

Sree Krishna Temple in Travancore. It was taken just in time: Tippu's army arrived, plundered the temple, destroyed the subsidiary shrines and set the complex on fire. The temple, which should at this point have been doomed, was saved when an *ashareeri*, a heavenly voice, spoke just as the heavens opened and rain poured down to extinguish the fire²⁷. Finally, in March 1792, the combined forces of the Zamorin and the British, the latest foreign power to cast its eye on the region, drove Tippu out of Malabar and by September, the *moolavighraha* was reinstalled in the sanctum, and the *thidambu* brought back from Ambalapuzha.

However, though the temple still stood, its reserves were such that it could barely function. Many of the temple's tenants had become Muslims and refused to pay their rents; others had fled; the temple's income was hugely reduced, and its rituals and festivals were further affected when Tippu Sultan confiscated Haider Ali's *devadaaya*. The Zamorin's plight was such that he was unable to help since, in 1800, the year following the defeat and death of Tippu Sultan at Srirangapatna, the British declared Malabar to be part of the Madras Presidency.

Despite being almost ruined, Guruvayur was again saved, this time by one of Malabar's most illustrious families: the Ullanat Panickers. The Ullanat family traces its history back to an age when they were famous practitioners and teachers of the martial art of *kalaripayattu*. Their expertise was such that, though history assigns no date to the event, two brothers and a sister were brought from their original home in the Tulunad region of coastal Karnataka to train the soldiers of the Nediyrippu Swarupam, a small principality that eventually became the nucleus of the Zamorin's realm. This kingdom was then under the Cheraman Perumals who ruled until, perhaps, the middle of the 9th century. Among the ironies of the region's history is that though the last Perumal is one of Kerala's most legendary characters, few can agree on either his personal name or exact dates. Only

²⁷The various versions of carrying Guruvayurappan's idol to Ambalapuzha are given in Chapter 4: The Idol, p. 38.

in legend is he clearly declared to have been a great king who, after reigning for 36 years, converted to Islam, divided his kingdom up amongst those who owed him allegiance, and departed for Mecca.

It is the Perumal's last act as king that touches our story since one ruler was absent when the kingdom was divided: the Zamorin. As a result, when he came before the Perumal, he received the little that was left: the Perumal's sword, a broken conch, a last piece of land (which later became Calicut) and his faithful servant, the Ullanat Panicker. From then on, as the Zamorin's power and territory increased, so too did the standing and wealth of the Ullanat family. Finally, with a dedication that was both remarkable and sustained, the Ullanat Panickers stepped forward when Guruvayur Temple was at its lowest ebb, and not only looked after the Zamorin's interests but the well-being of the temple. For 75 years, from 1825 to 1900, they drew heavily on the wealth of their vast estates, giving their services free in order that the temple could survive, perform its daily *poojas* and conduct the annual festival.

Slowly the temple's situation improved and, once again, pilgrims began seeking Guruvayurappan's blessings. By 1841 when the Government of Madras restored the *devadaaya* appropriated by Tippu Sultan, the temple was again secure, and, between 1859 and 1892, major renovations took place. At the same time, much of what was achieved was negated by acrimonious squabbling amongst the trustees appointed in 1825 to run the temple. The situation eventually reached such a pitch that, in 1889, the temple was closed and all *poojas* were stopped. Although they were restarted after a week, the trustees took 4 years to reach an acceptable compromise. Finally, the appointment in 1900 of the immensely capable Sree Konthi Menon as the temple's manager restored a sense of order to the temple. He fixed the hours of worship, ensured that the temple ran smoothly and that its precincts were kept clean. In 1916, a Court of Wards assumed management of the temple, since it was seen as being part of the Zamorin's estates, and by 1928, he was responsible for its administration. Two years later, the Madras High Court