



## PRIMARY RESEARCH

# Nair Service Society and temple reform movements in Kerala

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## Abstract

As a prominent social reform organization in the state, the Nair Service Society (NSS) closely monitors changes in the Devaswom administration and shares its views without hesitation. In regards to the matter of depoliticizing the Devaswom administration, the NSS has an equidistance policy towards Sangh Parivar organizations. The study explores the response of the NSS to the challenges in the administration of temples in modern Kerala. The study explores the response of the NSS to the difficulties in the administration of temples in modern Kerala. The methods used in the study are historical and analytical. The secondary data is collected through the publications of NSS, books, journals and News Paper. The primary data is collected through personal interviews with organization leaders through open-ended questionnaires. Numerous research on different facets of NSS have been conducted in the past, focusing on its organizational operations, social reform movements, etc. Regarding the administration of temples in the state, NSS upholds an unequivocal stance. The NSS actively participated in temple management and kept a close eye on any changes to Devaswom administration. The NSS believed that the advancement of the organization depended on temple prosperity. Being a social organization, the NSS is closely supervised in all temple-related operations throughout the state. Representatives of the NSS have often served as chairs and members of various Devaswom governing organizations. The study is mainly multidisciplinary and covers cultural, political and economic perspectives on Kerala politics. The current research is novel in that it focuses on the opinions and viewpoints surrounding temples, such as political meddling in internal operations, increasing yearly contributions, concerns about land encroachment, trade union activity among temple workers, including priestly classes, etc.

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## INTRODUCTION

Kerala is one of the Hindu majority states in India. Temples are the religious institutions of the Hindu society and they contribute much in mobilizing the Hindu society undivided. In the state of Travancore, Hinduism was the established religion. Hindu society was divided into various caste groups, constituted nearly three-fifths of the entire population of Travancore (GOK, 1949). The word Nair refers to the powerful Hindu caste from the southern Indian state of Kerala. The Nairs played a dominant role in Kerala during the mediaeval era and far into the 19th century. Nair community is one of the prominent communities in the Hindu religion, which constitutes 12.88% of the total population (Aravindan, 2006: 33).

However, by the mid-nineteenth century, this supremacy had begun to fade. Nairs are Nagas and Kshatriyas from the Serpent Dynasty (Nagavansham) who severed their holy thread and fled south to avoid the wrath of a vengeful Parashurama. Historical censuses in the state show that Nairs were the second-largest Hindu community in the Indian state of Kerala. The 1891 census recorded approximately 980,860 Nairs in Kerala. By 1941, Nairs accounted for around 17.5% of the entire population of Travancore in Kerala, a modest decrease from 19.33% in 1881. However, Nair population numbers in Kerala have been declining in recent years, with estimates varying from 14-20% of the state's population due to factors such as forced conversions in the late 1700s. Some districts in Kerala have minimal

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populations of Nairs. Malappuram has a Nair population of 1.8%, while Kasargode has approximately 2.1%. Their actual figures will be about 12-13% of the total Kerala population.

Temples serve Hindus' spiritual and cultural needs and play an essential role in the state's socio-political, economic, and cultural landscape (Rajagopal, 2019). Temples in Kerala are the symbols of great cultural legacy, and they become agents of developing, consolidating, transmitting and conserving the heritage of high culture (Veluthat, 2010). The historical Temple Entry Proclamation broke down caste barriers and secured social justice for the marginalized. In 1811, the government took over the temples' management under the pretence of corruption because of their power, influence, and money. When royalty gave way to democracy, temples were entrusted with popular governance. Large areas of land that belonged to the temples were lost due to the state government's progressive land laws, which significantly impacted the temples' income.

Temples witnessed a number of campaigns in the nineteenth century to achieve equality and end caste-based prejudice. Social reformers like Vaikunda Swamikal, Chattampi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, V. T. Bhattathiripad, Ayyankali, Mannathu Padmanabhan, Kumaran Asan, and T. K. Madhavan, as well as caste-based organizations like SNDP Yogam, Yogakshema Sabha, and NSS, served as inspiration for the movement to end untouchability and grant lower caste members access to temples. Under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, the Indian National Congress supported the campaign for religious freedom. Inspired by the message of Sree Narayana Guru to fortify oneself via organization, Ayyankali founded Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sanghom in 1907; this group went on to become the model for contemporary Dalit consolidation efforts in Kerala.

Temples, also known as Devaswoms, serve the spiritual and cultural requirements of the Hindu populace and are significant elements of the state's sociopolitical, economic, and cultural landscape. Temple-related activities are the primary source of activity for the Nair community. The Brahmin caste efficiently managed priestly responsibilities in Nair temples. The Nair community, who belonged to the higher caste system, significantly impacted temple management; however, after Col. Munro assumed control of temple management in 1811, this influence significantly decreased.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This research aims to investigate the activities of the Nair Service Society, a prominent Hindu organization in Kerala, in temple administration. The formation of the NSS marked

the beginning of a new era of revolutionary social movements in Kerala. NSS represents the robust Nair community, which constitutes 12.88% of the overall population of Kerala. As a prominent social reform organization in the state, the Nair Service Society closely monitors changes in the Devaswom administration and shares its views without hesitation. In regards to the matter of depoliticizing the Devaswom administration, the NSS has an equidistance policy towards Sangh Parivar organizations. NSS founder Mannathu Padmanabhan served as the Travancore Devaswom Board's first president. He instituted some reforms in temple administration that incited animosity within the political establishment and led to his removal from office. Mannam spearheaded the formation of Hindu Mahamandalam, the state's first Hindu consolidation movement.

### **Research Problem**

The Nair Service Society (NSS) was founded in 1914 to safeguard the Nair community from antiquated religious rites and traditions. The memory of NSS's founder, Mannathu Padmanabhan, is essential to the organization's operations. The formation of the NSS marked the beginning of a new era of revolutionary social movements in Kerala. Mannam devoted his life to liberating marginalized people and was a remarkable leader, social reformer, humanist, and orator. NSS represents the robust Nair community, which constitutes 12.88% of the overall population of Kerala. The activities of NSS continue to be centred on the memory of its founder, Mannathu Padmanabhan. As a humanist, social reformer, orator, and outstanding leader, Mannam devoted his life to liberating oppressed classes. The Nair community, which belonged to the higher strata of the caste structure, wielded significant sway over temple management, significantly decreasing since Col. Munro assumed control of temples in 1811.

The Nair Service Society (NSS) is an organization that represents the interests of the Nairs, numerically the largest forward caste group in Kerala. Mannanathu Padmanabhan founded the Nair Service Society (NSS) in 1914 to unify the Nair community and enhance the ties that bind them via shared culture, customs, and way of life. The organization has come to represent selfless service and social dedication. Mannam gave people hope and a dream of freedom from ignorance, suffering, and poverty. The ultimate goal of NSS is to empower the Nair community by eradicating various superstitious beliefs and practices. At this juncture, Mannathu Padmanabhan took the initiative to bring the Nair community together and build. With persistence, relentless efforts, vision, and foresight, the N.S.S. established a network of ed-

educational institutions, hospitals, and other socially beneficial organizations throughout the state. Mannathu Padmanabhan dedicated his life to the advancement of the lives of the underprivileged, disadvantaged, and untouchables during a time when they were treated as slaves and not allowed to worship in temples. He was a karma yogi who walked ahead of his time. He was a social reformer and a Renaissance hero who, till the end of his life, toiled tirelessly for the advancement and prosperity of his community and humanity (G. S. Nair, 2023).

### Issues in Temple Administration

As a secular state, the government is not expected to interfere in the internal administration of religious institutions; however, in Kerala, temple administration is carried out by Devaswom governing bodies, and the government's control over them has gradually paved the way for the politicization of administration. Since the religious institutions of other communities are essentially left free to decide their religious matters, the intervention of a secular state may be seen as paradoxical. NSS follows a clear and precise stand on the issues concerned with the administration of temples in the state.

The NSS actively participated in temple management, closely monitoring changes in Devaswom administration. The NSS believed that the organization's progress depended on the prosperity of temples. As a social organization, the NSS is closely monitored in temple-related activities throughout the state. NSS representatives have served numerous times as chairmen and members of various Devaswom governing bodies. Regarding some issues of temple governance, the NSS has a strong opinion. Political appointees run the state's Devaswom governing bodies; non-believers are periodically appointed to Devaswom committees by the government. The NSS opposes non-believers being appointed to temple governing boards. NSS developed a Devaswom Corporation in 1961 to oversee temple management since they had a strong interest in temple administration. The corporation aims to bring the temples under NSS management, eliminate misrule, and ensure democratic governance (Kurup, 2015). Numerous temples throughout the state received renovations thanks to the NSS's initiative.

### Politicization of temple administration

The politicization of administration is one of the most severe concerns confronting the state's temple. Politics and the appointment of non-believers to Devaswom governing bodies challenged temple customs (Rajagopal, 2019). Political control over Hindu denominations by a secular state has

been contentious in state politics since the 1950s. The foundation of Hindu Mahamandalam (1950), perhaps the state's first Hindu consolidation organization, served as a platform for protest against the politicization of the Devaswom administration. Mannathu Padmanabhan, the inaugural President of the TDB, and R. Sankar, the nominated Member to the Board, were removed from their positions due to pressure from Christian factions inside the Congress party. As a result, they were the first victims of the politicization process of temple administration. State Governments in power have often made amendments to Devaswom laws to implement their political agenda.

Like other Hindu organizations, the NSS also opposed the politicization of temple administration and state control over temples. They are also against the nomination of non-believers in temple administration they strongly protested against the government's move in 1990 to entrust non-believers in temple administration. NSS alleged that government interference in the day-to-day administration of temples is one of the reasons for the present state of affairs of the Devaswom administration. NSS strongly disagreed with the LDF government's move to consolidate the Devaswom administration in the state without proper consultations. NSS Delegates meeting in 1998 urged the government to retain the autonomy of Travancore Cochin Devaswom Boards. Meanwhile, NSS follows a central stand and keeps away from Sangh Parivar's organizations on the depoliticization of the Devaswom administration. During the Nilackal issue 1983, TN Upendranatha Kurup, a member of the NSS Director Board, was the TDB president. Nilackal Action Council was formed by various Hindu organizations in which NSS is also represented. Then, the General Secretary of NSS, Kidangoor Gopalakrishna Pillai, cautioned the government against constructing a church at Nilackal.

### Encroachment of temple land

Protecting temple land from unlawful encroachment has become a top priority for the Devaswom management of the state. It is estimated that private individuals, including non-Hindus, encroached on large temple lands. The Land Conservancy Act covers the TDB's unassessed landed properties, as provided by Sections 27 and 50 of the TCHRI Act of 1950. However, even though the CDB's landed properties are subject to the TCHRI Act, they are not eligible for this safeguard. Thousands of acres of temple land in Malabar have been alienated.

In the 1960s, Kerala politics witnessed a significant tenant agitation in Malabar, supported by the Christian Church and Communist Parties, resisting eviction by Devaswom author-

ities. Migrant settlers illegally seized 30,000 acres of private forest owned by the Kottiyoor Temple (Chander, 1981). The temple officials opted to execute a 99-year super lease to Nair Service Society by evicting the illegal tenants. NSS possessed 27000 acres of Kottiyoor temple land in a lease during the time of VK Velappan, devaswom Minister and former president of NSS. Thus, the evictees began agitation with the assistance of the Church and the Communists, two antagonistic forces in the state allied for a shared aim (A. B. Nair, 1994).

A Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) commission also urged that temple land be included in the Agrarian Relations Act to protect the rights of Devaswom tenants (KLA, 1962). Meanwhile, the NSS obtained a favourable decision from the Court, but due to the protest, the NSS cancelled the lease and returned the temple property. (Sethunathan, 2015). According to Jayashanker's book *Temples of Wayanad District*, published by the census directorate, the temple owned 14,999 acres of land before the Land Reforms Act, which has since been reduced to a measly 15 acres. While reading about the history of Malabar temples, one can observe examples of massive land alienation.

### Land Legislations

Land legislation in the state has jeopardized the financial stability of temples in Kerala, notably in the Malabar region. NSS opposes land legislation that harms the interests of temples in the state. The liberation struggle against Kerala's first democratically elected Communist government began two days after the first land reform bill passed through the parliamentary process. The NSS was adamantly opposed to the land reform legislation; its chief, Mannathu Padmanabhan, stated that since the NSS could not influence the ministry's policy, the ministry must go (Nossitter, 1982). The NSS opposed the Agrarian Reforms Bill's stringent provisions, which also sought that Devaswom lands be exempted from its terms. NSS submitted several petitions to the government to exclude Devaswom property from the bill's limit, but the government did not accept them. NSS had various estates around the state; some were leased property of temples; the Pattazhi and Noorokkad estates were leased from their respective temples.

### Unified Devaswom Administration

One of the most significant impediments to the effective operation of the Devaswom administration in Kerala is the lack of unified Devaswom governance. The administration's effective coordination contributes to uniformity in rituals and service conditions for temple employees and the preven-

tion of land alienation and financial fraud. When such concerns develop, appointing commissions but failing to implement their recommendations is standard practice. In Kerala, temples are under various Devaswom governing bodies like Devaswom Boards and Devaswom Managing Committees; particular Devaswom laws govern each. After submitting the Sankaran Nair Commission Report, the NSS General Body passed a resolution urging the government for a unified Devaswom administration for all temples in the state. The NSS strongly argued that those who believe in god and temple worship should be in charge of running Devaswom (Devi, 1998). NSS stands for complete autonomy to Devaswom boards in the state and is against governmental interference in its administration.

### Issue of the entry of Non-Hindus

Even seven decades since the Temple Entry Proclamation, the state of Kerala has seen a debate over the admission of believers of all religious persons to all temples. Devaswom Boards exhibit notice boards limiting non-Hindu admission into temples. (Rajagopal, 2018). The Guruvayur Devaswom committee opened the temple to non-Hindus and removed dress code restrictions in the dining hall, enabling devotees to wear shirts, pants, and boots. They removed the board in front of the dining hall stating that non-Hindus are prohibited. The NSS has expressed concern to the government about the Guruvayur Devaswom committee's decision to allow non-Hindus to enter the dining hall while wearing shirts, trousers, and caps. Finally, the Devaswom Committee reversed its decision. The NSS, through its mouthpiece service, denounced the board's decision. NSS applauded the decision of the Devaswom committee to examine its previous decision. NSS never opposed the entry of non-Hindus into temples, only stating that they believed in Hinduism. At the same time, the NSS has strongly condemned any attempt by the government to alter temple rituals. (Radhakrishnan, 2007)

### Appointment of non-Brahmin priest

Today, temples have become the focus of many controversies concerning the freedom of worship afforded to society's marginalized groups, particularly women and Dalits. The Supreme Court's decisions in 1995 and 2002 on the appointment of non-Brahmin priests in temples were consequential in the sense that they lifted the ban on non-Brahmins, including Dalits, becoming priests and practising tantra. The tantric of the Guruvayur temple recently declared that similar to temples under the devaswom boards, non-Brahmin priests were not permitted in the Guruvayur tem-



ple because it has its own set of tantric regulations. For the first time in history, in 2017, a member of the Pulaya community was selected as a priest in a Kerala temple following reservation rules similar to those used for government employee recruitment. In 2006, when TDB decided to appoint non-Brahmin priests in temples, NSS openly resisted the move.

In earlier times, NSS recognized Brahmin priesthood in temples and insisted the continuation of hereditary monopoly in the priesthood continues to date despite many state interventions in other areas of management of temples (Madhusoodhanan, 2010). Later, they appointed Nair priests in their temples by breaking all traditions. NSS started a school to provide training in temple rituals for the community youth at Tiruvalla (Rajagopal, 2022). In 2013, the Nair Service Society's request to select priests from its community for temples operated by the organization sparked a dispute regarding whether devotees would accept non-Brahmin priests. NSS established a tantric school, Sri Padmanabha NSS ThantraVidhyapeedom, in Thiruvalla to educate Nair youngsters. The institution offers a full-time, two-year course of study, including 18 months of coursework and a six-month internship at a temple.

### Devaswom Recruitment

In 2007, the LDF government decided to hand over the appointment of Devaswom services to the Kerala Public Service Commission to combat the unhealthy practices that predominate in temple recruitment. This decision sparked controversy, and some Hindu institutions, including the NSS, publicly criticized it. The NSS filed a writ petition against the Hindu Religious Institutions (Amendment) Act 2007, which requires recruitment to the administrative staff of the Travancore and Cochin Devaswom Boards through the Commission (PSC). NSS opposes handing over Devaswom board recruitments to KPSC and implementing reservations in Devaswom appointments because it would disrupt temple administration in the state. PSC is a secular body; hence, it lacks locus standi. Sections 29A and 127A of the Hindu Religious Institutions (Amendment) Act 2007 violated the original provisions of the Hindu Religious Institutions Act of 1950, which granted absolute power to select and appoint Devaswom service members to Devaswom boards. According to the Act, Hindus who believe in God and temple worship are eligible for positions in Devaswom services. The PSC could not conduct such an examination because the selection committee did not include Hindus. NSS advocated for an independent recruitment board based

on the Justice Paripoornan Commission's recommendations, which is required for Devaswom recruitment. Later, the UDF administration established the Devaswom Recruitment Board in 2013. Due to NSS complaints, the government decided not to implement its earlier decision. Later, the UDF government decided to constitute the Devaswom Recruitment Board in 2013. Again, when the LDF government assumed office in 2016, they decided to dismantle the Devaswom Recruitment Board created by the previous UDF government and entrust KPSC with filling vacancies on five devaswom boards (including two Devaswom committees) throughout the state. The government's decision provoked the NSS, and its annual conference 2016 passed a resolution condemning the left-wing government decision. Meanwhile, the government withdrew from the decision and revamped the recruitment board by nominating left members.

### Devaswom Reservation Rule

The NSS applauded the left-wing government's unprecedented decision 2017 to grant 10% reservation for backward sectors of forwarding communities in Devaswom Board employment. However, the indefinite delay in executing the judgement infuriated NSS, and it was claimed that the government's Law Department misled them with a defective legal opinion. Considering the reality, NSS demanded that the state government enforce the decision as soon as possible. However, the government has slowly recognized that the NSS has written a memorandum to the Chief Minister seeking immediate action. In response to the NSS, the government declared that a revision to the rule is needed and that the matter. Finally, the government issued a clarification on this matter. In government service, Muslims and backward Christians have an 18% job quota. Regarding Devaswom Boards, the Hindus in the general category will receive the 18% quota. The 10% reservation proposed for economically vulnerable groups in the forward caste will be deducted from the 18% reserved for the general category. The quota for Hindu Ezhava—a backward community—on temple board seats would be enhanced from 14 to 17 per cent. The OBC quota, except Ezhava, would be increased from 3 to 6 per cent. The new policy would also assist the SC/ST groups by increasing their share of reservations. Since the state government offered 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among Kerala's Hindu forward caste communities, 73 persons have secured employment in various Devaswom boards (Balan, 2022).

### Women Entry

Women's entry into the Sabarimala temple and related controversies have impacted state politics, particularly with the Supreme Court's decision on September 28, 2018, to allow women to visit the temple regardless of age. The issue polarised the Hindu populace, allowing Hindu organizations to gain widespread support and solidify their social basis. NSS filed a review petition before the Supreme Court. Senior Advocate K. Parasaran represented the NSS before the Supreme Court in the Sabarimala case. The NSS urged the state government to file a review petition and consider enacting an ordinance to preserve the hilltop shrine's traditions. According to G. Sukumaran Nair, the NSS, as an institution dedicated to protecting secular ideals and faith in God, urges the government and TDB to handle the situation more seriously. (Pti, 2017).

The Pandalam palace managing committee and Tanthri Samajom have reviewed all Sabarimala-related concerns with the NSS before making a final decision. They jointly urged the government to file a review petition on the Supreme Court ruling. The Pandalam Palace Managing Committee and Tanthri Samajam had boycotted the Chief Minister's conference. The NSS's position caused a setback for the LDF government, and LDF leaders took a mild stance towards NSS during their comments. The NSS organized prayer yathras around the state, in which thousands of devotees participated (Rajagopal, 2019).

The NSS believed that temple customs and rituals should be preserved and not compromised (Kuttoo, 2022). The petition seeking women's entry into the Sabarimala shrine in the Supreme Court was joined by the NSS as a party in the case, challenging the petitioners' claim. The NSS underlined its conviction that a democratically elected government and court were obligated to maintain such ancient practices and traditions. They demanded that the government even explore protecting such customs and traditions through appropriate legislation (Pti, 2017). The NSS openly supported the agitation against women's entry into Sabarimala. They stood for the preservation of the hill shrine's customs and traditions. The Nair Service Society opposed the entry of women of all ages into the Sabarimala Temple, citing concerns about customs and traditions. The TDB protects the Sabarimala temple's customs and traditions, supported by devotee contributions rather than government funds (Pti, 2018). Narayana Varma, Secretary of the Pandalam Palace Managing Committee, stated that the NSS is at the forefront of preserving temple customs in Sabarimala and has spent millions of rupees on the legal battle. The NSS's role in this regard is memorable and laudable.

The Nair Service Society has opted not to attend the state government-sponsored convention of progressive social organizations to discuss women's entry into Sabarimala. The NSS's decision to boycott the crucial conference was a setback for the government's efforts to compromise on the religiously sensitive topic. (Hindu, 2018). G. Sukumaran Nair, general secretary of the NSS, criticized Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for his steadfast stance on Sabarimala to build a "socially divisive human wall of women," ignoring all advice and under the dubious guise of defending Renaissance ideals. He openly supported the lighting of lamps at Ayyappa Jyothi, which Hindu organizations organized on December 26, 2018, and remarked that believers should participate regardless of the political leanings of the organizers. On January 1, 2019, he further blasted the "wall of non-believers," claiming that it was the government's ruse to open Sabarimala to women after all other options had failed.

The NSS leadership was sharply critical of the government's decision to encourage women's entry into the temple on January 2 when thousands reached Perunna to celebrate the founder's birthday, Mannathu Padmanabhan. They alleged that the government exploited the Supreme Court verdict allowing the entry of women of all ages to Sabarimala as a pretext to undermine faith and impose atheism on Kerala. By complaining about the decay of Renaissance values, it tried to create a smokescreen so that the ruling party's agenda could be pursued through horrible means. In a strong critique of the state's handling of the Sabarimala issue, NSS argued that the administration had exacerbated a problem that might have been settled peacefully. The NSS condemned the TDB's decision to seek an explanation from the Tantri of the Sabarimala temple for ordering a "purification ritual" following the entry of two women (Hindu, 2019).

NSS is cautious of the government-sponsored Women's Wall programme, which threatens to turn God's own country into Satan's dominion. A resolution was put forward during the delegates meeting at the 2019 Mannam Jayanthi celebration, expressing the NSS's strong opposition to the state government's approach to the Sabarimala temple's customs and traditions (Pti & India, 2019). According to NSS general secretary G. Sukumaran Nair, the government is promoting atheism by removing Sabarimala traditions. CPM state secretary Kodyeri Balakrishnan alleged that the NSS general secretary was misleading people and colluding with the BJP, attempting to communally divide the state in the name of customs and beliefs (TNN, 2019). The NSS questioned Justice Chandrashekhara Menon's recommendations for estab-

lishing a separate administrative structure for the Sabarimala temple. The Nair Service Society, a social reform organization in the state, voiced its disapproval of the leftist government's attitude and opposed women's entry to the Sabarimala shrine. Before the Sabarimala dispute, NSS had tight ties with the LDF ministry, but following the SC ruling, the government's policy on the matter caused a schism between them. In an editorial in *Service*, the mouthpiece of the NSS declared that the Lok Sabha election result represented the protest of the devotees against the government policy that dishonoured the Sabarimala temple.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review gives the researcher a thorough understanding of previous research done in his field. To gain a fundamental understanding of the role of the NSS and the challenges related to temple management, a survey of pertinent literature was conducted. Books that were helpful in understanding the development of temples and their management were examined, and it was inevitable that different Commission findings would be utilized to pinpoint the problems associated with temple management. Further research is necessary on the subject; however, thorough studies on the history, artwork, architecture, and tourist elements of Kerala's temples are already available. This research is a hitherto uncharted field: books, unpublished PhD theses, commission reports established by the High Court, and the Devaswom manual.

(Sadasivan, 2000) *A Social History of India* examines the history of temple admission movements and temple governance in Kerala. According to the author, the Ezhavas and Nairs shared managerial responsibilities for a number of temples. Still, this management ended when Munro nationalized or placed the temples under state control in 1811. The book investigates the role of SNDP Yogam and Sree Narayana Guru in Travancore's temple-related movements. Guru, who had worked to convert the masses from primitive idolatry to progressive humanism, forced men to accept him as God. If temple access was refused, the Ezhavas threatened to abandon the repressive Hinduism and seek refuge with the Cross and Crescent. This book also discusses the establishment of the Hindu Mahamandalam and the Devaswom Board.

The biographical work *R Sankar (M)* by (Kumaran, 1987) includes the history of temples in Travancore as well as the evolution of state-temple interactions from 1811. He claims Munro's policies lessened temple influence. Strong Hindu leaders Mannam and R. Sankar formed the first Devaswom Board, which reorganized the Travancore Devas-

wom Board's administrative procedures in an effort to strengthen Hinduism. The political drama of removing the two Devaswom Board heads is recounted in the book. Regarding Mannam and Sankar's alliance, then-Chief Minister T.K. Narayana Pillai remarked sarcastically that it was a mishmash of snake venom and chemical poison. The book also recounts the history of the Hindu Mahamandalam and Democratic Congress, as well as its political branch and the united actions of the NSS and SNDP Yogam to achieve Hindu unity.

Padmanabhan and Menon (2003), published *Reminiscences of My Life* (Trans. by P. C. Menon). It is a valuable resource for studying the social structure, social ostracism, and severity of caste-based discrimination that pervaded traditional Kerala society. The autobiography, which was first written in Malayalam, describes the straightforward and modest life of a great visionary who devoted his entire being to helping the most vulnerable members of society. The Nair Service Society and Mannathu Padmanabhan were instrumental in the ceaseless fight against distance pollution and caste exclusion that prevented the so-called untouchables from entering the temple premises. His family's temple was opened to all Hindus even twenty years prior to the Temple Entry Proclamation. Because of his compassion for those from lower castes, the NSS adopted a number of resolutions endorsing temple admission for all Hindus. Mannam personally spearheaded the Vaikom and Guruvayur Satyagrahas, two campaigns against temple access. Sree Narayana Guru's role in initiating temple reforms and elevating the Ezhava community is acknowledged explicitly in the book.

The fiery words of Mannam, one of the leading lights of Kerala's social renaissance, are collected in NSS (2013), *Mannathu Padmanabhante Prasangangal (M)* (The Selected words of Mannathu Padmanabhan), edited by S. Narayanan Nair. The book contains information on his beliefs about the need for Hindu unity, the universalization of temple worship, the adverse effects of state control over temple governance, political meddling, untouchables' access to temples, the simplification of temple rituals, the opposition to Brahmin monopoly in temple rites, and the necessity of centres for religious discourse in temples. The book sheds light on Kerala's social realities and is a valuable resource.

The Report (1993), of the Enquiry Commissioner-Complaints regarding Guruvayur Devaswom, addresses in detail the different aspects of the management of Guruvayur Devaswom, including the temple rites, maintenance, security, discipline, finance management, material management, and politicization. The report also covered recommenda-

tions for desirable modifications to the Guruvayur Devaswom Act as well as the arrangement and organization of the administrative apparatus. The Commission Report also conducted a thorough investigation into the numerous accusations of corruption, indiscipline, misconduct, politics, and favouritism made against the Devaswom Committee. The Commission also noted a number of severe problems with the way Guruvayur Devaswom was run, including a lack of temple employees, the Devaswom becoming politicized, trade unionism, rowdy employee behaviour, corruption, mismanagement of Devaswom fund, financial indiscipline, etc. The report provides several valuable suggestions for the improvement of Guruvayur Devaswom.

Madhusoodhanan (2010), unpublished doctoral thesis, "The Nature of the Relationship Between the State and the Management of Hindu Temples in Kerala," focuses on the secular state's role in Hindu religious institutions. In a secular state, the question of political authority over temple administration is hotly contested. The study also analyses the positions taken by SNDP Yogam, NSS, and Pulayar Maha Sabha regarding Brahmanical hegemony in temple sacred areas. Since the Yogam seemed content with maintaining authority over the holy sections of their temples, they did not start any attempts to end the Brahmin monopoly in the sacred area. Additionally, Pulayar Maha Sabha refrained from intervening to break the Brahmin monopoly, and their concerns with temples had less to do with the locations designated as sacred than they did with the equality of those who offered prayers alongside them. The NSS insisted on maintaining the Brahmins' inherited monopoly on the priesthood. As a result, background information about the Hindu organizations' approaches to the problem of Brahmin monopoly in the priesthood is gained. The state's meddling in Hindu shrines is criticized in the text as illogical as it doesn't exist in the operations of other religious institutions.

The Untouchables and Their Struggle for Temple Entry in Kerala, since 1920, by (Sivathambika, 1991), an unpublished PhD thesis, tells the story of Kerala's social history and the place of temples in the caste system dominated by Brahmins. Without having the opportunity to view God, the lower caste members worshipped him (idol). A thorough analysis of temple entry movements in the areas that were formerly known as Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar is provided in the thesis. The study looks at the intent, means, and boundaries of worship as well as the restrictions placed on untouchables' access to temple grounds and pathways. The researcher saw an intriguing thing: low-caste Hindus worshipped inferior divinities and evil spirits because they

practised being untouchable and unapproachable.

(GOK, 1964), Report of the High-level Committee for Unification of Laws relating to Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments (Kuttikrishna Menon Committee Report), is the state's first report on the study of Devaswoms, examining the possibility of a unified Devaswom administrative setup for governance. In addition to outlining the history of temple administration in the formerly Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar regions, the study emphasizes the necessity of financial management and the establishment of an independent central board for all temples in the state. The Committee made 108 proposals for the reorganization of temple management in the state. The influence of the Agrarian Relations Act, alienation and encroachment on temple lands, among other significant issues are also discussed in the Report.

In his book *The History of Trade Union Movement in Kerala*, K. R. Nair (2006) describes the history of trade union activities among temple employees as well as protest movements supported by political party leaders in the Travancore region. The author links the strikes by temple workers to the state's trade union movements. It is stated that the unions representing the temple workers even threatened to take direct action if their demands weren't granted. The Board established a Salary Revision Committee in response to demand from the unions to examine the working conditions, income, and financial standing of the temples as well as any unique situations involving the labour and pay of the temple staff.

The review helps to create a framework of significant concepts pertinent to the topic. However, these studies are not as thorough when it comes to the management of Devaswoms and the problems that exist there, such as politicization, state control, and the lack of a standard administrative structure for the temples run by the state's controlled Devaswom governing bodies. Therefore, the study represents a sincere effort to close this gap.

## METHODOLOGY

This study delves into the diverse socio-political concerns that the government-sponsored Devaswom governing bodies in Kerala are confronting in their administration. Because it examines government policies and the NSS's function in managing Hindu temples, the work is descriptive, analytical, and empirical. Primary data were gathered from interviews and information gleaned from NSS publications. In addition to the information collected via surveys, interviews, and fieldwork, the study makes substantial use of information from several Commission reports, administra-



tion reports, Supreme Court and High Court rulings, Devaswom manuals, and legislative procedures. Books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, doctorate theses, online journals, and the internet are examples of secondary sources used in the research.

## FINDINGS

Mannathu Padmanabhan advocated for a systematic administration of Travancore temples, and his contributions to the field are undeniably substantial. Mannam was critical of the state's meddling in the management of Hindu temples. Despite the government seizing control of the temples due to ineffective management, he said that no progress had been made subsequently. In any case, the government-managed temples are communal property exclusively utilized by the Hindu populace. He emphasized the importance of freeing temples from the effective control of the government.

Mannam was a harsh critic of the State Government's hypocritical stance about its meddling in religious matters. It is unreasonable for the government to actively engage in the internal affairs of one religious institution while mostly ignoring others. The government ought to assume control of all spiritual establishments or abstain from managing temple affairs. The Hindu community is capable of managing its religious institutions, just as other communities are. Furthermore, it is unfair that Hindus are being denied civic equality. Thus, he urged Hindus to act in unison and without regard to caste in order to retake temples from the hands of the government. Mannam and NSS have played a noteworthy part in the historic temple entry movement. The NSS passed a number of resolutions supporting the Avar-

nas' temple admission. The Savarna Jatha, led by Mannam, impacted the era's political and social climate by supporting the Vaikom Satyagraha.

## CONCLUSION

The NSS has a unique viewpoint on temple-related issues, in contrast to other Hindu organizations in the state. They never compromise on it. The LDF government's policies—including the appointment of non-believers to temple governing bodies, the activation of militant trade unions among temple workers, the entry of women, and other measures—were despised by the NSS. On the other hand, citing concerns about temples, the left parties are more alarmed by the emergence of RSS and Sangh Parivar organizations in the state. The NSS was a prominent supporter of Ayyappa Jyothy and other RSS-sponsored programmes several years ago. NSS wielded influence in state politics, and subsequent governments in the state took a favourable position on Devaswom reform that coincided with NSS. The NSS held that temple traditions and customs need to be upheld and not altered. Compared to other Hindu organizations in the state, the NSS has a distinct perspective on matters pertaining to temples. They never give in on it. The NSS detested specific initiatives of the LDF government, such as the admission of women, the creation of militant trade unions among temple employees, the nomination of non-believers to temple governing bodies, and other actions. However, despite their worries about temples, the leftist parties are more concerned about the rise of the RSS and Sangh Parivar in the state.

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