

formulated a clear administrative pattern and confirmed that the Zamorin was in charge.

Meanwhile, as Guruvayur went through administrative uncertainties, the world outside was waking up to a new order; the struggle for Independence was being intensified; the feudal system was being questioned and there was growing awareness that preventing lower-caste Hindus from worshipping in Guruvayur—and other temples—was unjust.

Yet, though there were always many who felt such discrimination was wrong, it was not until 1925 that Mahatma Gandhi joined one of Kerala's great social reformers, K. Kelappan, and marched in the Sathyagraha—meaning 'firm adherence to the truth'—to the Travancore temple of Vaikom to secure entry there for *all* Hindus. However, the success of the Vaikom Sathyagraha had no effect on the situation at Guruvayur, and 6 years passed before another Sathyagraha, again led by K. Kelappan, arrived at Guruvayur to agitate for temple entry. (It was news of this protest that made the rest of India aware of the temple's existence.) The temple authorities resisted the protestors with force, obstructing their entry and erecting a fence around the temple. At one point, the situation was so volatile that the temple was closed for 28 days and all *poojas* suspended.²⁸ When it re-opened, there was considerable dismay since the sanctum lamp, originally lit by lightning, had gone out. Yet on the *same day*, a coconut tree near the temple's eastern side caught fire during a thunderstorm. At once, a Moopan, a traditional supplier of *avil*²⁹, climbed up with a dry coconut leaf, lit it from the burning tree and took it to the temple. Any lamp still burning was extinguished, and as soon as the one in the sanctum had been re-lit from the coconut leaf, it was used to re-light the others. The agitation failed, despite Mahatma Gandhi's blessings and support, and another 15 years passed before, on 2 June 1947,

the Madras Government—under whose control Guruvayur then came—signed the historic Act that finally opened the temple to all Hindus, regardless of caste. Even so, until 1 January 1982, when the last dissenting voice fell silent, only Brahmins were fed in the temple; now *prasada oottu*, the giving of food, is available to everyone.

One of the phrases that repeatedly crops up whenever an attempt is made to unravel Guruvayur's past is 'in the Zamorin's days'. Nowadays, despite the fact that this could actually mean a period of several centuries, it generally refers to the years between 1930 and 1970. During those 40 years, several schemes were framed, rules defined and acts implemented. In essence, they all sought to outline the parameters of administering the temple, the salaries to be paid while investing supervisory control with the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Board. In 1939, this Board attempted to acquire overall control since there were serious reservations about how the temple was being run. At this juncture, the Zamorin successfully moved the High Court in his favour, and though the Board made several more attempts to gain control due to the deteriorating quality of management, the Guruvayur Devaswom Act was finally passed in 1971, a few months after the devastating fire almost gutted the temple. This Act effectively curbed the power of both the Zamorin of Calicut and Mallisery Namboothiripad, the traditional owner or Ooralan of the temple. The Act has since been refined so that the temple's governing authority, the Devaswom, now consists of six political appointees and three hereditary ones: the Zamorin Raja, the *Karanavan* (eldest male) of the Mallisery *illam* (the traditional house of a Namboodiri Brahmin family) and the Thanthri (religious head) of the temple, *ex officio*. The politically appointed members, one of whom must be a Devaswom employee, and one a member of a scheduled caste, change every 2 years.

²⁸ Although the *poojas* stopped in the temple, the Lord's *chailanya* was transferred to the *thidambu* and the rituals continued in the Thanthri *Madhom*.

²⁹ Beaten rice grains.