*

sthirī bhava sukhāya nah, to confer blessings on the world and happiness on us, mayst Thou permanently reside here in the image"! The divine *Caitanya* or force thus inducted is maintained and augmented by the daily routine worships, occasional extra worships, and the annual *Utsava* or festival. Ordinarily, the Lord at Guruvāyūr is offered worship five times a day, which is done by the priests behind closed doors. The temple is opened to the public for *Darsan* at 3.30 a.m. It is closed at about 11 a.m. when the fourth or mid-day worship is half way through. Between the third worship and the fourth is performed the *Annaprāśan* or first feeding of babies with rice. Since the beginning of this century marriages also are arranged in the temple in front of the Lord near the flag-staff. Some 60 to 70 *Annaprāśans* and 70 to 80 marriages a day are not now unusual.

The temple is re-opened at 4.30 p.m. and the mid-day worship is completed. After the *Dīpārādhana* or worship with the waving of lights at sun-set, begins the fifth or last worship, which comes to a close at 10 p.m., the last item being the reading of the *Tirthola* or accounts of the day.

Of the extra worships, the most important is the *Udayāstamana Pūja*, so called because formerly it had begun at sun-rise (*Udaya*) and was continued without a break till sun-set (*Astamana*). Consisting of the routine five and extra fourteen, in all nineteen, worships, the *Udayāstamana Pūja* is now begun the previous night itself, the *Ōtikkans* being responsible for the additional fourteen.

The annual *Utsava* or festival had in former days a three-fold aspect: political, cultural, and religious. Its political significance has already been referred to. As an exhibition of Kerala culture, we have to be content with a bare mention of the numerous processions with richly caparisoned elephants, the exposition of the *Puranas* by the *Cākkīyars*, the *Bhajans*, *Kirtans*, and *Nāmajapas*, and the exciting performances of the *Mārāmars* on the drum.

Two features of the Guruvāyūr festival deserve more than a passing notice. One is the complete absence of fire-works. The people account for it by saying that the Lord, *Kṛṣṇa*, being a baby, will be frightened by the firing of guns! But the baby remained in the temple when the goddesses were brought here for their now extinct *Pūram* festival, marked by a profusion of fire-works. A

more rational explanation might be the temple was founded at a time when gun-powder was unknown in Malabar, and the proverbial conservatism of temple authorities would not permit its introduction when it came into use.

The other peculiar feature is the running race of the elephants and the running circumambulations on the ninth day and the tenth. In the evening, before the flag was hoisted, the elephants, which are to participate in the processions, are taken to *Maññuḷāl*, half a mile directly east of the temple, and started on a race. The elephant which enters the *Gōpuram*, or ornamental gate-way, and, running round the temple seven times, touches the flag-staff first becomes the leader or the state elephant. In all the processions of the festival, it takes its stand in the centre, and the Lord takes His seat on its back alone. This elephant enjoys also certain perquisites. In ancient days the elephants had all come from *Ṭṛkkunāvāy*. And the drivers must have vied with one another to secure for their elephant the coveted privileges of the leader. Though *Ṭṛkkunāvāy* was destroyed, the ancient custom is thus still preserved.

At night, on the ninth day, the Lord goes out on a boar hunt. One of the chief pests of Kerala in ancient days was the wild boar. The boars now consist of devotees disguised as boars, the popular belief being that those who take part in it will have a long life and also a place reserved for them in heaven. The state elephant carrying the Lord drives them all into the outer court-yard and runs after them nine times round the temple, at the end of which the boar leader collapses and the hunt comes to a close. After the *Āṛāṭṭu*, or ceremonial immersion in the tank, the state elephant, with the Lord on its back, runs round the temple, and stops only at the close of the eleventh round, when the Lord dismounts and proceeds to His *sanctum sanctorum*. As the circumambulations go on, with the people urging the elephant to greater and greater speed by twisting its tail and other devices as though it is a common bullock, even the old and the crippled, martyrs to rheumatism and paralysis, are drawn into the crowd by an irresistible impulse and run with it, overcoming their handicaps and finding themselves cured and happy at the end.

The object of the running rounds during the boar hunt is obvious. But the running circumambulations after the *Āṛāṭṭu* are

not so easy to explain. Perhaps it is an objective and symbolic expression of the Lord's joy at the happy conclusion of His annual festival and an evidence of the new energy obtained through the rites of the various days of the *Utsava*. From the root *Su*, *Utsava* means a spurt up, here of divine *Caitanya* or force. It is a sort of re-enforcement or rejuvenation. More elaborate and complicated than the routine worship, the rites are performed not by the priests who are responsible for the daily worship but by people well-versed in the *Tantras* or science and art of temple worship. The various ceremonies of the *Utsava* at Guruvāyūr are performed by the *Tantra-kur*, consisting of the *Tantri* and the *Otikkans*.

(1) *Tantri*: Puḷakkara Cennamaṅgalam Nampūtiri is the hereditary *Tantri* of Guruvāyūr. The *Tantrimatham* on the eastern bank of the northern tank is his permanent official residence. It was one of his ancestors, Cennamaṅgalam Narayanan Nampūtiri, born in A.D. 1427, who wrote the *Tantrasamuccaya*, according to which all temple worship is now conducted in Kerala. Originally belonging to Guruvāyūr, he was also the chief priest of the temple. Subsequently, when the Zamorin extended his authority over these regions, he became his domestic chaplain. These duties, along with other calls on him as the authoritative exponent of the *Tantras*, compelled him gradually to withdraw from his daily duties at Guruvāyūr, where he now comes only on special occasions. Neither Alvānceri Tamprākkaḷ, the highest sacerdotal dignity in Kerala, nor Jagatguru Sankarācārya can enter the *sanctum sanctorum*.

(2) *Otikkans*: The *Otikkan* is both a teacher and reciter of the Vedas. He officiates also as domestic priest. Guruvāyūr has four *Otikkans*, the descendants of those who had formerly ministered to the needs of the original seventy-two families. When Cennamaṅgalam was the chief priest, they had assisted him by performing the third worship of the day. Even now the third worship is their responsibility. The fourteen extra worships of the *Udayāstaman* have also now to be performed by them. They officiate also for the *Tantri* in rites which he has to perform, including the offer of the *Utsavabali* to the spirit attendants of the Lord.

(3) *Sānti-kaḷakam*: Lower in status are the *Sāntis* or priests who perform the daily worship. While the *Tantri* and the *Otik-*

kans are collectively called *Tantra-kūr*, the daily officiating priests are called *Śānti-kaḷakam* or priest-service. The former are hereditary, the latter hold their office during pleasure. The former have their own quarters outside the temple and can live with their families, the latter have to observe strict *Brahmacarya*, and reside within the temple walls, subject to surprise inspection at night by the *Ūrāḷar*. As they cannot go out, they are called *Purappatāsāntis* (*Pura* out, *Patā* not going). The *Śāntikkaḷakam* had also to pay a small amount every year, like other servants, to the private purse of the Lord, to the *Ūrāḷar*, and to the *Samudāya Manuṣam*. Till the Mysorean occupation, the *Śānti-kaḷakam* consisted of *Embrāntiris* or Tulu Brahmins. The *Śāntis* now are all *Namputiris*.

(a) *Melśānti*: The *Melśānti* is the chief priest. On account of the ascetic restrictions on his daily life, he is appointed only for six months at a time. He is appointed by the *Ūrāḷar* on the recommendation of the *Tanṭri*. Before he enters on his duties he has to undergo a probation for fifteen days under the *Tanṭri* and the *Ottikkans*.

(b) *Kīlśānti*: *Kīlśānti* means assistant priest. Guruvāyūr has two *Kīlśāntis*, appointed for two months at a time. Their duties are to prepare the offerings for the daily worship, bring water for the *Abhiṣēka*, make sandal paste, and distribute the holy water and flowers. They have also to take the *Utsava vighraha*, the small image of the Lord, on elephant back in the numerous processions of the ordinary and festival days. They cannot touch the *Mūla-vighraha*, or original image made of antimony or act for the *Melśānti*, which can be done only by the *Tantra-kūr*.

Of all the temples of Kerala Guruvāyūr is now the most popular. The procession of humanity that comes here to receive the grace of the Lord swells day after day. The moment we enter the grand gate-way, an indescribable bliss bursts upon us, an infinite joy wells up in us. Expectant mothers come here to pray for easy delivery and a bonnie baby like Little Kṛṣṇa himself. The childless also have their wishes fulfilled. Bent down and prostrate with disease, the sick come here and are quickly healed. The depressed and the disappointed go back assured of their future. In the general atmosphere of joy and happiness, all griefs and sorrows are forgotten. Even the very stones of the pavement

seem to say "Rejoice and be exceeding glad." Those who come here sobbing invariably go back smiling.

Fortunately, Guruvāyūr is accessible by road at all times of the year. Through booking is available by way of Trichur from all places connected by rail. There is also no lack of accommodation for tourists and pilgrims of every rank and condition.

Guruvāyūr does not owe its greatness to its antiquity; Tirunāvāyi and Trivandrum are much older. It is also not due to its size; Trichūr and Peruvanam are much bigger. It owes nothing to royal patronage; the endowment of the Zamorin, once the emperor of Kerala, does not bring much more than one or two measures of rice per day! By saying that the Lord's grace floweth where it listeth we do worse than beg the question; it means that the Lord is fickle, which He is not. The real reason for the sanctity of Guruvāyūr seems to be the observance, albeit imperfect, of the rules prescribed in the *Tantrasamuccaya*. A stricter observance of these rules by the authorities, priests, and pilgrims, alike, would certainly enhance its sanctity and make it a veritable Lourdes for Hindus all over the world.