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**SAMATHA LOKSEVA SAMITHI**  
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## History Of Athirathram

The ritual emerged from predecessor rituals, which were incorporated as building blocks, around the 10th century BC, and was likely continuously practiced until the late [Vedic period](#), or the 6th century BC. In post-Vedic times, there were various revivals of the practice, under the [Gupta Empire](#) in the north (ca. 4th to 6th century), and under the [Chola Empire](#) in the south (ca. 9th century), but by the 11th century, the practice was held to have been discontinued; except for the Nambudiris of Kerala.

To observe the ritual, goat sacrifice is essential.<sup>[4]</sup> Since animal sacrifice is frowned upon by the Hindu society since the end of Vedic age and is a punishable offense in modern India, all documented Agnicayanas have been performed without this and may be deemed incomplete.

In 1975 Indologist [Frits Staal](#) documented in great detail the performance of an Agnicayana conducted performed by [Nambudiri Brahmins](#) according to [Samaveda](#) tradition<sup>[5]</sup> at Panjal, [Kerala](#).<sup>[6][7]</sup> The last performance before that had been in 1956, and the Nambudiris were concerned that the ritual was threatened by extinction. It had never before been observed by outsiders. In exchange for a financial participation of the scholars towards the cost of the ritual, the Nambudiris agreed that it should be filmed and recorded. The ritual was performed from 12 to 24 April 1975. An effigy was used to symbolize the goat sacrifice.<sup>[4]</sup> Staal (1989) bases a general analysis of the similarities of [grammar](#) and [ritual](#) on this performance.

After the 1975 Agnicayana, there have been several more Nambudiri performances: in 1990 Agnicayana at [Kundoor](#), and in 2006 at Sukapuram.<sup>[7]</sup> Belief holds Sukapuram to be one among the 64 villages originally established by [Parashurama](#), the [sixth avatar](#) of [Vishnu](#) after creating [Kerala](#) by throwing his axe into the ocean. The [Somayagam](#) (Agnistoma) was performed for the first time in 222 years at [Aluva](#) from 25 April till 1 May 2009.<sup>[8]</sup>