

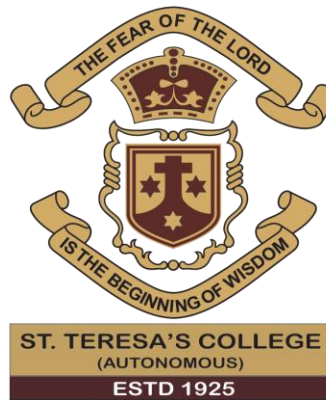
# NAGANCHERI MANA

## A TALE OF DISPOSSESSION FOLLOWED BY PENURY

A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a B.A. Degree in History

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam

Affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam



AB19HIS019	NIVEDYA RAJEEV
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AB19HIS032	ASHNA MARY

### DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE

MARCH 2022

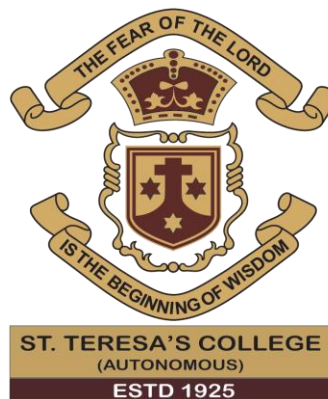
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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project titled “Nagancheri Mana: A Tale of dispossession followed by penury” is being submitted by name in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a B.A. Degree in History of St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous), affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, is a bonafide record of the work done by the students under my supervision and guidance. No part of this work has been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree.

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## DECLARATION

We hereby declare that this project titled “Nagancheri Mana: A Tale of dispossession followed by penury” is an original work done by us under the guidance of Dr. Stancy S, Associate Professor, Department of History, St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous). No part of this work has been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree.

Place: Ernakulam

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Kerala is one of the smallest states located in the southern part of India which was formed on 1 November 1956.<sup>1</sup> It is located between the Arabian sea to the west and the Western Ghats to the east and it is bordered by the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.<sup>2</sup> Kerala is popularly known as “God’s Own Country” which was coined by Walter Mendez who was the Creative Director of an Indian advertising agency in 1989.<sup>3</sup> The phrase “God’s Own Country” was first used in the context of Kerala by Dr. Vipin Gopal in 1993.<sup>4</sup> Kerala has its own unique culture. Earlier, Kerala consisted of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. Earlier Kerala consisted of 3 main divisions, which are Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, where the former two were kingdoms and the latter was part of Madras presidency.<sup>5</sup>

Travancore was the former princely state situated in the southwestern part of present-day Kerala. Travancore was known for its high literacy rate and advancements in governing systems. After India gained its independence in 1947, Travancore and Cochin (present-day Kochi) came together to form a state in India named as Travancore-Cochin or Thiru-Kochi which was a short-lived state of India from 1949 to 1956.<sup>6</sup> In 1856, Travancore was subdivided into three divisions which are – The northern division, the Quilon division, and the Southern division. These were administered by

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<sup>1</sup> “Essay, Paragraph or Speech on ‘Kerala — God’s Own Country’ Complete Essay, Speech for Class 10, Class 12 and Graduation and Other Classes.,” accessed December 12, 2021, <https://virtualguru.com/essay-paragraph-or-speech-on-kerala-gods-own-country-complete-essay-speech-for-class-10-class-12-and-graduation-and-other-classes/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Geography of Kerala,” in *Wikipedia*, November 2, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Geography\\_of\\_Kerala&oldid=1053149618](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Geography_of_Kerala&oldid=1053149618).

<sup>3</sup> “God’s Own Country,” in *Wikipedia*, November 17, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=God%27s\\_Own\\_Country&oldid=1055790174](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=God%27s_Own_Country&oldid=1055790174).

<sup>4</sup> “Essay, Paragraph or Speech on ‘Kerala — God’s Own Country’ Complete Essay, Speech for Class 10, Class 12 and Graduation and Other Classes.”

<sup>5</sup> A Sreedharan Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (D C Books, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> “Travancore–Cochin,” in *Wikipedia*, December 8, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Travancore%E2%80%93Cochin&oldid=1059253197>.

a Diwan Peishkar which was a rank equivalent to the Collector in British India. Later, according to the 1911 census of Travancore, the divisions were further classified into five which comprises the Padmanabhapuram division, Trivandrum division, Quilon division, Kottayam division, and the Devikulam division. There were 33 taluks in Travancore. One of the taluks among them is Cunnathunad (Kunnathunadu).<sup>7</sup> Kunnathunadu is a taluk located in the present-day Ernakulam district and its headquarters is in Perumbavoor.

As we all know, Perumbavoor has many immigrants from other parts of India such as West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, etc., and its economy is completely based on agricultural productions and plywood industries. Perumbavoor is considered Asia's largest plywood industry. Even though Perumbavoor has significance in the present scenario, it also has some history that hasn't been discussed much yet. Perumbavoor is a municipality that was formed in 1936, sanctioned by the then Diwan of Travancore, Sir C.P Ramaswamy Iyer.<sup>8</sup> Iringole Kavu, which is now run by the Travancore Dewaswom board is situated in Perumbavoor has added some popularity to this place. There is a Mana, or illam which means the house of Namboothiris, known as Nagancheri Mana located in Perumbavoor, adjacent to the Iringole Kavu, is unknown to most of the people.<sup>9</sup>

The region which covered the Iringole Forests (Iringole Vanam) was earlier known as Iringole Desam. This Iringole Desam consisted of 32 illams and one among them was Nagancheri Mana. Nagancheri Mana is also called as Iringole Mana. It dates back to 700 years ago. The history of Nagancheri Mana is considered as one of the cruel ironies of the state of Kerala. The fate of the mana was one faced by the landed nobility and gentry of modern Kerala where the EMS government implemented the Land Reforms Act of 1963 which changed their fortunes and led to the decline of this mana who once owned over 15,000 hectares of land ranging from Aluva to Thiruvananthapuram.

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<sup>7</sup> "Travancore," in *Wikipedia*, December 9, 2021,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Travancore&oldid=1059487960>.

<sup>8</sup> "Perumbavoor," in *Wikipedia*, November 22, 2021,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Perumbavoor&oldid=1056614939>.

<sup>9</sup> "What Does Illam Mean," accessed December 12, 2021, <https://findwords.info/term/illam>.

The new secretariat and the EMS statue at Thiruvananthapuram were once owned by the mana.<sup>10</sup> Currently, Nagancheri mana has been preserved as a park known as Nagancheri Mana Park where people can visit and spend leisure time there.

This project is divided into five chapters. The first chapter consist of the introduction to the project topic, explains the basic terms, and describes the objectives and methodology used for the project. The second chapter is about the historical background of the Nagancheri Mana, the classification of the mana, and its relation with Iringole Kavau. The third chapter is about the assets Nagancheri Mana possesses, the Land Reforms Act of 1963 and its impact on the mana, and how it led to the decline of the mana. The fourth chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected through surveys. The fifth or the final chapter exhibits the findings and conclusions drawn from this project.

## **Review of literature**

As mentioned earlier, this dissertation focuses on the untold history of Nagancheri Mana and its decline, the term “Mana” has been used several times. The word “Mana” refers to the houses of Namboothiris. It is said that the word has been derived either from Kannada or Tulu. It is still unclear. The houses of Namboothiris are also popularly called Illam or Madhom too with an unclear distinction between them. The word “Illam” may have its origin from Tamil and the word “Madhom” from Tulu. The word “Namboothiri”, also transliterated as Namboodiri, Nambudiri, Nampoothiri, Namputiri, Nampithiru, etc., are the Brahmins of Kerala. In this dissertation, we will be using the spelling Namboothiri. The term “Kavau” has also been used throughout this dissertation. It means sacred groves in a traditional manner. This term is commonly used across the Malabar Coast in Kerala, South India.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Tale of ‘Iringole Mana’ or When History Took No Prisoners | Kochi News - Times of India,” accessed December 9, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/tale-of-iringole-mana-or-when-history-took-no-prisoners/articleshow/48063147.cms>.

<sup>11</sup> “Kavau,” in *Wikipedia*, November 28, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kavau&oldid=1057557457>.

Books such as *A Survey of Kerala History*, *Kerala Samskaram*, and *Kerala District Gazetteers* written by A Sreedhara Menon, *History of Kerala* by K. P Padmanabha Menon, *History of Travancore* by P. Sankunni Menon, *Travancore State Manual* by V. Nagam Aiya, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* and *Brahmin Settlement in Kerala- Historical Studies* by Kesavan Veluthat, *Malabar Manual* by William Logan, *Caste and Tribes in Southern India* by Edgar Thurston, *History of Namboothiri Community in Kerala* co-authored by M.G.S Narayan and Kesavan Veluthat, *State and Society in Pre Modern South India* co-written by P Champakalaskmi, Kesavan Veluthat, and T R Venugopalan were studied for understanding the main and subtopics. *Iringole Kavuvu Charithravum Vishwasavum* by Adv Jijobal Book gives reference to the local traditions and customs.

Books, memorials, government publications and reports, newspapers articles, researches, places of importance, and common knowledge have been helpful in this study.

## **Objectives**

The land reform act introduced by the first communist government of Kerala was known to have shaken the existing land relations and the landowning communities particularly Namboothiris who were traditionally the landowners in the state. On the brighter side, many kudiyanas or tenants got their claimants on the land but on the other side, many Namboothiri families lost acres of the property leaving them in a vicious web of poverty. In the process, many manas or illams who were once at the forefront of society, relegated to the periphery of social hierarchy, often forgotten in the pages of history.

This dissertation concentrates on one such Namboothiri mana which became the victim of land reforms and was overlooked by authorities- Nagancheri Mana situated at Kunnathunadu in Perumbavoor.

Since the history of Nagancheri Mana is unknown to the world except for family members of mana and natives living in the surrounding. This implies that writings on Nagancheri mana and Iringole Kavuvu is limited, but not unavailable.

Hence our objectives include –

- To study the historical background of mana through oral tradition and to trace the known genealogy of their family, and the assets they owned.
- To unearth the unheard history of mana through the perspective of the present generation of family members to segregate truths and misconceptions about the mana.
- Iringole Kavu situated in the vicinity of Nagancheri Mana forms an integral part of the untold history of mana. So, this project aims to look into Iringole Kavu and its relations with Nagancheri mana
- To understand the evolution of land reforms from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to the period of the EMS government and how it changed the condition of Namboothiri illams.
- To analyse the impact of land reforms on Nagancheri mana and how it led to the downfall of this Namboothiri family along with other reasons for its decline.

## **Methodology**

The research methodology adopted by this project includes both analytical and descriptive approaches. It's analytical in the sense that this work aims at analysing various reasons for the decline of Nagancheri Mana. The objective source from which this project obtained data consists of survey, gazette, and government documents.

Primary sources for this project comprise of the interview with the present generation of Nagancheri Mana, Ms. Geetha Vasudev, who is the niece of the late Vasudevan Namboothiri, the last karanavar of Nagancheri Mana and Adv. Jijobal, who had published a book on Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavu. A Survey with 20 sample respondents who either belong to Perumbavoor or had visited or heard about Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavu has been directed through a Google form which included MCQ, Yes or No questions, and descriptive questions. The results of the survey will be presented in graphs and charts in the project. Apart from online surveys, direct as well as telephonic interviews were also done with the management staff of the Iringole Kavu and Nagancheri Mana Park, natives of the surrounding and various family members mentioned above. Information collected and analysed from surveys forms an integral primary source of this project due to the limited

availability of written sources. Field visits to the park and Kavu were also undertaken to collect authentic data regarding the topic.

Secondary data used mostly include published books available from the college library, public libraries, and Kerala History Association. In the circumstance of the non-availability of certain books, e-books available on the internet were accessed.

Newspaper articles and magazine reports from various reputed media were also considered valuable in getting basic information about the topic. Government documents on Land Reforms Acts, Research Thesis on Namboothiris of Kerala and land relations in Travancore, and various online websites were useful in forming an understanding in a larger context.

### **Limitations**

Written sources on this exact topic were very limited. Mostly, oral history was used to know more about the family genealogy. Since the demise of the last karnavar of the Mana, Vasudeva Namboothiri, oral information was collected from his other family members. Current family members of Mana who had cooperated with us have shared with us the history which they had seen or gathered from their ancestors. Hence some information derived from interviews may contain subjective notions. We have tried maximum to authenticate such data by cross-examination with other respondents.

The history of Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavu is a mix of myths and actual events. In this dissertation we have tried to deal with such myths separately, segregating them from actual history.

Though oral knowledge circulating about mana is the best source to study this topic, there is a limitation to it. Since the topic is less studied, the scope for this topic for future research is abundant.

# CHAPTER 2

## THE HISTORY OF NAGANCHERI MANA

### Travancore

Travancore, also known as Thiruvithamkoor, is the southernmost state in India. The Kingdom of Travancore or the Kingdom of Thiruvithamkoor, existed from c. 1729 to 1949. Its early history, territory extension, and other factors are mostly not available due to the non – existence of a perfect history of the kingdom.<sup>12</sup> The name of the kingdom was derived from the Thiruvithamcode which is in the present-day Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. It was then anglicized by the British to Travancore.<sup>13</sup>

The Mandala kingdom of Chera was considered the mother country of Travancore, which was once the best portion of Southern India and which underwent various changes during the four Yugas according to Puranic texts. Travancore is bounded by the Indian Ocean in its south and the west, the east is covered by the ranges of ghats and the northern region is mostly covered with rivers, lakes, and backwaters.

Travancore might be the only kingdom in India which preserves its original caste, religion, customs, manners, etc. Once the compiler of the Travancore records rightly said that, “Travancore is one of the very few specimens of a pure Hindu Government, the institutions of which has never been affected by the Mohammedan conquest”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Travancore,” in *Wikipedia*, December 9, 2021,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Travancore&oldid=1059487960>.

<sup>13</sup> “Travancore | Historical State, India | Britannica,” accessed December 12, 2021,

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Travancore>.

<sup>14</sup> P. Shungoony Menon, *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times* (Higginbotham, 1878).

The Kingdom of Travancore was ruled by the Travancore Royal Family from Padmanabhapuram, and later Thiruvananthapuram. The kingdom mostly covered the southern part of the present-day Kerala which includes – Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram, and some parts of Ernakulam district. It also includes the southernmost part of Tamil Nadu which consists of Kanyakumari and some parts of the Thenkasi district.

As a result of the amalgamation of Travancore and Cochin in 1950, the five Tamil-majority Taluks of Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, and Sengottai were transferred to Madras State in 1956. According to the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, the Malayalam-speaking regions of Travancore-Cochin merged with the Malabar District (excluding the Laccadive and Minicoy Islands) and the Kasaragod Taluk of South Canara district in Madras State to form the modern Malayalam-state of Kerala on November 1, 1956.

### **Namboothiris of Kerala**

Kerala Brahmins, commonly called Namboothiri Brahmins was a patrilineal landed aristocracy who practiced primogeniture. Being an immigrant community, it consolidated its position in casteless Kerala society as spiritual authority, advisors, ministers, janmis, Sanskrit scholars, most importantly through complex relationship (sambandham) with Nair matrilineal caste. In contrast to Brahmins in other parts of India, Namboothiri in Kerala faced limitations to their customary roles because of the peculiar social structure prevalent in Kerala - the existence of a loose, feudalistic type of political organization, permitting considerable local autonomy and the system of primogeniture found in South India solely among the Namboodiri.<sup>15</sup> This system permitted the consolidation and maintenance of power and wealth in individual families. authority tended to run from the large landlord family to those under him, in a way similar to European feudal manor. According to K. P. Padmanabhan Menon, Malabar before the arrival of the Portuguese resembled the corresponding feudal system of Europe during the 13th and 14th centuries.<sup>16</sup> The petty chieftains more or less exercised the right., not simply of taking up arms between themselves but also were so far free and independent as to wage war against their feudal heads themselves.

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<sup>15</sup> Joan P. Mencher, "Namboothiri Brahmins - An Analysis of Traditional Elite 1965," n.d.

<sup>16</sup> K P Padmanabhan Menon, *History of Kerala*, 1924.



The exact century of Brahmin migration is still a debate among historians. From the third century to the twelfth century, even beyond it is speculated to be the period of brahmin immigration. Keralolpathi attributes the advent of Brahmins to Kerala to Parasuraman legend.<sup>17</sup> According to Parasuraman (5th avatar of Lord Vishnu) gave the southwest coast of India to brahmins who settled in thirty-two grammam in the north (present-day south Canara district of Mysore) and thirty-two in the south in Kerala. Though the legend gives a religious dimension to the Aryanisation of Kerala, Parashurama legend is still relegated to folklore or myth by historians.

Each Brahmin settlement had a temple. Around this temple came sanketham (temple corporation made up of a group of Namboodiri illams in a given locale.) This corporation constituted a self-contained and independent community exercising sovereign powers and “Owning the sovereignty to the Yogam” (i.e., the board of the Sanketham).<sup>18</sup> Hence this grammam was geographically localized, their illams were located around 10 to 25 miles of the temple. Namboothiri homes are variously called Illam, Mana, or Madhom, with unclear distinctions between them. The word Illam may have its origin from Tamil, while Mana may be from Kannada / Tulu, and Madhom is still used by many who had emigrated long ago from Tulu Naadu.<sup>19</sup> Most Brahmin settlements flourished on the banks of rivers where fertile soil will be available for rice cultivation. gifts by rulers, temple revenue, tributes from other castes, and harvest from land (mostly brahmaswam land) formed the base for the vast wealth of this class.

The word Namboothiri can be dissected into Nambu denoting sacred or trustworthy and Tiri meaning light. One of the early classifications that existed within Namboothiris were Vaishnavites with the patronage of the Chalukya dynasty and Saivites who followed Chera Cholas and Pandyas. In a feudal caste-based society, Brahmins adorned the role of temple trustees and priests, teachers, messengers during the war even as moneylenders. Hence as Edgar Thurston has quoted Brahmins are well-read and possess many books, and are learned and masters of many arts; and so, kings honour

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<sup>17</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, n.d.

<sup>18</sup> K P Padmanabhan Menon, *History of Kerala*, 1924.

<sup>19</sup> “Some Namboothiri Illams,” accessed December 12, 2021, <https://www.namboothiri.com/articles/some-namboothiri-illams.htm>.

them as such.<sup>20</sup> when it comes to characterisation and beliefs, Namboothiris had boundless faith in God and his will, showed hospitality to strangers, was meticulous in observing ordinances in texts, and was gentle in manners. Everyday prayers at sunrise, noon, and sunset and habitual bath before prayer were followed strictly. Throughout their life, Namboothiris are disciples of Vedas. In their day-to-day life, a minimum of half-hour or couple of hours will be dedicated to religious activities. His academic life starts around the age of seven and the rest of his eight years revolve around his education. Namboothiris never attend a function without invitation. But there was an interesting sect of Brahmins called Pattar Brahmins who are wanders fed by rich illam. They are always present at functions like marriage uninvited. Often the presence of Namboothiris is honoured by giving dakshinas (money gifts) to them which varies according to Namboothiris status example Namboothiri got eight annas as dakshina whereas Embranthiri and Pattar Brahmins got six and four annas respectively.

Areas known for the heavy population of Namboothiri were south Malabar and Cochin (areas that yield direct political control of Namboothiris). Trichur taluk where there was the densest Namboothiri concentration, area was for a long time dominated by the so-called Yogiathiripads or ecclesiastical heads of the Vadakunnathan and Perumanam Devaswoms (temple boards). Whereas it is said that there were no Namboothiri illams south of Aluva river on the Cochin Travancore border.<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes Namboothiris are addressed as Namboothiripad, where pad suffix is denoting power or authority. Though some scholars suggest that Namboothiripad is a more strict and higher rank than the other, this difference in names doesn't escalate into a division. Based on duty Namboothiris perform they are addressed by certain titles. According to the census report of Cochin 1901- 'Adhyans Brahmins are expected to study Sastras and Vedas and prohibited from attending funerals and accepting tributes from farmers. While those who do yaga are Somayagis and sacrifice is called Aditiris. Brahmins who do yagas with fire (Agni) are called Agnihotris or Akkitiris. Before doing any sacrifice, the Brahmins should be married. To teach sastras are the duty of Bhattatiris and duty to conduct as a family priest and teach Vedas to belong to Orthikans. The vadhyans teach Vedas and supervise the moral conduct of the disciples, vydikans decide what constitutes a violation of caste

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<sup>20</sup> Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Cosmo Publications, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Joan P. Mencher, "Namboothiri Brahmins - An Analysis of Traditional Elite 1965," n.d.

rules and whatnot. Smarthans officiate over caste council or courts, investigate infidelity among Namboothiri on orders and study smriti. Tantris perform as a high priest and does exorcism. Vaidyans or mussads are physicians with medical knowledge and operate surgeries. Among them, there are eight families known as Ashta Vaidyans'.<sup>22</sup>

When it comes to the political arena, Namboothiri yielded both direct and indirect control. Being the highest spiritual authority gives them indirect power as “neutrals” between different regions. Namboothiris had to perform communication agents for the preservation of authoritarian rulers. Hence Namboothiris had a place in the political hierarchy of Kerala which is above and beyond territorial concerns.<sup>23</sup>

Interaction of Namboothiri and Nair caste in the matrilineal setup of Kerala resulted in the influence of Sanskrit education among Nairs along with day-to-day customs.

There was a sharp distinction between the Brahmins of other parts of the subcontinent and Namboothiris. The latter were aristocratic jenmis (landlords). Structurally, one of the most significant differences between the Brahmins of Kerala and other Brahmins in South India was the practice of having only the eldest son take a wife or wives from his caste. Whereas younger sons either observed celibacy or entered into marriage alliance known as sambandham with Nair caste, though such alliance was not considered as marriage by Namboothiris.<sup>24</sup> Off springs through sambandham relations trace their lineage and inherit the property through their Nair mother. Off springs of younger sons through sambandham were not entitled to the wealth of their father's illams.

This intercaste alliance was meant to avoid division of property which in turn helped to maintain the wealth of Namboothiri illam. Sometimes such sambandham were formed between women of the royal families who followed Marumakkathayam.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Namboothiris

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<sup>22</sup> Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*.

<sup>23</sup> P. Mencher, “Namboothiri Brahmins - An Analysis of Traditional Elite 1965.”

<sup>24</sup> A Sreedharan Menon, *Kerala Samskaram*, Pg 195.

<sup>25</sup> A Sreedharan Menon, *Kerala Samskaram*, Pg 194.

followed the Makkathayam form of inheritance where lineage is traced through the father and the eldest son inherited the asset of the family.

In the colonial period, Brahmins maintained a distance from western education in Juxtapose to Nairs and Tamil Brahmins who embraced and made the best out of western education. As the British assumed centralization of power took place (as in Cochin and Travancore), and the Nairs lost their role as soldiers and political advisers, the Namboothiris along with them lost their political status, though they retained their unchallenged spiritual supremacy.<sup>26</sup> They continued to dominate the economic and social life of the country under their superior position as jenmis. Thus, making a compromise between political and religious status. This wide gap between Namboothiris and western education, later on, becomes a curse for them once land reforms are introduced in the post-independence period leaving them without any other options for survival other than priesthood in temples.

Flag Bearers of reforms in the Namboothiri community were younger members who had a martial connection with the Nair caste. Changes occurring in the Nair community made Namboothiris apprehensive as well as captivated by these changes. The Nair males became a reference group for the Namboothiris.<sup>27</sup> Waves of change brought by western education pressed for legislation like the Nair Regulation of 1920 which provided that Brahmin husbands should maintain their Nair wives and children. This made sambandham marriage a liability for Namboothiris. In its initial stages, the movement was double-pronged, emphasizing the demand for English education and the right for all Namboodiri males to marry within their caste. These reforms also included Namboothiri women who were chained to interiors of illams. Entry of party politics resulted in two fractions among Namboothiri - one which sided with the Congress party, mainly orthodox Namboothiris and the younger generation who embraced Communist ideology. Despite their wealth and scholarly status, the Namboothiri community was backward for years. Their backwardness further led to poverty upon the introduction of land reforms.

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<sup>26</sup> A Sreedharan Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (D C Books, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Joan P. Mencher, "Namboothiri Brahmins - An Analysis of Traditional Elite 1965," n.d.

## Perumbavoor

In 1856, Travancore was classified into three divisions which are Northern, Quilon, and Southern. The Northern division (Kottayam) comprises of talukas of Sharetalay, Vycome, Yetmanoor, Cottayam, Chunginacherry, Meenachil, Thodupolay, Moovatupulay, Kunnathnaud, Alangaud, and Paravoor. The Quilon division consists of the talukas of Ambalappulay, Chengannoor, Pandalam, Kunnattur, Karungapully, Kartikapully, Harippad, Mavelikarai, Quilon; and the Southern division (Padmanabhapuram) includes the talukas of Thoivalay, Agasteeswaram, Kalculam, Eraneel, and Velavencode.<sup>28</sup>

According to the 1911 census, Travancore was sub-divided into five divisions which comprise of Padmanabhapuram, Trivandrum, Quilon, Kottayam, and Devikulam division. Travancore had 33 taluks under them and they are - Thoivalai, Agasteeswaram, Eraniel, Culcoolum, Vilavancode, Neyyattinkarai, Trivandrum South, Trivandrum North, Nedoomangad, Sheraingil, Kottarakarai, Pathanapuram, Sengottai, Quilon, Kunnathur, Karunagapully, Karthikapully, Mavelikkarai, Chengannur, Thiruvallai, Ambalappulay, Sharetala, Vycome, Yettoomanoor, Cottayam, Chunganacherry, Meenachil, Moovattupulay, Todupulay, Cunnathunad, Alangaud, Paravoor, and Cardomom Hills.<sup>29</sup>

One among the taluks of Travancore which gives significance to this dissertation is Cunnathunad. Cunnathunad, presently, Kunnathunad is a taluk in Ernakulam district of Kerala. It was formed during the time of 1762-65 along with some other taluks such as Alengad and Paravur. The headquarters of Kunnathunad in Perumbavoor.<sup>30</sup>

Perumbavoor is a place with lots of historical significance, located at the banks of the river Periyar, which was formerly known as the Poorna river in the Ernakulam district of modern-day Kerala. The town lies between Angamaly and Muvattupuzha on the Main Central Road (MC Road),

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<sup>28</sup> "Travancore," in *Wikipedia*, December 9, 2021,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Travancore&oldid=1059487960>.

<sup>29</sup> N Subramhanya Aiyar, "Census of India 1911," *The Report on the Census (Travancore, 1911)*.

<sup>30</sup> "Kunnathunad," in *Wikipedia*, January 10, 2021,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kunnathunad&oldid=999565237>.

which connects Thiruvananthapuram through the old Travancore region. It is currently known as a Mini North India of Kerala.<sup>31</sup>

In 1936, Perumbavoor was formed as a municipality under the then Diwan of Travancore Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer, who sanctioned four panchayats, which are Perumbavoor, Paravur, Nedumangad, and Bhoothapandi.<sup>32</sup>

## **Iringole Desam**

Encompassed by an impenetrable forest at the center of its surroundings, Iringole at Kunnathunadu in Perumbavoor constitute earlier Iringole Desam. The thick forest of Iringole Desam was nourished by the Churni river (Periyar) which housed the famous Vanadurga (forest Goddess) temple and groves form the heart of Perumbavoor.

Iringole is the corrupted version of the term Irinnole which emphasised the origin story of Vanadurga worshipped \*. The myths postulate that the Goddess who came to the forest seated at a stone facing east led to the formulation of the term Irinnole means “seated” which later on corrupted into Iringole. The Iringole Desam earlier covered 32 Brahmin illams who were designated as ooranna (temple trustee). To name a few include Kuzhipilly, Edapara, Pattasheery, Oroozhiyam, Nagancheri\*. At present only Pattasheery, Oroozhiyam, and Nagancheri mana families exist at Iringole whose past is known. The rest of the families declined to be long forgotten in history. Nagancheri Mana, one among the 32 illams at Iringole Desam existing today, in past held the position of head of ooranna of Iringole Kavu.

## **The origin of Nagancheri mana**

There was 32 Namboothiri manas at Iringole Desam and one among them was Nagancheri mana. Nagancheri mana was formerly known as Nagashreni because they worshipped serpents

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<sup>31</sup> “Perumbavoor: A Mini North India in Kerala,” *The Times of India*, May 3, 2016,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/perumbavoor-a-mini-north-india-in-kerala/articleshow/52055285.cms>.

<sup>32</sup> “Perumbavoor,” in *Wikipedia*, November 22, 2021,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Perumbavoor&oldid=1056614939>.

(Nagas). The origin of Nagancheri mana can be traced to the people who came from Thirumudikunnu, which is situated near Koratty, presently in the Thrissur district of Kerala. Later, they started living at an illam in Kuttikkappilly. Their household deity (Paradevatha) was Shastha and Bhadrakali of the Shastabhadrakali temple. Nagancheri was a family that traditionally performed serpent insinuations, serpent sacrifices, and transplants. Speaking of Nagancheri, the family named Aladi is very important. In the past, there would be two or three families who were traditionally in charge of household works at an illam. If there were any kinds of obstacles such as death or pregnancy which is wholly termed as *pulavalaimakal*, they had to replace them. As mentioned earlier, the Nagancheri family came from a place near Koratty, they had to decide which family should go to which someone sarcastically said the let the female swarms of the Aladi family go. Aladi family was a Nair family with women-domination. The family of Chenganat and Chemmayat are the closest ones to them and also who would be there for them during the time of emergency. After some generations, the Aladi family had no more female generation (*penn thavazhi*). Thus, they offered a gold elephant toy at Iringole Kavu. But there were some issues with it according to the jyotsyan (priest) and they had to offer a real baby elephant and they named it Karthyayini. Atlast, they had a girl child and named her Karthyayini as well. Still, some members of the family present offerings to their household deity (*dharmadevan*).

### **Division of Nagancheri Mana**

Nagancheri was divided into three manas or illams namely Thekke Nagancheri (South), Naduvil Nagancheri (middle), and Vadakke Nagancheri (North). Since it was a joint family system, everyone lived together in the early days.

Thekke (south) Nagancheri mana was a big *ettukettu* illam. There were five Namboothiris and their wives who lived there. They did not have any children. Hence, they adopted one of the daughters of Umadevi Antharjanam who was married to Bhagavatacharyan Velinjil Damodaran Namboothiri named Chelamattath Kaplingad Sridevi. All the rights of Thekke Nagancheri mana were given to her. Thekke Nagancheri mana declined due to the non-existence of male children. Thus, currently Thekke Nagancheri mana is known as Kaplingad mana.

Naduvil Nagancheri was the old mana. It was caught on fire and due to that, they had to renovate it which is the present-day mana.

Vadakke Nagancheri was built by Chettikomban Neelakandan Namboothiri for the convenience of farming as there was a nuisance of monkeys during the cultivation in Naduvil Nagancheri. On the southern part of the mana, there were remains of the floor. It was the residence of a Christian family called *Padayattil* who lived in that field. Then the floor was filled up and made into a field for agricultural purposes.

There were several national highway routes near the mana. It is heard that the Kombanad near Vengur and Vidakuzhapuncha near Kalamassery was sold. The Vengoor Sastha temple was later handed over to an Ezhava family. The table in the lease collection office near the Vidakuzha temple can still be seen in the mana.

Naduvil Nagancheri was constructed around 300 years ago and it is said that the stone for construction purposes was brought from Kombanad hill and one of the bearers was Thottungal Korla. As the work of the mana was not completed, the rooms were covered with palm leaves and that was how the marriage (*veli*) of Vasudevan Namboothiri was done. The daughter of Vasudevan Namboothiri was married off to Athrassery mana. She is the grandmother of the former chief priest (*melshanti*) of Sabarimala - A. R Raman Namboothiri.<sup>33</sup>

Little is known about how Nagancheri mana had so many assets. Once the Namboothiris of Nagancheri went for *Murajapam*, which means chanting in turns at Thiruvananthapuram. The term *murajapam* is derived from two words *mura* and *japan*, in which *mura* means turns and *japan* means chanting. They chant hymns from Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda, with 24 scholars each assigned to recite the verses. The ceremonial chanting is being held in seven sessions, with each lasting for eight days and this is called a ‘*mura*’. Each *mura* concludes with a special ‘*sheeveli*’ or procession.<sup>34</sup> Vaithazha Kadu Poti was close friends with the contemporaries of Perumbavoor Nagancheri Iringol Mana and Chalakudi Kurumanthol Mana. When they went to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple for the *murajapam* ceremony, they used to stop by Vaithazha Kadu Poti. Vaithazha Kadu Poti reached

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<sup>33</sup> “New Melsanthi for Sabarimala,” *The Times of India*, October 21, 2001,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/new-melsanthi-for-sabarimala/articleshow/37022914.cms>.

<sup>34</sup> Athira M Nagarajan Saraswathy, “Behind the Scenes of the Murajapam Festival at Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple,” *The Hindu*, January 10, 2020, sec. Life & Style, <https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/behind-the-scenes-of-the-56-day-murajapam-festival-at-sree-padmanabhaswamy-temple/article30534238.ece>.



eternal on one of these murajapam occasions. His death rites were administered by the Namboothiri of Nagancheri Mana because he had no descendants. The prevalent system at the time gave the person performing the funeral rites ownership of the properties of the deceased who had no descendants to carry out the rites. As a result, Lord Ganapathy's Vaithazha Kadu Madhom and Sreekovil (sanctum-sanctorum) became part of Perumbavoor Nagancheri Iringol Mana. This occurred during the period of the great grandfather of Neelakandan Namboothiri of Nagancheri Mana. Later, his son N. Ganapathi Namboothiri became the owner.<sup>35</sup> They were given 500 hectares of land in Thiruvananthapuram and Neyyattinkara. Since then, they acquired the title of *Kandaru Shankararu*. Kandaru shankararu is a title position given to the Namboothiris by the Travancore king when they acquire lands in Vazhuthacaud and Neyyattinkara.

New roads had to be built during the reign of Swathi Thirunal in order to improve the public transit system.<sup>36</sup> To make this possible, Lord Ganapathy's deity in the Sreekovil (sanctum-sanctorum) on the roadside had to be relocated. It was relocated and re-consecrated near where the current temple now stands. Lord Ganapathy was revered by Vaithazha Kadu Poti as the embodiment of generosity, prosperity, and refuge. He worshipped the same idol that can be found in the current temple, which is thought to be over 700 years old.<sup>37</sup>

Nagancheri Mana, as well as others involved in everyday activities and residents of Vazhuthacaud, have worked on the temple's reconstruction and maintenance over the years. Today's Sreekovil is more than 200 years old. Vazhuthacaud Sree Maha Ganapathy Temple is situated in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram and is the abode of the destroyer of obstacles, Lord Ganapathy. The Ganapathy idol worshipped here is more than 500 years old and was transported for safekeeping from Perumbavoor to Thiruvananthapuram during Tipu Sultan's attack on Kerala. Legend says that Lord Ganapathy himself refused to be transported back to Perumbavoor and hence this temple was established permanently at Vazhuthacaud. The creator of this temple was a Namboothiri from the Nagancheri mana of Perumbavoor. He had settled down in Thiruvananthapuram and offered prayers

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<sup>35</sup> "Sree Maha Ganapathy Temple, Vazhuthacaud," accessed December 27, 2021, <http://ganapathytemple.in/temple.html>.

<sup>36</sup> "A Comprehensive Website on the Life and Music of Swathi Thirunal," accessed December 27, 2021, <https://www.swathithirunal.in/rlinsti/pwd.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> "Sree Maha Ganapathy Temple, Vazhuthacaud."

and rituals to the deity. He also managed the temple administration for the rest of his life. But after his death, his successors could not continue the same services. They entrusted the same on a payment basis to another family who continued Shanti and the management of the temple for many years. Again, someone from the Nagancheri family took over the management of the temple and continued services for some time. Finding it difficult to continue to manage further, he handed over the ownership and management of the temple to a legally constituted public trust in the year 1981. In all these years, even in difficult circumstances, Pooja and rituals were never affected due to the grace of the Lord. Vazhuthacaud Sree Maha Ganapathi Temple Trust is the present management and the temple is prospering and progressing well. More and more devotees are coming to the temple for worship and to be blessed by the deity Lord Ganapathi.<sup>38</sup>

Just like the royal families, Nagancheri mana too received land taxes. When it was later terminated, it received a lump sum payment, the last installment being received in June 1980 or so.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Nagancheri family**

According to Geetha Vasudevan, the history of the past two generations is only known. The known genealogy of the family starts from Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri, who is the ancestor of Geetha Vasudevan and Ganapathy Namboothiri.

Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri had four children (three sons and a daughter). They are – Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri, Vasudevan Namboothiri, Kuberan Namboothiri, and the daughter whose name is unknown.

The eldest son of Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri named Neelakandan Namboothiri is called Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri is popularly known as Chettikomban because of his huge figure (aajanu bahu). The lineage (thavazhi) of middle Nagancheri starts from him. He was a bachelor and a wanderlust who did not have any responsibility towards his family. Once, when he returned

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<sup>38</sup> “Sree Maha Ganapathy Temple, Vazhuthacaud, Thiruvananthapuram,” accessed December 25, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/vazhuthacaudganapathytemple/>.

<sup>39</sup> Geetha Vasudev, The origin of Nagancheri Mana, Telephone, November 2.

home back from his travels, a Namboothiri sarcastically commented on his arrival in front of Mullappilly Warriath. He said that all the rights to the properties were given to another person of their family. Hearing this, Chettikomban tried to commit suicide by hanging. The karyasthan (steward), Achyuthan Nair who was nearby heard the sound of rope being hung, he came running and cut the rope. Chettikomban left the mana and married from Nayathod Udayamangalam illam. He then settled at Naduvil Nagancheri and from there the present generation starts. He had five children which includes three sons named Neelakandan Namboothiri, Sooryan Namboothiri, Kuberan Namboothiri, and two daughters whose names are unknown.

The present generation traces their origin from Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri. His eldest son Neelakandan Namboothiri is also called Kunju Namboothiri.<sup>40</sup> It was during his time, that the government implemented the Land Reforms Act of 1963 and confiscated all the lands of Brahmins who had more than 1000 hectares.<sup>41</sup> He had five children which includes 3 sons and 2 daughters among whom are Neelakandan Namboothiri and Vasudevan Namboothiri. Vasudevan Namboothiri was the last karanavar of Nagancheri Mana. He was deaf. He passed away in 2019 aged 107. His son is Ganapathy Namboothiri who is a priest in Cherukunnam Sree Dharma Shastha temple.

The second son of Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri was Sooryan Namboothiri who did the Manjappa kappilakkavu prathishta died due to a boat accident and his body was never found.

The second son of Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri is Vasudevan Namboothiri. His lineage (thavazhi) came to be the Thekke Nagancheri. He married from Thengottath Mana. He had five sons who are Vasudevan Namboothiri, Narayanan Namboothiri, Ganapathy Namboothiri, and Krishnan Namboothiri. The eldest son Vasudevan Namboothiri had one daughter from his first marriage and she was married to Athrassery mana. Then, Vasudevan Namboothiri married for the second time from Athrassery mana and had four daughters along with one or two sons who died before attaining the age of 2. His daughters were married off to Koodathinkal, Ambalappilly, Kollimuttam, and Maruthoor illams respectively. The name of the second son of Valiya Vasudevan

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<sup>40</sup> Adv Jijobal, *Iringole Kavu Vishwasavum Charithravum*, 1st ed., vol. 1, 1 vol. (Rishikulam Publishers, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> "Tale of 'Iringole Mana' or When History Took No Prisoners | Kochi News - Times of India," accessed December 9, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/tale-of-iringole-mana-or-when-history-took-no-prisoners/articleshow/48063147.cms>.

Namboothiri is unknown, but he was married to Kadungalloor Mamalassery illam and had no children. The third son of Valiya Vasudevan Namboothiri is Narayanan Namboothiri. He married from Koodathinkal mana and his granddaughter Chelamattath Kapilngad Sridevi stays at Thekke (south) Nagancheri presently. They don't have any children. The fourth son Ganapathy Namboothiri married from Chelamattath Kapilngad Mana and had one child who passed away at an early age. Valiya Vasudevan Namboothiri's last son Krishnan Namboothiri married from Adiyalloor mana of Thrissur and had one daughter who was married to Kadungalloor Mavalassery mana.

The third son of Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri is Kuberan Namboothiri. He was mentally retarded. Pieces of information about him and his lineage are still unknown.

Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri had a daughter too whose name is unknown was married to Brahmamangalam Patteri illam.

The descendants of Kunju Namboothiri and Kuberan Namboothiri are still to be seen.<sup>42</sup>

The main occupations of the Nagancheri Namboothiris were being priests at various temples and they also did tantric practices. They were known for their serpent rituals and offerings as the former name of the mana 'Nagashreni' suggests.<sup>43</sup>

## **Iringole Kavu**

Iringole Kavu is a Hindu Forest temple dedicated to the Goddess Durga which is located 2.5km from Perumbavoor. This is one of the 108 Durga Temples in Kerala that Lord Parasurama, Lord Vishnu's sixth avatar, is said to have consecrated.

Locals claim that the temple is 2,746 years old, according to a prominent astrologer Kaimukku Parameswaran Namboothiri. But it has been around 1200 years since the rituals and the arrival of the

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<sup>42</sup> Vasudev, The origin of Nagancheri Mana.

<sup>43</sup> Jijobal, *Iringole Kavu Vishwasavum Charithravum*.

devotees to the temple began.<sup>44</sup> The authority of Iringole Kavu was transferred to the Travancore Dewaswom Board in 1965. Until then, the authority was under the Kunju Namboothiri. In the beginning, the *ooranma* (temple trusteeship) of the Iringole Kavu was with 32 illams. Later, the authority was shortened to three manas namely, Padassery, Nagancheri, and Orozhiyam. Among this *ooranma*, Pattassery mana had the highest authority, then comes Nagancheri mana and at last Orozhiyam. Pattassery mana was called the *mumban* because they had the supreme authority over the Kavu and Nagancheri mana was known as *Vamban* due to their wealth.

The temple and the forest were once owned by 32 illams (residence of Brahmins). However, even from the earlier times, the sacred grove had cultural linkages with the Pulaya community. The grove was very much associated with the agriculture in the surrounding area. For instance, the traditional sowing of seeds (*vithidal*), on the Sankranthi day of the Malayalam month of Kumbham is being conducted outside the temple. That day marks the first harvesting of the rice and offering it first to the deity for the thanksgiving offering, involvement of different communities, associated with agriculture, in the traditional functions and rituals, clearly indicates the cultural importance of this sacred grove in the rural landscape.<sup>45</sup>

## **Myths and legends**

One of the myths which surround Iringole Kavu is of the story of Lord Krishna and Kansa. Kansa imprisoned Devaki and Vasudeva because he was afraid that their eighth son Krishna, who was about to be born, would be his earth's terminator. Kansa, terrified and enraged, vowed to murder all of their sons. Vasudeva was determined to preserve his eighth son from harm at any cost. Soon after Krishna was born, his parents moved him to Vrindavan and placed another girl infant (an incarnation of the goddess Yoga-Nidra or Maya) in the cradle. Even though she was not Vasudevar's eighth son, Kansa planned to kill the girl baby as well. He fiercely hoisted the infant above his head,

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<sup>44</sup> "Iringole Kaavu: The Tale of a Temple in Love with Monsoon," OnManorama, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.onmanorama.com/travel/kerala/2018/03/27/iringole-kaavu-the-tale-of-a-temple-in-love-with-monsoon.html>.

<sup>45</sup> U M Chandrashekara, "Iringole Kavu A Potential Biodiversity Heritage Site in Kerala," Study report (Nilambur, n.d.).

but the baby magically transformed into a supernatural force and remained in the atmosphere as '*Irinnole*.' Iringole was the name given to this place later. The gods and goddesses are said to have surrounded the power in the form of trees and plants. The 'Devas,' according to devotees, are the huge trees with roots reaching out in all directions, singing and chanting praises to the Bhagavathy.<sup>46</sup>

Another thing is the legend about the Iringol Kavu, it is heard that a woman belonging to the Harijan community, who was grazing in the forest, bled while she was pruning. It is said that there was blood when the sickle was placed on the stone and when they were informed about it, a Namboothiri from Pattassery mana suddenly offered jaggery to the Goddess. Otherwise, it is said the deity will disappear. During that period, Nagancheri mana was not here because they came to Iringole Desam later and stayed at Kuttikkappilly illam. When they settled in the illam, they also got the rights of the house according to the custom of the time.

Another tradition is linked to one of the grove's trees, the '*Valiya llavu*,' which is revered by devotees. According to tradition, a sage named Trinabindu was meditating inside the grove when he was interrupted by Hanuman, the monkey god. The sage, enraged, chased the monkey god away. Hanuman then returned with an elephant and a lion, infuriating the sage, who condemned Hanuman for being unaware of his might because he was sitting on top of a tree. When Hanuman's father, the wind deity, learned of the curse, he began shaking every tree in the grove. All of the trees, except the one on which Hanuman had been perched, trembled in response to Vayu's strength. Valiya llavu was the name given to this tree after that.<sup>47</sup>

### **The customs and traditions of Iringole Kavu**

Mainly three festivals are celebrated in the grove. While, Pooram, the annual festival is usually held in March every year (Malayalam month of Meenam), Thrikarthika - the deity's birthday is

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<sup>46</sup> "Iringole Kavv: The Tale of a Temple in Love with Monsoon," OnManorama, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.onmanorama.com/travel/kerala/2018/03/27/iringole-kaavu-the-tale-of-a-temple-in-love-with-monsoon.html>.

<sup>47</sup> "Iringole Kavv," accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.ktexplorer.com/post/iringole-kavu>.

celebrated on the Kartika Nakshatram (star) in the Malayalam month of Vrischikam (November - December). On the Karthika day of every month species, pooja will be performed, as this day is associated with the birth star of the deity.<sup>48</sup> both the festivals in Meenam and Vrischikam are preceded by harvest seasons of the Malayalam month of Makaram and Kanni respectively. only after the harvest and measuring of yield, the festivities in the Kavu will begin. one of the peculiar features of Iringole Kavu is that always a female elephant is brought for pooram. This custom of bringing female elephants for utsavams is often associated with female goddess shrines. the post-harvest yield like 101 nazhi ari or rice, jaggery, coconut, and kadalipazham (banana) was offered to Durga as part of the celebration. for the deity's birthday in Vrischikam maiden harvest are offered while for other festivals post-harvest yields are devoted. rituals in Kavu start by gifting jaggery in coconut shells. kadumpayasam and jaggery are the main offerings in Iringole Kavu. The celebration of festivities after harvest season, Meenam and Kanni, offering of jaggery in coconut shell indicates towards the myth of Pulaya women who first found the presence of Durga in the forest. According to the myth, the Pulaya woman was the first to offer jaggery to the goddess. these festivals and myths indirectly point towards the agrarian communities and relations surrounding the place. Hence, this shows that Iringole Kavu is also related to peasantry communities.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Chandrashekara, "Iringole Kavu A Potential Biodiversity Heritage Site in Kerala."

<sup>49</sup> Jijobal, *Iringole Kavu Vishwasavum Charithravum*.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE DECLINE OF NAGANCHERI MANA

### **Land tenure policy and its effects on Namboothiri families**

Land is always associated with the factor of production, a symbol of status, security, and influence.<sup>50</sup> In ancient times one of the factors which determined the social relation between different strata of society was land ownership. Most often land relationships were accompanied by a hierarchical feudal system. Kerala society was no exception to it. The only difference was that land relations were mixed up with caste structure prevalent in the society. Obviously, the elite caste of Namboothiri Brahmins occupied the top layer of feudal hierarchy by the virtue of the Chola Chera war of the 11th century, janmam rights, and the myth of Parashurama.<sup>51</sup> According to Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai janmi system, the designation for Brahmin landlordism founded on the concept of janman rights was a product of the prolonged Chera Chola war.<sup>52</sup> The so-called janmi who restrained themselves from cultivating land leased out this land to various leaseholders, the kudiyan to cultivate in return for a share from produce or pattom. Hence the so formed agrarian relation came to be identified as janmi kudiyan relations. Soon both the devaswom and brahmaswom lands are monopolised by uralas and janmis respectively who were none other than the Namboothiris. Brahmin landlordism thrived by exploiting kudiyan or tenants through increasing tax and illegal eviction, turning their life into misery. The hegemony of Namboothiris on land, the deteriorating condition of peasants, interference of colonisers, and the socio-economic condition of the 18th and 19th centuries instigated the first set of land legislation in the land of Kerala.

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<sup>50</sup> Ginu George, “Transformations in the Land Holdings and Social Relation of Namboothiri Brahmins in 19th and 20th Century Travancore” (Mahatma Gandhi University, 2017).

<sup>51</sup> A Sreedharan Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (D C Books, 2019). Pg.136

<sup>52</sup> G A Prakash, “Changes in Agrarian Structure and Land Tenure in Kerala - A Historical Review” (Thiruvananthapuram Economic Studies Society, August 2017).



Travancore was one of the pioneer states in India to introduce land reforms from time to time due to its peculiar political atmosphere. It all started with the maker of modern Travancore, Marthanda Varma when he introduced permanent revenue settlement mainly to regulate and check its power of devaswom land. For the first time in the history of the country, a regular survey of the lands and a systematic assessment were undertaken. The first revenue settlement took place in 1738-39 A.D.<sup>53</sup> Pativu kanaku or a fixed expenditure and a tax called melvaram or share of the overlord was imposed on devaswom who were earlier exempted from tax.<sup>54</sup> The cleverest political strategy of Marthanda Varma to transfer the whole kingdom to Padmanabhaswamy temple through thrippadi danam was a serious blow to the landed aristocracy of that time along with revenue settlement.<sup>55</sup> Efforts to regulate landed gentry by Travancore rulers can be seen in the time of Maharani Gowri Lakshmi Bai by then resident col. Munro in 1811.<sup>56</sup> The mission of Velu Thampi Dalawa to undermine the power of temples by confiscating the temple property was carried by Col. Munro.<sup>57</sup> This move proved to be a landmark event in the history of temples in the state. colonial influence on land policy always had a hidden agenda of bringing landowning class loyal to them by reducing their income from land. this usually created distance between foreign masters and landed nobility.

Beginning of the 19th century Travancore took initiatives to promote expansion in cultivation and increase in productivity to maintain the rising population.<sup>58</sup> As part of it, wastelands and hilly areas were brought under cultivation under the royal proclamation of 1819. A major development set in motion by this proclamation was the allocation of this wasteland on lease to Syrian Christians and Ezhavas making them owners of the land. The outcome was the appearance of small proprietors who in the long run undermined the Brahmin landlordism.

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<sup>53</sup> Sharmila Prasad R, "Marthanda Varma - A Legend of Modern Travancore," n.d.

<sup>54</sup> R Chempakalakshmi, Kesavan Veluthat, and T R Venugopal, *State and Society in Pre-Modern South India*, n.d.

<sup>55</sup> P K Rajagopal, "Temples in Travancore: History, Polity and Governance" 7, no. 4 (April 2020): 56.

<sup>56</sup> P. Shungoony Menon, *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times* (Higginbotham, 1878).

<sup>57</sup> Rajagopal, "Temples in Travancore: History, Polity and Governance."

<sup>58</sup> B A Prakash, "Economic History of Kerala Part 2 Travancore" (Thiruvananthapuram Economic Studies Society, n.d.).

From mid of 19th century to mid of 20th-century Travancore witnessed a series of land regulations that instigated the shrinking of Namboothiri hegemony as janmis. The Pattom Proclamation (1865), Janmi-Kudiyan Proclamation (1867), Janmi - Kudiyan Amendment Regulation (1933), and Travancore Prevention of Eviction Act (1949) were important among them. the Magna Carta of Travancore, pattom proclamation by Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma in 1865 changed the feudal scenario in Travancore by making tenants owners of the sircar land with hereditary rights.<sup>59</sup> Janmi kudiyan proclamation provided the necessary protection for tenants from eviction, inefficiency for this legislation led to its amendment in 1896 where permanent occupancy was granted to tenants. once again in 1933 this law underwent amendment to giving complete ownership to tenants on account of payment of fixed tax to janmi.<sup>60</sup> 1949 Travancore prevention of eviction act was enacted to prevent the kudikidapukkaran. later on, various land reforms were also launched by Thiru-Kochi state controlling the janmis and protecting the tenants.

The Kerala Land Reforms Act was an Act to enact comprehensive legislation relating to land reforms in the state of Kerala. This Act was published on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1964. Sections 2 to 71, 73 to 82, 84, 99 to 108, and 110 to 132 came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of April 1964. The remaining provisions came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1970.<sup>61</sup> The Land Reforms Act of 1963 aimed at the abolition of landlordism.

The history of land reforms doesn't begin in 1957. Efforts by benevolent rulers to protect the son of soils, at the same time check the Brahmin landlords goes back even before independence to the 18th century. Land reforms are always been double-edged in their motive to give land to tiller and to abolish feudalism. On one side it was a new hope for liberation from age-old caste cruelties and poverty and on the other hand, these were written as cruel ironies in the history of Namboothiri illams. Land reforms were always a nemesis for the Kerala Namboothiri supremacy as their main power was extracted and exercised through the land. As mentioned above, we can see that all the land regulations introduced were stepping stones to undermine Namboothiris. Need for revenue combined colonial

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<sup>59</sup> Prakash, "Changes in Agrarian Structure and Land Tenure in Kerala - A Historical Review."

<sup>60</sup> Noor Muhammed, *Socio-Economic Dimension of Agriculture*, n.d.

<sup>61</sup> James Joseph Adhikarathil, "A NOTE ON KERALA LAND REFORMS ACT,"

<https://www.slideshare.net/mysandesham/a-note-on-kerala-land-reforms-act>.

interest of acquiring control over land work against the landlords in pre-independence era whereas the objective social justice, equality, and welfare of lower section triggered land laws after Kerala state was formed. Whatever may be the intention land reforms always was the villain in the story of Brahmins which in long run became their focal reason for their toppling. In spite of this, the entire blame for Namboothiris ruin cannot be put on land reforms is a fact to be remembered. Changing scenarios and attitudes of both Namboothiris and other castes have to be taken into account while looking into Namboothiris' fate.

### **Land Reforms in Kerala**

The tale of Kerala's land reforms is not a single one. It is a story told from different angles, spanning social, political, and economic changes, as well as the introduction of new crops like rubber and the expansion of coconut production in the state's rural landscape.<sup>62</sup> Due to old land relations, taxation, and regulation during the British Raj, India inherited a semi-feudal agrarian system at the time of independence, with land ownership concentrated in the hands of a few individual landowners. Several states have implemented voluntary and state-mediated land reforms since independence. The states of West Bengal and Kerala are the most noteworthy and successful examples of land reform. The Land Reforms Ordinance was enacted by K. R. Gowri Amma, a minister in the first EMS government in Kerala, India.

In India's southern state of Kerala, the EMS government was the first communist state government to be democratically elected.<sup>63</sup> The controversial Land Reforms Ordinance, which was eventually converted into an act, was introduced shortly after the administration took its oath of office in 1957. This, together with an Education Bill, caused a huge commotion among the landlord classes. The radical socialists' catchphrase was "the land for tillers," which sent shockwaves through the country's landowner classes. The ordinance imposed a strict limit on how much land a family may own. Tenants and hut dwellers were given a claim to the excess land they had laboured on for

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<sup>62</sup> "Land Reforms Reshaped State: Prof P K Michael Tharakan," accessed December 27, 2021,

<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/amp/nation/in-other-news/051116/land-reforms-reshaped-state-prof-p-k-michael-tharakan.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Prasenjit Bose, "EMS Namboodiripad and the Communist Government of Kerala," n.d., 15.

centuries under the feudal system. Furthermore, the statute guaranteed tenure security and protection against eviction. These ground-breaking steps resulted in the state government's untimely demise, as the central government, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, utilised Article 356 to dismiss it, citing a breakdown of law and order as the reason.<sup>64</sup> Kerala's land reforms resulted in significant political, economic, and social developments. At the time of the state's creation, various sorts of feudal ties existed in Travancore-Cochin and Malabar. Landless farmers and those who had been evicted from their land wanted their complaints to be addressed. Changes were being demanded louder and louder. The Land Reforms Bill was submitted in the Legislative Assembly by the government that came to power in 1957. The Agrarian Relations Bill, which was first introduced in 1958, was passed with minor changes. In 1960, 1963, and 1964, the legislature enacted land reform bills. However, on January 1, 1970, the C. Achutha Menon government passed the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969, which abolished the feudal system and guaranteed the rights of tenants on the land. Cash crop plantations, on the other hand, were immune from the law's reach. Since then, the act has been amended numerous times, the most recent being in 2012.<sup>65</sup>

The main objectives of the Land Reforms include ending old feudal relations by legitimising the right of real peasants, to own the land they cultivate, introducing a land ceiling and distributing excess land among landless agricultural labourers, to eliminate exploitation and inequalities in the agrarian sector, to ensure consistent progress and transformation of society, to achieve economic development and modernisation and to put an end to the feudal age.

### **Assets acquired by Nagancheri Mana**

Nagancheri Mana was a family that owned 15000 hectares of agricultural land from Paravur to Neyyattinkara in Thiruvananthapuram. Vasudevan Namboothiri became the sole owner of the properties as all the five paternal brothers had no sons. Sixty-one years ago, the Nagancheri was a big land-owning family. They owned 5,000 acres of land at Panniyur, Karimanur, Thattakuzha,

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<sup>64</sup> KISHORE K. KOTICHA, "PRESIDENTIAL INTERVENTION UNDER ARTICLE 356 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA," *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 2, no. 1 (1959): 125–33.

<sup>65</sup> "Land Reform in Kerala," in *Wikipedia*, July 5, 2021,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Land\\_reform\\_in\\_Kerala&oldid=1032159089](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Land_reform_in_Kerala&oldid=1032159089).

Cheenikuzhi, Udumbannur, and Purupuzha in Thodupuzha. When they acquired Sree Maha Ganapathy temple at Vazhuthacaud, they also received lands in Thykad, Airanimuttam, Vattuvilakam, Vanchiyur, Vilavankot, Neyyattinkara, and in present-day Tamil Nadu such as Kanyakumari, Towala, and Agatheeshwaram. They owned several temples such as Iringol kavu, Kombanad Sridharmashastha Temple, Aimuri Shiva Temple, Aluva Vidakuzha Sri Krishna Temple, Chandrapillikavu, Iravichira Shiva Temple, Neelamkulangara Sri Krishna Temple, Thodupuzha Karimanur Narasimha Temple, Panniyur Varaha Temple, and Varuthakkad Mahaganapati Temple in Thiruvananthapuram.<sup>66</sup> In the olden times, the mana would receive 7.50 lakh ‘para’ from the paddy lessee after harvest annually.<sup>67</sup>

### **The decline of Nagancheri Mana**

The opulence of Nagancheri mana in Perumbavoor can be best understood from the assets it possessed over 100 years. From a migrant family from Koratty to the oorayima of Iringole Kavu, the Nagancheri family had a rich history of affluence and prestige behind it. Still, it is a harsh reality that the rich legacy of the so-called Nagashreni family now lies only has faint memories in the minds of natives. being the processors of the title Kandaru Shankararu and deshavazhi of 18 desams to the fateful death of its last head of the family Vasudevan Namboothiri in three cents land represents the best example of fortune changes caused by land reforms. The memoir of the downfall of Nagancheri prosperous history owes mainly to land reforms brought by the first government of Kerala. Yet, land reforms alone do not constitute for its decline as there is more to the story of the ruin of this family.

The downfall of mana is traced to the time of Vasudevan Namboothiri and his father Kunju Namboothiri. The humongous property of the mana was transferred to the name of Vasudevan Namboothiri so as to preserve it, in the absence of a male heir for his father’s brothers. At that time the assets of the family comprised 14 temples, 8 Brahmins, and around 5000 acres of land in various desams. But with the passing of the Kerala stay on eviction proceeding act in 1957, the land began to be transferred to the leaseholder’s name. slowly Nagancheri starts to lose its estates. like the last nail

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<sup>66</sup> “നാഗഞ്ചേരിമന വാസുദേവൻ നമ്പൂതിരി അന്തരിച്ചു.” ManoramaOnline, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://www.manoramaonline.com/news/kerala/2019/07/27/vasudevan-namboodiri-passed-away.html>.

<sup>67</sup> “Tale of ‘Iringole Mana’ or When History Took No Prisoners | Kochi News - Times of India.”

in the coffin, the Land Reform Amendment Act of 1969 completely led them to penury. There are many revenue sources that show according to the appeal of Maharaja of Travancore, Nagancheri Namboothiris had given up 1000 acres of land to the government. The secretariat of Kerala, situated in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram stand as testimony to this as once it was owned by Nagancheri mana who got this through Vazhuthacaud Potti. Due to the pathetic condition of mana, the daily rituals of Iringole kavu came to a halt. Following this, the devotees started to complain about the stoppage of Nitya puja which led to the take-over of the Iringole Kavu Bhagavathy temple by the Travancore devaswom board in 1965. Along with the Kavu, 200-kilogram gold jewellers, a female elephant, and copper utensils were handed over to the devaswom board. As a consequence, Nagancheri mana lost their nearest asset due to poverty.<sup>68</sup>

At last, on 18th June 1980, Vasudevan Namboothiri had to sell Middle Nagancheri mana and 2.30-acre of land surrounding it merely for 1 lakh to Perumbavoor municipality and they left the house only with clothes and available documents of the land.<sup>69</sup> According to Ganapathy Namboothiri, son of the last karanavar, late Vasudevan Namboothiri, they relocated to 3 cents of land was in the name of their mother Savitri Antarjanam where Vasudevan Namboothiri took his last breath in 2019. Vasudevan Namboothiri approached the Paravoor Muncif court to appeal against Land Reform Act, but it was of no use. Also, Vasudevan Namboothiri approached the then, Chief Minister E K Nayanar to make him aware of his grievances and demerits of land reforms. But, E K Nayanar agreed to offer 3 cents of land to which Vasudevan Namboothiri refused to accept it instead he suggested to install a statue of E M S Namboothiripad on that land. Mana which was taken over and protected by the Perumbavoor municipality was handed over to the Kerala Lalithakala Academy in 1993 on a ten-year lease to build an art village. Although Iringole was declared as the first art village in Kerala centered on Nagancheri Mana, it did not last long. The mana was reclaimed by the municipality following a dispute over its ownership and due to the lack of funds, Lalithakala Academy stepped out from this project.

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<sup>68</sup> “നാഗഞ്ചേരിമന വാസുദേവൻ നമ്പൂതിരി അന്തരിച്ചു.” ManoramaOnline, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://www.manoramaonline.com/news/kerala/2019/07/27/vasudevan-namboodiri-passed-away.html>.

<sup>69</sup> “Tale of ‘Iringole Mana’ or When History Took No Prisoners | Kochi News - Times of India.”

Due to health issues, the land on which Vasudevan Namboothiri settled was on the mortgage. In the end, Vasudevan Namboothiri who was once a wealthy landowner had to take his last breath as a tenant on his own. Presently, Nagancheri Mana is preserved by Perumbavoor municipality as a park. It is famous as a rare pathinarukettu (sixteen halls with four courtyards) but was remodelled to the now existing structure due to difficulty in maintaining it properly. Iringole Kavu is still visited for both religious and leisure activities.

As mentioned earlier, The Land Reforms Act was not the only reason for the decline. There were many other reasons too such as the overdependence on their lands and their revenue and because of that when the Land Reforms Act was introduced, it led them to live without alternative solutions for the income. Many of them left their traditional occupations such as priesthood, teaching, etc., when they became a janmi as they started to acquire lots of lands. As in the case of Nagancheri Mana, the Namboothiris used to do tantric practices and serpent offerings (sarpabali) which they left behind because of their greediness towards lands. In the longer run, this greediness came to haunt many Namboothiri families as they had no other occupations to do, once their lands were confiscated by the government. Even before the Land Laws were enacted, the Namboothiris of Nagancheri mana sold their properties for their own personal reasons and to live a luxurious life such as the selling of Kombanad and Vidakuzhapunja temple. This led to a decrease in the lands they have owned.

According to Geetha Vasudevan, the Land Reforms Act has taken over a large amount of land from Nagancheri mana, but they would have survived the penury if they had gone for a proper job or occupation. The attitude of taking their luxurious life for granted has added fuel to their misery. Another reason is the property division among the siblings, the marriage of daughters, and health issues.

The Land Reforms Act was not the only villain in the lives of the Namboothiris of Nagancheri Mana, but also their ignorance of the changing scenarios in the society and to the western lifestyle has led to the decline. Neither did they have a proper education to get a good job nor did they have the ability to till the soil in their own lands. The land that brought a smile to their face has brought tears to their eyes.

# CHAPTER 4

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

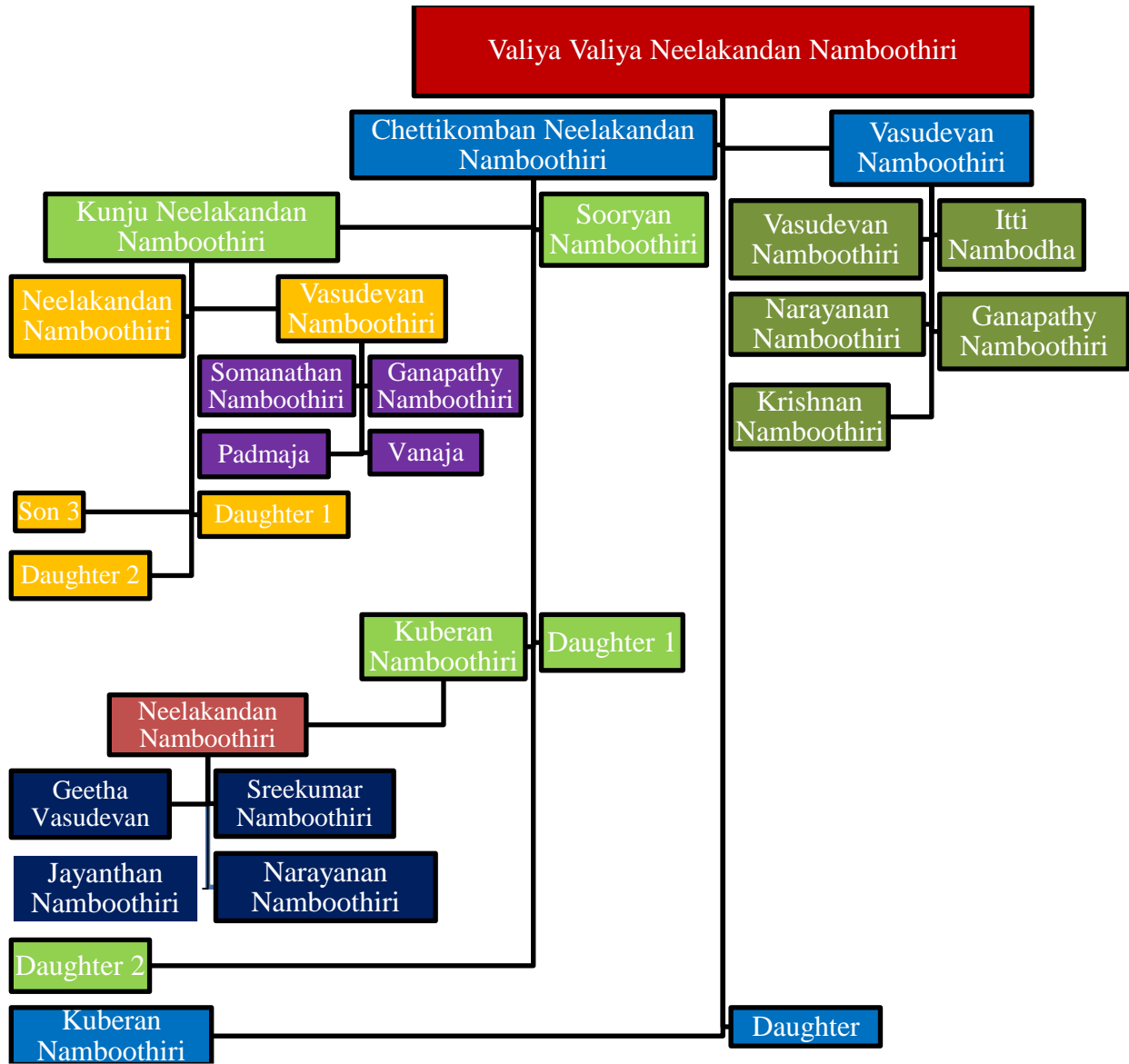
The collected data have to be processed so that eligible conclusions are made. The interviews were of valuable help in this regard. The purpose of the analysis is to summarize the completed observation in such a manner that they yield answers to the research questions. The purpose of interpretation is to search for a broader meaning of the answers by linking them to another available knowledge.

Table 1: Assets possessed by Nagancheri Mana

Lands (5000 acres)	Temples owned
Panniyur	Iringol kavu
Karimanur	Kombanad Sridharmashastha Temple
Thattakuzha	Aimuri Shiva Temple
Cheenikuzhi	Aluva Vidakuzha Srikrishna Temple
Udumbannur	Chandrapillikavu
Purupuzha	Neelamkulangara Sri Krishna Temple
Thykad	Thodupuzha Karimanur Narasimha Temple
Airanimuttam	Panniyur Varaha Temple
Vattuvilakam	Vazhuthacaud Sree Mahaganapati Temple
Vanchiyur	Iravichira Shiva Temple
Vilavankot	
Neyyattinkara	
Kanyakumari	
Towala	
Agatheeshwaram	



Chart 1: Nagancheri family tree



- Children of Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri
- Children of Chettikomban Neelakandan Namboothiri
- Children of Vasudevan Namboothiri
- Children of Kunju Neelakandan Namboothiri
- Children of Vasudevan Namboothiri
- Son of Kuberan Namboothiri
- Children of Neelakandan Namboothiri

Table 2: Public visit to Nagancheri Mana

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	14	73.3
No	2	6.7
Not yet, but I will	4	20
Total	20	100

The above-shown table is about the number of respondents who had visited Nagancheri mana. From the pie chart, 73.3% of respondents had paid a visit to the mana, while the rest of the respondents who constitute 6.7% and 20% represent the people who had not visited and those who plan to visit in the future respectively.

Figure 1: Public visit to Nagancheri Mana

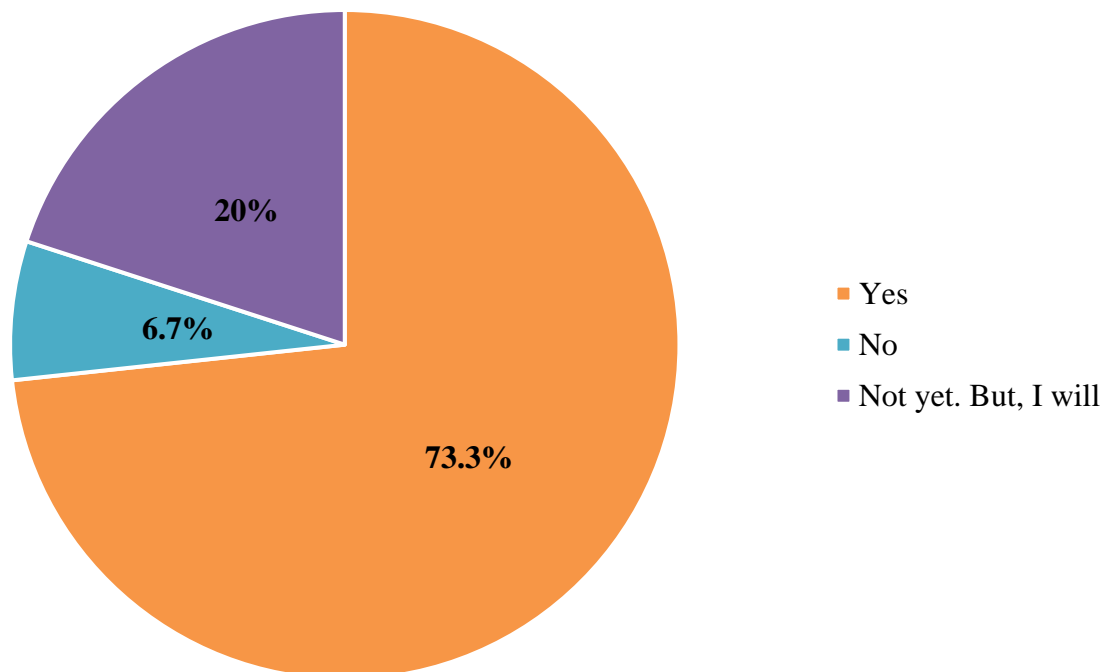


Table 3: Public knowledge on the history of Nagancheri Mana

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	66.7
No	5	33.3
Total	20	100

Table 3 presents the percentage of people who already have knowledge about the history of Nagancheri mana. In which 66.7% have prior knowledge about the history of the mana and 33.3% of the respondents don't know about it.

Figure 2: Public knowledge on the history of Nagancheri Mana

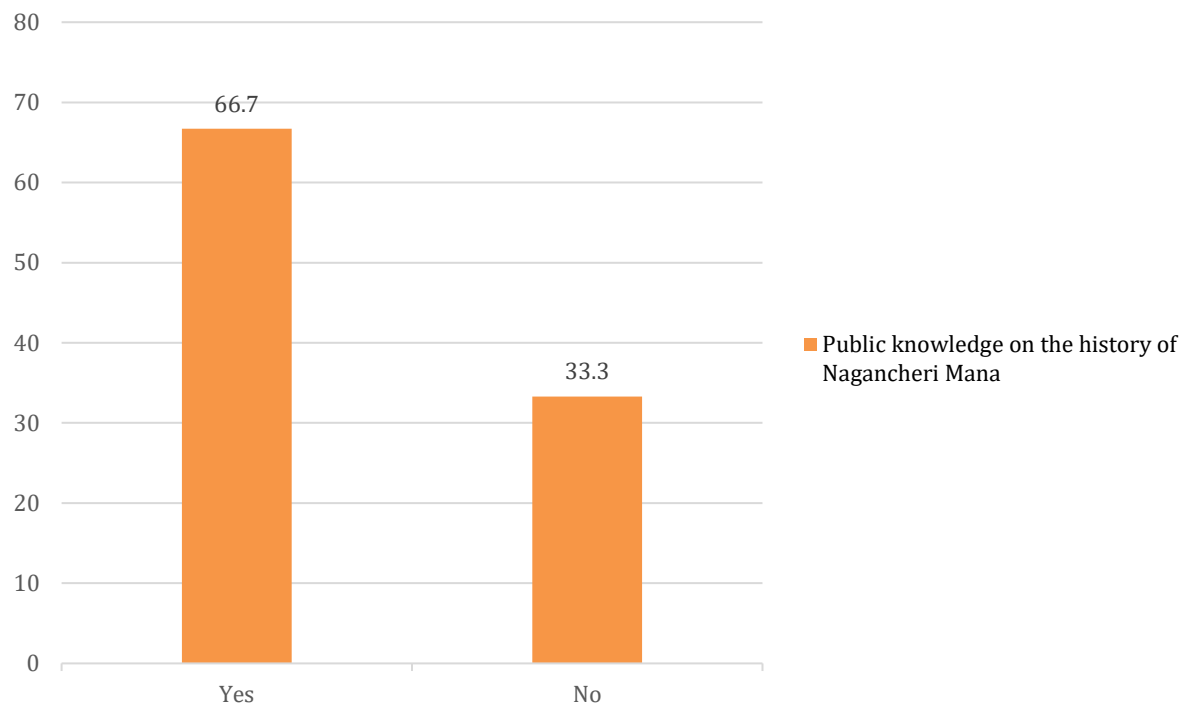


Table 4: Sources of knowledge on the history of Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavvu

Response	Nagancheri mana (%)	Iringole Kavvu (%)
Books	20	7.5
Media	20	14.5
Through family, relatives, and friends	35	47
Natives of the place	24	31
Other	1	0
Total	100	100

The above-depicted table shows that among those who have knowledge about mana, 20% have acquired that knowledge through books and another 20% through media sources. Whereas 35% and 24% among them have got to know the history through family, relatives, friends and being native of the place respectively. Only 1% have known through other means.

Figure 3: Sources of knowledge on the history of Nagancheri Mana

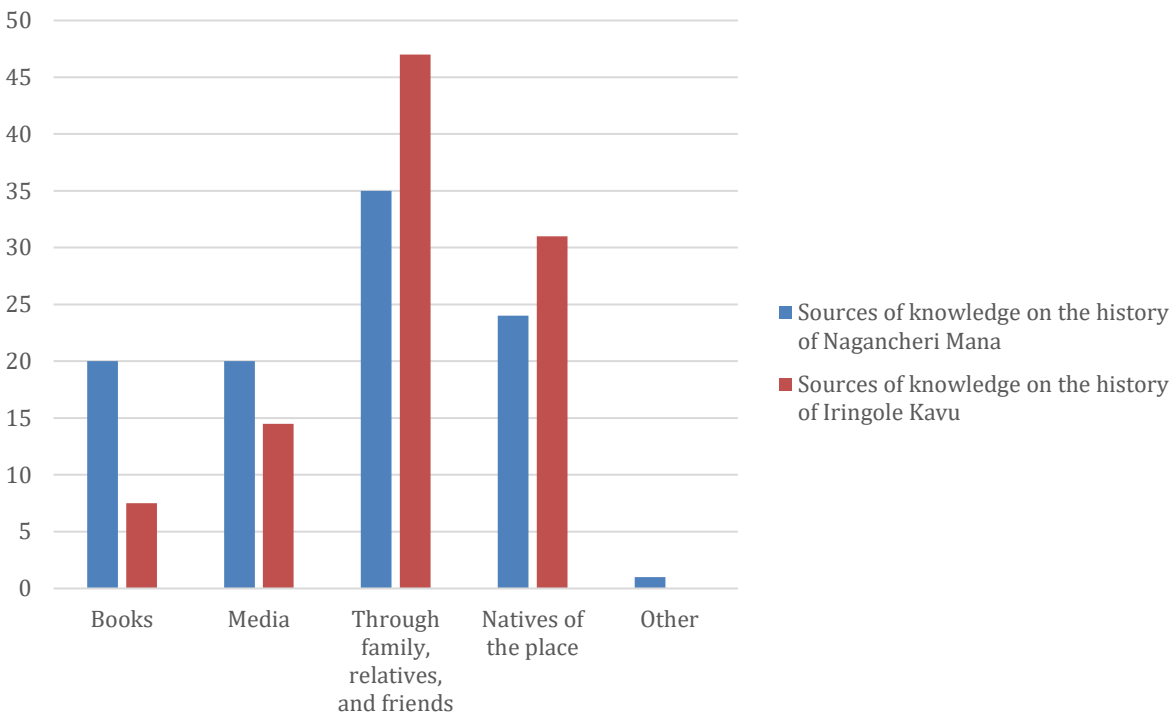


Table 5: Public visit to Iringole Kavu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	93.3
No	1	6.7
Total	20	100

The above-presented table is about the number of respondents who had visited the Iringole Kavu. It shows that a majority of 93.3% have visited the kavu and only 6.7% have not visited the place.

Figure 4: Public visit to Iringole Kavu

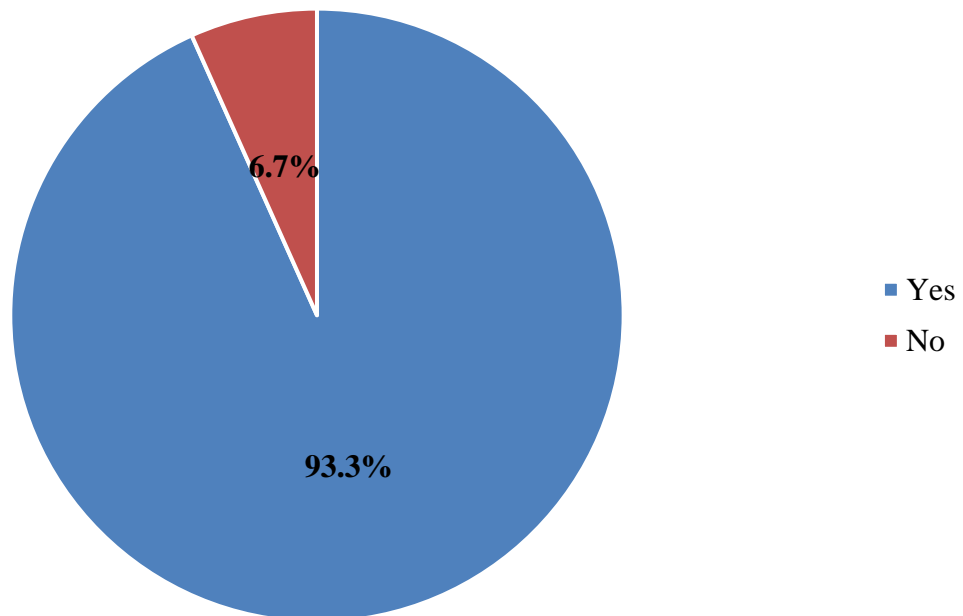


Table 6: Purpose of visit to Iringole Kavau

Response	Percentage
Religious purposes	49
Entertainment/leisure	36
Research	6
Other	9
Total	100

From the above table, it is understood that the purpose of visit behind 49% of respondents was religious reason whereas 36% visited the Kavau for entertainment or leisure purposes. Only a small proportion of 6% and 9% visit for research and other activities respectively.

Figure 5: Purpose of visit to Iringole Kavau

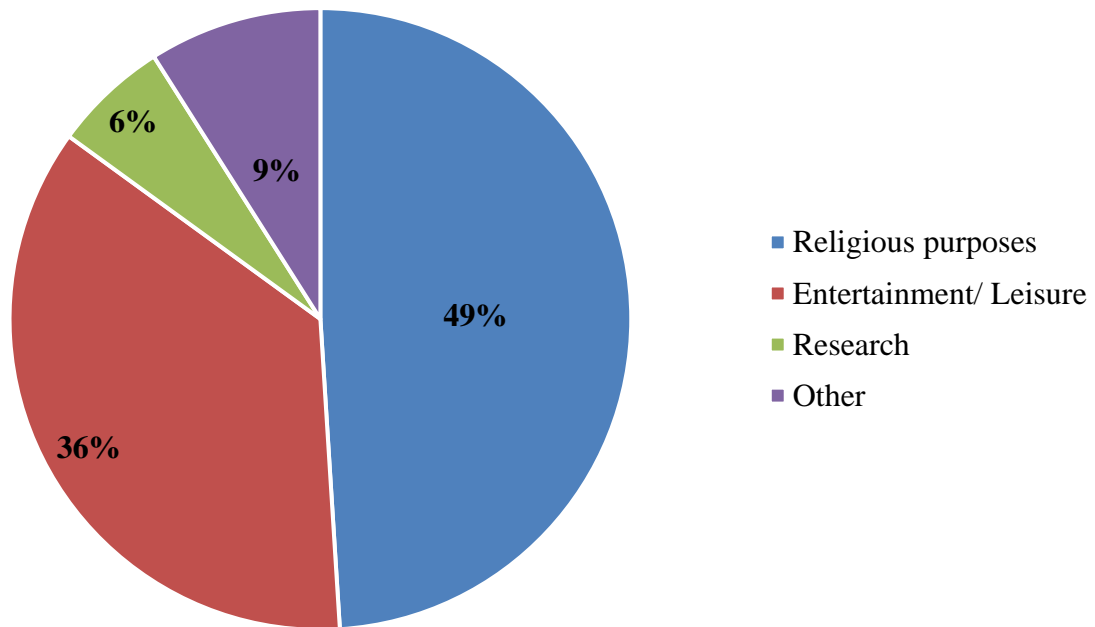


Table 7: Public knowledge on the connection between Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavvu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	14	73.3
No	6	26.7
Total	20	100

Table 7 is about the respondents who knew about the connection between Nagancheri mana and iringol kavvu. It shows that around 73.3% know about the connection while the rest 26.7% have no idea about this connection.

Figure 6: Public knowledge on the connection between Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavvu

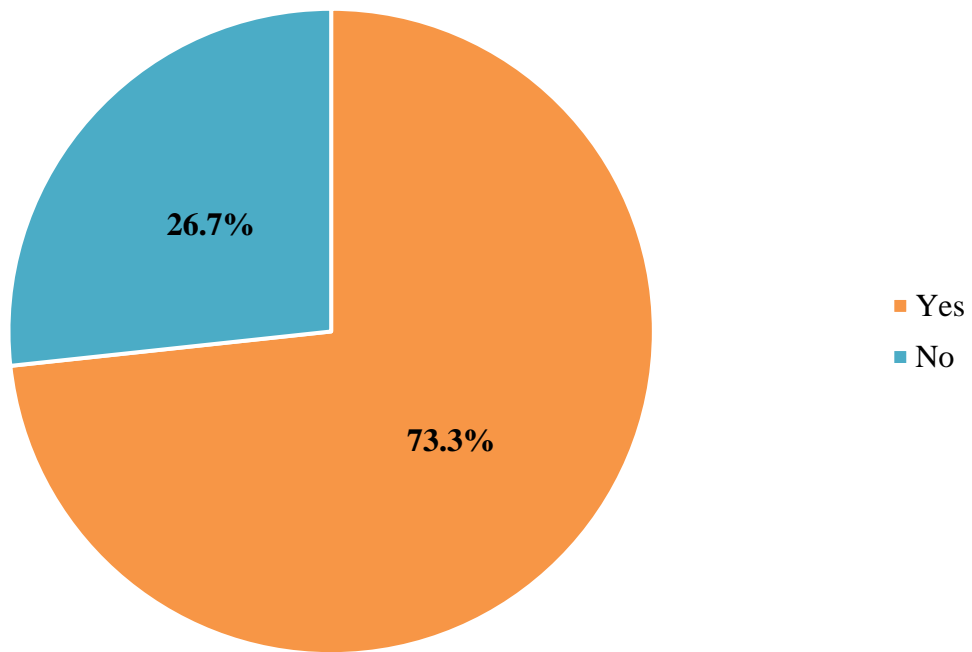


Table 8: Opinion on the untold history of Nagancheri mana and Iringole Kavu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Needs to be told	17	86.7
Need not be told	3	13.3
Total	20	100

It is clear from Table 8 above that 86.7% of respondents agree that the history of Nagancheri mana and Iringole Kavu has to be told and 13.3% say that it need not be told.

Figure 7: Opinion on the untold history of Nagancheri mana and Iringole Kavu

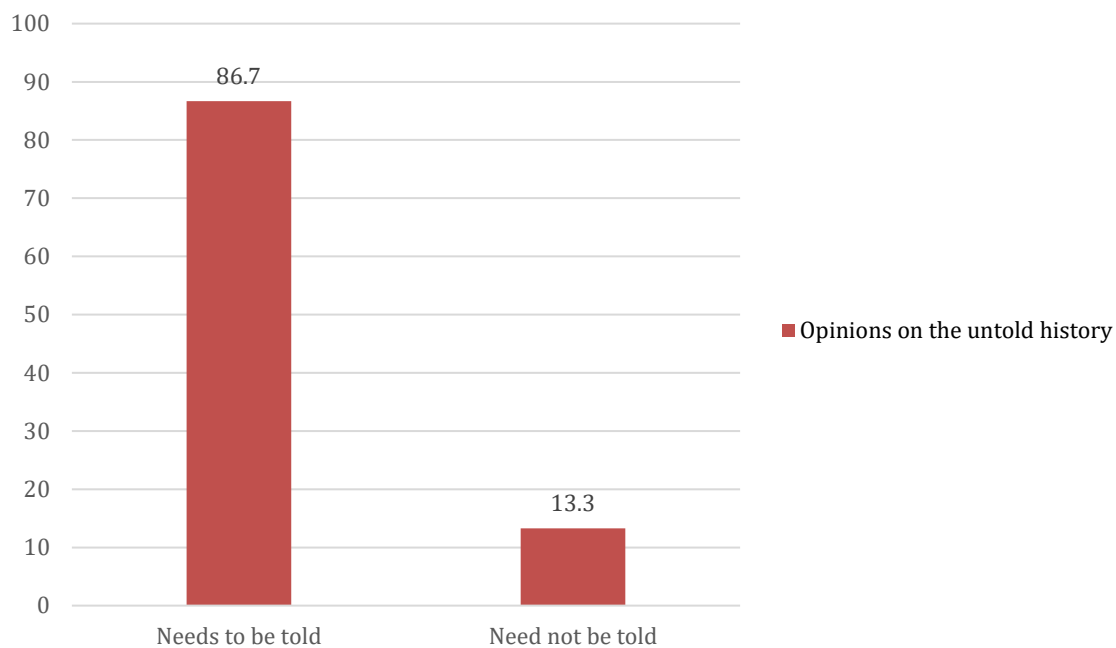




Table 9: Opinion on Nagancheri Mana being a victim of the Kerala Land Reforms Act

Response	Frequency	Percentage
True	10	53.3
False	4	6.7
Not sure	6	40
Total	20	100

In the above table, 53.3% of people acknowledge that Nagancheri mana was a victim of the Kerala land reform act while 6.7% of the people refuse the particular statement. While 40% are unsure of Nagancheri mana being a victim of the Kerala land reform act.

Figure 8: Opinion on Nagancheri Mana being a victim of the Kerala Land Reforms Act of 1963

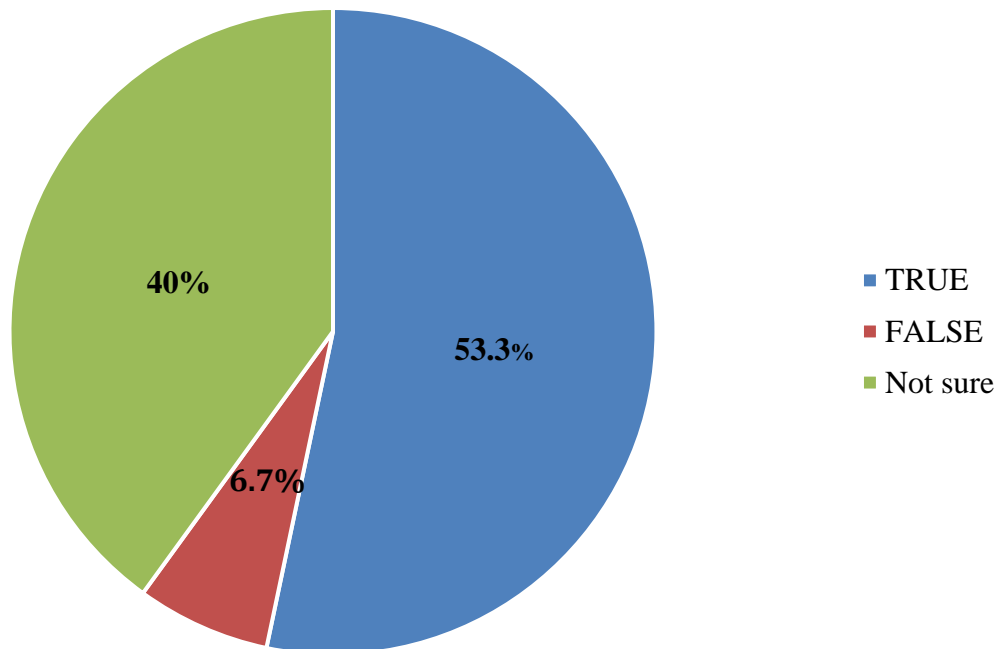
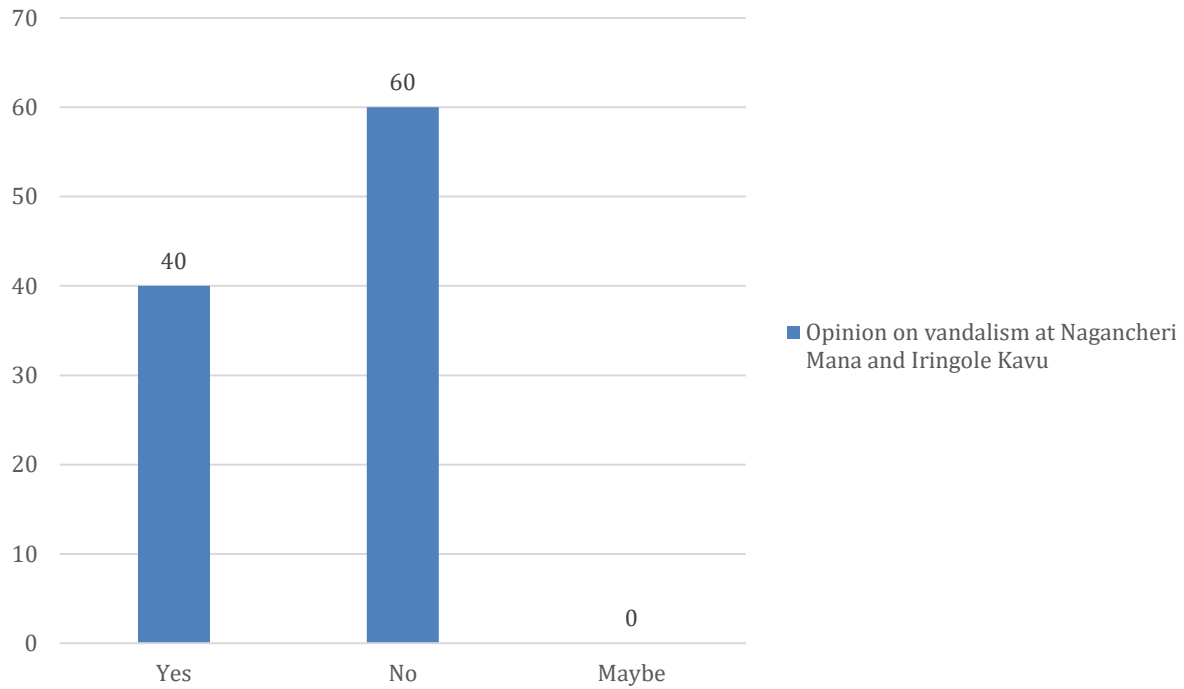


Table 10: Opinion on vandalism at Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	40
No	11	60
Maybe	0	0
Total	20	100

Table 10 represents the public opinion on whether Nagancheri mana and Iringole Kavu are being vandalized or not. 60% of people agree that it is being vandalized whereas 40% say the opposite of it.

Figure 9: Opinion on vandalism at Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavu



# CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

One of the objectives of this project was to study the historical background of Nagancheri Mana through the present generation. Thus, through the second chapter, the history of Nagancheri mana and their origin can be traced from Koratty in Thrissur to Iringole in Perumbavoor. The narrow strip between the Western ghats and Arabian sea, the land of Kerala comprised of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. Through the works of V. Nagan Aiya and K P Padmanabha Menon, it's evident that Travancore comprised of thirty-three taluks in which one among them was Kunnathunad.<sup>70</sup> The headquarters of Kunnathunad is Perumbavoor which is also the area of study throughout this project.<sup>71</sup> At the heart of Perumbavoor, lies the Iringole forest (Vanam). The area surrounding the Iringole forest was once called the Iringole Desam. The study narrows down to Nagancheri Mana which was one of the thirty-two illams in Iringole Desam.

Even though Nagancheri mana held a prominent name in Perumbavoor, they were not the natives of the place. The history of Nagancheri mana begins from the journey of the Aaladi family which had to leave their hometown Koratty in Thrissur to Iringole Desam due to the absence of a male heir and they settled in Kuttikkappilly illam. They came to Perumbavoor with empty hands, but within the 700 years of history, they acquired land ownership from various regions from Aluva to Thiruvananthapuram. The growth of Nagancheri Mana doesn't end here as it grows to become desadikaris of 18 desams, to becoming the temple trustees of different temples. Due to various reasons, Nagancheri mana was classified into three divisions namely Thekke (south) Nagancheri, Naduvil (middle) Nagancheri, and Vadakke (north) Nagancheri. Naduvil Nagancheri mana is the present-day Nagancheri mana which is open to the public as a park. It is 300 years old. Traditionally being associated with the occupation of serpent offerings and worshipping, Nagancheri mana was formerly known as Nagashreni.

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<sup>70</sup> "Travancore."

<sup>71</sup> "Kunnathunad," in *Wikipedia*, January 10, 2021,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kunnathunad&oldid=999565237>.

Nagancheri mana inherited lots of lands also due to their compassion. For example, Vaithazha Kadu Poti was pals with Perumbavoor Nagancheri Iringol Mana and Chalakudi Kurumanthol Mana's contemporaries. They used to stop by Vaithazha Kadu Poti on their way to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple for the murajapam function. On one of these murajapam events, Vaithazha Kadu Poti reached immortal. Because he had no descendants, his death rites were performed by the of Nagancheri Mana. The system in place at the time allowed the person performing the funeral ceremonies ownership of the deceased's property if there were no descendants to carry out the rites. Thus, Nagancheri mana acquired the temple of Sree Maha Ganapathy at Vazhuthacaud, Thiruvananthapuram which constituted a major share of their landholdings.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, Nagancheri mana owns a considerable number of properties in various desams, but, it's unknown that how these properties came under their possession.

The second chapter sourced mainly from personal interviews and books, also shows the family of Nagancheri Mana starting from Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri and his successors. From this, it is understandable how the land properties have been transferred from one generation to another. For example, Chettikomban Neelakandan Namboothiri and Vasudevan Namboothiri, sons of Valiya Valiya Neelakandan Namboothiri inherited Naduvil (middle) Nagancheri mana and Thekke (south) Nagancheri mana respectively. Later, due to the absence of male heirs among the successors of Chettikomban Neelakandan Namboothiri, their land was given to the grandson Vasudevan Namboothiri. Hence, it made him the owner of all the assets inherited by Nagancheri Mana until it was seized by the EMS government following the enactment of the Land Reforms Act. Therefore, the second chapter gives a brief understanding of the origin, history, and family genealogy collected from the present generation of the mana. According to the survey conducted, it is quite clear that the public awareness of the past of Nagancheri mana is limited. The majority of the respondents of the survey feel that the bygone tales of Nagancheri mana is a history that needs to be told.

The third objective of the project aims at exploring the relation between Nagancheri mana and Iringole Kavu, which is located at the heart of the Iringole forest. Iringole Kavu is a valuable

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<sup>72</sup> "Sree Maha Ganapathy Temple, Vazhuthacaud."

possession of Nagancheri mana. Iringole Kavu, 2.5 kilometers from Perumbavoor, is a Hindu Forest Temple dedicated to the Goddess Durga. It is said that the temple is 2,746 years old. However, the rites and devotees' arrival at the temple has been going on for over 1200 years. In 1965, Iringole Kavu's power was handed to the Travancore Dewaswom Board.<sup>73</sup> The authority had previously been vested in the Kunju Namboothiri. The Iringole Kavu's ooranma (temple trusteeship) had 32 illams at the beginning. The authority was eventually reduced to three manas: Pattassery, Nagancheri, and Orozhiyam. Pattassery mana was the most powerful of these ooranmas, followed by Nagancheri mana and finally Orozhiyam. It was under the ownership of Nagancheri mana when the temple's authority was transferred to Travancore Dewaswom Board. The destitution of Nagancheri mana is one of the main causes for the power transfer of Iringole Kavu to the Travancore Dewaswom Board. From the survey, it is evident that Iringole kavu is more famous than Nagancheri mana. Mostly, the Nagancheri mana is familiar to the public, through its association with Iringole Kavu.

Chapter three of the project focuses on the several reasons which led to the decline of Nagancheri Mana and its selling to the Perumbavoor municipality in 1980. One of the main reasons for the decline and the loss of land ownership was the Land Reforms Act. The Kerala Land Reforms Act was enacted in order to create comprehensive land reform legislation in Kerala. Landlordism was abolished by the Land Reforms Act of 1963. The Land Reforms Act was always a stumbling block for Namboothiri illams. This phenomenon did not start with the land reforms act of 1957 but was already present in Kerala society dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the pretext of providing help for the tenants, the native rulers and the colonisers used Land Reforms as a tool to undermine the Brahmin landlordism. The administrative reforms of Marthanda Varma to the Travancore Prevention of Eviction Act (1949) provide evidence to the above-mentioned statement.<sup>74</sup>

When it comes to Nagancheri mana, the Land Reforms Act had completely drained its wealth. The tragedy of Nagancheri mana began when they had to give up hectares of land owned by them following the Land Reforms Act which was passed during the time of the EMS government. As a consequence, they started losing their other properties one after the other such as Iringole Kavu was

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<sup>73</sup> Jijobal, *Iringole Kavu Vishwasavum Charithravum*.

<sup>74</sup> "Land Reform in Kerala," in *Wikipedia*, July 5, 2021,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Land\\_reform\\_in\\_Kerala&oldid=1032159089](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Land_reform_in_Kerala&oldid=1032159089).

taken over by Travancore Deraswom Board. They had to move from Nagancheri mana to a mere 3 cents land and the mana was given to the Perumbavoor municipality in 1980 for Rs. 1 Lakh.<sup>75</sup> Vasudevan Namboothiri, the last karanavar approached courts against the Land Reforms Act, but it was of no avail. He even detested E K Nayanar when he offered three cents of land and he asked to install a statue of EMS there. Thus, the last deshadikari, Vasudevan Namboothiri who once lived a luxurious life had to live in a three cents plot till his last breath.

On the basis of the personal interviews conducted, it came to the notice that the Land Reforms Act was not only the reason for the decline of Nagancheri Mana but also, the ignorance of the family members towards their traditional jobs and other works, which led them to a pathetic condition. They led a splendid life by selling their properties which they considered as taken for granted. The unforeseen issues like property division among siblings, the marriage of daughters, and health issues added to the causes for its fall. Therefore, when the Land Reforms Act was passed, the Nagancheri family was left with no other option but to give up their properties to the government and accept their fate.

Chapter four deals with the survey conducted in which it gives details about the general knowledge on Nagancheri mana and Iringole Kavu by 20 respondents. The survey consisted of 21 questions in which 11 questions were marked required. The questions consisted of descriptive, objective, and Yes/No types. The majority of the respondents were centered on Perumbavoor and Iringole. People staying out of Perumbavoor and has knowledge on the history of Nagancheri mana and Iringole kavu and those who have visited the places have attempted the survey. Among the 20 respondents, 12 of them were students of the age group 16-23 and the rest of the 8 respondents were in between the 48-55 age group.

14 respondents (73.3%) have visited Nagancheri mana, 2 (6.7%) have not visited, and 4 (20%) respondents wish to visit the place in the future. Most of the respondents have visited the place during 2015, 2019, 2020, and 2021. Only a few respondents have visited the mana before 2015.

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<sup>75</sup> “Tale of ‘Iringole Mana’ or When History Took No Prisoners | Kochi News - Times of India.”

The survey inquired whether the public knows the history of Nagancheri mana to which 15 (66.7%) respondents have knowledge about the mana and for the rest 5 (33.3%) respondents the history is unknown. The prior knowledge which the respondents have includes that the mana is an ancestral home to the Nagancheri namboothiris which was forced to sell to Perumbavoor municipality but now it is in ruins and open to the public on a nominal fee. The respondents have an awareness on the history mainly through their family, relatives, and friends (35%). 24% know the history being the native of the place whereas 20% each knows the history through books and social media. Only 1% knows through other means.

Some of the factors that attracted the repliers to the park are it is being a serene place in the midst of the concrete forest, its heritage, its old architecture, and a pond in its compound, etc.

On being asked whether they visited Iringole kavu, a majority of 19 answerers (93.3%) have visited the place and 1 (6.7%) respondent have not visited the place. 49% visited the kavu for religious purposes, 36% for entertainment or leisure, 6% for research works and 9% other activities respectively. When asked about the public knowledge on how Iringole kavu is associated with Nagancheri mana, 14 (73.3%) respondents know the connection, and 6 (26.7%) of them do not know the connection. Most of them have knowledge that the temple property belonged to the mana through family, relatives, and friends (47%), natives of the place (31%), books (7.5%), and social media (14.5%). It is found that 9 (60%) respondents believe that the property of Nagancheri mana and premises of Iringole kavu is subjected to vandalism by visitors whereas 6 respondents believe the opposite.

It can be inferred that more people have visited Iringole kavu comparatively than Nagancheri mana. Most of them are aware of both the places through family, friends, and relatives. Respondents know about the Nagancheri mana through its connection with Iringole kavu.

17 (86.7%) answerers suggest that the past of Nagancheri mana and Iringole kavu is an untold history that needs to be told while 3 (13.3%) answerers feel that it need not be told.

The next focus of the survey was to collect the public opinion on the impact of the Land Reforms act on Nagancheri mana. 10 respondents believe that the Land Reform Act was the major

reason for its decline because of the many reports published in newspapers about the mana, on the other hand, 4 respondents don't agree with it. 6 respondents are not sure whether or not the Land Reforms Act was the reason for the fall of the mana.

To conclude from chapter 4, it can be seen that after the confiscation of Nagancheri mana by Perumbavoor municipality and Iringole kavu by the Travancore Dewaswom board, both places have been attractive spots in Perumbavoor open to all. The present generation in Perumbavoor comes to know about this hidden past either by visiting the places or through acquaintances. Thus, it is evident from the survey that only a limited part of its history is known to the public.

Therefore, this project tries to unfold the history of Nagancheri mana which was relegated to backstage when it declined. On the basic level, this project is a study on a Namboothiri mana that lost its prominence due to land reforms. The Land Reforms Act was not the only villain in their lives, but also, their lack of understanding to the changing societal scenarios and ignorance to the western way of life contributed to their collapse. They lacked both the necessary education to obtain a suitable career and the capacity to cultivate the soil on their own farm. On a larger scale, this project represents the relation between Brahmins and lands, how this land gave them power and status, and at last, the land itself dug the grave for Brahmins. The land that used to make them smile pushed them to penury.



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## APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

\*Required

- 1) Name \*
- 2) Age \*
- 3) Place of residence \*
- 4) Are you a student? \*
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 5) Have you visited Nagancheri Mana at Perumbavoor? \*
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) Not yet. But I will.
- 6) If your answer is 'Yes', mention the year of visit.
- 7) Do you know the history of Nagancheri Mana? \*
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 8) If 'Yes', what do you know about it?
- 9) How do you know the history of Nagancheri Mana? \*
  - a) Books
  - b) Media (social media, newspaper, etc)
  - c) Through family, relatives, friends
  - d) Natives of the place

e) Other

10) What attracted you to Naganacheri Mana?

11) Is it a good thing that Nagancheri Mana is a park now? \*

a) Yes

b) No

12) Have you visited Iringole Kavvu? \*

a) Yes

b) No

13) If 'Yes', why did you visit the Kavvu?

a) Religious purpose

b) Entertainment/Leisure

c) Research

d) Other

14) Do you know that Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavvu have a connection? \*

a) Yes

b) No

15) If 'Yes', what do you know about it?

16) How do you know about it?

a) Books

b) Media (social media, newspaper, etc)

c) Through family, relatives, friends

d) Natives of the place

e) Other

17) Do you think that the history of Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavu is unrecognized but is one that needs to be told? \*

18) Do you know something about the myths behind Iringole Kavu? \*

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Little bit

19) If 'Yes', according to you, which myth is more believable or more satisfying?

20) Do you think Nagancheri Mana was a victim of the Land Reforms Act of 1963? \*

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I do not know.

21) Do you think Nagancheri Mana or Iringole Kavu is undergoing any kind of vandalism by the visitors? \*

- a) Yes
- b) No

## **APPENDIX 2: TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

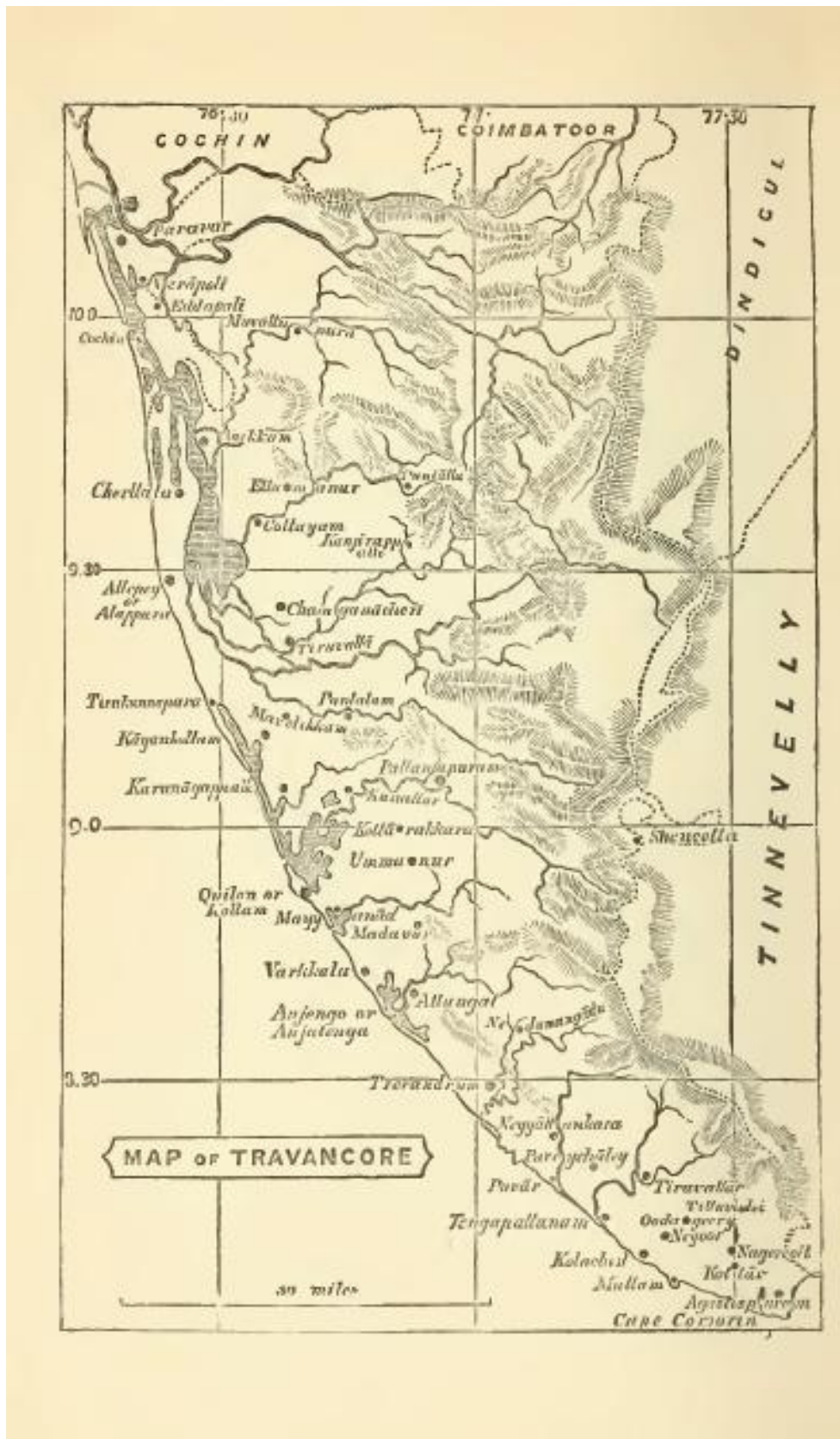
1. What is the historical background of Nagancheri mana?
2. When was Nagancheri mana established or how old, is it? (Year of the establishment)
3. Is there any founder for mana? Who?
4. Is there any specific reason for establishing mana at Perumbavoor/ how come Nagancheri mana came to situate in Perumbavoor/ was it originally founded at Perumbavoor if not where was it located earlier?
5. How much worth of the property was owned by mana? How was the mana able to acquire that much property? Was it hereditarily acquired or any donation from kings (Brahma dana)?
6. How many families lived in the mana? (Throughout the years)
7. How many members were at the time of the confiscation of land by the government according to the Land Reforms Act?
8. Is there any branch for Nagancheri mana anywhere else?
9. Does mana have any connection with any ruler or royal family?
10. How many temples were under mana? (Including 11 temples in Kerala and Tamil Nadu)  
Name some temples.
11. “Once the head of 18 ‘desams’ spread from Aluva to Thiruvananthapuram” - which were those 18 desams? How did mana control such vast land by staying at Perumbavoor? Is there any land mechanism followed by them to keep hold of land?

12. Were there any special rituals or practices by mana? (Local tradition customs).
13. How was the karanavar or desadikari selected? (Criteria of succession).
14. Who was the head before Vasudevan Namboothiri? When did Vasudeva Namboothiri become desadikari?
15. Did mana undergo any kind of renovation?
16. Is there any famous incident, personality, ritual, myth, legend, story, or custom associated with them which is unknown to the public?
17. Is karanavar of mana benevolent towards its people?
18. What were the reasons for the decline of mana?
19. Why did most of the family members have the name Neelakandan or Vasudevan Namboothiri?
20. How was the condition of women in Nagancheri mana?

**APPENDIX 3: MAPS**

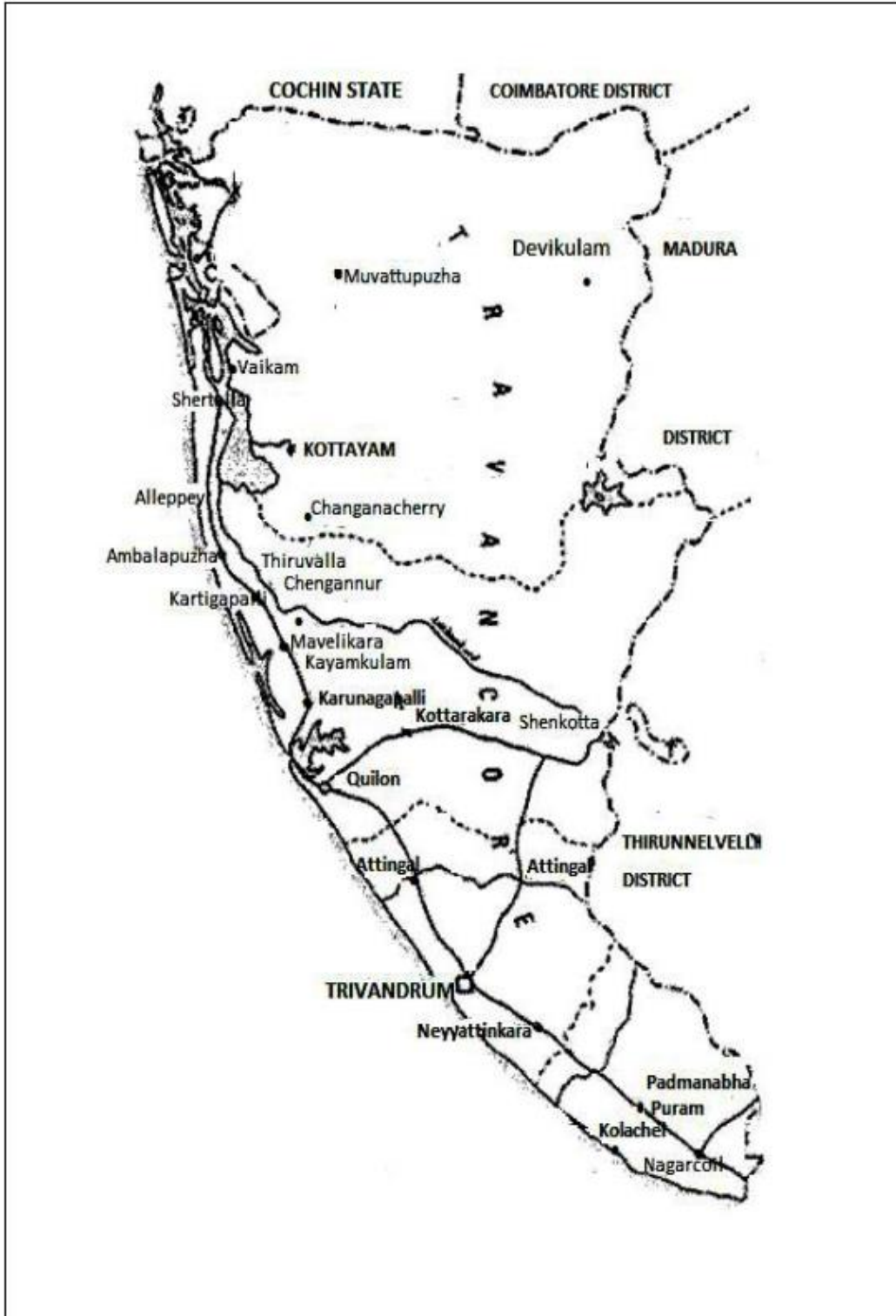


Kingdom of Travancore in India, Wikipedia, 2006

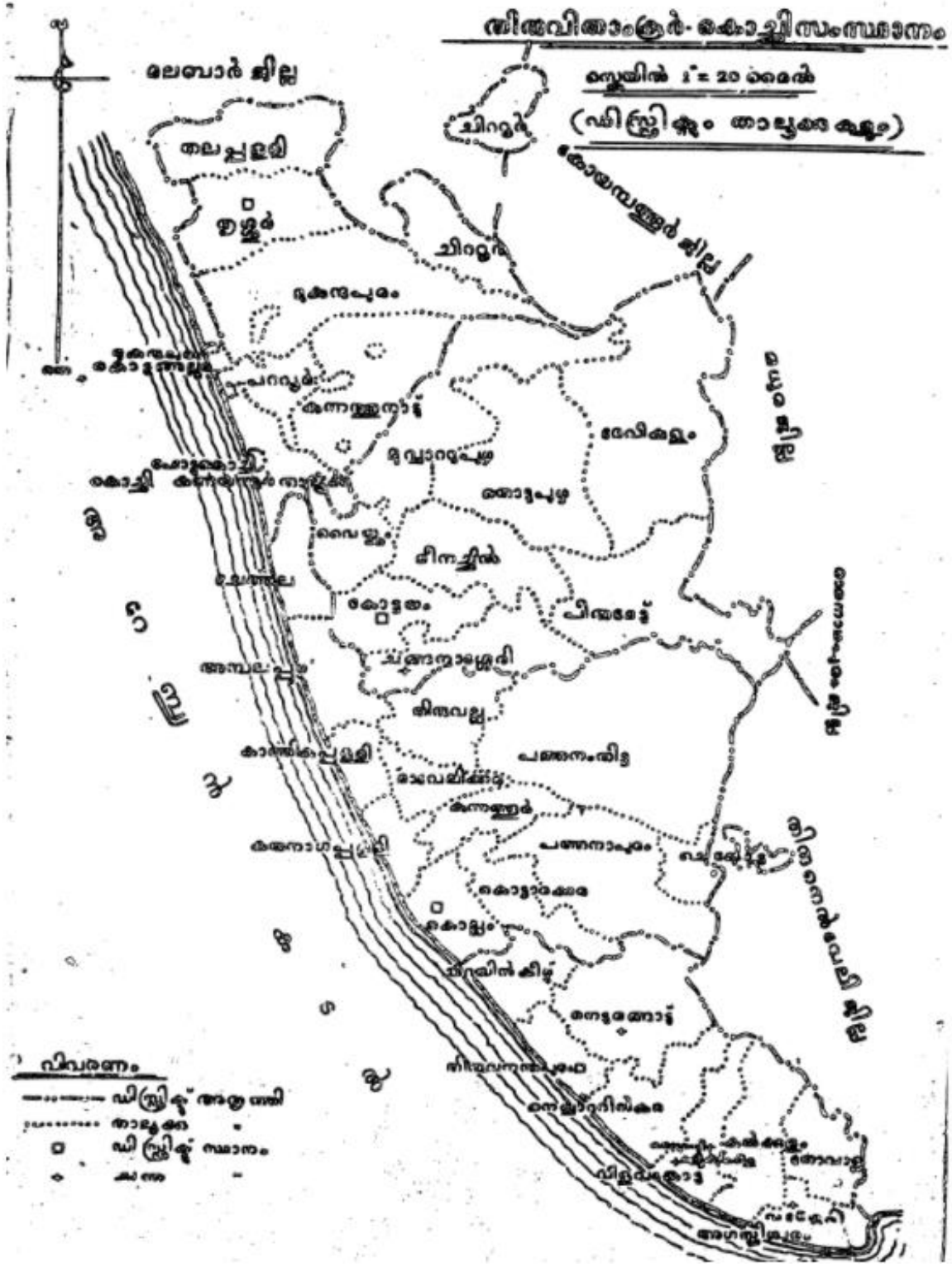


Travancore in 1871





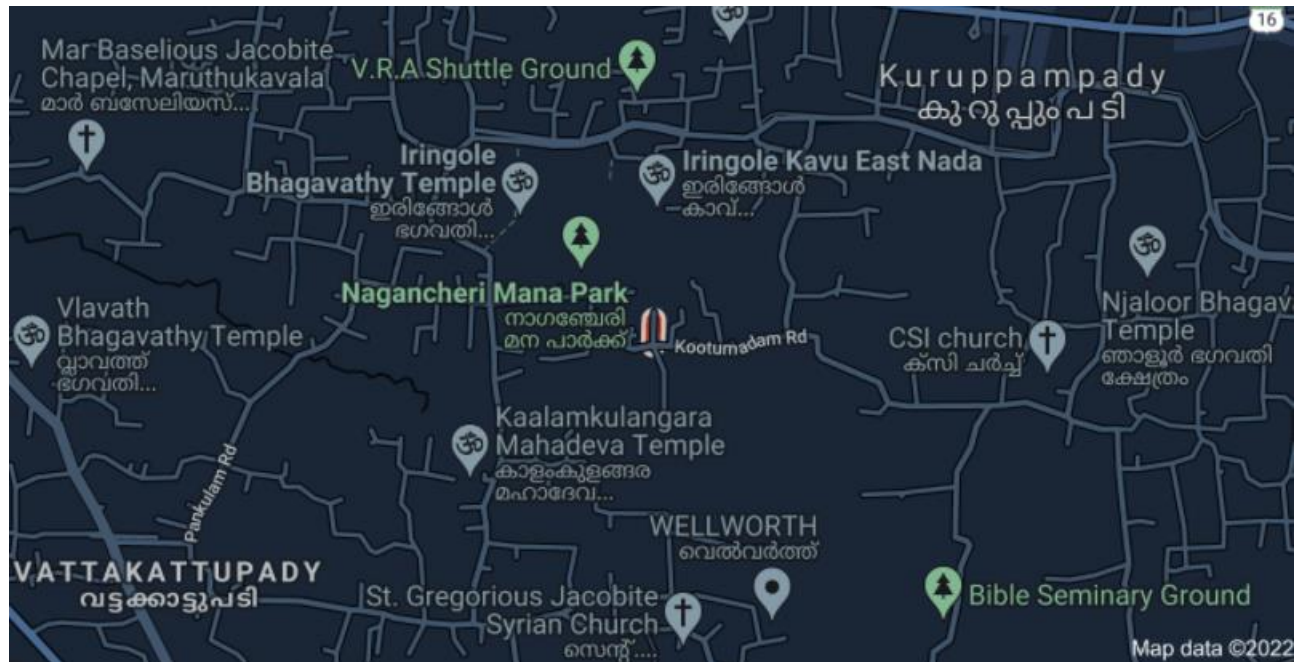
Travancore in 1900



Taluks of Travancore



Kunnathunad



Location of Nagancheri Mana and Iringole Kavu

## APPENDIX 4: PICTURES



Nagancheri Mana





Nagancheri Mana Park



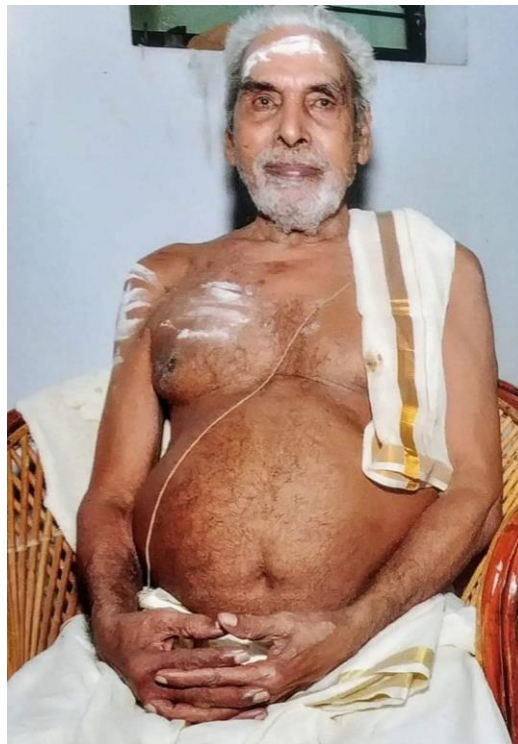
Iringole Kavu



Iringole vanam (forest)



Late Vasudevan Namboothiri



Neelakandan Namboothiri (Grandson of Kunju Namboothiri)



Geetha Vasudevan



Three cents plot





Sree Maha Ganapathy Temple, Vazhuthacaud



Aimuri Shiva Temple, Perumbavoor