



*Lauded as one of the One Hundred and Eight great centers of worship for Sree Maha Vishnu (i.e. 108 Divya Thirupathies) in Bharatha Varsha, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram (Divya Thirupathi No. 59) is considered as "Bhuloka Vaikuntam" (the Abode of the God on Earth) as well as a treasure house of art and architecture. The influence exerted by this Temple over the State and its people as well as on the territories far removed from it, literally spans centuries. Its glory and importance are multifarious. Despite the changing phases of its evolution, it has guarded and cherished its legacy of spiritualism including continuity of traditional rites and rituals without sacrificing them in the name of "progress." This booklet is a pilgrimage into the realm of devotion and is a journey into many interesting aspects of the temple as well as its Lord. Infusion of royalty has added splendor to its many unique features. It is an overview of the various aspects related to the Lord and his Abode on earth. Some of the material for this booklet was freely drawn from the book, "Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple," by Her Highness Aswathy Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi and other references given in the bibliography. It is hoped that this book will be published not only in English but also in the four South Indian languages, namely, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada and other languages of India, including, Bengali, Gujarathi, Hindi, and Marathi. This way people all over India as well as outside India would get an appreciation of this glorious temple of the Gods. In conclusion, this booklet strives to receive and transmit the glory of this ancient Abode of the Divine which has faced and outlived the relentless march of time. This booklet is respectfully submitted to the divya padas (Thiruvadi) of Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram .*

# *The Splendor of Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram*

*(Divya Thirupathi - 59)*

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Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala*

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by Ranga Komanduri and Aswathy Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi*

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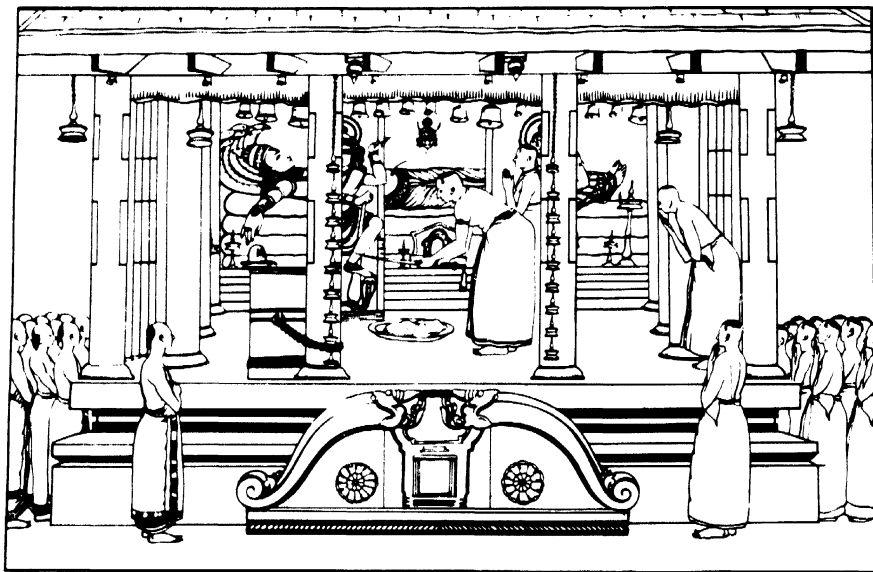
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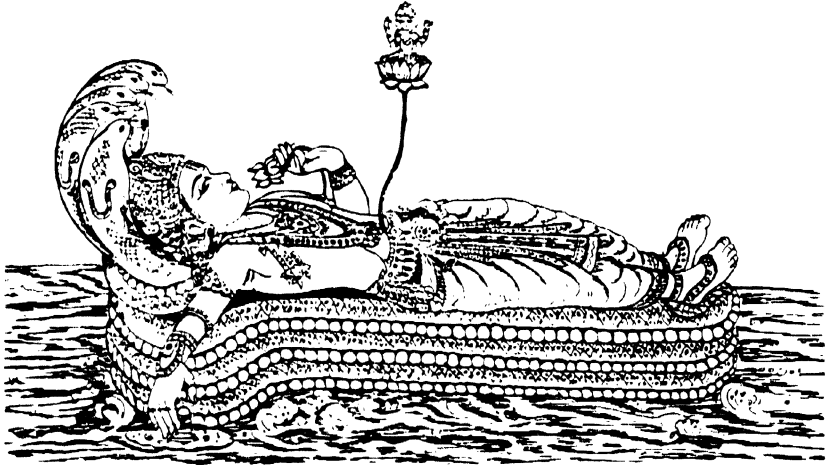
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*Thrippati Danam*

## DHYANA SLOKAM

*"Shanthakaram Bhujagashayanam Padmanabham Suresham  
Vishvaadharam Gaganasadrusham Meghavarnam Shubhangam  
Lakshmikantham Kamalanayanam Yogihridhyanagamyam  
Vande Vishnum Bhavabhayaharam Sarva Lokaikanadham"*



*Om̐kara Rupaḥ Kāmāya Pādārāṇḍam  
Sree Vāṇchi Bhūpa Kuladaivatam, Viśvarūpam  
Seshasayanam, Shrivāṇanāpādmahastham  
Sree Padmanābham ! Māma Dehi Karavāḷambam*

## (VISUALIZATION OF THE LORD)

*The celestials after their unsuccessful pleadings at the doors of 'Brahma and Siva, finally approached Sree Maha Vishnu to present the case of the tormented earth harassed by the demons. Vishnu agreed to incarnate on the earth to save her as well as the sages who were being inflicted with much suffering by the powers of darkness. This was the seventh incarnation of Sree Maha Vishnu, viz. Sree Rama. Before His descent to the earth as Sree Rama, Sree Maha Vishnu sank in deep yogic trance (Yoga Nidra) in the Milky Ocean ('Thiru-pal-kadal or Kshirabdhii) while the celestials stood by in great reverence. The almighty form, resting on the five-hooded snake Anantha or Adishesha (coiled charge of infinity), contained within it the entire cosmic order, with His feet resting on the earth, the umbilical cord of creation rising up from His navel and the stalk of the lotus (Padma) opening as the seat of the creator, Brahma (representing the creative aspect), the body unfolding within it the complete range of celestials and terrestrials (including plant and animal life), with the Sun and the Moon (representing the day and the night) as the two eyes. He is in supreme control of Maya (illusion), reality, and eternity and at the same time He is at absolute peace. The destructive aspect represented as Siva is also close at hand. It may be noted that the Linga is formed out of Banalinga which is held in high esteem by the Saivites. Some hold that Sree Padmanabha Swamy is offering refuge or a protective hand to Pralayakala Rudra (Siva) at the time of the Great Deluge. Another view is that He is performing Puja to Maheswara. It is this Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient Sree Padmanabha Swamy who represents Sree Maha Vishnu as the Moola Vighraha in the sanctum sanctorum of the Temple.*

## DIVYA MANTRAMS

*There are four Divya Mantrams (or Sacred Hymns) of prime importance believed to have been rendered by Sree Maha Vishnu (the Moolacharya) Himself and handed over to us through Great Acharyas (Masters or Seers) They are the Ashtakshara Mantram, the Dwaadasa Akshara Mantram, the Mantra Ratnam (Dhwayam), and the Charama Slokam.*

### **Ashtakshara Mantram**

*" Om Namo Narayanaya ! "*

*(Salutations to Sriman Narayana whose qualities are Om!)*

### **Dwaadasa Akshara Mantram**

*"Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya !"*

*(Salutations to Sriman Bhagavan Vasudeva!)*

### **Mantra Ratnam (Dhwayam)**

*"Sriman Narayana Charanou Sharanam Prapadyae.  
Srimathe Narayanaya Namah !"*

*(I take refuge at the holy feet of Sriman Narayana. Salutations to Sriman Narayana!)*

### **Charama Slokam**

*(Rendered by Bhagawan Sree Krishna (Narayana) to Sree Arjuna (Nara) in the Bhagavath Geetha)*

*"Sarva Dharman Parityajya Mam Ekam Saranam Vraja  
Aham Thuva Sarva Papabhyo Mokshayishyami Ma Suchaha ! "*

*(Abandoning all rituals, take refuge in Me alone;  
I will erase all your sins and grant you moksha or salvation!)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*"It is unwise to even attempt to restrict, to the persuasion of the humble pen, the beauty and grandeur of this magnificent figure (Sree Padmanabha Swamy) or to try to capture within the pages of a book the wonder of the sublime face or Thiru Mukham (Divine Face). The different expressions projected on the face of the Yoga Moorthy which is always serene but superimposed with the aura of benign grace, the sweetness of the smile that has captured the hearts of generations, all these cannot be explained but have to be experienced." These beautiful words came out of the noble thoughts of one of the authors (G.L.B) of a monumental work on "Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple" (see Reference 1) published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, India. No wonder the sovereigns of the former State of Travancore are proud (or privileged) to consider themselves as "Padmanabha Dasas\*." This booklet is written based primarily on that work and partly on the other works listed under References. It covers a broad range of topics related to the Divinity and His glorious abode on earth, namely, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.*

*Sree Padmanabha Swamy was proclaimed as the absolute ruler of the Princely State of Travancore in 1750 by King Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma who transferred his kingdom to Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy by absolute gift and dedication. Since then, the rulers on their own freewill accepted the role of 'Dasas' (mere slaves not servants) of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and only administered the kingdom on His behalf.*

*Kerala State was one of the few Princely States in India that remained mostly free from the foreign rule and their adverse influence on temple worship. There are some 25,000 Hindu temples (of both Siva and Vishnu faiths) in Kerala. In spite of it, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple occupies a special status all its own (Chapter 2) in the hearts of the people. It appears reasonable to assume that the temples of Kerala would not be much different*

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\* Dasa means almost a slave. A servant has the option to leave and has a status of his own, independent of the master, whereas no such choice is available in the case of a slave nor does he/she have a claim to a separate identity. Thus, he/she and his/her successors are forever bound to the master.

from those in the other three neighboring Southern States of India, namely, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh because of the common religion, same Divinities, and shared culture. In spite of this, Kerala evolved its own temple architecture which blends gently with the surroundings and appears as an extension to domestic dwelling. Since wood was plentiful, it was used extensively as the construction material, but it being perishable, many temples had to be renovated and reconstructed with the result that many ancient temples did not retain many of the original features. These aspects are brought out in Chapter 3.

Bhagawan Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Sree Maha Vishnu, exerted considerable influence in the former Princely States of Travancore and Cochin (Chapter 4). He is believed to have retrieved the lush land of Kerala from the ocean. He is credited with the construction of many a temple all over the land of the Malayalees. A rare temple dedicated to Sree Bhagawan Parasurama is located in Kerala near Thiruvananthapuram.

Thiruvananthapuram is the 59th of the 108 Divya Thirupathies or the sacred places of worship of Sree Maha Vishnu. Incidentally, the word Thirupathi is derived from the word Tiru, meaning Sree or Mahalakshmi and Pati meaning her spouse, i.e. the abode of Maha Lakshmi's spouse or Lakshmikantan, namely, Sree Maha Vishnu. Of the 108 Divya Thirupathies, 13 are located in Malai Nadu (or Malayala Nadu) as presented in Chapter 5.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, like a priceless jewel of unsurpassed brilliance, rests in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram, in the old, walled Fort area. The name of the town, Thiru-anantha-puram, is derived from the presiding deity (not only of the town but also of the whole State of erstwhile Travancore), Sree Padmanabha Swamy (Sree Maha Vishnu) who is seen reclining in Yogic slumber upon the infinite coils of the sacred serpent Anantha (Chapter 6).

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is very ancient and considered an important Sree Maha Vishnu Kshethram. The Sthala Purana presented in Chapter 7 takes us to Divakara Muni and the Tulu connection as well as Vilvamangala Swamiyar and the Namboodiri connection. It is believed that they are one and the same. The Divine Vision granted to the Sage when the Iluppa tree in Ananthan Kattu transformed into a mighty form

of Sree Maha Vishnu resting on Anantha as Sree Padmanabha Swamy is presented in this chapter. This also relates to the story of a little boy living with Divakara Muni who put in his little mouth, a Salagrama (a sacred stone symbolizing Sree Maha Vishnu), which was worshipped by Divakara Muni.

A brief history of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is presented in Chapters 8 followed by a description of the physical structure, architecture, and sculpture (including Kulasekhara Mandapam) in Chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 11 presents a brief description of the murals in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Chapter 12 describes worship of the various Divinities in the Temple. The great Srivaishnavite saint, Nammalvar, poured out his heart in devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy standing in the view of His holy feet (Thiruvadi). 'Bhagavan Sree Ramanuja, the acclaimed saint and proponent of Visishtadvaita philosophy, the incarnation of Lord Anantha, worshipped this Divinity. Kulasekhara Alvar was the Sovereign of the State and a great Padmanabha Bhakta. Out of the 18 Puranas, no less than seven, namely, Varaha, Brahma, Brahmanda, Padma, Bhagavatha, and Matsya, refer to this great Divinity and the Temple dedicated to Him. The Divinity is referred to by various names (Thirunamas) including "Sree Ananthasayana," "Sree Sayanandura Purusha," and "Sree Padmanabha."

Unlike most deities in South India, the Moola Vighraha of Sree Padmanabha Swamy is not made of black granite but out of Katu Sarkara Yogam, a special composition and a complex process indigenous to Kerala. Chapter 13 describes briefly the materials used and Chapter 14 describes the complex process of Katu Sarkara Yogam in more detail. What a coincidence, the new Divine image formed out of Katu Sarkara Yogam in 1733 incorporated 12,008 sacred Salagramas brought from the river bed of the sacred river Gandaki in Nepal. The special sanctity derived from the presence of so many sacred Salagramas is also presented in Chapters 13 and 14. Some background on Salagrama, the sacred stone personifying Sree Maha Vishnu in the abstract form is presented in Chapter 15. It may be pointed out that since the composition of Katu-Sarkara is black, the Moola Vighraha is often mistaken to have been made of black granite, which is the common practice in Dravida Desa.

Nowhere in the annals of history was there a situation where the Temple and the Royalty were so closely intertwined that their characters overlapped as in the case of Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy and the Royalty of the erstwhile State of Travancore. This connection is described in some detail in Chapter 16 with emphasis on

the contributions of Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma and Chittira Thirunal Rama Varma. Also, the contributions of some of the sovereigns were so unique that they required special attention. Notably coming under this cadre are Kulasekhara Perumal (Chapter 17) and Swathi Thirunal (Chapter 18). In order to keep this book short and devote it exclusively to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and His Abode on this earth, it has not been possible to include the many and varied contributions of the royalty over the generations. They are documented in greater detail in Reference 1 and the reader is referred to it.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was renowned for its role in feeding poor Brahmin students who used to come to the Temple from far and wide to study Vedas and Scriptures. This was of such unparalleled proportions that along with the spiritual fame, the Temple's fame as the provider of food (Anna Datha) and as dispenser of education (Vidya Datha) also spread far and wide (Uttupuras). This is briefly presented in Chapter 19. The worship of the Divine in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is different from that in other temples in the South, especially those outside Kerala. A strong influence of Namboodiri and Tulu Brahmins in the worship of the celestial and the administration of the Temple affairs can be seen. The Pushpanjali Swamiyar, the Tantries, the Nambies, the Potties, and the Santies all form the framework on which worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and other divinities in the Temple rests. As this tradition is different from Srivaishnava Sampradaya practiced in the other ancient temples of the South, outside Kerala, it is briefly presented in Chapter 20. Nammalvar, considered one of the greatest of the Dwadasa Alvars and the author of the 1000-verse Thiruvaymozhi, poured out his devotion and sang in ecstasy 11 verses (Pasurams) (10th Decad - 2nd canto of Thiruvaymozhi) on the glory of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and his beautiful abode on earth, Anandapuram (Thiruvananthapuram). Since these hymns exclusively deal with the subject matter of this book and as they are authored by such an acclaimed sage they are covered in Chapter 21 to enhance the value of this book to the devotees of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is unique in that there is symbolism associated with each of its activities. For example, there are only six Vahanas for the use of the Deities, namely, the Simhasana (denoting Molaadhara), the Anantha (denoting Swadhishtana), the Kamala (denoting Manipooraka), the Pallakku or Palanquin (denoting Anantha), the Garuda (denoting Visuddhi), and the Indra (denoting Ajnachakra) Vahanas.

*They represent the six chakras (wheels) with Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself being the Supreme dominating force - the Sahasradala Padma (the 1000-petal lotus). There are generally Sthalapuranas associated with the Divinities in major temples. They are like snapshots captured to indicate the circumstances under which a divinity came into being on this earth in a given form at a given auspicious time and location. Consequently, special festivals are associated with these temples. In the case of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple they are the Thiru Onam, the bi-annual festivals which include the Palli Vetta, the Arat Procession, the sexennial Murajapam, and the Lakshadeepam festivals. These are described in some detail in Chapters 22 to 23. Chapter 24 deals with some historical highlights of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.*

*In summary, it may be noted that the glory of Sree Padmanabha Swamy is portrayed throughout the literature covering a lengthy span from the age of Puranas to the 20th century. Despite the changing phases of its evolution, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has guarded and cherished its legacy of spiritualism including continuity of traditional rites and rituals without sacrificing them in the name of "progress." An attempt has been made in this booklet to cover briefly many interesting and unique but related aspects of this Maha Divya Kshetram and the Divinities associated with it. And, Sree Padmanabha Swamy continues to play on the heart-strings of His bhaktas (devotees) making their souls sing out in adoration at His divine behest. It is hoped that this little booklet would provide insights into the splendor of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram and transmit the glory of this ancient Abode of the Divine which has faced and outlived the relentless march of time. It is also hoped that this book will provide an appreciation of the cultural and religious heritage of the people of this great State of Kerala with some historical highlights of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple of Thiruvananthapuram, nestling in the extreme South of the Indian sub-continent.*

## 2. KERALA

Kerala, "the magnificent land of the Cheras," is one of the few Princely States in India that remained relatively free from the adverse foreign influence on Hindu religion. After the Indian Independence, the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin were merged as one united State of Travancore and Cochin. The subsequent linguistic reorganization of the Indian States in 1956 brought together the Malayalam speaking people into a single State of Kerala comprising areas of Travancore (except for some parts of the Kanyakumari District), Cochin, Malabar, and a part of S. Karnataka.

The land of Kerala was formed on the Western slopes and coastal plains of the Western Ghats. Geologically, the steep face of the Ghats was formed by the sliding of the ocean floor along the fault line of the Western Ghats as the Indian Peninsula moved N-E across the Arabian Sea. The coastal line of Kerala on the West stretches over 350 miles from Karnataka to within 60 miles on the Southern tip of India, but no where is the State wider than 75 miles. Because of the heavy rainfall, a striking feature in Kerala (in contrast to most other parts of India) is the greenness of vegetation seen throughout the year. The coconut groves, the Westwardly ocean breeze, the sandy soil, and the beautiful landscapes are just a few characteristics of the great State of Kerala.

It is estimated that there are some 25,000 Hindu Temples in Kerala dedicated to various Deities. A somewhat remarkable feature of the Kerala temples is the non-differentiation and peaceful coexistence of Vishnu and Siva faiths in many temples. An amalgamation of this can be seen at its best in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram where the Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva are seen together in the sanctum sanctorum. Similarly, in Sabarimala, Lord Ayyappa Swamy (also called Harihara Putra) believed to have been born out of union of Sree Maha Vishnu (Mohini Avatara) and Maheswara again personifies the unity of these two faiths. The Sankaranarayana in Vadakkunnathan Temple is another example of the combination of Vishnu and Siva into one. Thus the temporal status of many of these temples remained untouched by the rivalries of the Vaishnavite and Saivite cults, which unfortunately was not the case in many other parts of India resulting in the destruction of the temples and culture, and even in the attack on the civilization itself.





Kerala has produced a rich heritage of outstanding scholars, teachers (or Acharyas), and poet-saints. Adi Sankara (788-820), the great Advaita philosopher hails from Kaladi, a village 8 miles from Alwaye in the central part of Kerala. He arrived on the scene at a critical juncture when religion was becoming tainted with unholy customs. He could not bear the sight of people fighting in the name of God and indulging in violence and bloodshed. He reorganized Hinduism and provided a reinterpreted faith (Advaita). More important, at a time when the very existence of God was in question, he brought the faith back into the hearts of the people. Kulasekhara Varma, alias Kulasekhara Alvar, a sovereign from 800-820 was a great devotee of Sree Maha Vishnu and poured out his devotion or Bhakti to Sree Padmanabha Swamy into his literary works and in his commitment to the Temple till the abdication of his kingdom and onward spiritual sojourn to Srirangam. His literary compositions include one of the exquisite devotional works in Sanskrit of a garland of 40 Slokas on Sree Maha Vishnu (Sree Krishna) titled "Mukunda Mala" and "Perumal Tirumozhi" in Tamil. The latter forms part of the first thousand of the "Naalaayira Divya Prabhandam" or "Dravida Veda." Swathi Thirunal, another Sovereign of the State (1829-1846) earned enduring fame in the realm of devotional music. "His total adoration for and complete surrender to Sree Padmanabha Swamy resulted in the outpourings of his musical compositions which projected undulating notes of varied emotions of ecstasy, agony, longing, and abject devotion or Bhakti which poured forth in an overflow that could not be stemmed." Different types of compositions for classical music and dance forms, narrations and verses known as Slokas in an amazing number of languages have taken life from the inspired vision of Swathi Thirunal. Melpathur Narayana Bhattatiri (1559-1625) wrote "Narayaniyam," sitting on the Mandapa in front of Lord Krishna of Guruvayur. Poontaanam Namboodari's (1547-1640) Malayalam works include "Srikrishna-Karnamritam" and "Santhana Gopalam." Prince Manavedan from the royal family of Kozhicode (Zamorin) (1595-1658), a fervent devotee of the Lord of Guruvayur wrote "Krishnattam" (or "Krishna Geetha"), a dance-drama on Krishna, which is regularly staged at Sree Guruvayur Temple.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has been not only conducting spiritual and religious activities but also promoting various art forms. Some 99 Arangams (art forms) thrived under the patronage of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Notable among them, which became identified as a specialty of the Kerala State, are the famous

*Kathakali, Mohiniattom, and Koothu, to mention a few. Kathakali is a dance drama with detailed hand and facial movements with elaborate costumes and make-up. The presentation of this dance drama is accompanied by certain specified musical instruments and two vocalists who sing the story. The Kathakali songs rate high in scholarly expression, language, and literary content. Mohiniattom, originally performed by the Deva Dasies (or maidens of a temple dedicated to the Divine), is a languorous, slow moving but elegant dance style. Koothu is a sing-song presentation of religious lore and social satire.*

*In addition to the ardent devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the contributions of the royalty of the former Princely State of Travancore over the centuries to this Temple are innumerable in the form of jewelry, cash, land, Temple construction and renovations, and more importantly in the daily maintenance of the Temple itself. The continued dedication of the royal family of Travancore, even today, in the service of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as Sree Padmanabha Dasa is so strong that no viable comparison can be made. The Thrippati Danam in 1750 by Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma which was a total surrender of the entire State of Travancore to Sree Padmanabha Swamy is an act of abject devotion and dedication. The Kshetra Praveshana Vilambanum (the Temple Entry Proclamation) in 1936 by Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma proclaiming that no restriction be placed on any Hindu by birth or by religion in entering any temple under his administration for worship is a landmark decision in the annals of Indian heritage. The refusal of Maharaja Chithira Thirunal to take the Oath of Office as Rajpramukh (Head of the State) for life of the united State of Travancore and Cochin in 1949 on account of the Oath of Allegiance already submitted to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and subsequent modification of the Oath by the Indian Government to overcome the objections is possible only for a person of his total humility and dedication to Bhagavan Sree Padmanabha Swamy.*

### 3. UNIQUE ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF KERALA TEMPLES

*Kerala temples resemble domestic houses with ample courtyards and tiled, slanted roofs and form a natural extension of habitation. Perhaps Kerala's temples are the most house-like structures of all the temples in India (especially in South India). They are built such that they gently harmonize and blend with the environment with lush forest setting, earthy in materials, and as a natural extension to houses. The temple architecture had more specific development in the early 9th century at the time of Kulasekhara Sovereigns. The Chera and Kulasekhara dynasties have pioneered an architectural tradition that is unique to Kerala. It consists of sloping roofs and profuse use of wood in superstructure. In fact, Kerala temples must be credited with the advancement of wooden art in Asia. The use of sloping roofs on wooden frames which was introduced primarily to counteract heavy rainfall, also lent similarity to the architectural traditions of the Himalayan region, China, Japan, and many Far Eastern countries. It is in the superstructure, above the Prastara, that the Kerala temples are distinctive. There are no receding tiers above the Vimana carrying miniature shrines. The roof, be it single or double, is steep and pointed and is generally covered with copper sheets. It, thus, resembles the roofs of most private dwellings in the region. Still variations are noted.*

*Since wood is plentiful in Kerala, it is used extensively in the construction. Different names are given to the various units of the temple. The main Vimana together with the sanctum sanctorum is called "Sreekovil," the Ardhamandapa is the Namaskara Mandapa or the Mukha Mandapa (in shape square with a pyramidal roof), Cheruchuttu, the first enclosure encompassing the Sreekovil (or inner Pradakshinapath), a corridor or a pillared hall is "Nalambalam" or "Chuttambalam," at the outer entrance to which is the "Belikkalapura," containing the "Belikkal " or altar for offering sanctified food to the Divinities. The "Vilakkumatam" is a gallery of rows of lamps, generally numbering from five to nine, encircling the "Nalambalam." The outer Pradakshinapath is known as the "Sreebelippura" or "Sivelippura."*

*A typical Kerala temple has the Sreekovil (Main Deity or Central Shrine) the plan of which may be round,*

square, rectangular, oval, or semicircular. The roof is shaped in accord with the plan of the sanctum below it. If the plan is circular, the roof is a huge cone; if square, it is a steep pyramid. There is also a ridged roof, single or double, with the ridge terminating in a triangular gable end. Often the roof, whatever its form, is in two or three stories. Further, whatever the plan of the Sreekoil, the arrangements of other components follow invariably a concentric rectangular or square alignment. The temple well which supplies water for Abhisekam (the sacred bath) of the Deities and for preparing Prasada is situated generally in the N-E corner. The Madapalli or the kitchen is also situated in one portion of the Nalambalam. The structure from Adhusthana (basement) to Stupa (finial, the uppermost structure of the temple) is termed Vimana.

The distinguishing features of a typical Kerala temple are underlined by the structure of the sanctum sanctorum, the Cheruchutta, the Chuttambalam, the Belikkal area, the Dwajasthamba, Chuttuvilakku or encircling lamps, and open courtyards. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Suchindram Temple seem to be the only exceptions among the ancient temples in erstwhile Travancore exhibiting a blend of Tamil (Dravidian) and local Kerala style architecture. This is particularly evident in Dravidian style of the Rajagopuram abounding with figures and themes on one side and the open courtyards and the like on the other side. Since these two Temples came directly under the temple tradition set down by the Namboodiri Brahmins of Kerala, they were able to retain their basic originality even though the Dravidian ideas have influenced and inspired the structural patterns. The Nayak influence is also evident in the figures though many exhibit a distinct local flavor. As such, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is a happy amalgamation of the Dravidian, Chola, and Pandya as well as the indigenous styles of architecture which complement and not contradict each other.

The Eastern Gopura of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is distinctly Dravidian in style. However, most Tamil Nadu temple towers have fourteen floors representing the fourteen worlds from Patala (down below or the Hell) to the Satya Loka (or the Heaven). In this Temple only seven floors exist. They symbolize the worlds of elevated order commencing with our earth and reaching up to Satya Loka or Brahma Loka. The reasoning is that in this Bhuloka Vaikunta where Sree Padmanabha Swamy reigns, the lower worlds and their downward trend merit no significance. The seven worlds of elevated order begin with the earth or Bhuloka, Bhuvarloka, Svarloka





*or Swargaloka, Maharloka, Inanaloka, Tapoloka, and Satyaloka. The seven Kumbhas on top of the Gopura also point to these seven worlds.*

*Another interesting point to note is that in most ancient Dravidian temples of Sree Maha Vishnu, there are separate sanctums for Sree Devi (Thayar or the Divine Mother, Sree Maha Lakshmi) and 'Bhu Devi (Sree Andal). Also, most temples would have icons of various Alvars, Sree Ramanuja, and sometimes other Sree Vaishnava Acharyas. However, in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the Sree Devi and 'Bhu Devi idols are in the main sanctum only and no Alvar Sannidhies are found either. Sree Ramanuja had visited Thiruvananthapuram and worshipped Sree Padmanabha Swamy and as a mark of honor to this illustrious Sage, a place was provided for him inside the Nalambalam of the Temple. He is depicted there in an engraving on the wall opposite Sree Veda Vyasa's Shrine. It is interesting to note that the consecration of Bhagavan Veda Vyasa as in this Temple is rather rare. Sree Veda Vyasa sits on a platform with Asvathama standing to his left. Veda Vyasa is considered Sree Maha Vishnu Himself who incarnated on this earth in the declining years of Kaliyuga. It was Veda Vyasa who codified and categorized the Vedas into four sections, namely, Rig, Sama, Yagur, and Atharva. It is for the monumental work that he was endowed with the title of "Veda Vyasa" and his original name is Krishna Draipayana. He is famed as the author of the great epic, Mahabharata. Asvathama is the son of Dhronacharya, the illustrious teacher of Pandavas. He is believed to be the next "Veda Vyasa" and hence his place as standing to the left of Sree Veda Vyasa.*

## 4. THE PARASURAMA CONNECTION

*Ksatriyarudhiramaye jagadapagata paapam  
Snapayasi payasi samitabhavataapam  
Kesava dhirta Bhrgupatirupa  
Jaya Jagadisa Hare !*

- - Jayadeva's Dasavatara Stotra

*"O God Almighty, in the form of the Lord of the Bhrgus, You have bathed the world in the blood of the tyrannous rulers, Thus cleansing it of sin and destroying the misery of its relative existence. Hail ! Hari, God of the Universe. Victory to Thee !"*

*The great land of Kerala existed at the time of Vamana Avatar, the fifth incarnation of Sree Maha Vishnu when Bali Chakravathy ruled the land. This land mass was claimed by the sea at some point in time. Parasurama (also known as Bhargavarama) is the sixth incarnation of Sree Maha Vishnu. He was the last of the five children born to the Sage Jamadagni, one of the Saptharishies (or the Seven Great Sages who were glorified as the Seven Stars in the Constellation) and his wife Renuka. Parasurama loved his mother very dearly. But, when his father commanded him to kill her for supposedly having sinned, Parasurama obeyed his father's order (Pithru Agna Palana) without hesitation and slew her. His unquestioning obedience, however, pleased the Great Sage, Jamadagni, who rewarded his son with a boon. Parasurama, without hesitation, requested his father to restore his mother's life with his Tapo-sakti (spiritual power). Jamadagni had no option but to readily oblige.*

*Many of the Aryan rulers in those times were a menace to the welfare of the society. The worst of them was Sahastarjuna, who embarked upon a victory tour or conquest of many Kshatriyas and stretched it further to destroy the hermitages of various sages for mere sadistic delight. It is under those circumstances that Sree Maha Vishnu took the form of Parasurama, as the sixth incarnation, to root out the evil and establish law and order. However, when his father was killed by a Kshatriya, Parasurama became furious and vowed to root out the Kshatriya race for ever. Parasurama, then, somewhat indiscriminately killed many Kshatriyas some of whom*





were kind, noble, and had won the hearts of the people they governed.

When Sage Narada brought this fact to the attention of Bhagavan Parasurama, He acknowledges the mistake and decided to mend it with a great penance. He also voluntarily gave back to the people all the land he conquered to the extent that he did not have literally a place, to put his feet on. It is believed that under these circumstance Parasurama retrieved from the depth of the ocean the lush land stretching between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea on the Western Coast of India which is now the Kerala State. The common belief is that by throwing his powerful ax (Parasu) as far as it could go, he reclaimed the land from the waves. He was also credited with having built many a temple (including the five important temples of Ayyappa along the hilly tracts of the Western Ghats) all over this land, consecrated the idols, and developed detailed procedures (Parasurama Paddhati) for the worship of the Lord. One can find tremendous influence of Bhagavan Parasurama in the erstwhile Princely States of Travancore and Cochin more than anywhere else in India. Perhaps one of the few temples dedicated to Bhagavan Parasurama is located in Kerala, only a few miles from Thiruvananthapuram. The other one which was built in 1779 is located in Phule in Maharashtra State.

For conducting the daily worship in the temples and also for performing consecration ceremonies and Tantric requirements in temples of the future, Parasurama selected competent Tantries from 12 Namboodiri houses of the land. The Tharananalloor Namboodiripads, the hereditary Tantries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, are among these twelve houses. It can thus be seen that Bhagavan Parasurama who had so much influence and for this purpose commanded so much reverence in Kerala is the reformed Parasurama, who has done so much good for the welfare of mankind and not necessarily the Parasurama who vowed to root out the Kshatriyas. It is He who is worshipped as the sixth incarnation of Sree Maha Vishnu. It may be pointed out that this is the only incarnation that extended its confines beyond its own time, namely, to that of Sree Rama incarnation in Treta Yuga (where Parasurama gave his Astras (weapons) to Sree Rama for use against Ravana), to Sree Krishna incarnation in Dwapara Yuga (where he helped Sree Krishna and Balarama to defend their powerful enemy Jarasandha), and to train Bhishma of Mahabharata fame in Asthra Vidya, one finds the active presence of Bhagavan Parasurama during these two incarnations as well, which is unique.

## 5. ANCIENT SREE MAHA VISHNU TEMPLES IN KERALA

The word *Thirupathi* is derived from the word *Thiru*, meaning Sree or Mahalakshmi and *Pathi* meaning her spouse. Thus *Thirupathi* connotes the abode of Maha Lakshmi's spouse or Lakshmikantam, namely, Sree Maha Vishnu. Of the 108 Divya *Thirupathies* of Sree Maha Vishnu, 13 are located in Malai Nadu (or Malayala Nadu). They are Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Thiru Van Parisaaram (also called 'Tiruppatisaaram'), Thirukkatkarai, Thiru-muzhikkalam, Thirupuliyur, Thiruchengunnur (Thiruchhitraru), Thiru-navai, Thiruvella, Thiruvannandur, Thiruvattaru, Thiruvittu-vakkodu, Thiruk-katti-thanam, and Thiruvaaranvillai or Aaramula. Interestingly enough, this list of temples does not include such famous Krishna temples as Guruvayur, Thirunavayi, Trichambaram, Thiruvavappu, Ambalapuzha, Tripunithura, or Sree Rama Temples at Triprayar, Thiruvilwamala, and Thiruvangad or Sankaranarayana (Siva-Vishnu) at Vadaakkunathan Temple or the famous Sree Ayyappa Swamy (Hari-Hara Putra) Temple in Sabarimala. Such is the great temple heritage and Srivaishnava Sampradaya of Kerala.

## 6. THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

*The name of the city, Thiru-anantha-puram, is derived from the presiding Deity, Sree Padmanabha Swamy (Sree Maha Vishnu) who is seen relaxing in Yogic slumber upon the infinite coils of the sacred serpent Anantha. The term "Anantha" in the name of the city, Thiru-anantha-puram, should be understood as an abbreviation of the divine name of Anantha Padmanabha, and not merely "Anantha" the divine serpent on whose coils the Lord rests. This place is the 59th of the 108 Divya Thirupathies or the sacred places of worship of Sree Maha Vishnu. Thiruvananthapuram rests in the reflected glory of her Master Sree Padmanabha Swamy and despite the winds of change and ravages of time, the basic inner core of essential effulgence continues to bloom due to His divine grace.*

*King Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma proclaimed in 1750 that Sree Padmanabha Swamy would be the absolute ruler of the State and the so-called rulers of the State would be only His Dasas. He transferred the kingdom to Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy by absolute gift and dedication "for as long as the Sun and Moon shall shine, all the lands and functions appertaining thereto, together with all rights and dignities, positions of honor, and all other possessions."*

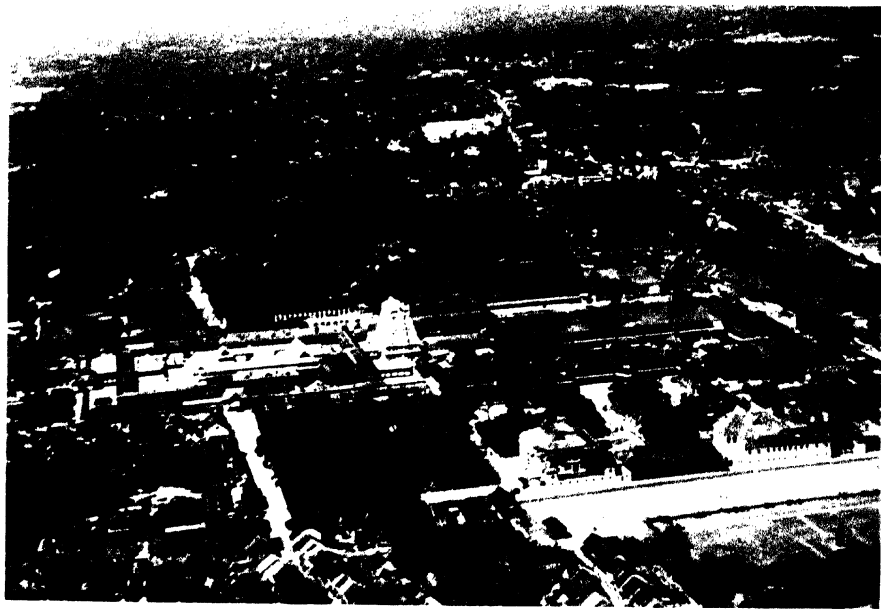
*Like a priceless jewel of unsurpassed brilliance, this great Center of Divinity, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple rests in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram. Many ancient temples abound in this region including the Mithranandapuram Temple dedicated to the Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara; the Siva Temple at Padma Theertham; Sree Ramaswamy Temple; Sree Nagaraja Temple in Ananthan Kaattu; Sree Murugan Temple, Sree Varaha Moorthy Temple; and Sree Maha Ganapathy Temple enhancing the spiritual greatness of this Divya Sthalam.*

*Nammalvar, considered one of the greatest of the Dwadasa Alvars and the author of the 1000-verse Thiruvaymozhi, poured out his devotion and sang in ecstasy 11 verses (Pasurams) (10th Decad- 2nd canto of Thiruvaymozhi) on the glory of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and his beautiful abode on earth, Anandapuram (Thiruvananthapuram) which is the repository of enchantment. He described the sacred city, where the Lord*

*permanently dwells, as a blessed place which abounds in lush fields and lakes, trees and flower gardens with a profusion of scented blooms, with sea on one side and buildings as tall as hills on the other. It is the choicest place of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and it is considered that a visit to this place by the pilgrims will drive away all their sins. It is also believed that for seven births and more, there are no woes for the pilgrims who visit this place or for people who live in this town. This is literally what is meant by Sthala Mahatmyam, or auspiciousness of a holy place.*









## 7. STHALA PURANAM

*Sthala Puranam is the sacredness or auspiciousness of the place as described in scriptures or other authentic literature written or transferred from word to mouth. Palm leaf scrolls (or Grandhas and Inscriptions) of the Temple, Ananthasayana Mahatmyam, and other material lend support as to how this Maha Kshetra (Great Temple or the Holy Place of Worship) came into being. Two of the most enduring versions are given here.*

### Divakara Muni and the Tulu Connection

*A Tulu Brahmin sage named Divakara Muni was once performing penance in Athartha Desam, in Kumbala near Mangalore. One day a radiant two-year old child appeared before him. A spontaneous love for this little boy was formed in the heart of this ascetic. The sage inquired of the child who he was. The child replied that he had neither a father nor a mother and no home in particular either. The sage then requested the little lad to make his home with him. The child agreed to it only on the condition that if he ever felt humiliated he would leave at once. One day the little boy was in an extremely naughty mood and put into his little mouth a sacred Salagrama from the place where Divakara Muni was performing Puja. On seeing this, the sage became impatient and sharply reprimanded the child. Strictly following his prior condition, the child ran away immediately, proclaiming as he sped on, that if ever the Muni desired to see him, he would have to go to Ananthan Kattu (Forest of Anantha) and seek him out there. Realization dawned on the sage as to the true nature of his little companion (Sree Maha Vishnu in the disguise of a little boy) and in despair he followed in the direction taken by the child. Finally, after searching long he reached a forest near the seashore just in time to see the child disappear into an Iluppa tree (Basia Longifolia -Indian Butter tree). In a trice, the tree crashed down and as though by a miracle transformed into the mighty form of the Lord, Sree Maha Vishnu, resting on Anantha, i.e. as Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy. This was the divine vision granted by the Lord to Divakara Muni. Unable to imbibe a revelation of such magnitude of the Divya Mangala Roopa stretching to a length of about eighteen miles, the saint prayed that the Lord be pleased to limit His form to three times the length of his Yoga Dandu (i.e. about 18 feet long) to accommodate his limited mortal vision. His plea was granted and the mighty form*

transformed to this dimension. Pleased by his devotion, the Lord decreed that henceforth, the Tulu Brahmins hailing from the Divakara Muni's homeland conduct the daily Pujas for Him which is followed even to date.

#### Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar and the Namboodiri Connection

The most accepted version regarding the consecration of the Temple relates to the famous Namboodiri Brahmin, Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar. The story is very similar to the one just presented except that the sage is Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar (and not Divakara Muni) with minor differences as to details. Additional points towards the end that must be included here are as follows. At night time the sage reached the edge of a forest and was sitting under a tree in deep dejection. From the hut of a Pulaya (supposedly the very low caste among Hindus) he heard the raised voice of a Pulaya woman admonishing her wailing baby "If you do not cease crying I will throw you into Ananthan Kaattu". The saint sped to her side to inquire the whereabouts of the forest and in reply she pointed a finger towards the nearby jungle. Elated, he blessed her and entered the forest taking a lighted wick from her hut (this is of immense significance in the backdrop of untouchability). In the early pre-dawn hours, an Ilappa tree suddenly crashed down before him and transformed into the mighty form of Sree Padmanabha Swamy resting on Anantha. The Swamiyar on receiving the Darshan of Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy, in an overflow of emotion and jubilation having nothing else to offer, submitted to Him an unripe mango from a nearby tree, placing it in a dry coconut shell. The coconut shell (believed to be that very same) has been covered with gold and gem studded and continues to be used in the daily Nivedya. Instead of Shanku commonly used in Sree Maha Vishnu temples, thus coconut shell is used in this Temple. A Naboodiri Brahmin who has embraced Sanyasa is designated as Pushpanjali Swamiyar (as he performs the daily worship with flowers to the Lord), in memory of Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar. He holds an important position in the Temple.

The location of the Temple, namely, Ananthan Kaattu (Forest of Anantha); the use of Iluppa tree for the Moorthy; the incorporation of not one Salagrama (recall the incident when the little lad put the Muni's Salagrama in his mouth), not twelve (for a temple or Kshetra), but twelve thousand and eight Salagramas collected from the bed of the sacred river, Gandaki in Nepal in the formation of the Moola Moorthy of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in Katu Sarkara Yogam; the role of Tulu and Naboodiri Brahmins in the performance of

*daily worship of the Deities and many other incidents lend support to the Sthala Purana of this Maha Divya Kshetra (the Great Holy Place of Worship).*

*It was mentioned under Sthala Purana (Chapter 7) that Divakara Muni/Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar had the divine vision of the Lord where a giant Iluppa tree transformed into an almighty form of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact time when Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was consecrated, there is no doubt regarding its great age and ancient character. Reference to the Temple appears in many Puranas. "Puranas," mean those that live from ancient times. The principal Puranas are 18 in number (although there are many upa-puranas or sub-puranas) of which at least seven carry references to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and His Abode in Thiruvananthapuram. They include Varaha Purana referring to the Lord as "Sree Sayanandura Purusha;" Brahma Purana referring to the town as "Ananthasayana Pura;" Brahmanda Purana referring to Him as "Sayanandura Purusha;" Padma Purana referring to Him as "Ananthasayanam;" Skanda Purana referring to Him as "Padmanabha;" Srimad Bhagavatha Purana referring to the pilgrimage of Lord Balarama (the 8th incarnation of Sree Maha Vishnu) towards the end of the Great Mahabharata War; and Matsya Purana referring to the town as "Ananthasayana Kshetram." As such it has to be logically concluded that the sage performed a re-consecration of an existing temple and not a consecration.*

*Saint Kulasekhara Varma, alias Kulasekhara Alvar, was the Sovereign from 800-820. He was a great devotee of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and was committed to the temple till his abdication of the kingdom and onward spiritual journey to Srirangam. Similarly, the early 9th century witnessed the visit of Saint Nammalvar who poured out his devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Standing in the view of the lotus feet of the Lord, Nammalvar sang in ecstasy eleven verses on the Lord of this Temple, which is part of Thiruvaymozhi and the Naalaayira Divya Prabhandam.*

*The year 1606 witnessed great strides made in the renovation and structural repairs of the temple. While the original features were all retained, one significant change was the substitution of wood (which was in compliance with the Kerala Temple architecture) by stone. This was adopted for fear of fire hazard. Most unfortunately,*

even in the midst of all this activity of renovation, a fire broke out in the 'Balalayam (temporary abode) of the Perumal. It was quickly brought under control before much damage could be wrought. When Iravi Iravi Varma (1611) became the ruler, the work assumed a faster tempo. The first floor of the sanctum was finished in granite and the next two floors in wood. The Kalasa Ceremony (Kumbhabhisekam) was conducted by Tarananallor Padmanabhan in 1632. In 1686 another great fire played havoc leaving behind a trail of destruction. It attacked the Abhisravana Mandapam, the shrine of Sree Narasimha Moorthy and swept into the main sanctum melting the metal utensils and the lamps and causing the granite structure to explode. The fire raged in unabated fury for one and a half days despite desperate attempts to extinguish it. As a terrible finale, the roof of the sanctum crashed in a burning mass of flames on the actual Idol of Illupa wood of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Despite the ferocity, the Idol remained miraculously unharmed except for the loss of three fingers in the left hand and all toes of the left leg.

King Marthanda Varma the Great (1729-58) initiated renovation of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and in the course of time brought about a complete renovation in stages. He, however, did not alter the original structure, not the details, but only repaired them. The innovation was the replacement of wood by granite to prevent future exposures to fire. Work commenced in 1730. The Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy was moved to Balalayam. The main idol, the reclining figure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy was reconstructed with twelve thousand and eight sacred Salagramas embedded in the body of the Moorthy and covered with a special composition known as Katu-Sarkara Yogam. The Sthapathi was Balaranya Konideva who executed this wondrous image of the Almighty God, in six years starting from 1733. This idol replaced the former idol of Iluppa wood (Indian 'Butter tree) which had sustained some damage in the Great Fire of 1686. The residing potency was withdrawn from It and infused into the present Katu-Sarkara Idol following elaborate and complex religious ritualistic ceremonies. Tantri Tarananallor Padmanabhan Parameswaran in 1739, conducted the re-consecration of the Moola Bimba in the Sreekovil.

The exquisite Ottakal Mandapam (Ekasila Mandapam) fashioned out of one huge granite stone slab cut out of a solid rock from Thirumala, an area not too far from the city, was built in front of the sanctum. In 1739, the

construction of Sivelippura (a covered area along which the Deities are ceremoniously taken out daily in procession) began and was completed in a record time. The immense Sivelippura with four corridors spanning the entire length of the inner portions with beautifully and intricately carved granite pillars, each having a Deepalakshmi, was the result. The teak log required for the Dhvajastambha (flag staff) was brought by men from Kakkacha Mala, some 30 miles away from the Temple, without it ever touching the ground. It was covered with gold and erected on a copper Padma Peetham (base of the flag staff) with the Idol of Garuda fixed on top. Near the Belikallu were consecrated two grand figures in granite of massive girth, that of Bhakta Hanuman in a posture of devotion and of Ashtanaga Garuda. Many other notable sculptures are also on view.

The foundation for the Eastern Gopura was laid in 1566 at the time of King Aditya Varma. The Gopura itself rises to about 100 ft and carries seven gold Kumbhas. It is seven storied with steps inside leading to the top. On top of the Gopura a boat-shaped ornamentation rests which is a symbol of Vanchi Nadu (the land of Vanchi or boat people). This was done as per the orders of Maharaja Karthika Thirunal. Tantri Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Parameswaran conducted the Kalasa ceremony in 1733. The Natakasala Mukhappu (hall for cultural performance and learned discourses and debates) was constructed at the Eastern side of the main entrance to the Temple. The Nalambalam, the immediate outer area coming after the Chuttambalam (the inner regions), was reconstructed and as a new addition, the Vilakku Matom for fixing lamps was made. The Abhisravana Mandapa in front of the Ottakkal Mandapa, the adjacent Alankara Mandapa as well as the Thiruolakka Mandapa were all renovated. The Padma Theertham of lauded sanctity attached to the Temple was widened and its shape re-defined running 250 feet from East to West and 50 feet from North to South. Granite steps were built around the tank and broad pathways were laid leading to the four entrances of the Temple as per the wishes of Maharaja Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma (famed in history as "Dharmaraja").

The Kulasekhara Mandapa famed far and wide for its exquisite stone sculpture was completed in 1765. It may be pointed out that Kulasekhara Mandapa is a living wonder of granite sculpture, a lavish expression of godliness in Silpa form. It continues to evoke admiration and dazzles the mind and eyes of those who pour in to view the array of marvels.

### 8. DESCRIPTION OF SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE

*It may be noted that Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram is a harmonious union of indigenous Malayali style, where use of wood as construction material, simplicity, and blend with surroundings are important considerations, and the Dravidian style grandeur with a tall Gopura and granite as construction material. Since Travancore with Sree Padmanabha Swamy as its Monarch had extensive Tamil speaking areas under its jurisdiction, such an acceptance, and amalgamation were essential for closer emotional integration of the two linguistic territories. It is generally considered that the exquisite stone sculpture present in a temple is an ornamentation of the Deity. If this is so, Sree Maha Vishnu, who is described as Alankara Priya and is the presiding Deity of this Temple, is indeed exquisitely ornamented with superb sculptures.*

*Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple rests in the Brahmasthana (heart) of Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala. As a majestic backdrop, nature has laid out a lavish display of her enchantment in fabulous blend of the sea, backwaters, hilly ranges, and whole vista of varying tones and textures of greenery. Facing East, the Temple rests on a moderately elevated part of the town. The area covered by its enclosures is about 570 ft. by 510 ft. or 25,700 square feet or about seven acres. It is enclosed within four high granite walls 20 ft high on the East and 15 ft high on the other three sides. There are four main entrances facing the four directions with four smaller ones, three on the Eastern side and one on the Northern side. The majestic Temple Gopura is situated at the Eastern entrance. It is seven storied and rises to about 100 ft with steps inside leading to the top. The top most part of the Gopura is boat-shaped which symbolizes Vanchi Nadu (the land of the boat people). It carries seven gold Kumbhas representing the seven Lokas (or seven worlds). Thirteen broad and very wide steps lead to the main imposing entrance. They are also known as "Kulasekhara Padi" (or steps) as it was Kulasekhara Alvar's desire to become the outer step of every Sree Maha Vishnu temple so that the auspiciousness of the touch of the feet of His devotees would ever be his.*

*Just outside the Temple portico, two bronze eight tiered lamps or Deepastambhas stand in line. This type of lamp is a requirement in most Kerala temples. Entrance through the central portion of the portico brings one*

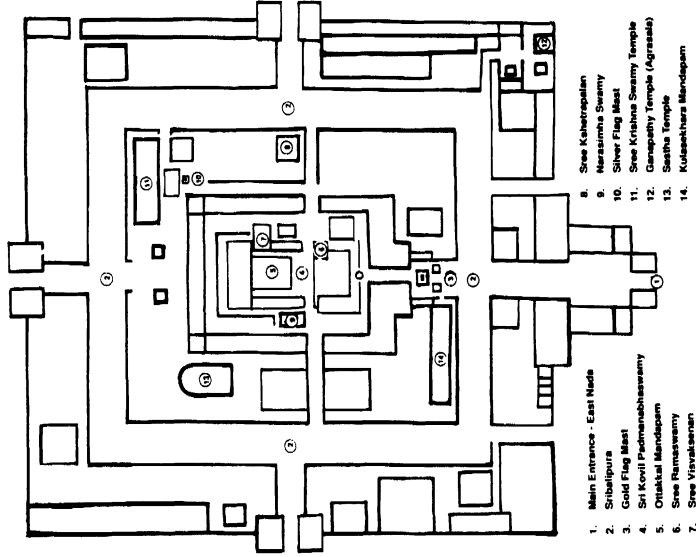
to the lofty and spacious hall known as Natakasala Mukhappu which is built on the Eastern side of the main entrance of the Temple. South Indian temples were necessarily the centers of art and culture. This Natakasala was the venue where divine dances, drama, musical recitals, and other art forms as well as rendering of scriptures, discussions on them, and other learned discourses took place. The hall is about 120 ft long by 48 ft wide. The next enclosed area is Sivelippura or Sreebelippura, the inner Pradakshinapatha. The imposing Dhruva Stambha comes next succeeded by the hall containing the big Belikkalu (or Beli stone). The Abhisravana Mandapa is located here and adjacent to it are the Alankara Mandapam and the Thiruolakka Mandapa as well as the pillared corridors. The "Vilakku Maatam" is a gallery of rows of lamps, generally numbering from five to nine, which stands around the "Nalambalam." In the outer Pradakshinapatha is the famed Kulasekhara Manda with four sets of granite musical pillars and 24 excellent sculptures. It stands where "Koothambalam" (where "Kuttu" and other performances are staged) is usually seen and was the venue of many Yajnas.

The Sreekovil in many Kerala temples is fronted by a square Namaskara Mandapa with a pyramidal roof. In some temples there is an additional pillared structure, known as the Balikkalppura in front of the Valiambalam providing the main entrance to the temple. Facing the Balikkalppura, which enshrines the main Balipitha is the Dhruvastambha (or flag staff) as well as Deepastambha. Surrounding the inner structure is the paved processional path (Sivelippura). The outer wall enclosing all these structures has one or more entrances (sometimes one on each of the four sides) by gopuras with multiple roofs covered with tiles though they are not as tall or as imposing as most of the shrines in the neighboring Tamil Nadu or other parts of South India. The layout of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple illustrates most of these features.

The imposing Sivelippura with covered four corridors around the entire length of the inner sanctum with beautifully and intricately carved 365  $\frac{1}{4}$  granite pillars, each different in engraving and with a Deepalakshmi on each continues to evoke awe. Each pillar represents one day of the year and the  $\frac{1}{4}$  is to accommodate the leap years. It measures about 314 ft from East to West and 406 feet from North to South (a total length of about 1440 ft), 20 ft wide and 20 ft high. The long, covered corridor (Sivelippura), used twice daily for the ceremonial, ritualistic circumambulation of the Ustava Deities, known as Sveli, can easily compete in style and grandeur







Layout of the Temple



thought not in length with the renowned Rameswaram Corridor thus claiming similarity to its counterpart. This place was also used for feeding a large number of Brahmins every day (see Chapter 19, Feeding of the Needy - The Uttupuras) and could accommodate as many as two thousand persons in one sitting.

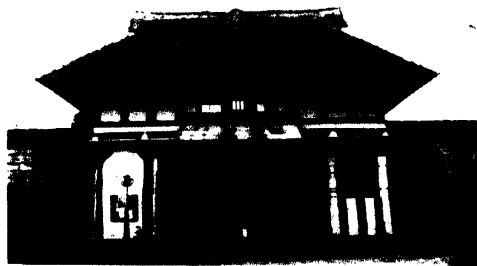
The Kulasekhara Mandapa is another living wonder of granite sculpture, a lavish expression of godliness in Silpa form. It continues to evoke admiration and dazzles the minds and eyes of those who pour in to view the array of marvels. The Sreekovil is a rectangular two divisional structure (Dvithalam) measuring 24 ft in length by 18 ft in breadth by 40 ft in height. The first portion is a long corridor-type area and the second across the high inner step is the chamber where the Main Deity is consecrated. The sanctum is two-storied, ridged and tiled with copper sheets with three globular gold crest pots (Stupikalasas), one each over the three doorways. On either side of these are affixed a gold trident-shaped emblem of Vishnu. Another crest pot and similar symbol stand by themselves on the roof of the Ottakkal Mandapam once again indicating its special sanctity. The sacred Ottakkal Mandapa (Ekasila Mandapa) built out of one huge granite stone slab cut out of a solid rock is considered to be an extension of the sanctum where Daily Abhisheka of the Uthsava Moorthies is performed.

It is claimed by many a devotee that when a pilgrim's ear is pressed gently against the outer wall of the sanctum, near the area where the Lord's lotus feet rest, the resonance of Pranava or Omkara (the primordial vibration) can be heard. Others claim that it is the muted roar of the Milky Ocean (Thiru-pal-kadal).

There are three entrances in a row which give access to the majestic view of the Divinity in the sanctum sanctorum, which is unique to Sree Padmanabha Swamy Sannidhies (Sanctums). Legend has it that they are a representation of Vilvamangala Swamiyar's request to Sree Padmanabha Swamy to reduce His awesome size of 18 miles long to three times the length of his six-foot Danda. A complete Darshan of Sree Padmanabha Swamy is possible only by viewing through all the three doors one after the other. The Darshan through the door at the crown of the Divine denotes cosmic wisdom; that through the middle door indicates the creation with Brahma emanating from the Nabhi of Sree Padmanabha Swamy; and that through the door at the lotus feet of the Lord (Thiruvadi) points to the ultimate path to salvation. Another interpretation is that they represent the three phases of time - past, present, and future, so significant in projecting the transient nature of mortality.

*Emerging from the sanctum sanctorum one reaches the Ekasila Mandapa or Ottakkal Mandapa (single rock platform). It is considered an extension of the sanctum in concept due to the absence of the usual Sopana (steps) leading up to it from the ground level, which separates the Sreekovil from the front Mandapa. Being monolithic, in a symbolic way it conjoins the sanctum as well. It is due to this identification with the sanctum that certain unique restrictions are imposed with regard to this Mandapa. The priests who are in service of the Lord in the sanctum do not touch the Mandapa when others are standing on it. Anything that is placed on it, whether by accident or by intention, automatically becomes the property of the Temple. Even ascending the Mandapa is an extremely sacred act. Normally in most temples, the Abhisheka (sacred bath to the divinities) is performed on the consecrated Idols placed in the main sanctum. In the case of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, as the Moola Bimba is made of Katu Sarkara Yogam, no Abhisheka is performed on the main deity. Instead, Abhisheka is performed daily to the Abhisheka Moorthies and the Uthsava Moorthi by bringing them to the Ottakkal Mandapa and the rituals are performed there as it is deemed to be a continuation of the inner shrine. No one is allowed to touch the Mandapa when the rites are in progress on it. The single-stone structure stands for oneness, standing on that which is one, thinking of One and only One, to become one with One. On it, on either side of the central door, just on the outside of the main sanctum stand the two ever vigilant and dutiful Dvarapalakas (guards) of Sree Maha Vishnu – Jaya and Vijaya.*

*It may be added that the Temple is among the extremely rare ones to qualify as a Mahakshetra in its structural and certain other criteria apart from its spiritual sublimity. Ten norms are quoted which are met by the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. They are antiquity, mention in the ancient literature, proximity to the sea or a sacred river, situation at an elevation or on top of a mountain or hill, origin in a forest, historical importance, royal links, presence of records (palm leaf, scrolls, inscriptions, copper plates etc.), magnificence of architecture and sculpture, and grandeur of festivals.*









## 10. KULASEKHARA MANDAPAM

*Work on this far famed, exquisitely carved Mandapa commenced under the direction of Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma in 1758. It took several years of untiring services of several master craftsmen to complete this extravaganza in stone which includes four sets of fabulous stone musical pillars. Twenty-eight pillars for sculpturing the Mandira Moorthies were brought from Thirumala which is the same geographical region from where the huge single stone for the Ottakal Mandapa (Ekasila Mandapa) was brought.*

*The outer boundary has 36 exquisitely carved beautiful Deepalakshmi sculptures on the pillars. A small corridor around the entire inner raised Mandapa separates the outer pillars. The main platform which stands at an elevation is reached by a few wooden steps. The sides of the Mandapa are ornamented with intricate patterns and designs, the bottom level giving the appearance of upturned petals of a lotus. The false ceiling in granite roofing in this spaciouly enclosed hall is a living example of the mastercraftmanship of the bygone era. The story of the great epic Ramayana is carved all around the top in what gives the appearance of a border of profuse sculptures or carvings in stone. Another exceptional feature is the perfectly proportioned stone bell suspended from the finely finished stone chain from the ceiling in the middle of the Mandapa. Unless one knows this fact, one can easily mistake it for a cast iron bell connected by an iron chain (the modern version).*

*This Mandapa which dominates the hall carries 28 pillars embellished with a vast variety of Silpas (figures and figurines) containing representations of many divinities with special emphasis on the amalgamation of Sree Maha Vishnu and Mahaeswara. Of the twenty eight pillars, twenty four offer a fascinating array of figures, central ones with subsidiary ones around, while four pillars situated in the corners are the famed musical pillars upon which delicate patterns were carved. Each group of musical pillars possesses nine pillars producing so many musical notes. Only seven temples in India are said to have such wonderful pillars.*

*In the inner border, scenes from the Mahabharata are carved. The granite ceiling is elaborately decorated, with rows upon rows of lotuses, seven in line, giving the appearance of a vast lotus carpet. The only break is in the middle from where a granite bell is suspended. It may be pointed out that any description in words of these*

*magnificent pillars will do no justice to the exquisite beauty and fine craftsmanship associated with them.*

*Various Deities carved on one side of the pillars in order include Sree Murugan, Siva-Shakti Panchakshari seated beneath the Kalpavriksha, Dhyana Maha Vishnu, Swayamvara Siva (facing Swayamvara Parvathi on the other side), Maha Gayatri, Maha Lakshmi Gopala, Ananthasana Moorthy (Maha Vishnu seated on Anantha), Swayamvara Rukmini (facing Swayamvara Sree Krishna on the other side), Astothara Venugopal, Venugopal, and Amrithabhisheka Vishnu. On the other side the sculptures on various pillars consist of idols of Veera Rama, Chathurbahu Ganapathi, Siva as Brahmanda Tandava Moorthy, Swayamvara Sree Krishna (facing Swayamvara Rukmini on the other side), Maha Vishnu and his consorts Sree Devi and Bhu Devi sitting on Garuda (this is how Periyalvar alias Vishnuchitta is believed to have had the divine vision of Sree Maha Vishnu that led to the spontaneous outpouring of Thiru Pallandu), Sree Rama Pattabhisheka, Gajendra Moksha, Swayamvara Parvathi (facing Swayamvara Siva on the other side), Mahavishnu Panchakshara with Goddess Lakshmi sitting on His left thigh, Bhadrakali, and finally Sree Sankaranarayana. It would be no exaggeration to point out that this marvel of magnificence, the Kulasekhara Mandapam, nestles like a fabulous jewel in the bosom of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.*

## 11. MURALS AT SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE

*The vast majority of Sreekoovils in Kerala have their bases and walls built of granite or laterite. Laterite is abundant in this area and can be cut and shaped easily when freshly quarried. But, because of their rough and pitted surface, the walls are heavily plastered with lime which form a good canvas for mural paintings which take the place of relief sculptures in the Dravidian style. The Kerala temples in general, and the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in particular, are known for their rich colored paintings executed on the lime plastered walls in fresco technique.*

*Innumerable outstanding mural paintings can be seen at Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in the Cheruchuttu, around the shrine of Sree Narasimha Swamy, all around the external walls of the main sanctum on the South, North, and West portions up to the outer wall of Sree Viswaksema's shrine, as a single major panel on the West inner side of Nalambalam, all around the shrine of Sree Krishna Swamy and in the inner wall of the shrine of Sree Kshetrapala (Sree Ayyappa Swamy). The main extensive murals encircling the outer walls of the sanctum adhere to the principle of the Pancha Malas (five garlands) accepted in temple painting. They are the Mriga Mala (animal garland), Pakshi Mala (bird garland), Vana Mala (forest garland), Bootha Mala (garland of extra terrestrials including demons), and Utra Mala (garland depicting the varied complex activities that go into the creation of life). The subjects are generally episodes from Puranas or the great epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata. These paintings were drawn using natural pigments obtained from natural stones and extracts from the plants. Such dyes penetrate deep into the layers of the surface painted, which had been treated initially with lime and natural resins. Most of these murals were originally executed in the time of Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma. Some of these masterpieces are retouched or redone to restore them from the ravages of weather, especially rain, using the same materials and by master painters who specialized in temple murals. Some of the murals include Nabhijanma (Brahma taking birth in the Padma or lotus from the Nabhi or navel of Sree Padmanabha), Ananthasayanam (one of the largest murals in Kerala), Yakshi, Rajarajeswara, Saraswathi, Lakshmi, Tripura Sundari, Mohini, Siva Thandavam, Parthasaradhi, Vishnu in sitting pose, Rama in meditation, Rama praying to propitiate Siva, Sita under the Asoka Tree, and Vasya Ganapathi. From an*

*iconographical viewpoint, these Murals rate high and are a tribute to the master of this art form and serve to enhance the greatness of this already radiant seat of divinity. The murals seen on the top two levels are the oldest available and best in execution.*

## 12. THE ABODE OF THE DIVINE

*Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy is conceptualized as Santaswaroopa Paramananda Yogamoorthy (Yogic form of the Divine embodied with peace and extraordinary bliss), reclining on the mighty five-hooded, three coiled serpent Anantha or Adi Seshha (the bedrest of infinitude of the Lord). The hoods turn inwards over the head of Sree Padmanabha as though in service like a canopy. The three coils represent the three Gunas or characteristics of mankind, namely, Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas (representing light, energy, and inertia, respectively) while the five hoods represent the Panchendriyas or five senses -- sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch which stand in everlasting service to the Divine who is in total command of these consolidated human tendencies which dictate man's action. The tail of the Anantha is tucked in but the tip is visible as is required of a perfect idol. Anantha means that which has no end. The serpent Anantha is Nitya Jeevatma (or eternal soul) having no birth or death and hence Infinity itself. The Lord who rests on this eternal magnitude or Anantha, contains all. In reality Anantha, the serpent serving as a Peetham or base for the Divine, has to be an extension of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself, for which potency other than Himself, has the power to support the Lord !*

*The Divya Mangala Moorthy of Sree Padmanabha Swamy reclines on Anantha (i.e., on the infinite coils of Adisesha) in Yoga Nidra (conscious cosmic slumber). He faces East with the head positioned to the South and the feet to the North. He is represented with two hands (similar to Sree Ranganadha of Srirangam). The left hand of the Divine holds the lotus and displays the Chin Mudra (a mystic symbol involving the thumb and the forefinger). The majestic right hand of the Divine stretches gently down graciously. Underneath, i.e. at the base, on a small gold platform is a Siva Linga formed out of Banalinga (held in high esteem by the Saivites) representing the destructive potency of the Lord. The creating forces of the universe are represented by the emanation from His Nabhi (or navel) a lotus on which is seated the four faced or Chaturmukha Brahma. The four faces represent the four Vedas. Thus this Temple is a sanctum of the Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara. The vital aspect of this sanctum is the total absence of cult clashes for superiority, which used to be so common in many parts of India, especially between the followers of Vishnu and Siva. This is one of the few Sree Maha Vishnu temples where Maheswara is in a place of such prominence along with Chaturmukha Brahma*

*and Sree Maha Vishnu.*

Sree Padmanabha Swamy is conceptualized as Shantaswaroopa Paramananda Yogamoorthy and His facial expressions reveal these extraordinary features including a straight nose and enigmatic lips. The different expressions projected on the Thiru Mukham (Divine Face) of the Yoga Murthy are always serene but superimposed with an aura of benign grace and sweetness of the smile which has captured the hearts of the people for generations. The eyes of the Divine represent the Sun and the Moon, or, the day and night, or the Wheels of Time. In Yogic slumber, the eyes are partially shut but ever vigilant in the protection of the universe. He bestows peace on His devotees as Santaakara Roopa, the very personification of peace.

The original Moola Moorthy, believed to be a Swayambhu (self-manifested for the benefit of the human race), was of Iluppa wood (Indian Butter Tree). The new Moorthy was fashioned out of Katu-Sarkara Yogam. It may be noted that the ingredients used in the formation of a Katu-Sarkara idol are of medicinal value. Just as the human body is protected by the antibodies, the same concept is extended to these divinities. The interior of this Moola Moorthy is embedded with twelve thousand and eight sacred Salagramas collected from the river bed of Gandaki in Nepal and brought on the backs of elephants. Details of how these Moorthies are formed by this special process, known as Katu-Sarkara Yogam, indigenous to Kerala, are given in Chapters 13 and 14. No Anki, or replica made of precious metal is placed on the Idol for fear of damaging it, unlike in most temples in the South where Anki made of silver or gold is placed on the Moola Murthies. For the same reason, no Abhisheka is performed on the Main Idol. Instead it is performed on the Uthsava Murthies in Ottakal Mandapa. Worship with flowers is all that is done. The old flowers are carefully removed by priests only of certain ranks (Peria Nambi or Panchagavyathu Nambi) by brushing the Idol gently with peacock feathers. A sacred gold-laced silk cloth adorns the Main Deity.

Right in the middle portion of the shrine, viewable through the central doorway are three gold Abhisheka Moorties seen in a standing position on a Simhasana or a grandly decorated low, elongated gold base. The Lord is in the middle with hands indicating the symbols of Abhaya and Varada with Sree Devi and Bhu Devi on either side. It is known that there are very few gold Abhisheka Moorties or Uthsavamurthies of Sree Maha Vishnu in

*the world; the prominent ones being the Sree Padmanabha Swamy at Thiruvananthapuram and the Sree Sundarabhabhu (Azhager or Kallazhager) at Tirumaalirumjilai, near Madurai in Tamil Nadu. On the left of Bhu Devi there is a smaller silver idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in a sitting posture which is the Siveli Bimba or the idol taken out for ceremonial processions. It is interesting to note that the main idol is reclining, the Abhisheka idol is standing, and the Siveli idol is sitting, representing the three postures, namely, Sayana, Sthanaka, and Aasana aspects of the Divine. The Agamas hold forth that a temple wherein all these three concepts of the Main Deity are present increases in sanctity. What more can one imagine when they assemble in the very Sreekovil itself !!!*

*On either side of this group of Idols facing North and South are seen the two consorts of the Divine, Goddesses Lakshmi Devi and Bhu Devi and the two Maharshies (or sages) - Bhrgu and Markandeya who are the respective fathers of these two deities. All of them are seated on separate bases. Lakshmi sits to the right of the central group and faces North. She represents prosperity. On her opposite side to the left of the group and facing South is Bhu Devi representing the earth - the cradle of all creation. These two Goddesses are really the vibrations of Sree Maha Vishnu in material representation. Bhrgu Maharshi faces North and is seated near Lakshmi Devi. Markandeya is placed near Bhu Devi and faces the South. The two Garuda birds -- one gold plated and the other silver plated, belonging to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy, respectively also find a place of sanctity inside the sanctum. They form one of a set of six different Vahanas used for the Divinities during their ceremonial circumambulation, but these two are invested with a special divinity as Prana Prathishta (invoking life or consecration) has been performed to them. This sets them apart from the other Vahanas. Because of their special status they are treated differently and once they are taken out they are naturally purified before returning to their abode in the inner sanctum. A single wick (Akhandam Deepam) is also lit for them.*

*Nammalvar, the 9th century Alvar of the greatest fame who visited the Temple and worshipped the Divinity, poured out his devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Standing near the lotus feet of the Divine, he sang 11 pasurams on this Divinity and His abode on earth. He pronounced that the benefit accrued from the chanting of Sahasra Namam (1000 holy names) of Sree Maha Vishnu is equivalent to uttering once the name of*

*Sree Padmanabha Swamy at this Temple. Sree Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, Sree Adi Sankara, and Sree Ramanuja have offered their homage at these doors. If one visits the land blessed with cool clime where Sree Padmanabha Swamy resides, he/she gets liberated from all sins and sorrows. Worship of the Divine will also result in the salvation from the grief of the cycle of birth and death. Accordingly, those fortunate ones who get an opportunity to obtain Darshan of Sree Padmanabha Swamy reclining on Anantha will certainly attain Moksha (reach the hands of the Lord in Sree Vaikuntam).*

*There are two other shrines in the Cheru Chuttu (inner enclosure surrounding the Sanctum). The first one facing West has two sets of the Idols in Panchaloha of Sree Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita Devi. While one set is attired and adorned in regal style (Pattabhi Rama), the other, in contrast, is simple representing the period of Vanavasa (Vanavasa Rama). Bhakta Hanuman stands on top of a stone base. The other shrine is that of Vishvakshena, the Commander-in-Chief of the Devathas, who is given a prominent position in this Temple. It may be noted that Vishvakshena is to Vaishnavites as Ganapati is to Sairvites. Vishvakshena is the Nirmalya Moorthy possessing Vishnu Amsa (or part-potency of Sree Maha Vishnu), with the right to early morning worship and to the same Nivedya after it is offered to the Lord. He is the Nitya Jeevatma. Innocent of all external decorations, the Nirmalya Moorthy is the very "Sat" in its pristine form. Normally, a Nirmalya Moorthy assumes the concept of being seated in the middle of an eight-petalled lotus in the shape of a Beli stone. Here, he is represented as a full scale figure in Katu-Sarkara Yogum. Visveksena is one among the Sahasra Nama (the thousand names) of Sree Maha Vishnu, as such he can be taken as Sree Maha Vishnu Himself. He holds the Sankhu (conch) and Chakra (disc) in his hands.*

*Sree Narasimha Swamy and Thiru Ambati Krishna Swamy are among the three main deities of this Temple. Sree Narasimha Swamy's shrine is located to the South of Sree Padmanabha Swamy's sanctum. Thiru Ambati Sree Krishna Swamy's abode is outside the Nalambalam to the North-West. Both the Deities face East. The Uthsavamoorthies (Siveli Idols) of these two Deities accompany Sree Padmanabha Swamy for the daily Siveli. Sree Narasimha Swamy idol is made of Panchaloha. A small Siveli idol in silver sits close by the main Idol.*

*The famous shrine of Sree Narasimha Swamy is compact and copper roofed. The "Panchloha" idol of Sri Narasimha Moorthy is reputed for its ferocity and power in its concept as Ugra Narasimha which is confirmed by the Tantries here. "Ramayana" is rendered continuously whenever the shrine is open (barring certain specific times) to counter balance His tremendous potency. Many are narrations of His power and grace. During the reign of Sree Swathi Thirunal Maharaja (1829-1847) an elephant ran amuck during an "Arat Procession" and charged the King. While people fled in panic, the King stood his ground and to the wonder of all, the elephant suddenly stopped and sank on its knees. Eye witnesses described a ferocious figure of Narasimha instead of the Maharaja. At times of impending adversity, many have heard with trepidation the chilling roar of a lion (Sree Narasimha) arising from this shrine.*

*The ancient Thiru Ambati Krishna Swamy Temple deserves particular mention because of its uncommon status. While Sree Padmanabha Swamy is the primary Divinity here, Thiru Ambati Krishna Swamy Temple is the oldest among the structures that exists today. This is because of the fire which attacked many parts of this Temple Complex but did not touch this Temple. The sacred granite idol of Thiru Ambati Krishna Swamy was brought from Gujarat by 72 families of Krishnavamsa Yadavas of the Vrishni sect headed by Krishna Varma that migrated to Kerala following directions received in a dream of Bhagavan Sree Krishna Himself. The temple operates as an independent Temple within the main complex possessing its own "Namaskara Mandapa," "Bali" stone, "Dwajastambha" (flag mast), etc. Rites and rituals, entry and exit point for the "Sivelies" and so on are separate for Sree Krishna Swamy, though the priests are common and festivals coincide. The two-armed granite Bimba (idol) with one hand holding the whip and the other resting on the left thigh is in standing posture. The place was believed to be once a cattle shed housing a number of cattle, with the Lord Krishna Himself invested with the character of "Gosala Krishna." The simplicity of this area is compensated to a great extent by an exquisitely crafted wooden "Namaskara Mandapa." The "Belikkal," and the "Dwajastambha," both now silver encased are located in their respective places before the "Mandapa."*

*The shrine of Veda Vyasa facing West is located in the North-West corner. Sree Vyasa Bhagavan is seated on a platform with Aswathama standing to his left. Consecrated idols of Veda Vyasa are exceedingly rare. He is*

*considered Sree Maha Vishnu Himself who incarnated as a great preceptor in the latter years of Dvapara Yuga. It may be noted that "Veda Vyasa" is the title given for producing a monumental work on codifying Vedas and that his real name is Krishna Dwaipayana. Of course, he is the author of the Great Epic, Mahabharata.*

*It is perplexing to note why Aswathama, who is standing to the left of Veda Vyasa, was given such a high place of honor in this Temple as his qualifications are considered minimal or even adverse. It could, perhaps be understood, based on the following circumstances. It may be noted that Aswathama was featured many times in the Mahabharata epic but in a fairly unfavorable light. This was partly because he was fighting on the side of Kauravas and mostly because in the later part of the Kurukshetra war, i.e. after the defeat of Duryodhana by Bhima, who broke his thighs with a mace, Aswathama entered the Pandava Camp in the middle of the night and committed the dreadful act of slaying while asleep the five sons of Panchali (Droupadi) and the Pancha Pandavas. For this heinous act, he was cursed to wander around the world aimlessly for the rest of his life, for he could not be killed as he was a Jeevatma or Chiranjeevi (i.e. born without death). The legend has it that when he repented of his horrible act, he was told that the only way to escape this curse was to take refuge at the feet of Veda Vyasa Bhagavan.*

*On the positive side Aswathama was the son of Dronacharya, the great teacher of Pandavas, and deserves a high place on this count. Also, he can be credited, though dubiously but nevertheless a fact, as partly responsible for the closure of the Great Mahabharata War. After the death of many stalwarts on the Kaurava side, Dronacharya began the fight against Pandavas. As he could not be conquered or killed by anybody till the death of Aswathama, Dharmaraja was made reluctantly to pronounce "Aswathama Hathah, Kunjarah" (i.e. the death of Aswathama (not the person) but an elephant in the war with the same name) by none other than Sree Krishna, the Moolacharya, for he saw no other way of ending this hideous war. This latter part of his announcement, namely, Kunjaraha, however, was almost whispered. On hearing this sad news from none other than Dharmaraja, who is considered a personification of honesty, Dronacharya decided to end his life (thinking that it was his son) which terminated the Great War. It was perhaps these two factors, namely, the son of Dhronacharya and the man, in a way, responsible for ending the Kurukshetra War that may have enabled*

*Aswathama to secure this high place of honor. There is also a point of view that Aswathama is slated to be the Vyasa in the next yuga or time frame after the Great Deluge. As such he is already given a seat next to Sree Veda Vyasa.*

*Sree Ramanuja, a great philosopher-saint went on a pilgrimage to Thiruvananthapuram from Srirangam, his headquarters. At Srirangam he established strict procedures (Pancharatra) for the worship of the divinity, Sree Ranganadha in Srirangam. It appears that Sree Ramanuja explored the possibility of introducing similar procedures but decided not to pursue when it appeared to him that Sree Padmanabha Swamy did not want a change in the procedures. As a mark of honor to this illustrious sage, a place was provided for him inside the Nalambhalam of the Temple. He is depicted there in an engraving on the wall opposite the Sree Veda Vyasa's shrine.*

*Agrasala Ganapathy facing West is the single shrine of Mahu Ganapathy within the temple premises. Originally the idol was in the cooking area as a witness and to oversee the massive free food distribution conducted in the Temple. He is associated with the concepts of plenty and prosperity of the bygone era. Near the main Belikkal on one side on a granite pillar is seen the Idol of Bhakya Hanuman and on the other, Ashtanga Garuda. Butter is smeared every day on Sree Hanuman as a form of worship of the Lord. However, it is amazing that it never melts however hot the day may be, never gets rancid, and is never eaten by ants or other insects. It is recorded that during the outbreak of a big fire in the Temple in 1935 which came close to Lord Hanuman, its fierce heat did not succeed in melting the butter which remained as fresh and unchanged as ever. It was a miracle indeed. Though young in age, the little shrine outside the Southern Sivelippura, housing the Puja idols of Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal is gaining its own potency.*

*Agamas state that if 12 Salagramas are worshipped together within a single orbit adhering to the traditional norms of Vaishnava worship, they collectively gain the potency of a Mahakshetra. Here within a single idol twelve thousand and eight Salagramas have received the veneration of centuries closely following elaborate code of worship thus gaining for this one Temple the potency of a thousand Mahakshetras.*

### 13. KATU-SARKARA YOGAM

*The Moola Moorthy inside the sanctum sanctorum, the Adishesha, the large sitting figures of Sree Devi and Bhu Devi, the two sages - Bhṛigu and Markandeya, Brahma in the lotus, and the assembly of celestials in the background are all made of specially prepared materials and by a unique process, known as Katu-Sarkara Yogam, which is a highly complicated process, indigenous to Kerala. Katu-Sarkara Yogam in Sanskrit means a composition of bitter and sweet. Since the composition of Katu-Sarkara is black, the idols are often mistaken to have been made of black granite, which is the common practice in Dravida Desa. The interior of this idol is embedded with twelve thousand and eight Salagramas. The unique process of Katu-Sarkara is described in some detail in the following chapter (Chapter 14) to give an idea of the complexity of the composition of the materials used as well as the process itself. The exact details, however, remain with those blessed with the divine task of forming the Moorthies making it hard to document them precisely. Here, a brief summary of some of the materials used in the formation of Katu Sarkara Yogam is given.*

*The materials used in the formation of Divya Mangala Vighraha of Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy include a high quality tree [similar to Iluppa wood (Indian Butter Tree)], selected from Karinjali, Devathara, Chandana; 12,008 sacred Salagramas collected from the river bed of Gandaki in Nepal; sands from different locations; coconut husk or fibers; bark of four fig trees viz Athi, Ithi, Arayalu, and Peralu; powdered barley, wheat, and leaves of Kasavu (Memecylon Edule); dried ginger (Chukkū), pepper, turmeric, and Thrippali (long pepper or Piper Longum); honey, milk, oil and ghee; kumkuma, chandana, arithram (Acacia Parnesiana), Kottam (Sassurea Lappa), karpooora (camphor), akil (Indian Cedar), gorochana (Benzar extract from the gall region of oxen) and kasthuri (musk); gums of various forms from the common gum tree, kundirikkam (Boswellia Serrate), gulgulu (Commiphora Mukul), jaggery, chenchaliyam (resin of Shorea Robusta), and Kavi earth (red lumber stone or red ochre); fine black stones found on the river beds; and gold and silver.*

## 14. MORE ON KATU-SARKARA YOGAM

*A brief description of the materials, preparation as well as the process used in the Katu-Sarkara Yogam are given in the following for it is fascinating to know this complex process.*

*A high quality tree, selected from among Karinjali, Devathara, and Chandana is cut to size and brought to the location where work has to be carried out on it. As per the specifications of the Moorthy, a Pasa or rope scale is made on which the waist and chest measurements are marked. Similarly, other measurements, representing the bones as it were, including the arms, feet, and the entire back are made. The areas of the palm, feet, ears, and nose are constructed by tying copper plates of suitable dimensions on the base structure. This is considered to be the skeleton of the moorthy. Within this particular Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy (not in Anantha according to the Tantries) are placed twelve thousand and eight Salagramas and the entire image is covered with a Yogam (composition) of Katu Sarkara.*

*A powdered mix of about 1 part of gum from the common gum tree (also called Thiruvatta Pasa), 3 parts of Kundirikkam (Boswellia Serrate), 5 parts of Gulgulu (Commiphora Mukul), 1 part of jaggery, 8 parts of Chenchalyam (resin of Shorea Robusta), and 3 parts of Kavi earth (red lumber stone or red ochre) is made. It is mixed with equal portions of oil and ghee and cooked in an earthen pot over fire till it reaches the consistency of honey. The mix is applied all over the skeleton of the Moorthy which binds the frame, which is known as Ashtabandha Lepana. After this the Nadi Bandhana commences. The fine fiber of hardened coconut jute is removed, washed, and cleaned well and is twisted from left to right in three spirals and tied on to this skeletal frame constituting Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna which are the three vital nerves of the spinal chord along with the four other nerve centers known as Pusha, Yasaswini, Shankhini, and Kuhu. Collectively they represent the Sapta Nadies (or the seven nerve centers of the body).*

*Sand from barren land (Jangala Desam) and marshy land (Anoopa Desam) is brought, washed, and cleaned separately and mixed. Three different types of concoctions consisting of (1) a mixture of Karinjali (Acacia catachu) and Maruthu (Terminalia Panicululata) boiled to a thick consistency, (2) Nalpamaram, a concentrate*

of the bark of four fig trees viz Athi, Ithi, Arayalu, and Peralu (i.e. *Ficus* of *Racemosa*, *Gibbosa*, *Religiosa*, and *Bengalensis*, respectively), and (3) a concentrate of Kolarakku (lac) are made. The sand is put in each of these concoctions for a period of ten days so that it is made to imbibe these solutions and dried. It is then put in Thriphala Kashayam made of three concentrated ingredients, namely, Kadukka (*Terminalia Chebilla*), Nellikka (Gooseberry or *Embilica Officinalis*), and Thannikka (*Terminalia Ballerica*) for 10 days and re-dried. One part of river sand is mixed with three equal parts of previously prepared sand and ground into a paste using the Thriphala Kashayam as the liquid base.

Powdered barley, wheat, and the leaves of Kasavu (*Memecylon Edule*) are mixed with 1/8 of the prepared sand. Water from matured coconuts is added to this mixture and ground daily for 10 days. Equal parts of Thiruvatta (gum), Gulgulu, Kundirikkam, and Chenchalyam are added to the special sand in the ratio of 1/16: 1 and mixed well with honey. To this equal parts of dried ginger (Chukku), pepper, turmeric, and Thrippali (long pepper or *Piper Longum*) are powdered and 1/24 measure is added to the same and mixed with honey, milk, and ghee. Equal quantities of Plavin Pasa (leaf latex-*Artocarpus Integrifolia*) and the inner substance of the Koovalu Kayu (shrub *Aegla Marmelos*) are mixed and ground. A portion (1/15) of this mixture is added to the special sand and reground with oil. Kumkuma, Chandana, Arithram (*Acacia Parnesiana*), Kottam (*Sassurea Lappa*), Karpooora (camphor), Akil (Indian Cedar), Gorochana (Benzar extract from gall region of oxen) are powdered and 1/32 of it is added to the sand and ground with the oil extract of Kasavu. Kasthuri (musk) is added to a slightly powdered mixture of gold, silver, river sand, sand from crab's hole, sea sand, sand from the farmer's plough, sand from the ant hill, sand from the vegetable patches, and fine powder from the tusks of a bull and an elephant. This mixture is added to the special sand and is deposited in a Kashaya or concentrate made from the resin of Illuppa tree (*Bassia Longifolia*). This composition is cooked for 5 days and then ground.

A quantity of coconut husk or fibers equal to 1/4 of this mixture is cut into small bits and mixed with this sand to which gum of Koovalam and gum of Plavu are added. This mixture is ground for 10 days and made into a composite. This composition is applied separately on the different parts of the frame of the Moorthy which covers the skeleton and on which the Nadi Bandhana (amalgamating the nerves of the skeleton through a special

procedure) had already been accomplished. It is well rubbed into those parts. With this particular method, it is not the intention to apply this mixture of mud paste in thick layers but to give a thin coating. Now it is the time to introduce the required features of the Moorthy on to the body which covers the frame. Pure silk on which the gum of leaf latex has been sprayed is wrapped around different parts of the body. Equal proportions of river sand, Kozhipparal (special rock ground to powder) and black colored stone found on the river bed are ground and daily mashed into a paste for one month in a concentrate of Thriphala, gum of Plavu, and gum of Kpovalam and a thin coating of the same is applied over the Moorthy and dried. An application of Sankhu powder (powdered conch) is made on the Moorthy to give a whitening effect. Required decorations and ornaments are worked on the surface enhancing the grandeur of the idol.

It is indeed a wonder that ants or other pests that are normally attracted by its coating do not attack the Idol. The materials used being such, no Abhisheka or Thirumanjanam (holy bath) is performed on It for fear of damaging thus necessitating separate metal idols for this purpose. No Anki, or replica made of precious metals, such as silver or gold coated copper, as is common in most Dravidian temples of Tamilnadu, is placed on the Idol, again for fear of damaging It. Worship with flowers is all that is done. The old flowers are removed gently by priests only of certain ranks with peacock feathers.

From this description, one can note that some of the ingredients used in the formation of the Moorthy are of medicinal value. Even this partial description is sufficient to project the greatly complicated procedure which goes in the formation of a Kattu-Sarkara Moorthy. As such it is no surprise that idols of this nature, though a specialty of Kerala, are so rare even in the land of their origin.

## 19. THE SALAGRAMA

*"Yatha Salagrama, Thatha Harihi! "*

Lord Vishnu is believed to be embodied in Salagrama (a sacred stone found in the bed of the hallowed River Gandaki, one of the tributaries of the Ganges River, which flows through Nepal). The formless Nirguna manifests, in Suguna form, in Salagrama as Sree Maha Vishnu. The Varaha Purana gives a legend that the Goddess Gandaki (personifying the River of the same name) prayed to Sree Maha Vishnu that He should be born to her. Her prayers were answered by Sree Maha Vishnu, who appeared in the stream of the sacred River, Gandaki, as Salagramas and ordained that anyone worshipping the Salagrama would attain the same benefits as would accrue by worshipping the Lord Himself in other forms. Depending on the number and size of the openings, the number of spirals inside the cavities, the disposition of the spirals, and the colour of the Salagrama several Moorthies or forms of Sree Maha Vishnu are distinguished among the Salagramas. A well known test for positive identification of a Salagrama consists of placing it in milk. A genuine Salagrama experiences an increase in size as well as in weight.

A Salagrama, from a geological point of view, is a flintified siliceous ammonite shell. It is usually a rounded well polished stone having one or several holes with visible spiral grooves inside them, resembling the Chakra. The Salagramas, though normally black, are also found of various other colors including brownish black, dark brown, dark green, red, and even white. The size of the Salagrama is also an important factor. While some are very, very small, just the size of a pea or pepper, others are very huge, as for example the one that forms the central piece of the Sree Kurmanadha in Sree Kurmam, which is over 3 ft long. Salagramas, usually worshipped in the household are of small to medium size that can be held conveniently in one's palm.

A Salagrama, black in color with three Chakras is said to represent Lakshminarayana, while one with two sets of Chakras one on the top and the other at the bottom of the cavity, signifies Lakshminarasimha. There are also Salagramas representing Sree Varaha, Bhu Varaha, Matsya, and other Avatars of Sree Maha Vishnu. Some Salagramas, which are of lighter colors are said to represent the Vyuh forms of Vishnu, namely Vasudeva,

*Samkarshana, and Aniruddha. Sometimes exquisite images of Sree Maha Vishnu like Krishna, Rama, Narasimha are carved out of big Salagramas and it is believed that such images have extraordinary powers. One Archaka Moorthy that is formed entirely of Salagrama is Sree Kurmanadha of Sree Kurmam in Andhra Pradesh. Here, Sree Kurmanadha is represented by three huge Salagramas one representing the head, the middle a big conical one representing the body, and a small one indicating the tail. In the case of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the Salagramas (twelve thousand and eight of them) congregate inside. Salagramas are often strung together with precious metal casings (gold or silver) as garlands for the deities in many important Srivaishnava temples including Sree Venkateswara Temple in Tirumalai, Sree Parthasaradhi Temple in Thiru-alli-keni (Triplicane), Sree Varadaraja Swamy Temple in Kancheepuram and Alagar Koil in Madurai. Sometimes, Sree Maha Lakshmi is carved on them and in other cases Thiru Manthram or Vishnu Sahasranamam is engraved. It may be noted that underneath the altar, namely, the Ratna Simhasana of Sree Jagannadha Swamy of Puri, Orissa some 100,000 Salagramas were embedded which is believed to contain the real life potency of the Divine in this Temple.*

*The Salagrama does not require any separate or special consecration prior to worship as the power is naturally bestowed on and concentrated in it. Medium sized Salagramas with small openings with a definite number of spirals are used in the household for daily worship. However, such Salagramas should be treated with reverence and complete responsibility should be taken without ever missing Nithya Aradhana (daily worship) for them. Twelve Salagramas worshipped together gain the potency of a Maha Kshetra (or great temple). Due to the veneration of the twelve thousand and eight Salagramas confined within the Moola Vighraha (Main Idol) of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in Thiruvananthapuram, it gains the greatness and sanctity of a thousand Maha Kshetras.*

## 16. THE TEMPLE AND THE ROYALTY CONNECTION

Nowhere in the annals of history was there a situation where the Temple and the Throne were so closely intertwined that their characters overlapped as in the case of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the Royalty of the erstwhile Travancore State. The various rulers carrying distinctive dynastic names were united in the acceptance of Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Syanandoorapuri (Thiruvananthapuram) as supreme in the fortunes of their clans and domain. Sree Padmanabha Swamy was not only the family Deity but also the tutelary Deity of the Royal Family. In fact the rulers considered themselves as "Padmanabha Dasas" dedicated to the service of the Lord. The Temple was more often than not the final authority by might of the Divine right in many matters of administration and vital policy decisions such as conquests, succession, adoption into the Royal household etc. Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma in 1750 by Thrippati Danam\* (the Deed of Dedication) surrendered his entire State to Sree Padmanabha. Thenceforth till the abolition of monarchy by the Government of India, Sree Padmanabha Swamy was the officially accepted the Ruler of Travancore. The kings held the office of administration as sacred trustees and reported to Him the business of the people conducted each day. It may not be considered out of place to emphasize here that the Kings and the councils apart, the Lord was vested with the position of being not only the presiding Deity but of being recognized officially by the administration of the British Government (pre-independence time) as the constitutional head of the erstwhile State of Travancore.

Three examples of the emotional involvement of the royal family, and their commitment to the service of Sree Padmanabha Swamy are given in the following. Details are covered in Reference 1.

The first one is the Thrippati Danam in 1750 in which Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma submitted to Sree Padmanabha Prajapati by a Deed of Gift carrying his signature, the entire State of Travancore. His directive that any further conquest of territory brought under the rule of Travancore by his successors should also be surrendered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy was accepted and scrupulously adhered to with deep respect by

\*Thrippati Danam meaning gift (Danam) offered at the Holy Steps of the Divine (Thiru-Padi) .

*the later generations. This monumental, one time gift of the whole State of Travancore, including the role of the Royalty as Sree Padmanabha Dasa, naturally outweighed the Kanikkas (or gifts) in the form of jewelry, cash, land, finances for temple construction and renovations, and more important the daily maintenance of the Temple the royalty had been submitting for centuries to the Deity.*

*The second one is the Kshetra Praveshana Vilambaram (the Temple Entry Proclamation) in 1936 by Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore. It may be mentioned that during the Regency, when Gandhiji visited Thiruvananthapuram, he inquired of the young King (Chithira Thirunal) if he would open the temples to Harijans (the so called backward class Hindus and meaning "Sree Maha Vishnu's children") when he assumed power. Out came the magnanimous reply with no hesitation, "I will throw open the doors of the temples to all Hindus." This somewhat surprised Gandhiji for he did not anticipate such a prompt positive response. Chithira Thirunal kept his word by proclaiming that there should be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or by religion on entering or worshipping at any temple within his jurisdiction including the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Mahatma Gandhi described this act as a "marvel of modern India," and hailed Chithira Thirunal as "Modern Asoka." This procedure is being followed even to this day.*

*The third one is when the Government of India had offered to install Maharaja Chithira Thirunal as Rajpramukh for life of the united State of Travancore and Cochin in 1949. The Maharaja informed the Government that on account of the dedication of the State to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the special loyalty and devotion which the rulers of Travancore owed to the Deity, by which allegiance was already submitted to the Lord, it would not be possible for him to take the Oath of Office as Rajpramukh. As such, he conveyed his inability to accept the said office. The devotion to Sree Padmanabha was viewed by some power centers as "bordering on to fanaticism for he rules the State not as its Head but as a servant of the tutelary Deity." Finally, a solution was found by which the Maharaja would give a solemn written assurance (instead of an Oath) to the Indian Government that he would do his best to protect, preserve, and defend the united State of Travancore and Cochin. This letter was read out by the Chief Justice in the presence of Sree Chithira Thirunal. There seems to be no other known instance parallel to this in the political history of the world.*

*The royal family still manages the daily affairs of the Temple. Every day the head of the family has "Darshan" of the divinity at the Temple (between 7.15 a.m. and 8.15 a.m.). This is followed by worship of the other members of the Royal family. Not a drop of water is taken till then. Their commitment to the Temple can be clearly noticed in the impeccable cleanliness anytime, anywhere in the Temple. This is in contrast to many other temples where cleanliness can be improved significantly. The compactness of this Temple (some 7 acres) which is of manageable size also lends itself to it. It is kept thus by the people who regard this not just as their job but as a service to God.*

## 17. KULASEKHARA ALVAR

" Namami Narayana Padapankajam  
Karomi Narayana Pujanam Sada  
Vadami Narayana Nama Nirmalam  
Smarami Narayana Tattvam Avyayam "

--- Sree Kulasekhara Perumal in Mukundamala

*(I bow to the lotus-feet of Sriman Narayana, I pray Sriman Narayana every moment  
I speak the sacred word Narayana, I contemplate the eternal truth, Narayana )*

Perhaps, the greatest contribution by the Royal family and the State of Kerala (Malayala Nadu) to the world of devotion is one of their great sovereigns, Kulasekhara Varma, alias Kulasekhara Perumal, who is the crown-jewel in the Royal Pedigree of Rulers of this noble land (800-820 AD). He was a great devotee of Sree Maha Vishnu and poured his Bhakti or devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy in his literary works and his commitment to the Temple till the abdication of his kingdom and onward spiritual journey to Srirangam. His literary compositions include "Mukunda Mala" in Sanskrit and "Perumal Tirumozhi" in Tamil. The latter forms the first thousand of the "Naalaayira Divya Prabhandam." In Perumal Tirumozhi (Fifth Decade) - Kulasekhara Alvar brings forth, the essence of the relationship between the Jeevathma (human soul) and the Paramathma (the God Almighty) for at the end the former has no where else to look up to than Paramathma. As the Jeevathma is possessed by the Paramathma, the former relies entirely on the latter (i.e. at His grace) whether the latter graces it or not. He beautifully portrays this Holy relationship of absolute dependence in many ways including the dependence of a hapless child put aside by his mother in anger; like the dependence of a wife on her husband even under adverse circumstances; like the dependence of the subjects on the Great King; like the trust imposed in the doctor by a patient who fully knows that his body is literally going to be cut (surgery) by the doctor (to take care of an ailment), like the blind trust of a bird resting on the sail of a boat in a vast ocean hoping to reach the shore; that between the harvest and the dark clouds that result in rains; like the dependence

of the lotus flowers which unfold as the rays of the rising Sun falls; and lastly akin to that between the great rivers that finally join the mighty ocean (confluence). A deep philosophical concept so beautifully brought forth with simple, real life examples.

The reign of Kulasekhara Varma is characterized by virtue, justice, peace, and happiness amongst his subjects. Kulasekhara Varma was born in Tiruvanchikkulam of the Kolli Nadu (i.e. land between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea) of the Chera Dynasty, spiritually descended from the Kaustubha-part of Sree Maha Vishnu. The devotion to Sree Maha Vishnu was so intense that it transformed in the case of Kulasekhara Perumal into devotion, love, and esteem towards His devotees. Consequently, the palace was thrown open to all Srivaishnavites which caused great concern for security to the palace guard. In an attempt to create displeasure against Srivaishnavites, the palace staff conspired to have a valuable jewel of the palace Deity, Sree Rama, removed stealthily and when the loss was discovered, it was hinted that nobody could be certain when all and sundry in the name of God (meaning Srivaishnava devotees) had access to every nook and corner of the palace. The King, whose faith in the devotees of the Lord and in their integrity knew no bounds, resented this insinuation and challenged those who complained against the Srivaishnavites to prove their case in one of the ancient modes of taking oath. A hungry (hence angry) serpent was put in a sack and the person who believed in the truth of his contention would put his hand into the bag with the oath "If what I said is true, let me be unhurt, if not, let the snake sting me." The palace staff refused to undergo this ordeal. The King immediately pronounced the innocence of the followers of Vishnu and to prove their innocence beyond doubt he underwent the same test. The snake did no harm but merely touched his hand. Such was the King's faith in the integrity of a true Vaishnavite. He was disgusted with the materialistic world after this episode and felt that he could not dwell with these vile and scheming ministers. So, he wanted to relinquish his power and devote the rest of his life in the service of Sree Ranganadha of Srirangam who was worshipped by Lord Rama himself. He would announce that he would go on a pilgrimage to Srirangam. The ministers knew that once Sree Kulasekhara left for Srirangam, he would never return as the service to Sree Ranganadha would be preminent in his mind.

Each day the King would announce his departure at the end of that day to Srirangam. The Royal

administrators would be very much concerned of the vacuum that would be caused by his permanent absence. Banking on Kulasekhara's devotion towards the Lord's devotees, they would daily assemble a large group of Srivaishnavites hailing from one Holy Shrine or the other nearby to the palace. Kulasekhara overwhelmed with the unique pleasure of serving them would postpone his departure to the following day. This led to the following introductory poem of Mukunda Mala, a garland of 40 stanzas to Sree Krishna, considered to be one of the most exquisite devotional works in Sanskrit:

*"Khusyatheey Yashya Nagarey Ranga Yathra Dine Dine,  
Thamaham Sirasa Vandey Rajanam Kulasekharam. !"*

*(I bow to Reverend Kulasekhara, the Royal Saint, whose Capital resounds with rumors recurrent ---  
To Ranga's shrine bound we for aye, To Ranga's shrine bound we for aye !)*

This went on for a while. Finally, the King was dejected and decided to dedicate the rest of his life in the service of Sree Ranganadha of Srirangam. He relinquished his crown and entrusted his son, Dridha Vrata, with the charge of his Government and moved permanently to Srirangam. There for a length of time he was engaged in the service of Sree Ranganadha and more importantly His devotees. At intervals he would undertake pilgrimages to the Holy Shrines of Sree Maha Vishnu. The intensity of his divine emotions resulted in the Dravida Prabhandha, called Perumal Thirumozhi, consisting of 105 verses of absolute self surrender to the Divine.

Tamil Srivaishnava devotional literature flowered in fullest fragrance with the outpouring of divine love towards Sree Maha Vishnu by the twelve great Srivaishnavite Saints (Dwadasa Alvars) collectively known as Alvars\* Kulasekhara Perumal is prominent among them. The Dwadasa Alvars are Poygai (Bhutham), Pudatt (Sarasya), Pey (Mahadhahyaya), Tirumazhisai (Bhaktisara), Kulasekhara, MadhuraKavi (Misram), Nammalvar (Satakopa or Parankusamunim), Perialvar (Vishnuchitta or Bhattanaadha), Goda Devi (Andal or Sri), Tondaradippodi (Vipranarayana or Bhaktangrarenu), Tiruppan (Yogivahan), and Tirumangai Alvar (Parakala). The collective verses or hymns by these Alvars formed the Naalaayira Divya Prabhandam. Parasarabhattar composed a beautiful verse linking all the 12 Alvars and Sree Ramanuja (Yathindra):

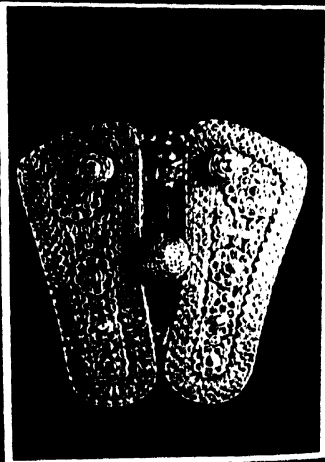
*Bhutham Sarasya Mahadhahyaya Bhattanaadha  
Sree Bhaktisara Kulasekhara Yogivahan  
Bhaktangrarenu Parakala Yathindra Misram  
Sreemath Parankusamunim Pranathosmi Nithayam*

*Kulasekhara Perumal in his Perumal Tirumozhi pointed out that what makes him a king is not when the crown was set on his head by men; but when the King of kings (Sriman Narayana) put His lotus feet on his head as crown. It is interesting to note that the top of the crown of Kulasekhara Sovereign contains Sree Padmanabha Paadam (emblem signifying the lotus feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy). Also, Kulasekhara Alvar, a supreme devotee of Sree Maha Vishnu, desired that after his mortal remains are separated from his soul (i.e. after samadhi) he wished to become the outer step of every Sree Maha Vishnu temple so that the auspiciousness of the touch of the feet of the devotees would ever be his. Consequently, the steps outside the Eastern entrance of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are known as Kulasekhara Padi (steps). It may be noted that it is a common practice in almost all Sree Maha Vishnu temples to name the step leading into the sanctum as "Kulasekhara Padi" and is revered as Kulasekhara Perumal in the Dravida Desa. It may also be noted that the title "Kulasekhara Perumal" earned by some of the subsequent kings of the State of Travancore is mistaken by some scholars and others alike, for the original Kulasekhara Perumal.*

*Kulasekhara Perumal 's birth star (which is also the birth star of Sree Rama) is described thus :*

*"Kumbhe Punarvasau Jatam, Kerala Chalapattane  
Kaustubhamsam, Dharadhisam, Kulasekharam Asraye !"*

*\* Alvar is a sage who has taken a deep plunge into the ocean of divine consciousness or one who is lost in rapturous devotion to the Divine*



Sree Padmanabha Padam on the Crown



## 18. SWATHI THIRUNAL

*Sree Padmanabha Dasa Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma Kulasekhara Perumal (1813-1846) earned enduring fame in the realm of devotional music. He was famed as a great patron of the varied art forms, literature, and music. He was a contemporary of the Great Music Trio --- Thagaraja Swamy, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Syama Sastry. His Court had international representation from China, Japan, Malaya, and Arabia apart from literary and musical giants from all over India. Some of the great names from India include Kshirabdi Sastri, Kannayya (Saint Thagaraja's disciple), Shadkala Govinda Marar, the 'Thanjavur Quartet' including Vadivelu Natvan, Meruswamy, Palghat Parameswara Bhagavatar, etc. Swathi Thirunal's total adoration for and complete surrender to Sree Padmanabha Swamy resulted in outpourings of his musical compositions which projected undulating notes of varied emotions of ecstasy, agony, longing, and abject devotion (or Bhakti) which poured forth in an overflow that could not be stemmed. Different types of compositions for classical music and dance forms, narrations and verses known as 'Slokas' in an amazing number of languages have taken life from the inspired vision of Swathi Thirunal. Though he has written in praise of other Deities, the bulk of his works sing the glory of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.*

*While it is customary to include the composer's name in each composition as an insignia (or Mudra), it may be emphasized that Swathi Thirunal's insignia was not his name which had never featured anywhere in his compositions but the sacred name of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in many forms including "Padmanabha," "Kamalanabha," "Abjanabha," "Ambujanabha," "Vanajanabha," "Sarasijanabha," "Vaarijanabha," "Sarasiruhanabha," "Sarojanabha," "Sarasanabha," etc. in almost all his works dedicated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. His music and Bhakti were, in fact, the two sides of the same coin. On one occasion Vadivelu Nattuvanar composed a Varna (a classical music composition) in praise of his patron, Swathi Thirunal. While commending the musical excellence of the composition, the King directed that it be never used again in this form as only Sree Padmanabha Swamy should be lauded through music and not himself. Such was his modesty and devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.*

*Padmanabhapuram used to be the capital of the State till the reign of 'Dharmaraja' Rama Varma. As its first love was always Sree Padmanabha Swamy and His temple at Thiruvananthapuram, the royalty shifted the capital to Thiruvananthapuram enabling the management of the Temple affairs directly. However, at Padmanabhapuram, there is a rare temple dedicated to Sree Saraswathi Devi which the Royalty used to worship with great devotion. Swathi Thirunal made a vow to Goddess Saraswathi Devi that the "Navarathri Festival" which had been conducted in the Padmanabhapuram Palace complex till then would continue to be held in Her honor with all splendor (which used to be held annually in Padmanabhapuram) in the month of Kanni (September/October) wherever the royal family resided by bringing the Deity there. Swathi Thirunal specially composed the following nine "Navarathri Krithies" (see Table for details) to be sung one each day during the "Navarathri Festival" in the "Navarathri Mandapa" in praise of the Devi. This custom is maintained even today both in deed and in spirit. He formulated the type of Vahanas in which the Deity is to be taken out as well as the type of musical instruments to be played each day. On the first day of the "Navarathri Festival" after performing puja to the Goddess, the first of the "Navarathri Krithies," namely, "Devi Jagajjanani" (see the following table for details) is sung. On the second day, the second of the "Navarathri Krithies," namely, "Pahimam Sree Rajarajeswari" is sung, and so on. This way each day of the festival is celebrated with the respective "Navarathri Krithi." The "Uthsava Prabhandam" written by Swathi Thirunal beautifully describes this festival.*

*The exquisite idol of Sree Saraswathi Devi (made of "Pancha Loha") was the very idol worshipped by Saint Kampan (author of Kamba Ramayanam) in the 12th Century. He handed over the Idol to the then Kulasekhara Perumal before attaining "Samadhi." Every year, the idol is brought on an elephant's back to the Fort Palace near Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the festival celebrated. Swathi Thirunal laid down detailed procedure for the Navarathri as well as for the daily routine and for the Uthsavas of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which is strictly adhered to.*

## *Navarathri Kirthanas Composed by Sree Swathi Thirunal*

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<i>No.</i>	<i>Kirtana</i>	<i>Ragam</i>	<i>Talam</i>
1.	<i>Devi Jaggaganani</i>	<i>Sankarabaranam</i>	<i>Adi</i>
2.	<i>Pahimam Sre Rajarajeswari</i>	<i>Kalyani</i>	<i>Adi</i>
3.	<i>Devi Pavane</i>	<i>Saaveri</i>	<i>Adi</i>
4.	<i>Bharati Maamava</i>	<i>Thodi</i>	<i>Adi</i>
5.	<i>Janani Maamava</i>	<i>Bhiravi</i>	<i>Chapu</i>
6.	<i>Sarasiruhana jaayey</i>	<i>Pantuvrali</i>	<i>Adi</i>
7.	<i>Janani Paahi</i>	<i>Suddasaveri</i>	<i>Chapu</i>
8.	<i>Paahi Janani</i>	<i>Natakurandi</i>	<i>Chapu</i>
9.	<i>Paahi Parvatha Nandini</i>	<i>Aarabhi</i>	<i>Adi</i>

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## 19. FEEDING OF THE NEEDY .. THE UTTUPURAM

*Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was renowned for its role in feeding poor Brahmin students who come to the Temple from far and wide to study Vedas and Scriptures. This was of such unparalleled proportions that along with the spiritual fame, the name of Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy as provider of food (Anna Datha) and shelter attained tremendous repute. Awesome indeed was the magnitude of this sacred Anna Dana which covered the 365 days of the year. In this sphere too, the name of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple became a byword. Lavish patronage was extended to scholars and preceptors of religion, language, literature, etc. from all places making this Temple, the meeting ground of scholarship. Perhaps the presence of the rare consecration within the Temple of Sree Veda Vyasa, the incomparable Guru, gave this much impetus to Vidya Danam. As a consequence, the propagation of Scriptures and the Vedas flourished. Even today, the daily chanting of the three Vedas continues as an unbroken tradition. The system produced spiritual and scholarly men of great eminence. There are many who have prospered in life and have occupied high positions in many walks of life after partaking the free food and reading by street lights. Although the main thrust was on Brahmin feeding, the Temple also excelled as an institution for the relief of the poor with part of the Nitya Nivedya distributed as charity to the poor irrespective of the caste. It may be noted that Christian, fisher folk, and at times Muslim pilgrims have also benefited from the Temple kitchens.*

## 20. WORSHIP OF THE CELESTIAL

*The Pushpanjali Swamiyar, the Tantries, the Nambies, the Potties, and the Santies all form the framework on which worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and other deities in the Temple rests. As this tradition is different from the Srivaishnava Sampradaya practiced in other ancient temples of the South, i.e. mainly outside Kerala, it is briefly presented herewith. It may be pointed out that great emphasis is placed on the aspect of "Sudham" (standards of purity) in this Temple.*

### Pushpanjali Swamiyar

*The Swamiyar's position is historically and administratively vital in the daily as well as overall functioning of the Temple from a religious point of view. He is the ecclesiastical head of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Chief and essential member of the Ettara Yogam (Council of eight and a half). He commands considerable authority and his presence and approval of various religious activities are mandatory. The main duty of the Swamiyar is to perform the daily Pushpanjali to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, which represents Puja with flowers, Tulasi, Tamara, Tetti, and Nandiyarvattam flowers. He is present in the Sreekovil from 6.00 a.m. to 8.00 a.m. when this worship is performed. Being a Sanyasin (a saffron clad renunciate), he has the right to carry his Dandu (staff) denoting his status which he alone is entitled to take with him into the sanctum. He performs Pushpanjali at Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy shrines as well. It is he who officiates during the assumption and relinquishment of the offices of the four Nambies who are the chief priests.*

*One Sanyasin each is chosen from two hereditary Mathams, namely, Naduvil Matham in Thrissur District located in Central Kerala and the Munchira Matham situated in South Travancore (now in Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu). Only Namboodiries who were performing an oblation known as Agnihotra used to be inducted into their respective Ashrams hailing from the three villages of Shukapuram, Perumanam, and Irinjalakuda. The two Swamiyars are designated to discharge their duties in the Temple six consecutive months each, annually.*

### Tantries

The Tarananalloor Namboodiripads of Irinjalakkauda have held the vaunted position of Tantries (hereditary) of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple from bygone ages. Along with Pushpanjali Swamiar, they establish the Namboodiri supremacy in the worship of the Divine, occupying key posts in the Temple administration. In all matters concerning the spiritual heritage of the Temple, their ruling is final. The Tantries follow a separate manual entrusted directly to their forefathers by Sree Parasurama, the Anushtana Grandham and also the Parasurama Paddhati (manual of procedures on rituals and Saguna worship). Pujas are performed to enhance the spiritual concentration in the Deities. The Pujas performed in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, namely, Etirtu Puja, Ucha Puja, and Athazha Puja are performed as per Paddhati Sampradayam. The presence of Namboodiris in the highest posts is at times quoted to establish the Vilvamangalam tradition.

### Nambies

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has four Chief Priests termed Nambies and they perform worship inside the sanctums to which they are attached. The Periya Nambi is the seniormost and with the Panchagavyathu Nambi, who alternates, takes it in monthly turns to perform the worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy inside the sanctum with full rituals as well as to conduct all other daily ceremonies such as the Abhisheka, the Nivedya, the Alankara, and the Deeparadhana. They alone can perform the daily Beli ritual and the Deeparadhanas connected with Sivel. Thekkaidathu Nambi is delegated to Sree Narasimha Swamy Sannidhi and Thiru Ampati Nambi to Sree Krishna Swamy Sannidhi.

### Potties and Santies

The four Nambies and all the 24 Potti priests who are engaged in the service of the Temple originate from two villages on either side of Chandragiri river. They are Akkara Desies (Tulu Brahmins) and Ikkara Desies (Tulu Malayalam Brahmins). There are 24 Santies (ordinary priests) for the performance of the manifold religious duties. One priest each among them is selected once a month by the officiating Nambies of the three sanctums to discharge subsidiary duties of specific nature. They have access to Sreekovil and are called Periya Shanties.





*Only the Swamiyar, the Tantries, Periya Nambi, and the Panchagavyathu Nambi have the right and privilege to touch the main Idol as well as the gold Abhisheka Idols. While the Periya Nambi and Panchagavyathu Nambi are allowed to perform the duties of the other two Nambies (of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy), the later two are not permitted to perform the duties of the former. Similarly, while the Peria Shanti of Sree Padmanabha Swamy has entry into the sanctum, he can only handle the silver Sivelu Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy which, among other duties, he carries on his head during the daily Sivelu. He is not allowed to touch the other Idols. Thus a strict priestly order in the performance of various activities connected with the worship of the Lord is maintained.*

*The ritualistic worship performed to Sree Padmanabha Swamy is Sree Maha Vishnu Puja. He is conceptualized as Shantaswaroopa Paramananda Yogamurthy (Yogic incarnation of peace and extreme bliss). The Nambies have to take an Oath of Secrecy before first entering Sreekovil that whatever is understood or seen inside will not be revealed outside. As such, certain aspects remain veiled in secrecy. Even they are forbidden to look behind the main idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The Tulu Brahmin priests of the Temple are followers of Panchratra but adhere to the Tantra Samuchaya with differences in the conduct of the rituals. As such three different lines of worship appear and finally amalgamate at one center. The Potti group with Panchratra, the Tantries with the Padhati Sampradayam, and the Swamiyar with the Pranava Mantra all gravitate along their accepted paths to the Holy Feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in sublime worship. It may be noted that in the worship of the Lord, instead of Sankhu (the conch), so indispensable in Sree Maha Vishnu temples, at times a coconut shell is substituted and rituals performed with it in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple (see Sthala Puranam, Chapter 7).*

*Finally, an interesting observation regarding the nature of the long standing priestly order. Dvaita (dualism) is represented by the Tulu Brahmins- Akkara and Ikkara Desies, Advaita (non-duality) by the Tantries and Vishistaadvaita (qualified non-dualism) by the Swamiyar. This is a practical application of the three schools of Hindu philosophy in perfect harmony.*

## 21. DAILY WORSHIP OF SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY

*The arrival of Periya Santies around 3.30 a.m. marks the time for the Thirumeni Kaval Kurup (special inside security guard), who retains the keys of all the three shrines, to open the Cheruchuttu enclosure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy's sanctum. The priest obtains the keys to the main sanctum from the Kurup and unlocks the central door. He kindles the lamps inside the sanctum with a flame taken from one of the two Akhanda Deepas (eternal lamps) burning within. By 4.00 a.m. Periya Nambi arrives, cleanses his feet and ascends the steps of the Ottakkal Mandapa. By this time, the public have already gathered and are waiting outside. He purifies the area with Panchagavya and immediately enters the sanctum after ringing the gold bell suspended outside the central entrance. By about 4.10 a.m. the public are permitted inside for the Nirmalya Darshan. The Nambi opens the middle door while the Periya Shanti opens the two remaining doors of the sanctum. By then auspicious music, termed Pandi Vadya, rises into the silence like a joyous outburst of melody in praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and to awaken Him from Yoga Nidra.*

*A silver platform is brought to Ottakkal Mandapa. After Puja, the Nambi brings the three gold Abhisheka idols of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Sree Devi, and Bhu Devi and places them on the platform. The Periya Shanti brings the silver Siveli Idol of the Swamy along with the Siva Linga and the Salagrama. The Periya Nambi performs the Abhisheka using Sankhu (conch). He then performs Puja with Cheratta (coconut shell). Oblation is done with water, Panchagavya, Panchamritha, tender coconut water, and cow's milk and after cleaning the idols, once again with water. Alankara follows with flowers and jewels. The public has to vacate as it is time for Nivedya consisting of puffed rice, plantain, and Uppu Manga (salted unripe mango) (recollect Vilvamangalathu Swamy's offering of raw mango to Sree Padmanabha Swamy when he received the Divine Darshan). The public is then allowed to witness the Deeparadhana using the five tiered lamp. The Idols are then returned to the Sreekovil. Pushpanjali is performed by the Nambi. After the distribution of Prasada, the area is cleared of all people for the Usha Nivedya, a fairly elaborate dawn offering. After this, the Mandapa is cleared and cleaned. It would be about 5.30 a.m. and the Etirtu Puja (the worship welcoming the day) commences. The Public is not allowed inside during this period.*

Once the purification is over, the Periya Shanti brings out the silver Sivali Idol of the Lord to the accompaniment of the prescribed instrumental music and blowing of Sankhu (conch) for the Sivali circumambulation. Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy join Sree Padmanabha Swamy along the way. Only the Peria Shanties detailed to each of the three Deities carry the Idols on their heads. After three circumambulations are completed, the Idols are brought to their respective shrines with the ringing of the bells and sounding of the conch. The public is now allowed to go up the Ottakkal Mandapa for prayer and worship for the first time during the day. The Pushpanjali Swamiyar arrives by 6.00 a.m. and ascends the Ottakkal Mandapam. He enters the Sreekovil, Dandu in hand. He remains within till about 8.00 a.m. Public entry into the inner areas remains suspended from 7.00 a.m. to 8.15 a.m. for daily worship and presentation of the administrative report of the previous day by the Maharaja. No one from the royal family is allowed to accompany him. After that the members of the royal family worship. Thereafter, the public is allowed inside for worship from 8.15 to 11.30 a.m. With the time approaching for the Ucha Puja (noon worship), the inner areas remain out of bounds for the public from then on. Various stages of Ucha Puja commence including Prasanna Puja and Nivedya. After that Deeparadhana is carried out by the officiating Nambi with a simple camphor lamp. The public can mount the Ottakkal Mandapa till 12.00 noon. Thereafter, the doors to the sanctum are closed. The imposing outer doors or entrances to the temple are closed by 1.00 p.m.

The four outer doors are opened at 4.00 p.m. The Nambi arrives at the sanctum at about 4.30 p.m. and decorates the Abhisheka Idols while the Sivali Idol is decorated by the Periya Shanti. He then conducts the Pushpanjali to the Deity. The inner doors to the Nalambalam are opened at 5.00 p.m. and the public can have Darshan up to 6.00 p.m. After this, the musicians start playing the divine music for the full-scale evening Deeparadhana. The auspicious time falls between 6.30 to 6.45 p.m. The public fill the Cheruchuttu area to get a glimpse of the glory of the ritual. None can touch the Mandapa then. The Deeparadhana starts with the seven tiered lamp lit by Periya Shanti. The Nambi begins the ritual, ringing the hand bell simultaneously. At that time the Periya Shanti opens the middle door, to be followed by the door at the crown and the one at the holy feet (Thiruvadi). The other lamps are handed over to the Nambi one by one in the order laid down. As such, next comes the Naga Deepam, followed by the Garuda Deepam, the five tiered lamp, the Kumbha Deepam and in

culmination the Karpura (Camphor) Deepam (Arathi). The sublime display of light merges with the light of the Lord and illumines the hearts of the devotees. Ghattiyam is recited thereafter. Devotees are allowed access to the Ottakkal Mandapa till 7.30 p.m. After the public leave, the Mandapa is purified and Athazha Puja and Nivedya begin. The Beli offering of the inner areas, by the officiating Nambi, the inner circumambulation of the Siveli Idols by the designated Periya Shanties, their outer Siveli rounds and outer Beli by the Nambi are the same as in the morning. The major difference is that for the night Siveli there is a Deeparadhana each at the eastern and western entrances followed by the recitation of the Ghattiyam\*. Ghattiyam (prose) are short verses in praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in different languages, such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Hindi though surprisingly none seems to have been composed in Malayalam, the native tongue of Maharaja Swathi Tirunal who authored them all. The Idols return to their respective sanctums followed by Deeparadhana and Nivedya. Sree Padmanabha Swamy's Deeparadhana comes last and is identified as Ardhayama Deeparadhana. After this the two side doors are secured. Tunes of soft and melodious music from Kurunkuzhal lull the Swamy to sleep. The daily routine of Sree Padmanabha Swamy thus comes to a conclusion. The daily routine worship of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy follows on similar lines.

\* There are altogether 83 Ghattiyams (or Gadyams, which means in Sanskrit composition in prose) written by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal specifically to be recited in connection with the Siveli processions of the Lord. An example of Ghattiyam in praise of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy is given in the following:

"Jaya Vijaye Bhavah ! Devadevothama ! Devathasarvabhousma !!  
Akshilandakoti Brahmandanayaka ! Sree Padmanabha !!!"





## 22. SREE NAMMALVAR ON THE GLORY OF SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY

*Maataapitaa yuvatayasthanayaaribhutey  
Sarvam Yadeva niyamenamadaswa yaanaam  
Aadhasyanam kulapathervakulabhiraaman  
Srimathadhamgri yugalam pranamaami murdham !*

*Nammalvar, considered one of the greatest of the Dwadasa Alwars and the author of the 1000 verse (actually 1102 verses arranged into a hundred decads) Thiruvaymozhi which is one of the sacred volumes of the Nalayara Divyaprabhanbam in Tamil, poured out his devotion and sung in ecstasy 11 hymns (Pasurams) (Kedumedar, 10th Decads- 2nd cant of Thiruvaymozhi) in the glory of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and his beautiful abode on earth, Anandapuram (Thiruvananthapuram) which is the repository of enchantment. It may be noted that Nammalvar's work commands a very unique status in the Sri Vaishnava devotional literature and he himself commands a special place in the Sri Vaishnava community (for e.g. one of the symbols used to bless the devotees in all the Sri Vaishnava temples, namely, Satakopam, is named after him, whose original name is Maran or Satakoppan). Nammalvar has sung in ecstasy of all the 13 famed Sree Maha Vishnu Kshtras (Diyva Thirupathies) of the then Malai Nadu (or Malaya Nadu). It is traditionally believed that Nammalvar never left the tree under which he spent good many years of his earlier part of this life. Instead, through his divine vision, he was able to picture the 108 Diyva Thirupathies and the divinities associated with each of them. In other words, the Lords in each of these temples have actually come to him and gave darshan without him ever moving from his place.*

*When Nammalvar visited Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple, it is reported that he declined to approach the door through which the crown and the Thirumukham of the reclining Lord could be visible (note that there are three entrances in a row which give access to the Divine in the sanctum sanctorum) for he maintained that only Sri Maha Lakshmi alone had the right to that place. Instead Nammalvar entered through the third door and*

standing at the feet of the Lord poured out his devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Of the eleven hymns composed by him on the Lord, ten deal with the actual subject matter and the last one is Phala Sruti which emphasizes the effect of perusing these verses. Since these hymns exclusively deal with the subject matter of this book and as they are authored by such an acclaimed sage they are included in the following to enhance the value of this book to the devotees of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

3794:

ketumida raayavellaam kEchavaa venna NnaaLum  
kotuvinaI seyyumkooRRin thamargaLum kuRukakillaar  
vidamudai yaravilpaLLi virumpinaan surumpalaRRum  
thadamudai vayal anandhapura\_nagarp pukuthuminRE. 10.2.1

The mere utterance of His name Kesava just once is enough to drive all troubles. Even the emissaries of Yama, the Lord of Death, will not approach the devotees who chants His holy name. Let us all proceed to this hallowed place which abounds in lust fields and lakes and which is known as "Anandapura Nagar" or "Anandapura" where Sriman Narayana reclines on a venomous serpent couch, Anathasaye (Adishesha or Anantha).

3795:

inRupOyp pukuthiraaki lezumaiyum Ethamchaara  
kunRunEr maadamaatE kurundhuchEr serundhipunnai  
manRalar pOzil anandhapura\_nagar maayan\_naamam  
onRumO raayiramaam uLLuvaark kumparoorE. 10.2.2

In Anandapuram (Thiruvananthapuram) there are buildings as tall as the hills. In it are found trees such as Kurunthu (Hiptage Bengalensis), Cherinchi (Abutilon Medicus), and Punna (Mastwood) as well as gardens with profusion of scented blooms.

3796:

oorumpuṭ koḍiyuṁ aqṭhē ulakollaamundumizndhaan  
chērumthāṇ Nanandhapuram sikkēnap pukuthiraakḷi  
theerum\_nOyvinaikaLellaam thiṇṇa\_naam aṚiyachchonnOm  
pērum OraayiraththuL onRu\_neer pēchuminē. 10.2.3

Our Hero is He who has the Garuda Vahana (Eagle as His vehicle) and the flag sporting the symbol of this bird. He is one who contains everything within Himself and protects all the worlds of this universe during the time of Pralaya or deluge marking the end of the cosmos. Once this action of annihilation concludes, it is He who brings forth from Himself the cycle of creation once again. If one visits this land blessed with cool climate where the Lord Himself resides, he gets liberated from all sorrows and sins. I repeatedly stress this aspect for your own enlightenment. Enjoy the greatness of this Lord by reciting at least one of His thousand names.

3797:

pēchumin kōchaminṚip periyā\_neer vēlaichoozndhu  
vaachamē kamazuncholai vayal aṇṇyanandhapuram  
nēchamchey thuṚaḷkinṚaanai neṚimaiyaal malargalLthoovī  
pōochanai seykinṚargaL puṇṇṇiyam seythavaaṚē. 10.2.4

Anantapuram which is blessed by the sea, waterways, and fields is greatly favored by Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Those who worship Him who rules in all glory, in a manner laid down by the scriptures become blessed souls.

3798:

puṇṇṇiyam seythu\_nalla punalotu malargalLthoovī  
ēṇṇumi ṇṇendhai\_naamam ippiṚap paṚukkumappaal  
thiṇṇam\_naam aṚiyachchonnOm seṚipozil anandhapuraththu  
aṇṇalaar kamalapaatham aṇṇukuvāar amararaavaar. 10.2.5

*Perform Archana (worship of the divinity with flowers) and Abhisheka (oblation with sacred water) and immerse yourself in the thought of God. That will be the salvation from the grief of the cycle of birth and death. Those who have the great fortune of obtaining the Darshan of His lotus feet will surely attain the place of the Divine in the future.*

3799:

amararaayth thirikinRaargathu aathichEra anandhapuraththu  
 amarar\_kOn archchikkkinRaNg kakappaNi seyvarvinnOr  
 namargaLO! sollakkenmin naamumpOy naNukavEndum  
 kumaranaar thaathaithunbam thudaiththakO vindhanaarE. 10.2.6

*When Sree Parameswara, the father of Sree Subramanya faced with the dire situation from the demon Basmasura, He was rescued by Govinda who is none other than Sree Padmanabha. This supreme power is the origin of all celestials and Indra, the King of these gods, does worship Him here. All the divine hordes come here daily for worship. Let us also pay our respects to these devotees like the Devas, immersed in the service of the Lord.*

3800:

thudaiththakO vindhanaarE yulakuyir thEvummaRRum  
 padaiththavem paramamoorthithi paampaNaip paLLikondaan  
 madaiththalai vaaLaipaayum vayalaNyanandhapuram  
 kadaiththalai seeykkappeRRaal kaduvinaai kaLaialaamE. 10.2.7

*Sree Govinda is the destroyer of the evil in the universe. He is also the creator of the multifarious worlds and divinities. He sank in deep Yoga Nidra (yogic trance) on Adishesha, the divine serpent in the Milky Ocean while the celestials stood in great reverence. If we place our feet at the entrance of the Temple at Ananthapuram which possesses lakes and canals in which the Varali fish prance and play and with an abundance of fields, even great sins will be vanquished and move away.*

3801:

ka<sup>du</sup>vinai ka<sup>Lai</sup>yalaakum ka<sup>ma</sup>naip payandha<sup>ka</sup>ka<sup>Lai</sup>  
ida<sup>va</sup>ka<sup>i</sup> ko<sup>nda</sup>thenbar ezila<sup>Ni</sup>yanandhapuram  
pa<sup>da</sup>mudai ya<sup>ra</sup>vilpa<sup>Li</sup> payin<sup>Ra</sup>van pa<sup>a</sup>thamka<sup>Na</sup>  
na<sup>da</sup>minO na<sup>ma</sup>rga<sup>Lu</sup>Leer! na<sup>am</sup>umak ka<sup>Ri</sup>yachchon<sup>Om</sup>.

10.2.8

*In the city of Anandapuri which is the repository of enchantment, the creator of the God of Beauty (Manmadha), permanently dwells as Sree Padmanabha who is radiant with youth and loveliness. Let us all proceed immediately to seek the vision of and worship at the sacred feet of that God who grants Darshan reclining on Anantha with its hoods spread out. This is indeed the ideal place to obtain liberation from the great sins of accumulated births.*

3802:

na<sup>am</sup>umak ka<sup>Ri</sup>yachchon<sup>na</sup> na<sup>a</sup>lka<sup>Lum</sup> na<sup>Ni</sup>yavaana  
ch<sup>Em</sup>am nangudai<sup>th</sup>thukkande<sup>er</sup> se<sup>Ri</sup>pozilanandhapuram  
thooma<sup>\_</sup>nal vi<sup>ra</sup>imalarga<sup>L</sup> thu<sup>va</sup>La<sup>Ra</sup> aay<sup>nd</sup>hukon<sup>du</sup>  
va<sup>am</sup>anan adi<sup>kk</sup>en<sup>Re</sup>thitha ma<sup>ay</sup>ndha<sup>Rum</sup> vi<sup>na</sup>ika<sup>L</sup>thaam<sup>E</sup>.

10.2.9

*The life span of man decreases with the progress of time. Hence the worship of the Lord should never be postponed to another hour. Ananthapura is a blessed place. Go to the Temple after fetching flowers for Puja (worship) and other articles required for worship. Submit flowers to be utilized for venerating the feet of Sree Padmanabha who incarnated as Vamana and stand with hands folded in homage. All your sins will vanish.*

3803:

ma<sup>ay</sup>ndha<sup>Rum</sup> vi<sup>na</sup>ika<sup>L</sup>thaam<sup>E</sup> ma<sup>a</sup>thavaa en<sup>na</sup> na<sup>a</sup>Lum  
E<sup>y</sup>ndha<sup>pon</sup> ma<sup>thi</sup>La<sup>na</sup>ndhapura na<sup>ga</sup>rendha<sup>ik</sup>ken<sup>Ru</sup>  
cha<sup>an</sup>dhotu vi<sup>La</sup>kkamthoopam tha<sup>a</sup>marai ma<sup>la</sup>rga<sup>L</sup>\_nalla  
aay<sup>nd</sup>huko<sup>N</sup> t<sup>E</sup>thithavalla<sup>ar</sup> g<sup>nd</sup>hamil pu<sup>ka</sup>zinaar<sup>E</sup>.

10.2.10.

*The very moment one pays obeisance to Sree Padmanabha and calls out "Madhava," all sins will vanish. One can always live in an illustrious manner if one is able to gain the great fortune of daily visiting this Temple thatched with gold, carrying sandal, flowers like lotus, and other items with them. Even when one attains union with Goad (on casting off mortal coils), they will be remembered by the world and attain glory*

3804:

*andhamil pukazanandhapura nagar aathiithannai  
kondhalar pozilKurukpor maaRan chol laayirathithuL  
aindhinO taindhumvallaar aNaivar\_pOy amarulakil  
paindhodi madandhaiyar\_tham vEymaru thOLiNaiyE.*

10.2.11

*Phala Stuthi (Sumnum Bonum)*

*Nammalvar who goes by many names as Sathakopan, Maran and so on has rendered a thousand verses in praise of Sri Maha Vishnu. Those who recite these ten stanzas of homage, dedicated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, among this collection will attain Vaikunta (the abode of Vishnu) on forsaking the human body. There, devine damsels will recieve tham and welcome them and serve them.*

*Nammalvar 's birth asterism is lauded thus :*

*Vrushabhetu Visaakhayam Kurikaapari Kparejam  
Pandyadese Kaleradou Sataarim Saymyapam Bhaje !*

## 23. SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE FESTIVALS

*Because of the multifarious religious activities required to be performed each day in any major temple, such as Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, everyday is hailed as a festive day. The pleasure and self satisfaction one experiences in worshipping the Divya Mangala Vighraha of the Divine and His consorts are far more than anything else one derives during any festival outside the Temple environment. However, many temples celebrate special occasions to glorify the Lord. While some festivals are very important and common to many Sree Maha Vishnu temples, such as Vikunta Ekadasi there are others which are special to specific divinities in different places. There is generally a Sthalapurana associated with these festivals. For example, Vikunta Ekadasi in Srirangam, Brahmasthanam in Tirumala, Garuda Seva at Kanchi, and Rathasthanam in Puri Jagannath Temple are festivals considered very special to these divinities. In the case of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Thiru Onam, Murajapam, and the Lakshadeepam festivals are very special so also the ten-day bi-annual Uthsavas (festivals) concluding with the Palli Vetta and Arat processions.*

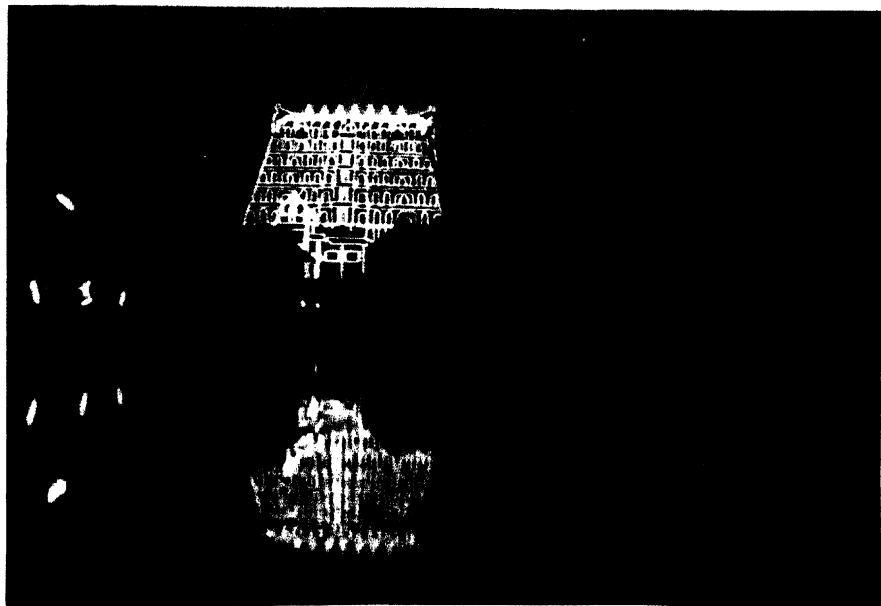
*As pointed out earlier, Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple is rather unique in many respects in that there is symbolism associated with each of its activities. For example, there are only six and only six Vahanas for use of the Deities. The six Vahanas employed for the processions are the Simhasana Vahana, the Anantha Vahana, the Kamala Vahana, the Pallakku (Palanquin) Vahana, the Garuda Vahana, and the Indra Vahana. The Vahanas of Sree Padmanabha Swamy are covered with gold while those of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy are covered with silver. Consequently, the former are called Gold Vahanas and the latter Silver Vahanas. The six Vahanas used in the Temple represent the six Chakras with Sree Padmanabha Himself being the supreme dominating force - the Sahasradala Padma (the thousand-petal lotus). The Simhasana Vahana denotes Mooladhara, the Anantha Vahana - Swadhishtana, the Kamala Vahana - Manipooraka, the Pallakku Vahana - Anantha, the Garuda Vahana - Visuddhi, and the Indra Vahana - Ajnachakra. This is one example of the importance of symbolism prevailing in this Temple.*

*The rites, rituals and events that take place in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple can be classified into four*

types - daily, monthly, biannual, and annual. In addition, Murajapam followed by Lakshadeepam festival takes place once in six years. Siveli is a ceremonial, ritualistic circumambulation of the Deities in Sivelippura (corridor used for procession) in the Temple, conducted twice a day - in the morning and at night.

Thiru Onam, is an annual celebration which is very special to Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple as well as the whole State of Kerala. When the Omniscience is vested with physical attributes, a day signifying the birth is assigned to that Divinity. Thiru Onam is, thus the asterism of Sree Padmanabha Swamy which is equivalent to Thirunal or Thiru Nakshathram. The Deities on this occasion are ornately decorated and taken for their nightly Siveli procession known as Ponnum Siveli on Vahanas. On the Thiru Onam day Anantha Vahana is used accompanied by the Mangala Vadya playing specific compositions of Swathi Thirunal. In addition, the main ceremony is the submission of Palli Villu (holy bow) which is performed in the morning to the three main deities (Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Sree Narasimha Swamy, and Sree Krishna Swamy) and Sree Rama Swamy.

The Temple festivals - Alpasi and Phalguni Uthsavams are celebrated for 10 days. All the six Vahanas of the Lord are employed for these processions. Of them, the Pallakku is used twice and the Garuda Vahana four times during the 10-day period, for all processions including the long ones of Palli Vetta and Arat. On the first day, the Simhasana Vahana is used; on the second day, the Anantha Vahana is used; on the third day, the Kamala Vahana is used; on the fourth day, Pallakku Vahana is used; on the fifth day, the Garuda Vahana is used; on the Sixth day Indra Vahana is used; and on the seventh day, the Pallakku Vahana is used. The last three days (i.e. days 8 to 10) the Garuda Vahana is used. The Vahanas are decorated with a profusion of flowers by the priests and are carried by the Potties. This practice is different from most other Dravidian temples of Sree Maha Vishnu where priests do not carry the Vahanas. Palli Vetta and Arat symbolize the triumph of good over evil which obstructs the spiritual life and the attainment of purification and peace through the destruction of passions. Palli Vetta is conducted on the ninth day of the each festival. It signifies the regal hunt. As the Ruler of the land, Sree Padmanabha Swamy hunts down and annihilates all the ills and wrongs of His domain which are represented by a coconut painted green. A mock forest is simulated in the middle of the public road near Sree Vettakkorumakan Temple and the coconut is placed in this forest for hunting. The Maharaja, as the Lord's





representative, shoots an arrow into the coconut. The till-then silent procession bursts into music and sound thus culminating the hunt successfully.

The Arat procession commences on the evening of the tenth day. It moves with an abundance of pomp and pageantry, color and music, with all emblems and insignia of total royalty, reliving history and heritage. On the elephant back are seen Deities from other temples who go with Sree Padmanabha Swamy to participate in the Arat. They return with Him and participate in the inner circumambulation of the Sivelippura before returning to their own temples. As the three Vahanas move out of the Fort walls, Sree Padmanabha Perumal is given a 21-gun salute, reserved for the ruler of the land. Near the beach there is a granite Mandapa known as the Karikku Mandapa where the Vahanas would be lowered for a short spell. The procession then reaches the beach. The Vahanas are brought to rest in the granite Arat Mandapa near Shanku Teerthakkara. Shanghumughom Mandapa on the sea shore is used specifically by the Temple for the Arat of the Lord. The Deities are removed from the Vahanas and taken to the sea. As they pass through the two lines of the police force, the Royal Salute is presented to the Deities. The immersion of the Deities in the sea thrice is the actual Arat ceremony and is the process of purification. Puja is performed to the three Idols on a raised sand bank on the beach itself after each immersion. After this, the Deities return. One important point to be noted regarding Alpasi Uthsava is that it is calculated ten days backwards from Arat which falls under the asterism of Thiru Onam in October/November while Phalguni Uthsava is calculated 10 days forward with Dhvajarohana (the flag hoisting) on the star Rohini which falls in March/April.

Murajapam (meaning, prayer in cyclic rotation) is a greatly sanctified period of concentrated prayer which is sexennial in periodicity. The prayer lays tremendous stress on the chanting of the Vedas and the Vishnu Sahasranama by a large number of Namboodiri Brahmins. According to the scriptures, for the enhancement of spiritual effulgence, Veda Mantra Japam is absolutely indispensable. It is essentially this prayer concentration that is achieved by the Murajapam. Rig Veda lays emphasis on Mantra, Yajur Veda on Kriya (rituals) and Sama Veda on Sruties (hymns in praise of the Divine). These three Vedas are recited daily during the span of the Murajapam adhering to the dictate that every rite connected with the Divines attains fulfillment only with the

*inclusion of Mantra-Kriya-Sruties.*

*'The fabled sexennial Lakshadeepam festival takes place at the end of the Murajapam, the 56-day-long period (8 weeks) of prayers and rituals. It is conducted with much pomp and fanfare in the grandest manner possible. Lakshadeepam literally means one lakh (or hundred thousand) lamps. With one lakh of lamps (Laksha deepam) fueled with the devotion of his entire being, Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal adored Sree Padmanabha Swamy in a spiritual and visual extravaganza first in 1750. This festival has been continuing unbroken since then, the latest one took place in January 1996. In 1971 electric lights were substituted for the traditional oil lamps for the outer areas, including the majestic Eastern Gopuram, because of spiraling costs of oil and its scarcity. The lights are lit for three consecutive days, namely, on the actual day of the Lakshadeepam and two days hence. It would not be an exaggeration to say that on those days all roads lead to Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.*

*Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is the only one in recorded religious history where this great Yajna is conducted without fail every six years. While Murajapam lays stress on the veneration of the Nada Brahman, Lakshadeepam projects the worship of the Teja Brahman. The thrust here is on the number "thousand" as in hundred thousand (lakh) with 'thousand' being equated to the aspect of innumerability and on "Deepam" which has the body fire. Fire possesses light, heat, and energy which characterize the subtle Gunas of atman. As such this mighty Yajnam comprising the Murajapam and Lakshadeepam is a deeply mystic process by which the Paramathma with initial attributes of Nada and Tejas is worshipped by the spiritual fire of countless Jeevatmas wherein the limited (Jeevatma) merges with the limitless (Paramathma). These lights proclaim, as they catch and reflect, the eternal glory that is Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram.*





## DARSHAN TIMINGS

*The Darshan timings are given as follows : 4.30 a.m. to 5.15 a.m.; 6.15 a.m. to 7.15 a.m.; 8.15 a.m. to 11.15 a.m.; 12 noon to 12.30 p.m. and 5.15 p.m.-7.30 p.m. These timings are subject to change during Uthsavas (festivals). The time between 7.15 a.m. and 8.15 a.m. is reserved for the visit of the royalty.*

*Note that admission is restricted to persons who profess the Hindu Religion. Strict dress code is observed. For males, dhoties with or without angavastram. For females, saris, dhoties or pavadas with blouse, or other covering appropriate for the age. Children under 12 may wear frocks. For those not dressed up in such clothes, these can be rented at the entrance to the Temple.*

*Sree Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Thiruvadigale Saranam ! ! !*

*Sarve Janaah, Sukhinobhavanthu ! ! !*

## 24. SOME HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS OF SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE

Year(s)	Reign	Event
731 800-820	Veera Marthanda Varma Kulasekhara Alvar	Hiranyagarbhom and Tulapurusha Daanam Cannnonized as one of the Dwadasa Alwars; Author of Mukunda Mala and Perumal Tirumozhi
825 1050	Udaya Marthanda Varma Bhaskara Ravi Varma	Consecration of Thiru Ambati Sree Krishna Swamy Temple Introduction of a constitution for the Temple; Ettarayogam -Council of the Temple
1090 1425	Rama Varma Iravi Iravi Varma	First to assume the title "Kulasekhara Perumal" Mathilakam (Temple) Records
1459 1502	Rama Marthanda Varma Iravi Iravi Varma	Ottakkal Mandapa Submission of the Holy Bow on Thiru Onam day to SPS
1566 1686	Aditya Varma Anizhom Thirunal	Foundation for the Eastern Gopuram Great Fire in the Temple
1731 1733	Marthanda Varma Marthanda Varma	Ottakkal Mandapa The main idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy was constituted with 12,000 Salagramas and covered with Katu-Sarkara Yogam; Widening of Padma Teertham; Garuda Vahanam; Kumbhabhishekam (Kalasa Ceremony)
1812 1815	Ayilyom Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi Uthruttathi Thirunal	Rules governing Temples and their wealth, significant aid to Brahmins working in temples. Rules of conduct for Temple staff.

1820	Gouri Parvathi Bayi	1. Murals in inner regions drawn 2. Extension of Sree Krishna Swamy's Uthsava from 5 days to 3. Kamala Vahanas brought from Kollom.
1829-46	Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma	Classical Devotional Music dedicated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Navaratri Festival, Temple Uthsavaas regularized and reorganized to the last detail., considerable number of books including Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabandhom, Uthsava Prabandhom which throw considerable light on this great Temple Considerable number of books including Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabandhom, Uthsava Prabandhom which throw considerable light into this great Temple.
1846		New Siveli idol of the main Deity made in gold and consecrated in the sanctum
1856	Uthrom Thirunal Marthanda Varma	Dredging and cleaning of the Padma Teertham. Significant contribution to Kathakali staged in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple
1855		Guidelines and code of conduct for the important rituals, for the High Priests etc.
1873	Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma	Ashtabandhana for idol of Sree Krishna Swamy
1877		Repair of Eastern Raja Gopura
1881	Vishaghom Thirunal Rama VarmaR	Silver Anki made for the imposing Sree Hanuman Swamy
1890	Moolom Thirunal Rama Varma	1. Ponnum Siveli systematized
1895		2. Protection from arrest accorded to Temple staff
1896		3. Sacred coconut shell used by Sree Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar

	<i>for the initial offering to Bhagavan was gold covered for protection.</i>
1897	4. <i>Ashtabandhana for Sree Krishna Swamy</i>
1902	5. <i>Stone Mandapa for Deities to rest during Arat festival put up on the beach.</i>
1924-31	<i>Pooradom Thirunal Setu</i>
	<i>Lokshmi Bai</i>
1931	<i>Utensils in gold for use of Sree Padmanabha Swamy</i>
1933	<i>First floor of Gopuram collapses. Immediate repair of the same.</i>
1934	<i>Outbreak of fire. Inner areas spared and subsequent renovation</i>
1936	<i>Temple Entry Proclamation by which entry was given to all Hindus inside temples under the State of Travancore. It was an epoch-making act.</i>
1942-1958	<i>All the Vahanas were re-done. The required precious metal was supplied from the Palace.</i>
1948	<i>Fixing of compensation to be paid by the State for loss of Temple lands. Sweeping political changes with far-reaching results</i>
1949	1. <i>Main condition insisted by Maharaja and complied by the Govt. of India was the continued connection and control of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. He and his successors should not be deprived of it.</i>
	2. <i>Refusal to take the Oath of Office as Rajpramukh as allegiance already submitted to his Master and God. Finally assumed office without the Oath. Unique in</i>

1961-1968	<p>world democratic political history.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Closing of Temple granary following loss of the vast fields.</li> <li>2. Compromise inevitable to overcome loss of income and increase of expenditure</li> <li>3. Conversion of certain Temple buildings as Kalyana Mandapas</li> <li>4. Making it easier for public to make offerings etc.</li> <li>5. Formation of politically motivated labour unions</li> </ol>
1972	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. First Lakshadeepam using electricity due to unavoidable economic reasons</li> <li>2. Drastic reduction in free feeding etc. following loss of lands and sharp decline in income. Lion's share of the Mahavaja's 'Privy Purse' went to the Temple. Abolition of the same by the Govt. of India came in Dec 1971.</li> <li>3. The Agrashale (Janapathy) emerged as a separate Divinity with the closure of the vast kitchens where He presided - the shrine is popular.</li> </ol>
Before 1977	Laying granite on certain parts of the grounds and constructing and covering corridors for protection from weather. Despite labour strikes, rituals of the Temple and the Maharaja's daily worship there remained unhindered
After 1977	Creation of special fund for the conduct of Marajapam and Lakshadeepam operating under a trust which was a funding agency of the Temple.
1985	Ashtabandha Kalasa for Sree Krishna Swamy, Redoing of the murals
1989	One more eternal lamp lit - it is the one lamp of this nature

- which devotees can offer oil.
- 1990
1. Niravilakku offering involving the lighting of many lamps
  2. Dredging of Padma Teertham
  3. Commencement of gold covering work on the Ottakkal Mandapa
  4. Gold Anki for the Lord for Vettah and Arat Processions.
- 1991
1. Flag mast of Thiru Ampati shrine enclosed in solid silver armor.
  2. Belikkal of same Temple (Sree Krishna's) covered with engraved silver.
  3. Work on gold covering of main Belikkal started.
  4. Sanction accorded for conduct of an elaborate Koti Archana in the Temple
- 1991(From July 20th)
- Full scale Kulavazha Chirappu on the birthday of Sree Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma Chithira Thirunal.
- 1992
1. Koti Archana
  2. Shifting of personal Puja Vighrahas of Chithira Thirunal inside the Temple premises. It now operates as a separate shrine open to public.
- 1994
1. Resumption of offering of food for Bhootom
  2. Restart of the playing of the Etakka.
  3. Bows to be made for Sree Rama Swamy.
  4. Adoption of Bharani Thirunal Lekha Parvathi Bayi.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Professor Ranga Komanduri obtained his B. E. and M.E. degrees from Osmania University in Hyderabad, India and Ph.D and D.Engg from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. He is a Chair Professor in the Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, U.S.A. His main research interests are in the areas of advanced manufacturing processes and materials. He had published some 130 technical papers and holds some 20 U.S. Patents. He is a Fellow of ASME, a Fellow of SME, and a full member of CIRP. His various awards include the F. W. Taylor Medal of CIRP, the ASME Blackall Machine Tool & Gage Award, and the ASME Pi Tau Sigma's Charles Russ Richards Memorial award. He is married to Srilakshmi and has a daughter, Sangeetha and a son, Mukund. Of late, he developed a keen interest in the ancient temples of South India in general and the 108 Divya Thirupathies in particular. He was fortunate to have visited some 75 Divya Thirupathies and had the darshan of the divinity. His other publications in this area (soon to appear in print) include the Splendor of Sri Balakrishnam of Tirumala (Divya Tirupati No. 96), the Splendor of Sri Nava Narasimha of Ahobila Kshetram (Divya Tirupati No. 97), and the Splendor of Sri Jagannath of Puri.

Princess Aswathy Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, a member of the royal family of the former princely State of Travancore, is the niece of His Highness Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma (the Maharaja of Travancore), the last ruler of the State. A graduate in Economics, she has distinguished herself as a writer. She has to her credit over one hundred and fifty poems and several articles in English published in some of the prominent news papers and journals in India and abroad. Her first book "Thirumulkazhcha," was a compilation of her poems expressing her deep emotion on the last days and subsequent demise of her beloved uncle. Her next work, "The Dawn," is a collection of poems on a variety of themes, published by Macmillan India Limited. Her third book, "Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple," is not only a treatise on the Temple but also a testament of her deep faith in her family deity. Her latest book, "Thulasi Garland" (also published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in 1998) covers some of the ancient temples of the former Travancore State and reveals the power and glory of the divine in the various manifestations. Married to Shri R. R. Varma of Paliakkara Western Place, Thiruvella, Gouri Lakshmi Bayi is blessed with two sons.

