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RESEARCH ARTICLE

To Whom Does Temple Wealth Belong? A Historical Essay on Landed Property in Travancore

K. N. Ganesh*

Abstract: The enormous wealth stored in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple of Thiruvananthapuram, the component items of which were classified and enumerated under the direction of the Supreme Court of India in June 2011, sparked off a major debate on the nature of temple wealth, and on the rights of the temple, the royal family that controlled the temple, and the people as a whole. The issues that have figured in the current controversy can be addressed only by means of study of the history of the growth of temples and their wealth. The Padmanabha temple, where the present hoard has been discovered, is a case in point. In the medieval context, the transformation of landed social wealth into temple wealth impelled the emergence of the temple as a source of social power, one that even kings were forced to recognise. Ultimately, whether described as divine wealth or social wealth, this wealth belongs to the people as the proceeds of their labour. The millions hoarded in the Padmanabha temple are the historical legacy of the millions who have tilled the soil and laboured on the earth for at least a millennium, and shall go back to them and their inheritors.

Keywords: Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple, history of Travancore, agrarian history of Kerala, Venad kingdom, temple hoard.

The enormous wealth stored in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple of Thiruvananthapuram,¹ the component items of which were classified and enumerated under the direction of the Supreme Court of India in June 2011, sparked off a major debate on the nature of temple wealth and on the rights of the temple, the royal family that controls the temple, and the people as a whole.

The present controversy began in 2009, when T. P. Sundararajan, a lawyer, former police officer, and resident of Mathilakam – where the Padmanabha temple of Thiruvananthapuram is located – filed a petition in the Kerala High Court. Two years later, the Supreme Court of India issued directives to the effect that the cellars

* Department of History, University of Calicut, knganesh2008@gmail.com.

¹ The full appellation of the temple is Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple; we refer to it hereafter as the Padmanabha temple.

of the temple be opened, and the wealth stored there be subjected to evaluation and enumeration. A heated debate ensued in the print and audio-visual media. Representatives of the Hindu Munnani, an organisation of the Hindu Right, demanded that the wealth be brought under the custody of “believers.” Members of the erstwhile royal family of Travancore said that the wealth should be considered the property of the temple, now controlled by the family. Secular political organisations and individuals in Kerala held that, since the temple is a public institution with an autonomous process of administration, the wealth found in it should not be treated as the private property of the royal family but be considered as national wealth, to which the people as a whole hold the right. They argued that the wealth be taken over by the state.

Since the wealth revealed in the cellars of the Padmanabha temple is estimated to be worth billions of rupees, the stakes in such a hoard are, inevitably, very high, and the debate over its ownership is likely to be intense.² Further, if one temple in Kerala can yield such a large hoard, questions can also be raised regarding the existence of similar hoards in other temples.

The large hoards of gold, silver, precious stones, and ornaments found in temples are commonly believed to be the contributions of “devotees” over the years. The Travancore royal family has produced evidence to show that a number of the valuables in the hoard of the Padmanabha temple are gifts made by members of the royal family in previous centuries. It is a fact that devotees, and members of royal and ennobled families, did donate to temples. But the Padmanabha temple must have received consistent and substantial contributions in order to acquire such a large hoard.

Another question that arises is: what was the purpose of maintaining such a hoard in the Padmanabha temple? Why was the hoard kept in cellars that temple functionaries refused to open? Till today, one of the cellars remains unopened. Although a hoard that cannot be utilised ceases to be wealth in the modern sense, the temple authorities did apparently have some reason for maintaining it.

Such issues can be addressed only if we examine the history of the growth of temples and their wealth. The Padmanabha temple, where the present hoard has been discovered, is a case in point.

² One description of the hoard says that “when five of the vaults were opened, they reportedly revealed incredible riches, among them, hundreds of kilos of gold coins, trinkets, diamonds, statues studded with jewels, emeralds and rubies, an 18-foot gold ornament, golden ‘coconut shells’ and idols made of solid gold” (see Krishnakumar 2011). The process of enumeration of the wealth has not yet been completed, as the temple authorities have objected to opening one of the cellars, Cellar B.

THE PADMANABHA TEMPLE

The Padmanabha temple in Thiruvananthapuram is one of the largest Vaishnava temples in the State of Kerala, and one among 108 Vaishnava sacred sites (*divya desam*) in South India. In the early medieval period, Thiruvananthapuram existed as a Brahmana settlement with its own assembly (*sabhai*), and a number of temples appear to have been established in the settlement.³ Although the exact date of establishment of the Padmanabha temple is uncertain, references to it appear in inscriptions of the early thirteenth century. By the thirteenth century, the Thiruvananthapuram assembly (*sabhai*), which may have been associated with the temple, had disappeared, and the temple was managed by an eight-member Brahmanical council (*yogam*) and by a Venad prince belonging to the Trippappur lineage.⁴ (The kingdom of Venad, at its peak, covered the modern districts of Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, and Kanniyakumari in Tamil Nadu; its traditional extent was from Kunretti near Kollam to Thovalai in Kanniyakumari.)

The later history of the Padmanabha temple, as well as of the Venad region, can be reconstructed from a vast corpus of records called the Mathilakam Records, now kept in the Kerala State Archives. Documents from the early fourteenth century onwards have been preserved in this corpus. Most of these deal with the land and monetary transactions of the temple and the disbursement of temple expenses, but they also contain valuable information regarding temple administration and the links of the temple with the Venad royal family. Very few of the records deal directly with political history, but it is possible from them to develop a clear understanding of the political conditions of the period. These documents help unravel the mystery of the wealth that is stored in the temple.

THE TEMPLE IN MEDIEVAL KERALA SOCIETY

Much work has been done on the nature and functions of temples in medieval Kerala society.⁵ Early temples in Kerala have been traced to the later Chera period, when large temples, such as the Padmanabha temple in Thiruvananthapuram, the Srivallabha temple in Tiruvalla, the Vadakkunnathan temple in Thrissur, the Tiruvanchikkulam temple in Kodungallur, and the Trikkandiyur temple in Thiroor, came into existence. Some, though not all, of these temples were associated with Brahmana settlements; their enshrined deities are Vishnu and Siva. There is also evidence of the existence of Buddhist and Jaina temples, as well as Bhagavati (mother

³ For a discussion of the early history of Thiruvananthapuram, see Pillai (1970).

⁴ The Mathilakam Records, preserved in the Kerala State Archives, contain references to meetings of the council (*yogam*) from a very early period, that is, from the fourteenth century (it came into existence in the thirteenth century).

⁵ For a good, general account of the role of the temple in medieval society, see Gurukkal (1992).

goddess) temples.⁶ Most of the inscriptions of the later Chera period (c. 800–1122 AD) refer to grants made to the temples, temple offerings, temple transactions, and legal regulations for the maintenance of the temples.⁷

Rulers and individuals made grants in both land and money. Such transactions generally took three forms. First, there were comprehensive land grants, accompanied by the ritual sprinkling of water on the land by which the temple gained exclusive rights over it (these land grants were called *neerattipper*). Secondly, there were land grants by which the temple received the surplus produce of the land, or other offerings obtained by means of selling or exchanging the produce of the land, but by which the grantor retained the tenancy right (*karanmai* or *attipper karanmai*) bestowed by the temple. Thirdly, there were grants made by merchants or other grantors who stipulated that the grants be used by the temple to procure land in order to meet temple expenses. The inscriptions refer to all three forms of grants and describe the organisation of temple expenditure; they also refer to provisions for sanctions and punishments in the event of violation of the stipulated provisions.

The inscriptions show that most of the land transferred to temples was paddy-growing wet land, but there are also references to transfers of land on which mixed cropping took place and to transfers of forest land (*kadu*, *karai* and *karaiapurayidom*). The formulaic expressions for *neerattipper* land (the first form of land grants mentioned above) reveal mixed-crop and forest zones within the lands thus transferred. This meant that apart from paddy fields and produce that could be sold in the market, forests too came under the control of the temples.

Money grants were calculated in standard coinage (called *tinaram*, *tiramam*, *achu* and *kasu*); in addition, there are references to transactions in gold weights (*kanam* and *kalanchu*). All forms of retribution for punishments were calculated in metal weights, and fines were calculated in gold.

There are indications that monetary transactions increased in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Usufructuary mortgages (*otti*) begin to appear in that period, and increased substantially after the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

There is evidence to show that temples began to engage in banking transactions. A twelfth-century inscription from Thiruvananthapuram regarding the donation of a silver drum (*tiruvanakkatudi*) states that payment to the drummer was to be met from the interest on money advanced by the temple to an individual land holder, thus utilising the interest on a loan to provide for a temple expense.⁸ Other

⁶ For references to Jaina and Buddhist centres in Kerala, see Aiyar (1962), Padmakumari Amma (2008), and Varier (2012).

⁷ See, for a discussion, Narayanan (1995). The meticulously compiled Index to the Chera inscriptions in this work provides a general idea of the contents of the inscriptions.

⁸ *Travancore Archaeological Series (TAS)* (1916–38), vol. II.

inscriptions show that money grants, or interest from money grants, were vested with landholders for making regular prescribed provisions for the temple. Merchants or grantors of money also made provisions for the supply of precious items like camphor, incense, sandal, and silk to the temple with their grants.⁹

The evidence shows that, by the eleventh century, land and money grants, increases in the types and forms of offerings, and the conduct of festivals and ceremonies, had made the temple a complex organisation. Earlier, the temples were managed by a simple Brahmanical body (*sabhai*, also called *parataiyar* and *padamulattavar*). The Thiruvananthapuram *sabhai* had, in addition, an executive functionary (called *samanjitan* or *poduval*).¹⁰ With the increase in temple functions, the number and designation of such executives increased, and we have references to *akappoduval*, *purappoduval* and *urppoduval*. The increase in money transactions impelled the growth of an accounting system (*kanakku*) and maintenance of the temple treasury (*sreebhandaram*).

Temples thus became large economic organisations, holding large tracts of land and much monetary wealth.

ORGANISATION OF THE PADMANABHA TEMPLE

The corpus of archival records known as the Mathilakam Records provides information on the organisation of the Padmanabha temple from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century.¹¹ The eight members (*yogakkar*) of the managing body or council (*yogam*) of the temple were representatives from six families of the Vaishnava Potti Brahmana caste, the king, and a head accountant-cum-manager (titled *srikaranam palliyati*). Earlier records mention an additional manager (*adhikarapadartham*) but the term disappears in the later records, perhaps implying an increase in the responsibility and power of the accountant-cum-manager.¹² There were also three other accountants: two who maintained accounts of the regular income and expenditure of the temple (*karanakanakku*), and one who was in charge of the temple treasury (*sribhandarakanakku*, called *karuvelakanakku* in later records).

All major decisions regarding the temple were taken in the council (*yogam*), which the king or his representative and the accountants attended; on special occasions, the heads of associated temples were also invited to a larger council. The king was only a signatory to the decisions of the council and enjoyed no special rights; he

⁹ Examples can be found in the Tiruvalla Copper Plates, *TAS* (1916–38), vol. II, iii.

¹⁰ *TAS* (1916–38), vol. IV, pp. 67–68.

¹¹ The discussion in this section is primarily based on Ganesh (1987).

¹² The Brahmana family of Mampilli appears to have occupied the position of *adhikarapadartham*; see Mathilakam Records, *churuna* (scroll of palm-leaf manuscripts) 2601, *ola* (palm-leaf manuscript) 40. Their number increased to three and then four, including members of other Brahmana families such as Pullaman, Amanturutti, Marayakottam, and others. However, these Brahmanas were not members of the temple *yogam*.

exercised his political discretion only in matters of political importance such as war, or a conflict between the royal family and the temple. The real executive authority was vested in a two-member Brahmanical executive body (*variyaṃ*), drawn from members of the council and rotated every year.

The land holdings of the Padmanabha temple were distributed throughout southern Travancore, from Varkala in Thiruvananthapuram to Nanchilnattu in modern Kanniyakumari district (Thovalai and Agastheeswaram taluks). They were located in villages (*desam*). Some of these villages were entirely controlled by the temple, which appointed its own collectors of dues (*tandalkkaran*), and some villages had land from which the temple received a share of the produce. During the fourteenth century, certain villages in Pantinadu near Tenkasi in modern Tamil Nadu were also attached to the temple, and the temple received a regular income from these tracts.

The expansion in the spread of villages controlled by the temple was largely coextensive with the expansion of the political authority of the Venad rulers. In the thirteenth century, temple lands were limited to tracts in and around Thiruvananthapuram, where the temple was located, but by the fifteenth century, the temple had lands extending to Kollam, Kanniyakumari, and Tirunelveli districts. After the fifteenth century, temple lands and the mode of collection of dues from such lands were reorganised. The original villages (*desam*) were brought under accountants and collectors of dues from a specific locality, called *adhikaram*, and a system of management of temple land by accountants (*kanakkupillai*) was introduced.

During the early phase, that is, from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, villages that held temple land were divided into two groups: villages that provided for the daily expenses of the temple (*nityanadaichelavucherikkal*), and villages attached to the temple treasury (*sribhandarachelavucherikkal*). Interestingly, all the outlying villages – that is, in Varkala, Attingal, and in modern Kanniyakumari district – had to provide for the regular expenses of the temple, while the villages in the immediate vicinity of Thiruvananthapuram were attached to the treasury. The regular expenses of the temple included the costs of various offerings, rituals (*puja*), and ceremonies, as well as that of specific offerings made by members of the ruling family or others (such as provisions for the *aippasi* and *panguni* festivals, conducted by the royal family). The treasury (*sribhandaram*) expenses included provisions for feeding Brahmanas and for maintaining and repairing the temple and sanctum sanctorum.¹³

However, with the reorganisation of the temple lands into units of revenue collection (*adhikaram*), a further reorganisation of the expenses was undertaken. As a consequence of this reorganisation, all the regular expenses of the temple were to be met from the income from the localities, and the valuables acquired

¹³ Details of the various allotments can be found in Mathilakam Records: *churuna* 1721, *ola* 176; *churuna* 1686, *ola* 36; *churuna* 1722, *ola* 18; *churuna* 1667, *ola* 98.

by the temple over the centuries were to be kept in a separate storehouse (called *karuvelam* or *karuvelappura*) with an accountant (*karuvelakanakku*) in charge of it.¹⁴ All the tracts that were originally part of the land assigned to the temple treasury (*sribhandaracherikkal*) were now brought under a group of officials called “accountants of six groups” (*arukuttathil karuvukarattil pillaimar*), who were given the very important task of maintaining and augmenting the temple treasury.¹⁵

Mention must be made of the types of valuables that came to the temple treasury. These included routine offerings of ornaments, beads, chains, and gold or silver pieces made by merchants, mendicants, and members of the royal and noble families,¹⁶ including a Pandya prince, Parakramapandya.¹⁷ They also included golden or metallic effigies or idols that were used for ceremonial processions (which probably included a reproduction in gold, called *udampu*, of the original idol of the temple), and numerous gold and silver offerings given to the temple as fines or retribution for offences committed by princes or nobles.¹⁸ The assigned compensation for an instance of murder or fatal injury to a temple servant was the donation of a golden vessel, for non-fatal injuries a silver vessel, and for minor offences monetary donations.

The valuables that the temple accumulated were utilised in several ways. In some cases, the money equivalent of a certain quantity of valuables would be loaned to a land holder, and he was required to make provisions for meeting certain temple expenses from the produce of his land, these provisions being treated as the interest on the money loaned. Sometimes the temple advanced money to land holders, including princes, to acquire their land on different types of mortgage (*otti*) or lease-cum-mortgage. The temple thus utilised the wealth it had accumulated by advancing interest-bearing loans to acquire land or to meet temple expenses; in other words, it began to assume the character of a financial institution similar to a bank.

THE STATE, THE TREASURY AND THE TEMPLE

Interestingly, during the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, there are no references to any land grant made by a Venad ruler to the Padmanabha temple. There are two documents in the Mathilakam Records that come close to a land assignment by a ruler. One is the provision made by Kulasekhara, a Pandya ruler of the sixteenth century, who assigned the proceeds from certain villages near

¹⁴ Mathilakam Records, *churuna* 1722, *ola* 4. The post of a separate *karuvukaram* accountant came into being in AD 1505.

¹⁵ Mathilakam Records: *churuna* 2601, *ola* 68; *churuna* 1719, *ola* 31; *churuna* 1719, *ola* 37; *churuna* 931, *ola* 185. These accountants were also called *pandarakaryam cheyvar*, showing their links with the Venad ruling family.

¹⁶ Mathilakam Records: *churuna* 2600, *ola* 83; *churuna* 2601, *ola* 188; and *churuna* 2600, *ola* 83–84, provide examples of fines of silver pots and other valuables paid by members of the royal family.

¹⁷ The Pandya prince Kulasekharadeva provided for an expense called *karuvelamkulam puja*: Mathilakam Records, *churuna* 1721, *ola* 176.

¹⁸ Such payments were called *karuvakettu*. For details, see Mathilakam Records, *Grandhavari* (translation of a record), *ola* 290–95.

Tenkasi for a temple ritual that came to be called *karuvelamkulam puja*.¹⁹ Another is a document from the fourteenth century, when a Venad prince is stated to have mortgaged a village (*desam*) near Thiruvananthapuram for a large sum of money.²⁰ In neither case was a total transfer of land made. In the first case the proceeds from the land were to be collected as rent (*pattam*) for the specified purpose, and the other was a typical mortgage (*otti*) deed made out between a prince and the temple.²¹ When, in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Tenkasi Pandyas themselves disappeared and proceeds from Tenkasi stopped arriving, the offerings continued to be made from the temple treasury.²²

Thus the temple treasury acquired control of vast tracts of land by different means, and since land constituted the basic form of wealth in society, the land holdings of the temple formed the basis and determined the value of all the assets of the temple. It appears that, by the end of the seventeenth century, the temple treasury (*karuvelappura*) was maintained at Sivagiri in Varkala.²³

There is no evidence that the rulers of Venad had direct access to this wealth at any time during this period. As noted before, the ruler was only one of the signatories of the council (*yogam*), whose decisions were always taken unanimously by the members. Any attempt by the ruler to gain access to the wealth had to have the concurrence of all members of the council. From the historical records, it appears that several Venad princes did try to negotiate with the temple council, only to be refused and told that the princes themselves had erred in not making compensation for offences such as the destruction of temple premises (*sanketam*).²⁴ The records contain detailed lists of the offences committed by various princes, and of retributions demanded and not paid.²⁵ Several rulers tried to resolve disputes by declaring themselves servants of the deity (*Padmanabhapadadasa*), thus admitting that their wealth was indeed the wealth of the temple.²⁶ However, Ramavarma, who ruled Venad at the beginning of the eighteenth century, refused to comply with the demands of the temple council, and

¹⁹ Mathilakam Records: *churuna* 1721, *ola* 176, AD 1546; *churuna* 1686, *ola* 36; *churuna* 51, *ola* 103.

²⁰ Mathilakam Records, *churuna* 1686, *ola* 94.

²¹ In fact, it was only in the eighteenth century that a *neerattiper* grant (by which the temple got exclusive rights over the land) was made by the ruler, Martandavarma. Even this was simply a formalisation of the rights of two other temples (the Mitranandapuram and Srikantheswara temples) in Thiruvananthapuram over some land.

²² Mathilakam Records: *churuna* 1727, *ola* 80; *churuna* 1667, *ola* 105. Other documents also show that the expenses of the *puja* were met from other parts of Venad.

²³ There is a reference to Sivagiri *karuvukarappura* in Velupillai (1940), Appendix Document CXXII; Mathilakam Records, *churuna* 2588, *ola* 193, AD 1737.

²⁴ A typical example is the Mathilakam *Grandhavari* of AD 1736, compiled during the time of Martandavarma, that gives details of various fines and retributions *not* paid by the Venad princes for several centuries.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ The term *Padmanabhapadadasa* was apparently first used by Ravivarma Kulasekhara, a prince of Desinganad (Kollam); see Kielhorn (1897), pp. 145–48. Later it was used by another Ravivarma who also assumed the title “Kulasekharapperumal,” at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

its members (*yogakkar*) had to resort to a form of hunger strike (*pattini anyayam*) against him.²⁷ The stability of the temple treasury and politics were thus intertwined.

Martandavarma, considered the founder of modern Travancore, succeeded Ramavarma as ruler in 1729 AD. Martandavarma received the support of the temple council after he successfully resisted a rebel invasion of Thiruvananthapuram, and he proceeded to set right the affairs of the temple.²⁸ This meant setting right the procedures for collection of surplus produce by the temple, that is, reorganising land rights and the procedures by which share-rents were collected. In this regard, a land settlement survey (*kandeluttu*) was conducted by an accountant, Shankaran, from 1739 to 1741 – an effort that led finally to the reorganisation of the entire revenue, agriculture, trade, and financial systems of Travancore state, and the separation of allotments to the temple treasury (*sreepandaravagai*) from dues to the state (*pandaravagai*).²⁹

It was at this time that the state came to be recognized as an independent financial entity. The original treasury, along with the land holdings attached to it, was left with the temple, but all other payments to the temple came to be reorganised by fixing the allotments to the temple in the settlement survey documents. The land settlement recorded different types of land, the amount that was to be collected from each plot, and the purpose for which each collection was to be made.³⁰ As a result of this reform, temple wealth became state wealth and came to be protected by the state. It was during this period of crisis that the treasury, which was located in Sivagiri in Varkala, was shifted to vaults inside the Padmanabha temple – the vaults in which the wealth was discovered recently.

The reorganisation of temple lands and of the system by which the share of the produce was to be collected by the temple under the initiative of the state resulted in a separation between the wealth of the treasury and the wealth of the temple, and this meant that the temple and the treasury came under the supervision of the state.³¹ However, Martandavarma sought to change the situation by means of an ideological device: he symbolically donated the core area of Venad as *trippadidanam* (a gift of one's entire belongings to the temple) to the temple and styled himself a servant of

²⁷ Mathilakam *Grandhavari*, *churuna* 28, *ola* 105, AD 1722. For a discussion of the practice of *pattini anyayam*, see Narayanan, ed. (1992), Introduction.

²⁸ A very useful contemporary account of the times of Martandavarma is the *Rajyakaryam churuna*, Mathilakam Records, in Velupillai (1940), Appendix.

²⁹ This can be seen from the settlement (*oluku*) documents during Martandavarma's period. A typical document (Case Record No. 78, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, AD 1738) separates *pandaravagai* lands from lands held by various temples and individuals.

³⁰ An example is provided by the accounts for Vanchiyur *adhikaram* of AD 1746; see Iyer (ed.) (1916).

³¹ The reorganisation of temple affairs became necessary because of persistent complaints from the temple authorities about the stoppage of temple rituals and ceremonies because supplies were not forthcoming from temple land. Efforts to collect rent from temple land by Martandavarma and his officials were met by resistance from the powerful group of accountants called *ettuveettil pillaimar*, whose suppression was a major feature of the political history of Venad in the early eighteenth century.

the deity (*Padmanabhapadadasa*).³² Thus, although (as in earlier times) state wealth continued to be deemed temple wealth – and the ruler merely its custodian as a servant of the temple deity – the content of this relationship changed. Padmanabha, the deity, had no earthly machinery to circumscribe the power of His servant, who set about annexing large areas of land that lay well beyond the temple’s original domains, and developing administrative and political machinery that was well beyond His grasp. But the myth of the servant of the deity survived, and the temple treasury survived and was maintained.³³

WEALTH AND PROPERTY

So we come back to the initial question: who controlled the wealth stored in the cellars of the Padmanabha temple? From all the available evidence, it appears that the members of the council (*yogakkar*) were the custodians of this wealth and took decisions with regard to it, and that the king was one of the signatories of the council (*yogam*). It is important, however, to note that no member of the *yogam* independently controlled any part of the temple wealth in any form. There is evidence that the Potti Brahmana families had property of their own, property that was unconnected with the temple’s wealth. Among rulers, only a prince of the Trippappur lineage had the right to be a member of the temple council, and while there is evidence of other princes participating in the *yogam*, this was possible only in special circumstances. Even after the consolidation of the Travancore state, the formal myth of custodianship continued, which meant that no member of the Travancore royal family could lay any legal claim over the temple’s wealth. Thus although the valuables of the temple treasury definitely constituted wealth, it could not be deemed to be the property of either the royal family or the council members (*yogakkar*). Even custodianship and decision-making rights could be wielded only by the council *in session, with everyone present*, and executive powers were held by two members of the council, not one.³⁴ Thus the concept of individual property in any form is not applicable to the wealth of the Padmanabha temple. Even the formal donation of property (*trippadidanam*) by Martandavarma did not make the temple’s wealth the property of the Travancore royal family, as the act of donation made the wealth of the treasury the wealth of Lord Padmanabha, with the king acting as his servant. For a believer, the entire world is the wealth of God, and he cannot possibly

³² For a general narrative, see Kunju (1976). Interestingly, only the region from Thovalai to Kavanar, the traditional territory of the Venad princes, was granted as *trippadidanam*, and not the area conquered by Martandavarma. Thus, Martandavarma continued as king in the conquered territories, but in the traditional Venad region, which also contained the Padmanabha temple land, the king was a servant of the deity.

³³ The documents show that the actual temple expenses, except for some of the special ceremonies and festivals conducted by the ruler (*adiyantiram*), were handed over to the various religious institutions (matham) established in the temple. Separate revenue accounts were maintained for these institutions. Thus the accounts of the temple treasury were kept separate from other accounts.

³⁴ The Mathilakam Records use a term that means “to make good an absence” (*kura teernum*) to show that an absent member of the *yogam* had to send a representative in his place.

make sense of an almighty God clutching on to a few valuables, even if they are worth billions of rupees in contemporary terms.

The people of the medieval period in Kerala – whether Brahmana, ruler or other – saw wealth as rooted in the land and its resources. Valuables that flowed into a temple treasury could be utilised meaningfully only when circulated in some form and invested in land. The increase in the wealth of the temple implied an increase in its control over land, resources, and labour, which in turn was the basis for an increase in the volume and splendour of its functions, and the enhancement of its esoteric, divine power. Without these manifestations the valuables in the temple would have remained completely without value, that is, the temple would not have preserved any wealth at all. The basis for the generation of wealth is the relationship between human beings as workers, on the one hand, and natural resources, including land and raw material, on the other. In the medieval context, the transformation of landed social wealth into temple wealth impelled the emergence of the temple as a source of social power, one that even kings were forced to recognise. Ultimately, divine or social wealth is a reflection of the wealth that belongs to the people as the proceeds of their labour. Thus, the millions hoarded in the Padmanabha temple are the historical legacy of the millions who have tilled the soil and laboured on earth for at least a millennium, and shall go back to them and their inheritors.

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GLOSSARY

<i>adhikaram</i>	a unit of revenue collection
<i>arukuttathil karuvukarattil pillaimar</i>	accountants of six groups
<i>churuna</i>	scroll of palm-leaf manuscripts
<i>desam</i>	administrative locality
<i>divya desam</i>	sacred sites
<i>grandhavari</i>	a translation of a record
<i>kanakkupillai</i>	accountant
<i>kanam, kalancu</i>	gold weights
<i>kandeluttu</i>	land settlement survey
<i>karanakanakku</i>	accountant who maintained accounts of the regular income and expenditure of the temple
<i>karanmai</i> (also <i>attipper karanmai</i>)	grants of land by which the temple received the surplus produce of the land or other offerings obtained by means of selling or exchanging the produce of the land, but by which the grantor retained tenancy rights
<i>karuvelam, karuvelappura</i>	storehouse; hence <i>karuvelakanakku</i> , store-house
<i>neerattipper</i>	accountant
<i>nityanadaichelavucherikkal</i>	comprehensive land grants, accompanied by the ritual sprinkling of water on the land, by which the temple got exclusive rights over the land
<i>ola</i>	villages that provided for the daily expenses of the temple
<i>otti</i>	palm-leaf manuscript
<i>Padmanabhapadadasa</i>	mortgage
<i>pandaravagai</i>	servant [at the feet of] Padmanabha, the presiding deity of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple
<i>pattam</i>	dues to the state
	rent

GLOSSARY (Continued)

<i>pattini anyayam</i>	hunger strike
<i>poduval</i> (also <i>samanjitan</i>)	executive functionary of the <i>sabhai</i> ; with the increase of temple functions, the number and designation of such executives increased, and there are references to <i>akappoduval</i> , <i>purappoduval</i> and <i>urppoduval</i> .
<i>sabhai</i>	assembly of a Brahmana settlement
<i>sreebhandaram</i>	temple treasury
<i>sreepandaravagai</i>	allotment to the temple treasury
<i>sribhandarachelavucherikkal</i>	villages attached to the temple treasury
<i>sribhandarakanakku</i>	accountant in charge of the temple treasury; called <i>karuvelakanakku</i> in later records
<i>srikananam palliyati</i>	head accountant-cum-manager
<i>tandalkkaran</i>	collectors of dues
<i>tinaram, tiramam, achu, kasu</i>	forms of standard coinage
<i>tiruvanakkatudi</i>	silver drum
<i>trippadidanam</i>	a gift of one's entire belongings to the temple
<i>udampu</i>	reproduction in gold of the original idol of the temple
<i>variyam</i>	brahmanical executive body
<i>yogam</i>	brahmanical council; hence <i>yogakkar</i> , members of the <i>yogam</i>
