

# Mapping Identity: Early Tribal and Hilly Ethnic Centers of Non-Brahmin Traditions in Central Travancore

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring the evolution of religion, spirituality, worship, and the formation of spiritual landscapes involves a structured academic approach that incorporates collective insights from history, anthropology, and ethnography. The history of spirituality and worship among South Indian village communities' dates to the early prehistoric period. Clearly, religion serves as the most institutional discourse and structure that has historically intertwined aspects of spirituality, worship, and priesthood within any society. It is observed that the evolutionary processes of these substructures have been influenced by various factors, most commonly popular beliefs, fear, and hereditary traits. Many substructures have their origins in "cults" that are ethnographically older than most of the Semitic religious traditions. Cultural anthropology suggests that the evolution of such cultural traits can be attributed to anthropomorphism and the involvement of human imagination. Within popular culture, the term "cult" often acquires a wide range of sophistication and institutionalization, becoming an integral part of a larger superstructure. In smaller cultures, there is a centrifugal effect that determines the hierarchy of worship and shifts from parochial practices to either universal or Sanskritized models of worship. Sacred

settlements and religious preferences in every society are shaped by a power-centered, hegemonic culture that has evolved through constant ethnic exchanges. This is viewed as a natural outcome of the reciprocal involvement of two categories, wherein processes such as universalization and parochialization are actively engaged. The adaptation, acceptance, and replacement of various religious approaches have led to a dynamic shift in spiritual preferences. Several prehistoric and ethnic communities residing in the hilly landscapes of Peninsular India maintain very primitive forms of worship, primarily characterized by ecological spirituality and animism. Due to the ecological impact of spirituality and their topographical isolation, these primordial practices tend to be static or semi-static in most areas. The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical and ethnographic examination of the early ethnic and hilly tribal centers of non-Brahmin worship in central Travancore

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Community, Cult, Worship, Priesthood, Non-Brahmin, Ecological spirituality, Sacred Settlement.

## An Overview

'Historicizing Syncretic Traditions and the Non Brahminic culture of Kerala' is a quintessential topic of discussion regarding the centuries-evolved spiritual traditions of

the subcontinent of India and, Kerala in specific. This area in history explores micro components of the religious traditions of Kerala. Syncretism is a theoretical framework that explains the historical development of multiple Hindu religious traditions, including Brahminic and Non Brahminic customary practices. This evolutionary process can be perceived as dynamic and political and persists even in contemporary social structures. The Brahminic culture covers the institutional religious tradition primarily found in the temple-centred religious context of Kerala, which emerged at least from the early centuries of the medieval era. The non-Brahmin traditions, in contrast, signifying the multiple individual sacred practices of autochthon cultures. There are numerous surviving cult points and sacred spaces in the form of hilly worshipping centers and holy groves that have been preserved by ethnic communities within the mountainous vegetation of Peninsular India.

The spiritual heterogeneity of culture and convergence of religious traditions of India are evident in the evolving acceptance and assimilation of multiple practices. These traditions are historically incorporated into the heritage of India and the evolution of these multiple elements is manifested in the formidable ethos of Indian spirituality. The ethnocentric and Sanskritic dichotomies of Non-Brahmin and Brahmin, universal and parochial exchanges, dominance, and integration have substantially shaped the spiritual context of Indian culture or what is generally considered the evolutionary elements of Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> The contextual understanding of Hinduism offers a broader canvas, generally treated as a macro semantic framework folded with numerous popular cult practices, dominant sects personified as

sub-religions within the spectrum, or major religions of other countries and native belief systems having Brahminic or Non Brahminic elements.<sup>2</sup>

There were numerous pre-historic and ethnic groups residing in the hilly regions of Peninsular India maintain a very ancient style of worship characterized by ecological spirituality and animism. The ecological influence of spirituality, coupled with geographical isolation, means this early form is generally either static or semi-static in most locations.<sup>3</sup> This article aims to provide a theoretical and ethnographic analysis of the presence of early ethnic and hilly tribal centers of non-Brahmin worship in central Travancore.

### **Distinguishing the Context of 'Religious Landscapes' and 'Sacred Lands'**

The, early western scholars have emphasized the economic perspective of 'sacred ground' in their research. Texts, customs, and sculptural remains suggest that settlements remained unchanged. The consensus is that only normal land generates income for sacred centers; however, the available evidence does not permit a separation between the two types of property. It should be noted that despite the cultivation of sacred space, they were no longer included in the realm of spirituality. Thus, it is necessary to delineate spiritual landscapes from ordinary land from an anthropocentric context by identifying specific characteristics.<sup>4</sup>

A 'Religious Landscape' is distinct from the traditional concept of sacred land, which identifies property as belonging to a divinity irrespective of its use, since it lacks such spaces and a financial background, as well as political support. In its broadest sense, the concept of "religious landscapes" refers to the context of cultural traditions and rituals

<sup>1</sup> Reddy, P.C. Gurivi. "Interplay of Traditions." *Indian Anthropologist*, vol. 39, no. 1, Indian Anthropological Association, 2009, pp. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Sugandhi, Namita, and Kathleen Morrison. "Archaeology of Hinduism." *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*, edited by

Timothy Insoll, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 921-922.

<sup>3</sup> *Census of Travancore State*. Travancore Government Press, 1876, pp. 186-200.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, Daniel G. "The Spiritual Geography of Landscape." *Prism Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, University of Oxford, 2020, p. 34.

within the domain of spirituality.<sup>5</sup> The cultural traditions are exemplified through the processional movement of people and the expression of religious beliefs during annual festivals. Among these are the pathways that one takes to a particular site where religious ceremonies and other rituals are held, as well as the routes a devotee takes or follows when entering a shrine that is of interest to him. Among them are the paths one uses to reach a particular site where religious ceremonies and other rituals are held, as well as the routes a devotee follows when he enters a shrine of interest to him as well as the state-owned or privately owned land surrounding a fortified shrine, there would be market stalls, artisans, and traders who aided pilgrims in a variety of ways.<sup>6</sup>

This framework not only covers the religious landscape but also a range of little narratives and folkloric practices that are connected to the landscape and the community in the minds of the populace. The similarity of mythical and oral practices among communities facilitates the creation of collective memory and has the potential to shape the geo-spiritual identity of such landscapes. It is this collective memory and socially recognized traditions that create the original and socially acceptable sacred spaces, including natural shrines and hilly deities. Essentially, this is the literal domain and territory of the deities. It comprises of crude sculptures and interpolated temple centers that are governed by religious custom and, sometimes, have restrictions concerning how to preserve their purity.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of a sacred landscape and a ritual land theoretical framework is highly contextual for the hilly tribal worshipping centers of Central Travancore. The natural topography and ecological setting of the region played a significant role in shaping the beliefs and practices of the indigenous communities. The sacred sites were often located in natural landscapes of waterfalls,

ivers, caves, forests, and hills, seen as home to powerful spirits and deities. The rituals and performances were also heavily influenced by the unique cultural and socio-economic conditions of the region. Therefore, an understanding of the sacred landscape and ritual land theoretical framework is essential for comprehending the religious practices and traditions of this region.

### **Major Hilly Worshipping Centers of Central Travancore**

The hilly ethnic worshipping centers of Central Travancore have a unique cultural identity that stands out from other Hindu practices. These centers are known for their Non Brahminic cultural practices that include non-vegetarian sacrifices and ritual traditions. The people of these areas follow a strong belief system that connects them with their ancestors and deities. The worship centers are found in these hills have been a part of the cultural identity of the region for a long time and continue to be so. The rituals and practices performed here are almost syncretized with Brahminism. They are geographically positioned surrounding a Brahminic center.

In addition to the sacred hills described above, there are several ethnic hilly landscapes located in the southwestern portion of the region. These hills serve as centers for various hill communities, ranging from 'Pottanmala' in Kuttoor village to Thiruvalla Taluk in the west. As we move northwards, we come across the remaining hills. Taken in to account of the mythological narratives, there are one hundred and one hills located in various geographical areas of Travancore. It is intriguing to note that these local narratives draw inspiration from Indian Epic Traditions such as the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata'. A widely-cited non-textual tradition indicates that the *Kauravas* of 'Mahabharatha' were responsible for the

<sup>5</sup>Horster, Marietta. "Religious Landscape and Sacred Ground: Relationships between Space and Cult in the Greek World." *Revue de l'histoire Des Religions*, no. 227, Armand Colin, 2010, pp. 435–458.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, p.437.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.438.

installation and adoration of these centers. It is evident from several centers in the western hills where *Duryodhana* is worshipped as the main deity ('Poruvazhy' in Adoor Taluk), while *Dushasana* is revered in 'Venthanathe Mala' at Vallamkulam in Eraviveoor of Thiruvalla Taluk as the primary deity. This can be seen as a deconstruction of Brahminic Epic traditions through an intellectually altered hierarchy of epic characters.<sup>8</sup>

Both sides of the river Pamba are occupied by Hindu temples, namely Aranmula Parthasarathy temple to the east and Tellyoor Kavu Bhagavathy temple to the west. In a sense, the Aranmula Parthasarathy temple represents the all-encompassing Brahminic tradition and the 'Tellyoor Kavu' temple is a syncretic expression of the primitive, Brahminic and Non Brahminic traditions. According to legend, these temples are protected by the sacred hills of the four directions. The Edappara Mala is located in the east, 'Kanakozha Mala' lies in the south, 'Pulikunnu Mala' lies in the west, and 'Kadapra Mala' lies in the north, are the ethnic religious hilly terrains that are believed to have safeguarded and adorned the central shrine of Aranmula Parthasarathy temple. Similarly, Malankotta mala in the east and Palakunnatte mala in the south, as well as Kanjiratte and Kazumala in the west and north are protecting Tellyoor Kavu Bhagavathy temple. Observations of ethnographic fieldwork in these settlements suggest that the cultural practices and modes of worship, as well as the spiritual beliefs, do not resemble those of the Brahminic traditions. The chief priest of these temples belongs to the scheduled tribes, such as *Malavelas* or *Malayaraya* and the worship is based on the *Kaulachara* system. There was a common practice in these centers known as *Kuruthi*, in which animals were sacrificed. Despite this, the remaining idols do not

appear to be of any particular shape and any cultural or iconographic comparison is practically impossible due to their crude appearance. In these centers, tree worship and nature worship are important elements. Furthermore, it should be noted that these patterns and schemes of worship differ greatly in Brahminic centers.<sup>9</sup>

'Pottan Mala' is another settlement located on the northern bank of the Manimala River, two kilometres from M.C. Road in Kuttoor village. There is a shrine at the top of 'Pottan Mala' dedicated to two primitive deities. The idols of 'Giri Tevar' and "*Malayachan*" are housed in the temple premises. In addition, the deity of "*Yakshi*" is in the northwest corner, while "*Sarpashtan*" is situated in the southwest corner of the temple compound. A significant offering made to this temple is the 'Pitru puja'. Currently, religious organizations manage this temple, and it has been transformed into a Shiva Parvathy temple with Brahminic rituals and practices.<sup>10</sup>

The 'Kadapra Mala' is another hilly region located in the village of Koipram, adjacent to the Thiruvalla-Pathanamthitta highway. The most significant deity at this temple is Malayachan (an ethnic ancestral deity) located towards the west. *Ayyappa's* sculpture is placed on top of the hill and is visible from the west. The temple is managed by a temple renovation committee. Currently, the worship is exclusively Brahminical, with a Brahminical chief priest. However, the non-Brahminical worship system used to prevail here in the past. The *Devaprasnam* ceremony was organized by the temple renovation committee, and the mode of worship was changed in accordance with its recommendations. *Devaprasnam* strongly suggested a Brahminic approach to worship.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> An ethnographic survey conducted within the hilly ethnic worshipping centers of Pathanamthitta district on August 24 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Information gathered from field visit to the cult centers on April 4, 2024

<sup>10</sup> Nellikkal Muraleedharan. *Aranmulayude Samskarika Pitrukam*. Sree Sankaracharya Sanskrit University, 2009, pp. 113-115.

<sup>11</sup> Information gathered from an elementary field visit to the described cult point by the scholar and documented the Malathullal festival dated on April 25

'Venthanathe Mala' is another ethnic hilly terrain located in Vallamkulam, Eraviperoor village, two kilometres south of the Tiruvalla-Pathanamthitta highway. The temple is managed by a family trustee. The major deities worshipped in this temple are *Dusasana, Shiva, Kali, Sasta, Vishnu, Naga, and Vallyachan*. According to legend, the temple was installed by Dusasana of Mahabharatha. The spiritual functions of this temple were originally managed by the *Malayaraya* tribes. A *Devaprasnam* was held in the 1980s, which resulted in the basic structure and traditions of this deity center being converted into Brahminical practices. The current chief priest (*Tanthri*) is from the Paramboor Illam, a Brahmin family. As per the recommendation of the *Devaprasnam*, the primitive idols were dropped into the Manimala River and this was interpreted as a *Jalasamadhi*. However, every two years, on the day of *Pathamudayam*, the *Malathullal* function is organized, which is led by the *Malaarayas* from Idukki district.<sup>12</sup> The cultural identities of hill deities are fading away, the 'Malakkotta Mala' and its divinity still maintains its original non-Brahmin identity intact. 'Malakkotta Mala' is situated two kilometres away from Thadiyoor in the Thottapuzhaserry village. Malankotta is the most prominent among the four hill deities that guard the Telliyoore Kave Temple. The major deities here are Telliyoore Devi, the other three hill deities, *Nagaraja*, and *Yogeshwara*. The Malavela tribe makes up the worshipping community here, and the mode of worship is based on the *Kaulachara* system, which involves offering arrack, toddy, tobacco, opium, and meat. *Kuruthi* (animal sacrifice) is still practiced here. The ceremony called *Malayutte* on the day of Makarasankramam is particularly special.

Pitru puja is also a dominant practice in the Malankotta hills. The Malankotta hills' non-Brahmin identity is sufficiently established from the findings and observations.<sup>13</sup>

### Major findings and Observations

Tantric texts describe various rites and rituals that are performed by Brahminic tantrists primarily to transfer, diminish, and desecrate non-Brahmin sacred centers. In the first instance, it is known as *Kaavumattam* or *Malamattam* and involves relocating the divinity to another spot within or outside the premises of the center.<sup>14</sup> A whole region formerly occupied by the original sacred land has been resettled and the divinity has migrated from the center to a completely different territory in the form of a symbolic spiritual power or a more tangible material form like a rough stone sculpture or some pieces of granite. The procedure is relatively simple and can typically be completed in one day without the involvement of a gathering. Eventually, in the next stage of ceremonies, there will be a reconsecration, which is the most significant function in the clearance procedure. The action entails modifying the original settlement and confining the sacred shrine to a small, isolated space within the altered sacred settlement. The ceremony of reconfiguration of ethnic religious settlements became a widespread phenomenon in the recent decades and is frequently performed. In this context, it is important to note that the majority of the settlement has been deforested and most plants have been removed. However, a few plants have been preserved to preserve the symbolism associated with primitive sacred settlements. The Brahminic system limits the original settlement to a narrow stretch of stone slabbed ground over which an

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2024.

<sup>12</sup>Information gathered from a field visit to Kadapra Mala dated on August 15 2023.

<sup>13</sup>Information collected from a souvenir published by the temple renovation committee of Malankotta Mala. The insights found from this document is that this center was mostly converted to Brahminic pattern.

<sup>14</sup>Information Gathered from Mr. Prasanna, a

Member of the Venthanathe Mala Renovation Committee, Dated April 4th, 2011, as Part of a Field Visit for the Postgraduate Dissertation Submitted by the Scholar in the Department of History at the University of Kerala."

unpolished monolith is erected. Similarly, to the first structure, *Nagas*, and other celestial deities, as well as ancestral gods, are ceremoniously consecrated to an uncovered structure.

Once the original natural religious landscapes have been cleared and the divine being is expected to reside in a newly constructed architectural settlement, the remainder of the land can be used for cultivation and income generation for the center. As a form of legitimizing their ritualistic position, some sacred settlements in southern Kerala cover the shrine of the converted deity with stone slabs. Thus, the deity has acquired a superior identity, has become a more prominent deity, and the newly constructed shrine represents the advancement of temple architecture in Kerala. After completion of the clearance of a natural religious landscape, the final phase involves initiating the destruction of the ancient spiritual concepts and idols from the site to move them to an existing, human-created sanctorum near the major center. The restoration and installation of the new temple will begin following the successful completion of this ritual. Since colonial times, religious land has also become an asset of financial exchange. Religious clearing and resettlement of societies have been involved with some economic motives, such as land transfers and mercantile transactions.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, this process has also led to the resettlement of primitive religious communities as well as ethnic and linguistic communities. The Brahmin priests, who are not in the original center of worship of the

primitive deities, have been delegated some special powers to non-Brahmin priests which allow them to worship their deities in the original location and to preserve the altered versions of their rituals and rites. The organized Brahminic communities encourage ethnic religious communities to make an occasional pilgrimage to their original shrines in order to perform religious offerings. In accordance with anthropological observations, the great tradition is destroying and eradicating the little traditions through an organized process that involves the little traditions. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the religious clearing process represents that non-Brahmin patterns and ritualistic traditions, even though it is being carried out under the Brahmin scheme.

Ritualists from different backgrounds participate in these ceremonies, including the chief Brahmin priest and his associates, priests from hill tribes or from the Pulluva community, and a local non-Brahmin priest among the village community. Traditionally, the process of selecting and inviting priestly classes is based strictly on the religious preferences of the local community, although the majority prefers the Brahmin priesthood. The availability of demanding priestly classes on charted dates based on astrological suggestions is also considered important when choosing priests. Traditionally, Brahmin priests conducted the transferring and removing ceremonies. Nowadays, non-Brahmin communities also perform these ceremonies, and the ritualistic methods differ slightly from those of the Brahminic model.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The present scholar has conducted two personal interviews since visiting Malankotta Mala. The first was with Vijayan Vela, the chief priest of this hilly spiritual landscape. From his words, it is known that his ancestors worshipped tough and unpolished sculptures that represented nature deities. During the scholar's visit, it was observed that the current center is occupied by syncretic deities of Brahmin and non-Brahmin hybridity. The second interview was with Brahma Sri Neelakandhan Bhattathiri (*Tanthri*), Paramboor Illam. According to him, a *Devaprashnam* was held in the 1982, and the basic structure and tradition of this deity center was converted into

Brahminical. Now, the chief priest (*Tanthri*) is from Paramboor Illam, a Brahmin family. Based on the Devaprasnam's recommendation, the primitive idols were dropped into the river Manimala, and this incident was interpreted as *Jalasadadhi*.

<sup>16</sup>Catrien Noterman, et al. 'The Changing Landscape of Sacred Groves in Kerala (India): A Critical View on the Role of Religion in Nature Conservation', *Religions*, Vol. 7, no. 4, MDPI, Basel, 2016, p. 38.

It is clear from the above discussions that many Brahmin families refrain from participating in such ceremonies due to the fear of misfortune and its aftereffects. In contrast to this, certain tantric families consider this to be a Brahminic burden, akin to the Whiteman's burden described in colonial writings. Religious clearance can be seen as a dichotomy between non-Brahminic, nature-based primitive traditions and the institutionalized Temple-Centric Brahminic system. The popularity of the Brahminic model continues to grow steadily, while the Non Brahminic system is diminishing and losing its unique characteristics and cultural identity. These two religious systems are at odds with one another about worship practices. The Brahminic is separate from the '*Tamoguna*' system and the Non Brahminic practices of worship are in turn enhanced by *Tamoguna*. Ethnographic studies indicate that the Brahminic system has the capability of absorbing and assimilating the little cultures into its own culture, and that both universal and parochial processes are present in the present system. This observation contradicts the assertions of early historians who held that there was a space for the mutual coexistence of multiple religious communities. After the *Kaulachara* and *Tamoguna* systems were replaced, the Vedic worshipping schemes have taken their place. In accordance with the advice of *Devaprasnam*, many hilly deity centers have been renovated and cleared. During the movement of religious clearance, the sculptural representations of Brahminic

deities have been replaced by primitive ethnic gods, thereby distorting the identity of the original. There has been a continuous process of clearing and resettling ethnic sacred shrines in contemporary times as well. The Tribal community living in the hilly worshiping points of Central Travancore lost their priesthood due to Brahminic intervention and a spiritual clearing mechanism. The tribes used to perform religious practices such as offering and rituals inside ancient sacrificial altars, vaults, and stone cells to appease their ancestors' spirits and local demons and prevent their anger. However, the introduction of Brahminical practices and a clearing mechanism by the Brahmins led to the loss of tribal priesthood and the incorporation of Brahminical practices. This discussion quintessentially highlights the complex religious dynamics and erosion of tribal traditions in the region.

In conclusion, the Brahminisation of the hilly terrains and the deterioration of the Malaaraya community along with the adoption of ritual purification practices caused their marginalisation in the hilly terrains of Central Travancore. The shift towards a Temple-centric Hindu spirituality resulted in an evident alteration from the earlier ecological spirituality. This process highlights the complexity of the intersection between religion, caste, and ecological practices in the village communities of peninsular India, and reminds us of the need to promote inclusivity and diversity in spiritual traditions.

**Table 1: The Major Hilly Cult Points of Central Travancore**

No	Name	location	Converted or Replaced Ethnic Deities	Newly Consecrated Deities	Rites and Rituals	Priesthood
1	Pottan mala	Kuttoor village, Thiruvalla, Pathanamthitta district	<i>Malayachan, Yakshi, Giri Thevar and Naga Raja</i>	<i>Shiva and Parvathy</i>	Annual conduct of <i>Malathullal and Pitrupuja</i> along with daily Brahminic worship	Brahminic
2	Kadapra mala	Koipram village, Thiruvalla, Pathanamthitta district	<i>Malayachan, Ayyappan and Kali, Naga</i> After conducting a Devaprasnam a decade ago, <i>Mala Yakki (Yakshi)</i> and an unknown nature God were replaced by the temple renovation committee.	<i>Shiva</i>	Daily Brahminic worship, no traces of ethnic worship	Brahminic
3	Venthanathe mala	Vallamkulam of Eraviperur village, Pathanamthitta district	<i>Dushasana, Shiva, Kali, Sastha, and Valyachan</i> A similar Devaprasnam was held in 1990s most of the listed tribal deities were thrown to river Manimala and installed the images of Brahminic deities	<i>Vishnu, Durga and Nagaraja</i>	<i>Malathullal</i> and <i>Kaulachara</i> worship are conducted annually by the Malayaraya tribes settled in Idukki	Brahminic worship prevails, however certain seasonal priesthood privileges are given to the Malayaraya tribes
4	Malankotta mala	Thadiyoor in the Thottapuzhaserry village. Pathanamthitta district	<i>Malayachan, Yakshi</i> and a few unnamed sculptures are placed here.	<i>Telliyoor Bhagavathy</i> (Syncretic manifestation), Nagaraja and Yogeshwara	<i>Kaulachara</i> offerings, <i>Vellamkudi</i> for ancestors. <i>Kuruthi</i> and <i>Malayoottu</i>	Malavela tribes
5	Edappara mala	Mallapuzhassery village, Pathanamthitta district	<i>Orrali</i> , hero worship offered to Kayamkulam Kochunni, Nagaraja	<i>Shiva and Parvathy</i>	<i>Kaulachara</i> rituals with Brahminic daily worship	Brahminic

*\*Source: Information Gathered from Several Field Visits Conducted by the Present Scholar to the Centers as Mentioned Above.*

### Declaration by Author

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### Notes and References

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#### Field Visits, Interviews, and Other Sources

- An ethnographic survey conducted within the hilly ethnic worshipping centers of Pathanamthitta district on August 24, 2023.
- Information gathered from field visit to the cult centers on April 4, 2024.
- Information gathered from an elementary field visit to the described cult point by the scholar and documented the Malathullal festival dated on April 25, 2024.
- Information gathered from a field visit to Kadapra Mala dated on August 15, 2023.
- Information collected from a souvenir published by the temple renovation committee of Malankotta Mala.
- Information gathered from Mr. Prasannan, a Member of the Venthanathe Mala Renovation Committee, dated April 4, 2011, as part of a field visit for a Postgraduate Dissertation submitted by the scholar in the Department of History at the University of Kerala.
- The present scholar has conducted two personal interviews since visiting Malankotta Mala. The first was with Vijayan Vela, the chief priest of this hilly spiritual landscape. The second interview was with Brahma Sri Neelakandhan Bhattathiri (Tanthri), Paramboor Illam.

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