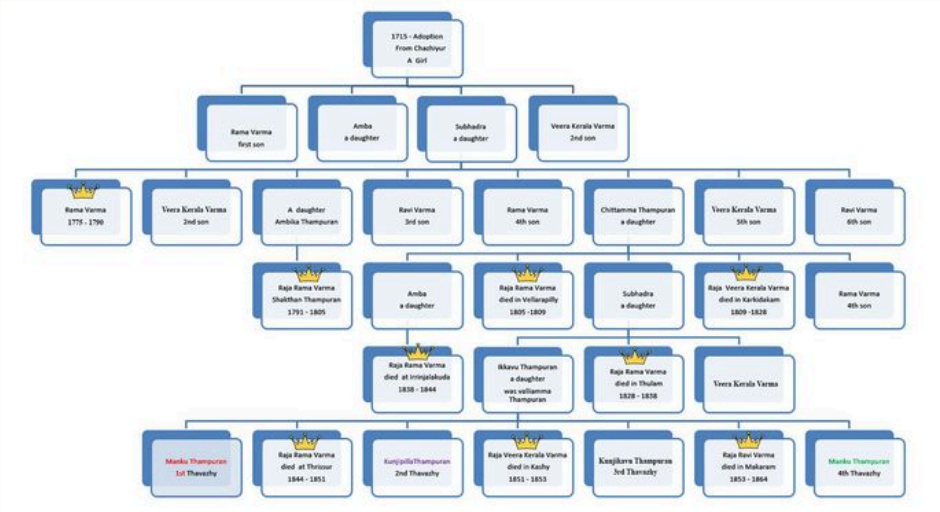


FactsDid you know

The Cochin kings who had to become temple hermits, and how Portugal ended the custom, 1505 to 1510

When Portuguese fleets first anchored off Cochin in 1500, succession to the Cochin throne came with an unusual spiritual obligation. By ancient custom, a reigning Raja had to abdicate in his old age, or upon the death of the family's senior member. He had to spend the rest of his life inside a temple as a religious recluse[1]. Under traditional practice, installing his

successor also required the approval of Cochin's rival overlord, the Zamorin of Calicut[3].

* **The Loyal King Retires to a Pagoda.** The Cochin monarch first allied with Pedro Álvares Cabral in 1500. Portuguese writers called him *Trimumpara*. Regional accounts identify him as **Unni Goda Varma** (or **Unni Rama Koil I**). He endured invasion and the burning of his capital rather than betray his Portuguese guests to the Zamorin[3]. Shortly after Portuguese captain Duarte Pacheco repelled the Zamorin's forces, the weary king followed ancestral custom. He **abdicated the throne and retired to a temple as an ascetic**[1]. The next two senior princes in line had sided with the Zamorin during the war. They were expelled from the country. So the retiring monarch appointed his surviving nephew, **Rama Varma** (also styled **Unni Rama Koil II** or *Nambeadora*), as regent[1]. Portugal's first Viceroy, Francisco de Almeida, arrived in November 1505. He brought a jewel-set golden crown for the old king. He found the king already hidden away in a temple. So he gave the crown to his nephew instead. He wanted to tie future royal succession to Lisbon's approval rather than Calicut's[1]. * **The 1510 Succession Crisis.** Five years later, in **1510**, the retired old king died in his temple[3]. Under ancestral law, the ruling king Rama Varma was now required to give up the crown. He had to become a temple hermit himself. He had to make way for the next prince in seniority[3]. However, that next senior prince belonged to the rival **Mutta Tavazhi** branch. He was a declared partisan of the Zamorin[3]. Cochin's Brahmins clamoured for ancient tradition to be respected. Meanwhile, the rival princes marched to **Vypin**. They were backed by a detachment of the Zamorin's Nayars. The reluctant Rama Varma prepared to step down. He withdrew into the countryside[3].

Alarmed, the Portuguese commander at Cochin sent an urgent message to Viceroy **Afonso de Albuquerque** at Cannanore[3]. Albuquerque rushed south. He routed the rival claimant's forces. He openly scorned the king's religious objections. He also scorned the Brahmins' protests. He said, **"Brahmans' words have ceased to rule this kingdom. The mighty arm of the foreigner must be respected in future."** [3] Local chieftains

presented themselves. These included those of Mulanturuttu, Parur, and Pallippuram. They pledged loyalty. They urged him not to heed the Brahmins. Only after that did Rama Varma consent. He did so with a heavy heart. He broke the tradition of his ancestors and stayed on the throne[4].

From 1510 onward, the custom of Cochin kings abdicating to live as temple hermits was **permanently abandoned**[13]. For nearly a century and a half, the Portuguese confined the Cochin crown strictly to the **Elaya Tavazhi** branch. They also allowed the eldest male across all royal branches, if he was older than the reigning king, to hold the separate title of **Perumpadappu Muppu**. This carried social and temple authority[10].