

# DISTRICT GAZETTEER OF TRIVANDRUM

## CHAPTER I

### GENERAL

#### Origin of the name of the District

The Trivandrum District is named after the city of Trivandrum which is at once the capital of Kerala State and the headquarters of the Trivandrum District. The common belief is that Trivandrum is the abbreviated English form of *Tiru-Ananthapuram*<sup>1</sup>. The city is presumed to have been called after Anantha, the poly-headed cobra, supporting Sri Padmanabha, the deity of the Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple, situated in the heart of the city. Trivandrum has also been called *Ananathasayanam* after Lord Padmanabha reclining on Anantha. *Syananduram* is also another famous name for Trivandrum.

The story of the origin of the name 'Trivandrum' is connected with the popular story of the origin of the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple, which is one of the 108 shrines sacred to the Sri Vaishnavas in India. The traditional account regarding the origin of the temple is given by V. Nagam Aiya as follows:—<sup>2</sup>

"The spot where the Trivandrum temple now stands was formerly a jungle called *Ananthankadu*. In this jungle lived a Pulaya and his wife who obtained their livelihood by cultivating a large rice-field near their hut. One day as the Pulayan's wife was weeding in her fields, she heard the cry of a baby close by and on a search found it to be a beautiful child which she took to be a divine infant and was at first afraid to touch. However, after washing herself, she fed the baby with her breast milk and left it again under the shade of a large tree. As soon as she had retired, a five-headed cobra came, removed the infant to a hole in the tree, and sheltered it from the sun with its hood, as the child was an

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1 City of Ananatha, the sacred snake.

2. *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, V. Nagam Aiya, pages 82-83.

incarnation of God Vishnu. While there, the Pulayan and his wife used to make offerings to the baby of milk and *conjee* in a cocoanut shell. Tidings of these things reached the ears of the sovereign of Travancore who immediately ordered a temple to be erected at the place."

"There is another version of the origin of Padmanabha's Temple in Trivandrum, which is handed down from generation to generation as a lullaby song still sung by the Brahmin women in the course of their daily domestic duties. It is as follows:

"The *Vilvamangalam Swamiyar* to whom is attributed the consecration of many temples in Malabar, used to perform his daily *pujas* to his *Salagramams*. During the *puja* he used to close his eyes for a long time in deep meditation of Mahavishnu, when a young child would interrupt him every day by displacing his *Salagramams* and flowers and annoying him in a hundred other ways: but when the Swamiyar opened his eyes the child always disappeared. One day finding the child's interruption intolerable, the *Swamiyar* in a fit of temper, while his eyes were yet shut, removed the meddling child by the back of his left hand. The child took umbrage at this and before the Swamiyar could open his eyes had told him that the child whom he had thus disregarded was none other than the deity that he had been intently praying to see and that he could not meet him anywhere else than at *Ananthankad*, a place of which the Sanyasi had not heard of. The Sanyasi woke from his meditation, found everything was lost and in his distress ran with all possible speed towards the direction which, he imagined, the child must have taken. He now and then heard the distant jingling of the child's waist-ornament and saw where there was loose sand the little foot-prints of the child. After several days' running in this wise without satisfying the cravings of hunger or thirst, the *Swamiyar* heard the cry of a child in the wilderness. He repaired to the spot from whence it came and discovered a solitary Pulaya woman threatening her weeping babe with the words, "If you continue weeping like this, child, I will throw you out into *Ananthankad*". The *Swamiyar's* joy at the mention of this name (*Ananthankad*) knew no bounds and on enquiry he was shown by the Pulaya woman the place which he wanted. Before he had gone a few paces more, the sound of the waist-ring bells

was heard again and a huge *Iluppa* (*Bassia longifolia*) tree came down with a loud crash which marked the spot of the deity's final rest. Vishnu was found lying on his *Adishesha* with all his four arms in splendour and serenity, extending from Tiruvallam to Tiruppapur with his middle portion at Tiru-anathapuram or Trivandrum. Then the *Swamiyar* was pardoned and blessed and he prayed for the deity's contracting himself into a small compass so that he might offer his pujas and make his circumambulations easily. The deity shrank accordingly in compliance with the *Bhakta's* request and the *Swamiyar* performed his pujas and *pradakshinams* to his heart's content. It is also said in this connection that the tree that fell indicating the spot of Vishnu's final rest was afterwards carved into the image of Vishnu in repose, the very same one that we now find inside the temple of Sri Padmanabha at Trivandrum, and a temple was erected over it by the then Travancore King. It is also said that the coconut shell in which the *Vilvamangalam Swamiyar* offered rice oblation to the deity is now represented by a golden bowl of the same shape in which even to-day rice offering is made to Sri Padmanabha. The Pulaya woman who husked the paddy with the hand for oblation by the *Swamiyar* was presented subsequently by the orthodox and munificent King of Travancore with a patch of paddy field for her family to live upon. This field is now called the *Putharikantam* in front of the Eastern Fort-gate, Trivandrum. And to this day it is the custom in Trivandrum that the Nambudiri *Sanyasins* perform pujas to Padmanabha in addition to the Pottis or *Pujaris* specially appointed for the purpose and great respect is shown them by the people as well as by the Maharajah".

What are given above are only the traditional views of the origin of the name 'Trivandrum'. It is worth mentioning in this connection that there is another, and perhaps a more authentic view regarding the origin of the name 'Trivandrum'. The city is referred to in ancient inscriptions as *Sri Anandapuram* or *Tiru-Anandapuram*, and the word Trivandrum is supposed to be a corruption of the above mentioned names. The name *Tiru-Anandapuram* or *Sri Anandapuram* is supposed to have been derived from Lord Vishnu, Ananda being a synonym for Vishnu. S. Sanku Iyer expounds this view of the origin of the name Trivandrum as follows: "The temple of Sri Padmanabhaswami in Trivandrum enshrining the serpent bedded Vishnu, the tutelary deity of

the Travancore Kings, is, in structure and internal arrangement a replica of the Tiruvattar temple,<sup>1</sup> which is believed to be the more ancient of the two. Trivandrum is referred to as 'Anandapuram' is some of the old inscriptions of the place. In the Tiruvattar *Sthalapurana*, Tiruvattar is called *Adyanandapuram* or original Trivandrum. The later construction of the temple at Trivandrum on the model of the one at Tiruvattar and its dedication to the similar deity reclining on the serpent-bed show that Trivandrum has some intimate connection with Tiruvattar".<sup>2</sup> If this version is correct, the name Trivandrum must have been the corruption of the term *Tiru-Anandapuram*.

### History of the District as an Administrative Unit

The area comprising the present Trivandrum District has been historically a part of the erstwhile Travancore State. But the Trivandrum District, as it is constituted to-day, came into existence only after the linguistic re-organisation of States, and the establishment of Kerala State. History records that Travancore State was divided into revenue divisions or districts for purposes of administration even from earlier days. During the reign of Maharaja Rama Varma (1758-1798 A.D.) Travancore consisted of three districts; namely, *Vadakkemukkom*, *Patinjaremukhom* and *Tekkemukkom*, each of which was under an officer designated the *Sarvadhikaryakkar*. *Tekkemukhom* corresponded roughly to the Trivandrum District of later days. In the year 1835 the State was divided into two revenue divisions, viz., the southern and the northern divisions with their headquarters at Kottayam and Quilon respectively, and each division was placed under the charge of a district officer called the Dewah Peishkar. There have been occasional changes since then in regard to the boundaries of the revenue divisions and the arrangements made for their administration. At the time of the integration of the States of Travancore and Cochin in 1949 there were three revenue divisions in Travancore viz., Trivandrum, Quilon and Kottayam. Each of these divisions was under a Division Peishkar. The

1 The Adikesava Perumal temple of Tiruvattar in Kalkulam Taluk of Kanyakumari District is considered to be of equal sanctity as that at Trivandrum. The God Adikesava in this temple is a Sayana Murthi stretched out on its commodious serpent bed, and bears a close resemblance to the deity in the Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple at Trivandrum.

2 Vide Article on "Ancient Travancore" in *Travancore Information and Listener*, Vol. VI, No. 11, page 22.