

the consequences of their actions. ‘Takshaka,’ he said, ‘was only an instrument of Destiny. He had no hatred for your father. What you are doing is unworthy of your position and you must halt this sacrifice at once and make amends for all you have done.’ Yet, while Janamejaya saw the wisdom of Guru’s words, he paid dearly for his actions. On the day of his wedding, when his bride touched him for the first time, the curses of the serpents afflicted him with leprosy. No doctor or medicine could help or cure him and, at one point, he was so desperate that all that stopped him from committing suicide was the arrival of Dattatreya, a famous sage. Knowing the depths of the king’s distress, Dattatreya described the benevolence of Guruvayur’s Krishna to Janamejaya and declared that the Lord would cure him.

It is now that the story of the idol being brought to Guruvayur is generally related for the first time, the sick

and desperate king listening intently as the sage relates each and every complex detail. By the time Dattatreya had finished, Janamejaya was convinced that his only hope was to prostrate before the Lord and seek His blessings.

With this in mind, Janamejaya and Dattatreya made their way across India until, at last, they reached Guruvayur. They stayed in the temple for 4 months, observing all *poojas*, bathing only in the temple’s tank, eating food provided by the temple, thinking only of the Lord, directing every thought and deed towards Him from before dawn until well after nightfall.

Then one night, as Janamejaya slept, he sensed that the Lord’s hands were passing gently over his entire body. He opened his eyes and found to his joyful amazement that his leprosy had vanished, his body was clear and he was free of all sores and pain.

The fame of Guruvayur and the temple’s presiding deity, Sree Krishna, affectionately known as Guruvayurappan, was now assured.

Although it is not uncommon for myths to contain elements of historical fact, there is no documentary evidence to substantiate any part of the story of Guruvayur’s beginnings. Furthermore, there is little but tradition to confirm that Adi Sankaracharya, generally thought to have lived between AD 788 and 820, laid down the rituals in the temple since no record describes his visit.

In the 9th century, some of the great Vaishnavite Alwar saints, the ‘Immersed Ones’, patronised certain temples in Kerala and sung of their glories. Yet, none of them ever mentioned Guruvayur. Even the origin of the word ‘Guruvayur’ can be disputed as, though everyone holds that it is the combination of Guru and Vayu, it appears that the temple was once called Kuruveyur, from *kuruvai* meaning ‘the sea’—a mere 3 km away. However, it seems to have been Melpathur Narayanan Bhattathiri who first placed stress on the locality being named after Guru and Vayu in his great Sanskrit work *Narayaneeyam* completed in 1587.

As can be seen, historical facts have played a marginal role in determining Guruvayur Temple’s origins. Furthermore,



Near the kodi maram.