



POORAM

2019

A JOURNEY BACK IN TIME

COLOURS OF THE GREATEST FESTIVAL

Welcome to the 36 hour long humongous festival of Kerala that symbolize the visit of various deities to the Vadakkumnathan Temple. Thrissur Pooram is the brainchild of Sakthan Thampuran, a powerful ruler who is also hailed as the architect of the city of Thrissur. Whether you frequent the fest annually or whether this is your very first time visiting the land of temples, you will be amazed at how a festival can be chaotic and synchronized at the same time. You'll be sharing the cramped hectic streets and alleys with caparisoned elephants, a cheering crowd, several folk art performers, line-ups of drummers and pipers and the rest of the temple troupe. The expanse resonating with the music of Panchavadyam, an orchestra of five instruments.

The frenzy witnessed around the Swaraj Maidan is majorly contributed by three key temples, the Thiruvambady, Paramekkavu and the Vadakkumnathan temple. The Goddesses of Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu temples, accompanied by elaborate processions are brought to a small hillock in the centre where the Vadakkumnathan diety stands. The most prestigious 'Kudamattom' happens henceforth, marked by colourful parasols decorated on elephant tops exchanged between elephant troupes and this is followed by many other pyrotechnics celebrations that stretch into the night.



INTRODUCTION

RICH & REGAL POORAM

The most remarkable thing about Kerala's landscape is that it is studded with thousands of temples; each one being a spring-board of an annual festival, comprising of religious rites, elephant processions, percussion orchestra, fireworks and cultural performances based on the temple and its folk arts. But Thrissur Pooram stands a class apart of all the aforesaid things. It has carved a unique position for itself much above the rest and is also recognized as a major national festival, one which is listed in the National Tourism calendar for international tourists.

Thrissur Pooram is a festival celebrated beyond the boundaries of cast and religion. It has grown as a festival celebrated across people of varied culture, community and diaspora, and has evolved into an expression of the peoples' craze for sound and colour, beauty and splendour. While its universal appeal fascinates the young and the old and engulfs both the East and the West, Pooram also acts as a unique social instrument to weld together people of variegated castes and creeds in collective activity, thereby making a distinctive contribution towards fostering communal amity and inculcating a cosmopolitan outlook.



Thrissur Pooram has been rightly described by an international travel website as "the most spectacular festival on the planet".

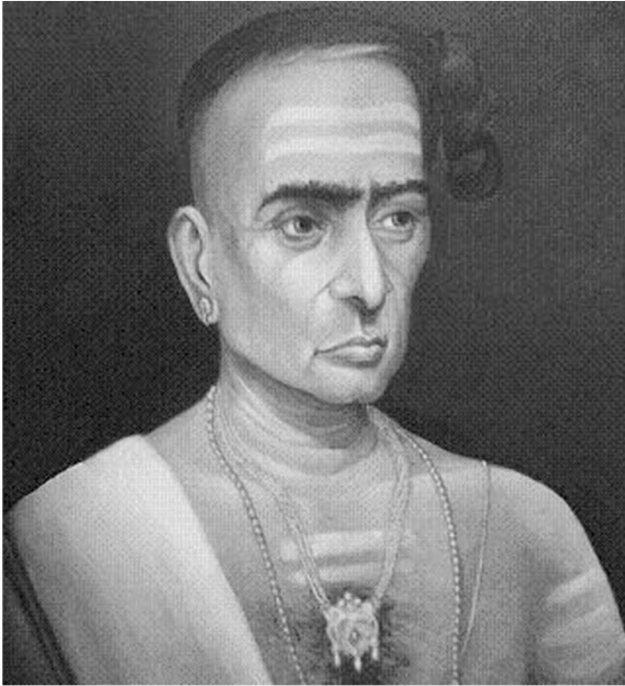
THE BACKSTORY: SAKTHAN THAMPURAN & THRISSUR

Steeped in history, thronged with myths and buzzing with enigma, the genesis of Thrissur Pooram like that of many other age-old temples and festivals is inevitably shrouded by the mists of antiquity. Based on certain relevant chronological benchmarks in the history of Cochin State and culling the contents of various legends transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation, it has been possible to obtain a fairly reliable reconstruction of the past.

The architect of Thrissur Pooram is indisputably Maharaja Rama Varma of Cochin State (1751-1805), popularly known as the Sakthan Thampuran (Strong King) who earns his name for the vigour of his rule and his uncompromising crusade against corruption, criminality and the severity of his punishments. Sakthan, as a young Prince, grew up in one of the worst periods in the chequered history of Cochin. The Namboothiris, deriving immense wealth and power through the control of temples and their vast domains, were insolent and challenged the suzerainty of the King. They even manoeuvred to bring the Thrissur Palace under the occupation of the Zamorin of Calicut. The humiliation was further augmented by the invasions by Hyder Ali and later by Tipu, as also the surreptitious machinations of the Dutch, the Portuguese and the English. Thrissur symbolised Sakthan's iron determination to re-establish order and retrieve the State's honour.



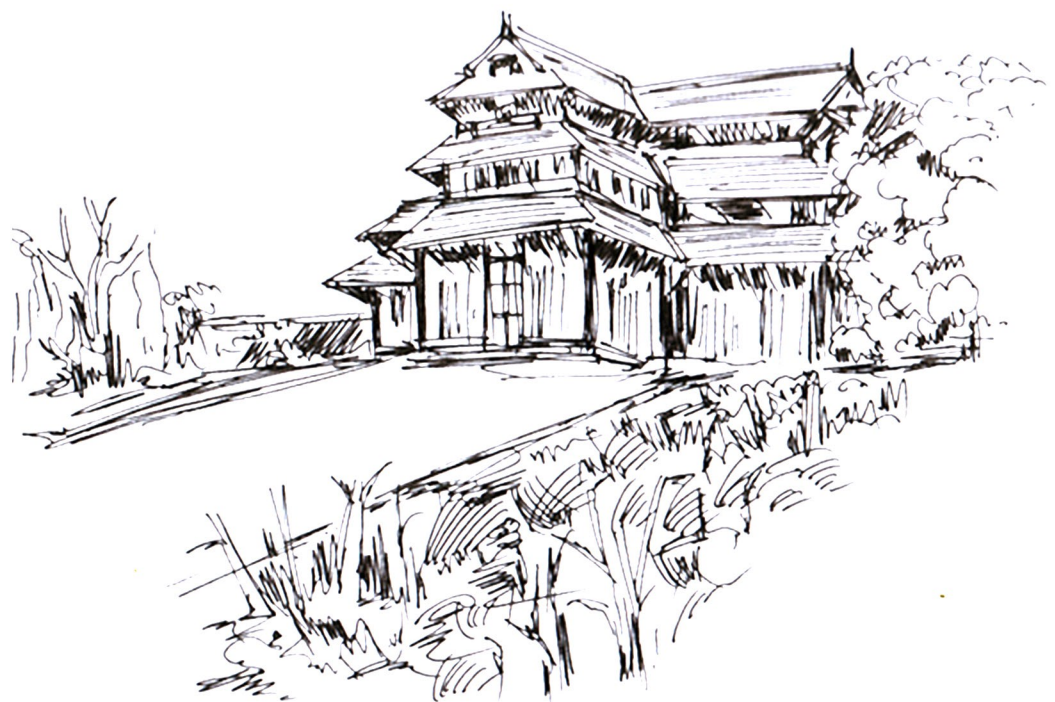
Thrissur town and its suburbs collectively called, the 'Peruvanamgramam', was then under the chieftainship of one of the most prevailing 'Namboothiri' clans. The Arattupuzha Pooram, an annual festival displaying the might of the Namboothiris, was conducted with all pomp and splendour at Arattupuzha, about 10km from Thrissur. A habitual practice followed then was to carry the deities of all Bhagavathy and Sastha temples under Namboodiris or local chieftains, all the way to Arattupuzha to participate and pay obeisance to Lord Sri Ram of Triprayar, the presiding deity of the festival.



Sakthan Thampuran built the planned city of Thrissur and he rebuilt the famous Vadakkumnathan temple which was destroyed during the attacks of Tippu.

Nevertheless, during such Arattupuzha Pooram, the deities from Thrissur could not make it to the venue due to unprecedented heavy rains. But it so happened that the Peruvanam chiefs, who were even otherwise not happy with the Thrissur sector, made use of the opportunity to prohibit the Thrissur temples from any future participation in the Arattupuzha Pooram. It was this incident that actually led to the institution of the eminent Thrissur Pooram. It was under Sakthan's reign that Thrissur underwent a complete transformation and it metamorphosed into a model town and Pooram was also conceived during this period under the aegis of two public-owned temples which were not participants of Arattupuzha festival even earlier.

Sakthan Thampuran was a powerful leader, commendable administrator and above all an ardent patron of art too. The planned city of Thrissur was built by Sakthan Thampuran and the renowned Vadakkumnathan temple, which had been demolished during the attack of Tippu was rebuilt then in accordance to the principles enshrined in the ArthaSastra of Kautilya. Sakthan suppressed the powerful Namboothiries known as Yogiar and transferred the administration of the temple into the hands of the King. Right from A.D. 1750 Thrissur and Vadakkumnathan temple were under the rule of the Zamorins of Calicut. The Cochin army sought help from the Travancore army for expelling the Zamorins of Calicut from Thrissur. The Namboothiries who revelled in pronounced prominence in the Vadakkumnathan temple were bottled-up by Sakthan and thereby ending their relevance and domination in the socio-political arena. This was a priority item in Sakthan's plan, and this was achieved by freezing the vast resources of the Vadakkumnathan temple from the control of the pontiffs (Yogadiris) and ordering punitive punishment to those who collaborated with the Zamorin in the occupation of the Thrissur Palace. The Pooram can be regarded as a positive manifestation from the end of Thampuran to honour the achievements, for which a grand festival involving the whole population of Thrissur was initiated so as to bring the monarchy and the people closer together. Towards this, he relied on the two public temples of Thrissur, viz., Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu. He called the important persons involved in the management of these temples and chalked out the plans for the festival known the world over today as Thrissur Pooram!

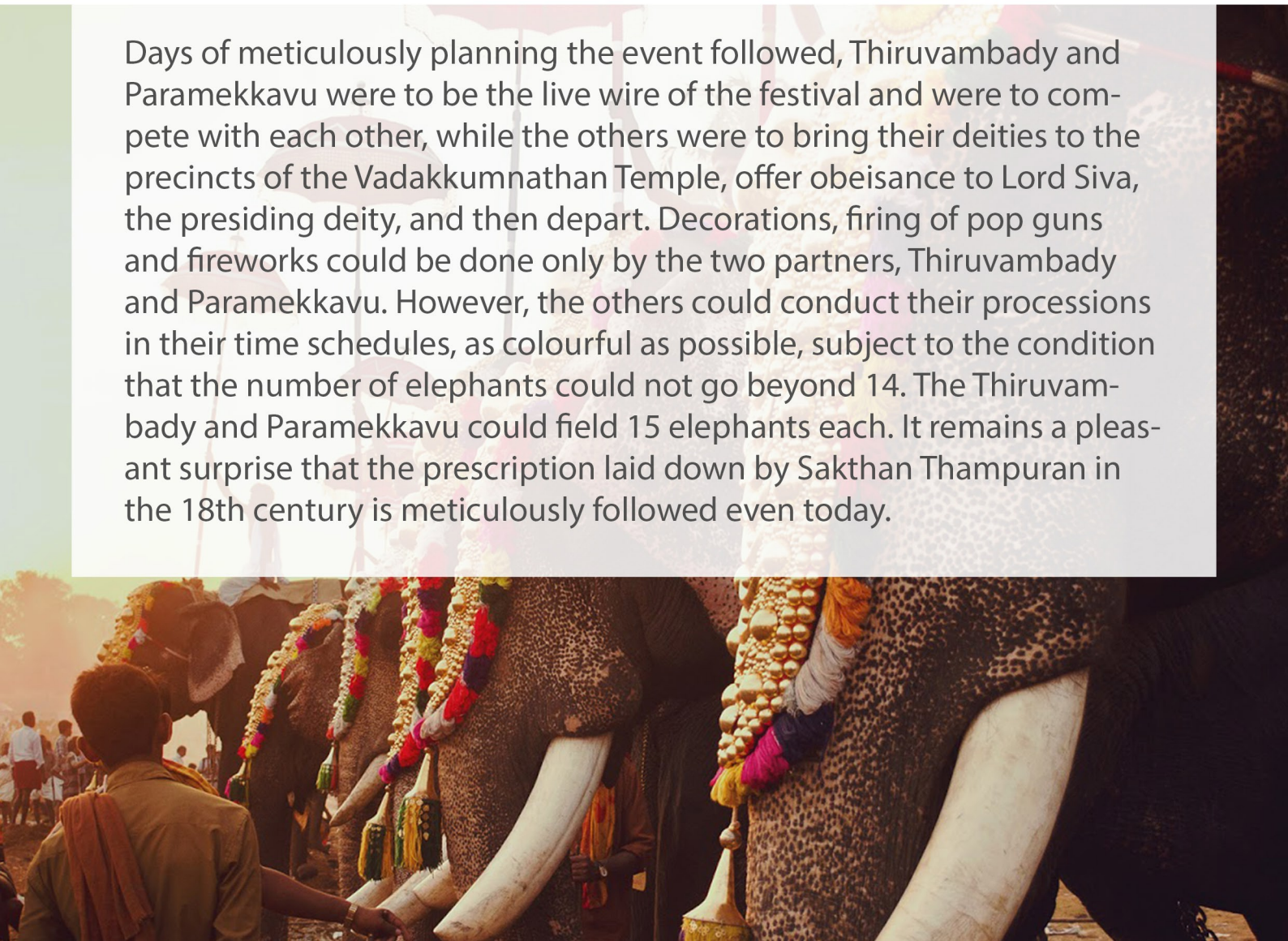


THE GENESIS OF THE THRISSUR POORAM

Sakthan Thamburan reckoned the festival to be a festival of Paramekkavu Devi and Thiruvambady Bhagavathy, nevertheless, his deep devotion to Thiruvambady Krishna found expression in fixing a golden effigy of Krishna as 'Muraleedhar' on the 'kolam' carrying the Thidambu' (mini idol) of Bhagavathy on the elephant. He knew that competition is the sine qua non of excellence and asked the Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu groups to vie with one another to make the festival more colourful and charming.

At this juncture, the Namboodiri Ooralars/local chieftains of eight other temples declared their support to this new idea that Sakthan Thamburan had raised and appealed to him to save them from the disgrace inflicted by the ban on participation in the Arattupuzha festival. The King graciously allowed these temples to participate in the Thrissur Pooram on the Pooram aster of the month of Mesha (April 14 to May 14 mostly) as per the Malayalam Calendar.

Days of meticulously planning the event followed, Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu were to be the live wire of the festival and were to compete with each other, while the others were to bring their deities to the precincts of the Vadakkumnathan Temple, offer obeisance to Lord Siva, the presiding deity, and then depart. Decorations, firing of pop guns and fireworks could be done only by the two partners, Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu. However, the others could conduct their processions in their time schedules, as colourful as possible, subject to the condition that the number of elephants could not go beyond 14. The Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu could field 15 elephants each. It remains a pleasant surprise that the prescription laid down by Sakthan Thampuran in the 18th century is meticulously followed even today.



THEKKINKAD MAIDAN

THE VENUE

The mayhem takes place in the town's major centre, the seventy-acre circular Thekkinkad Maidan, with its unique topography gently and symmetrically sloping away from the centre. The imposing ten-acre Vadakkumnathan Temple complex, enclosed by lofty 'elephant-belly' stone walls and four massive multi-storied 'gopurams', occupies the centre of the maidan, functioning as the physical and spiritual beacon of the festival. (Vadakkumnathan (Lord Siva) is the presiding deity of Thrissur).

SACRED, SOULFUL & SPECTACULAR SCENES OF POORAM

ELEPHANT PROCESSION

The erstwhile royalty of India seems to have realized that power is best brandished from elephant tops, consequently, Kings appeared before their dazzled subjects on elephants and established their supremacy. An elephant mounted by a deity is even more radiant and the deity mounted on an elephant is resplendent. The importance is attributed even during the selection of the pachyderm, best available ones are chosen and matched to ensure symmetry during 'Ezhunnallippu' (procession carrying the deity). They are decorated with elaborate accoutrements and their foreheads adorned with glittering gold plated 'nettippattams' (headgear). Added to these are the colourful, embroidered mega-parasols and the rhythmic waving of creamy white 'venchamarams' (yak tail bunches) against the background of large 'alavattams' (peacock feather fans) enhancing the divinity and beauty of the formation. As the drummers in the forefront spring into action, the entire formation comes alive, offering a rare and exquisite audiovisual feast to the viewers.



ORCHESTRA

Panchavadyam and Chendamelam are the main orchestras of the festival. Panchavadyam, a unique ensemble special to Kerala, is a harmonious combination of five different instruments, three of which are of the percussion type, viz., the Thimala, the Maddalam and the Edakka; the fourth is the time-keeping 'elathalam' (cymbals) and the fifth is the 'Kombu' (trumpet). The gay symphony, the beats and tempo of this vibrant orchestra have the power to hypnotise the listeners. The Chendamelam comprises of 'chendas' (drums), kuzhals (pipes), kombus (trumpets) and 'elathalams' (cymbals). It involves the participation of over 170 artists, 15 drummers playing the drum and another 75 using the bass end, about 50 cymbalists, 17 or more pipers and double the number of trumpeters. The famous Pandimelam has several phases of varying rhythm cycles and a grand finale that is sure to leave one awestruck.

FIREWORKS

Thrissur Pooram is also an opportunity to witness the greatest pyrotechnics on display. The fireworks commence (at around 3 o'clock early morning) with a loud bang heralding the lighting of the cracker chains, the serial explosions merging into a continuous roar punctuated with the bursting of innumerable 'gundus', dynamites and colourful crackers. It gains momentum through the night and ends in a dazzling climax of light and sound. This is followed by an impressive display of multi-coloured and multi-stage gold and silver rains, titanic wheels, fiery blossoms and several innovative combinations holding spellbound a million-strong crowd till the early hours of the morning. The flamboyance of the display is augmented by the spirit of friendly competition between the Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu sides.



THE THRISSUR POORAM A POTPOURRI OF EVENTS



The exuberant, anarchic swirl of Thrissur adorned by anything and everything indigenous to Kerala on display and the grand event commenced at the wee hours of 13th May 2019 and extended until the next day noon. This year, the festivities began at 6 am (13th of May) and concluded at 2pm (14th May). The section below is aimed at giving you a sneak peek into the major events carried out as a part of the Thrissur Pooram.

POORAM 19



THE CURTAIN RAISER: POORAM EXHIBITION MARKS 55 YEARS OF SPLENDOR IN 19'

The Thrissur Pooram exhibition, which extends for around 50 days sets the mood for the upcoming major thrills. The Pooram exhibition forms an excellent platform to educate, promote, advertise and sell assorted products. Showcasing the colourful face of the cultural capital of the state, the Pooram exhibition this year marks the 55th year from the time it was named so when taken up by the Paramekavu and Thiruvambadi Devaswoms in 1963.



ISRO Pavilion: Crowd puller at Thrissur Pooram Exhibition

A model of the space suit designed for Gaganyaan Astronauts and a scale model of the proposed Small Satellite Launch Vehicle are huge draws at exhibition this year. Apart from this the pavilion displays 1:10 scale model of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mk-III (GSLV Mk-III) and 1:3 scale model of crew module designed for human space flight mission. This is also the first time that scale models of the SSLV and crew modules are being displayed outside the VSSC.

This year the exhibition was inaugurated on the 1st of April 2019 and started functioning from 7th April 2019 till the 27th May 2019. The exhibition showcases food items, accessories, textiles, home appliances, Ayurvedic products, cosmetics and home décor at reasonable rates, along with educational stalls organized by various institutions and departments of the government.

7TH MAY 2019:

KODIYETTAM

The vision of Sakthan Thamburan was deeply farsighted and entirely holistic that even minute items still has his signature on it and he had fixed the family whose descendants will be the fabricator of Kodimaram for both temples. The kodimaram of Paramekavu was decided to be crafted by the descendants of Paravathany Chembil Kudumbam and that of Thiruvambady was chosen as the progenies of Kanattukkara Thazhettu Purakkal Ravunni.

Most of the temples have a permanent flag post but every year the Pooram flag is hosted in a makeshift post made out of fresh Arecanut tree. The carpenter in charge of hoisting the flag post select the arecanut tree to be elevated, the tree is uplifted and decorated with mango leaves, banyan leaves, and Karuka Pullu (a type of grass) on the eve of the Kodiyettu. The post is cut in a ritualistic style by the carpenter of the domain (Desathe Assari). The carpenter undergoes one-week vow before starting his work. He does the bhoomipooja too. Interestingly, this is the one and only time a non Bhramin performs a pooja inside the four walls of the temple. True to the tradition, the carpenter will wear the sacred thread at that time. The hoisting is done after taking permission from the senior most member (desathe assan) of the domain. Thiruvambhadi hosts temporary flags at Naduvilal and Naickanal and Paramekkavu at Manikandalal to declare the beginning of the festival. In line with this, Karamuku Pooram hoists another flag at Ollurkkavu junction. There would be two flags in Naithalakavu temple, one in front of Devi temple and other in front of Anthimahakalan.



The time of Kodiyaattam in all the associated temples for the year 2019 has been shown in the table below.

Temple

Time for Kodiyaattam

Kanimangalam	6.30pm to 7.00pm
Panamukkupily	6.30pm to 7.00pm
Chembukkavu	5.30pm to 6.00pm
Karamukku-Pookkattikkara	6.00pm to 6.30pm
Laloor	8.00am - 8.30am
Choorakkottu Kavu	7.30pm to 8.00pm
Ayyanthole	11.00am-11.30am
Naithalakavu	6.30pm to 7.00pm
Paramekkavu	12.00pm to 12.30pm
Thiruvambadi	11.30am to 12.00pm



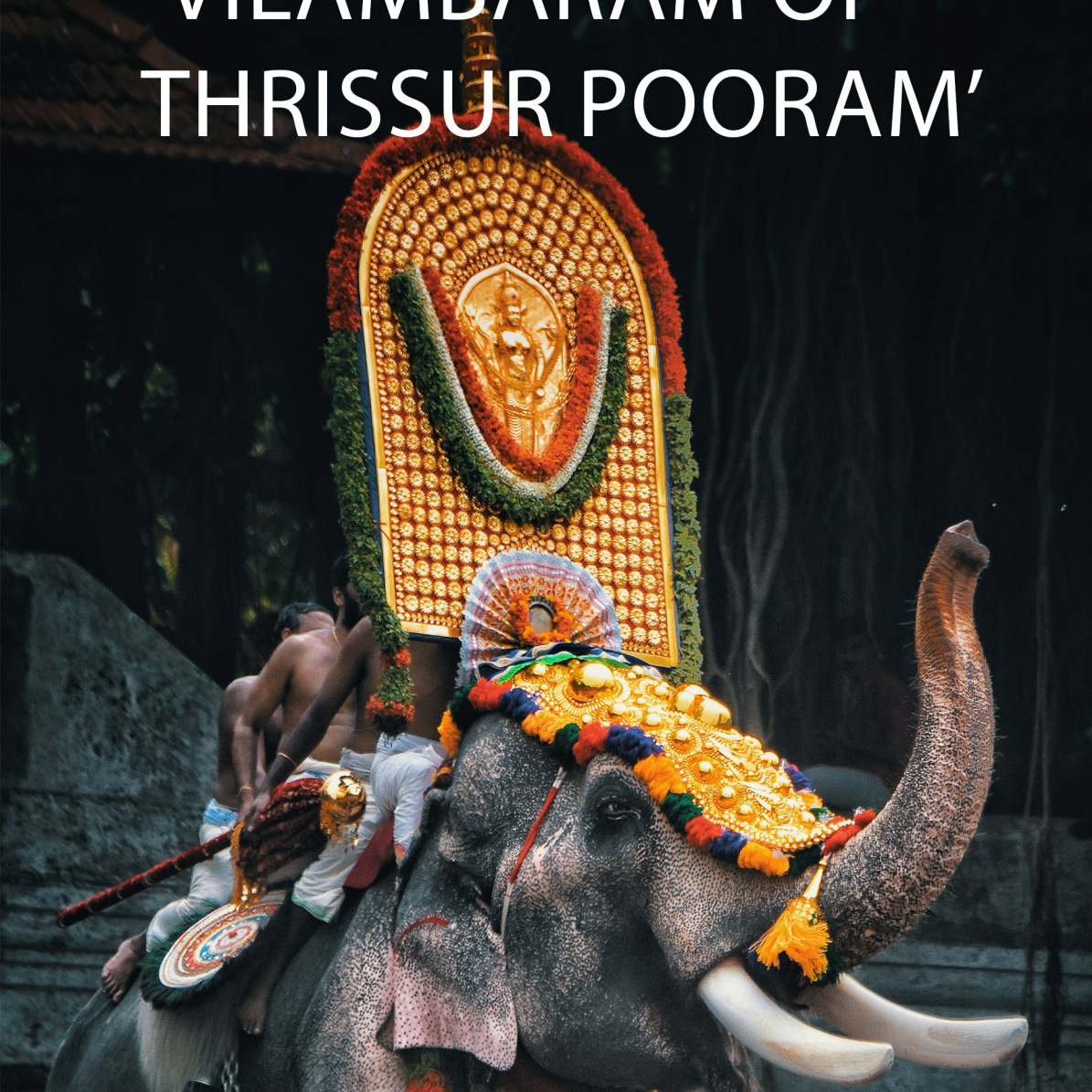
12TH & 13TH MAY SAMPLE FIREWORKS AND 'CHAMAYA PRADARSHANAM'

Thrissur assumes a festive look, days before the Pooram date. Artistically designed multi-tier `Pandals' decorated with myriad coloured bulbs weaving ever-changing patterns, welcome arches, festoons and flags spring up all over the town as Thrissurians stride into the festival mood. Pooram is heralded by two preparatory events; these are the Sample Fireworks in the evening of the last but one day and the exhibition of Accoutrements called the 'Chamaya Pradarshanam'. The sample fireworks display for this year was carried out on the 11th of May 2019, and 'Chamaya Pradarshanam' of the accoutrements used by the Paramekkavu side was displayed on the 11th of May 2019 and on 12th May 2019 by Thriuvambady. The accoutrements are new, freshly gold-plated Nettipattams, silken parasols, Venchamarams etc. The Exhibition, extending for over 12 hours into the night, gives an opportunity to appreciate the aesthetics at close range, and is visited by lakhs of people. The sample firework, a mini firework show and this year it was attended by over a lakh of people. On the 12th may 2019 the sample firework was commenced by the Thiruvambady side at around 7:45 pm and the Paramekkavu began theirs at 8:30pm.

FIRE WORKS



'VILAMBARAM OF THRISSUR POORAM'



The opening of the Thekke Gopura Nada of Sree Vadakkumnathan on the 12th of May, 2019, witnessed an unprecedented mass. It is with this event that the Thrissur Pooram celebrations were announced to the world, locally called the 'Vilambaram of Thrissur Pooram'. The major reason for this extraordinary crowd was because of the star tusker Thechikkottukavu Ramachandran. Ramachandran has had the privilege of carrying the idol of Kuttoo Naithalakavu Bhagavati right from his debut pooram in 2014 in a stretch for the last five years. He opens the Thekke Gopura Nada or the South Gate of the Vadakkumnathan Temple on the eve of Pooram, thereby symbolising its onset. This year the controversies regarding his appearance added enthusiasm to the onlookers and this led to a massive turn out at the Vilambaram ritual of Thrissur Pooram.

A sneak-peek on the most adored tusker in Kerala, Ekachatrathipathi Thechikottukavu Ramachandran. The star tusker is a migrant from Bihar brought to Kerala in early 1970's, when he was around 13 years of age, and is currently owned by the Peramangalam temple trust. He is the tallest pachyderm alive in Kerala today and second tallest Asian Elephant in the world. Maiden name of this celebrity was Moti Prasad, when he was brought to Kerala first, but keeping in mind that the name was inapt for his new surroundings, he was first renamed as Ganeshan and later as Ramachandran when he was brought by the Thechikottukavu devaswom. Erimayur Mani was his most important or first mahout for the longest period. Thechikottukavu Ramachandran was the newsmaker and crowd puller of 2019 Thrissur Pooram, shrouded by controversies but with a happy and blessed ending.



This year's Thrissur Pooram saw deviations from customary practices of a single elephant carrying the idol of Naithalakavu Bhagavati from Kuttoor to Vadakkumnathan. The idol was brought till Vadakkumnathan by Thechikkottukavu Devidasan and was handed over to Thechikkottukavu Ramachandran at Manikandal at around 9:40am. The team headed by Thechikkottukavu Ramachandran entered through the west entrance and exited through South or the Thekke Gopuram at 10.35 am and the pachyderm greeted the swelling crowd of his fans with his trunk which led to wild cheers from the crowd.





THE DAY

13TH MAY 19

MINI-POORAM OR THE KHADAKA POORAM

The Mini Poorams, star of the day, has the entire forenoon reserved for the eight invited deities from the minor temples in and around the town. The only activity that happens apart from Mini pooram in the forenoon slot is the ezhunnallippu procession of the deities from Thiruvambady temple to the Brahmaswom Madhom (vedic centre).

This year the Mini-pooram started arriving at the maidan from 7:45 in morning with the habitual practice of Kanimangalam Sastha entering first through the Thekke Gopura Nada and exists through west nada. The melam by the Khadaga Pooram starts at Sree Moolasthanam, and the first in the lot was Pandi melam by Kehlata Sundaran leading the exemplary show by the Kanimangalam Sastha temple team. The melam was a treat to our ears as well as to our eyes, to watch the seven mighty caparisoned tuskers accompanied by the high-voltage performance of pandi melam, this continued till 8.30am, with that the first team exited to return back in the evening after Kudamat-tam.

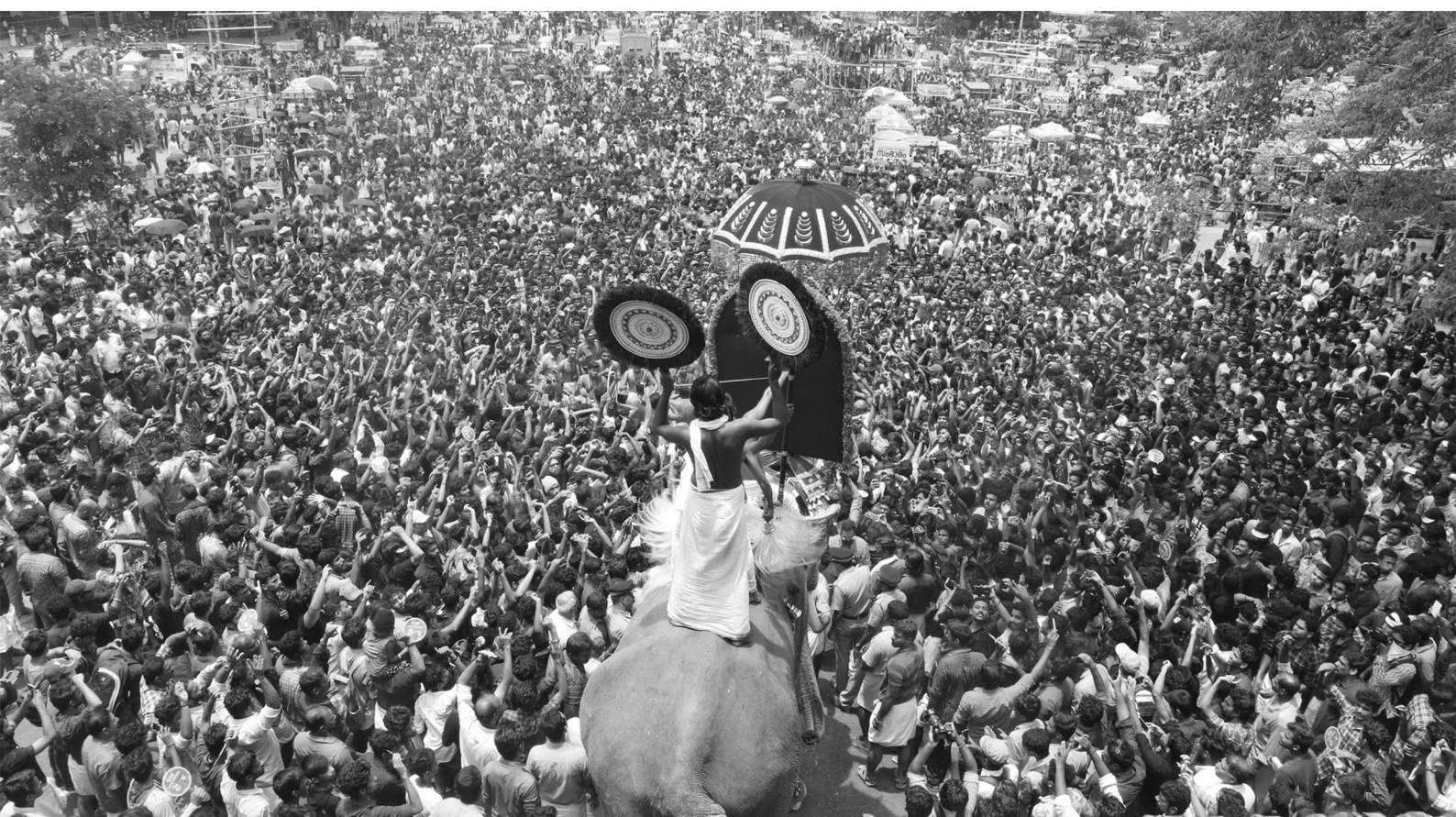


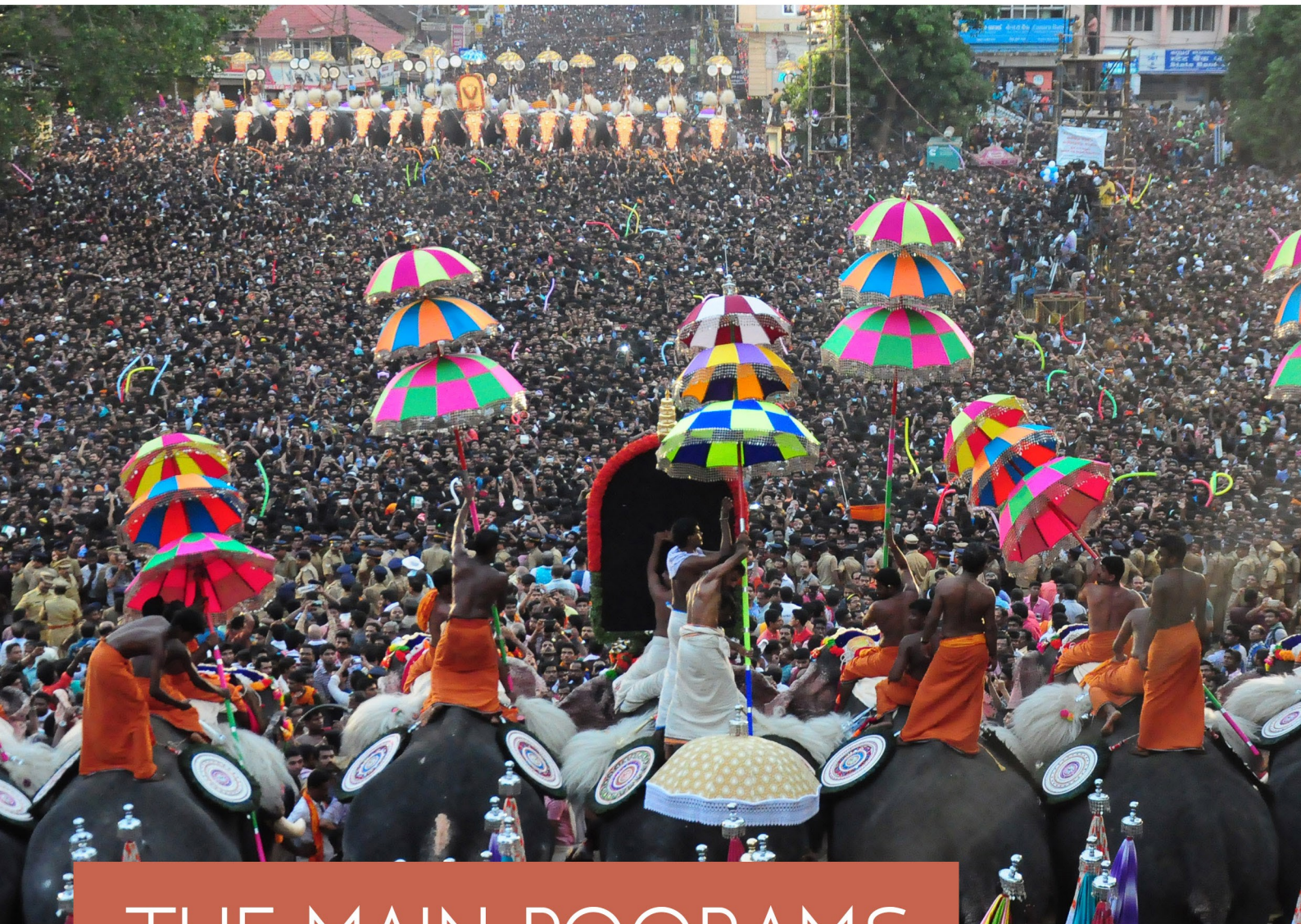
The custom is continued for all the associated temples, where idol depicting the respective deity is carried on elephant tops, flanked by 2 to 13 elephants. Accompanied by a high spirited orchestra, they gracefully find their way towards the Vadakkumnathan Temple, where they pay obeisance to Lord Siva and depart. The strength of elephants and the time schedule of each mini-poorams departure from their respective temples and arrival at the venue are fixed by tradition, and each of them operate within the allotted time frame so that one does not come in the way of the other. Thus, from morning till noon Thekkinkad Maidan is replete with the cascading processions of the mini-poorams.



The 36-hour-long pooram follows a strictly prescribed route to pay obeisance to Lord Vadakkumnathan. The pooram flags off with the mini poorams marked by the ceremonial entrance of the 'Kanimangalam Sastha' pooram through Southern Gopuram at 7am and this is succeeded by the arrival of Panamukkampilly Sathavu, Chembookavu Karthiayani Devi, Karamukku Karthiayani Devi, Choorakkottukavu Durga Devi, Ayyanthole Karthiayani Devi, and Naithalakavu Bhagavathi, Paramekkavu Bhagavathy and Thiruvambady Bhagavathy escorted by Krishna.

The "Kanimangalam Sastha" enters Vadakkumnathan through the Southern gopuram and exits through the Western gopuram, whereas the Chembookavu Baghavathy, Panamukkumpilly Sastha and Paramekkavu Bagavathy enters through Eastern gopuram and leave through Southern gopuram. The poorams of Laloore, Ayyanthole, Naithalakavu, Choorakottukavu, move to Thekkinkadu maidan from Naduvilal (west) and enters Vadakkumnathan through the Western gopuram and leaves through the Southern gopuram. Karamukku bagavathy enters through the Western gopuram and leaves through the Southern gopuram. Thiruvambady moves through Naikanal (North) and enters Vadakkumnathan through the Western gopuram and leaves through the Southern gopuram.





THE MAIN POORAMS OF THIRUVAMBADY AND PARAMEYKKAVU

Even though all the participating ten temples are an integral part of this festival, Pooram is mainly a healthy competition between two main parties, The Thiruvambady and Parameykkavu temple.

MORNING EZHUNNALLIPPU PROCESSION FROM THIRUVAMBADY TEMPLE

On the day of the utsav, the temple opened at 3 am for routine poojas and 'Usha Sheeveli' after which the 'Nadakkal para' started, wherein Devi started off her journey to the Pooram with a procession from Thiruvambady emerging at around 7.45 am, from the sanctum in a formation of three mighty caparisoned tuskers, the central one bearing the magnificent `Kolam'. This is the most enchanting sight of the morning hours.



For reasons of logistics, the deities of Thiruvambady Temple in the north of the town have to be moved to the Brahmaswom Madham (Vedic Mutt) close to the western fringe of Thekkinkad Maidan. The parade, moves along the Shoranur Road to the accompaniment of drums in the soothing `nadapandi' mode, a heart-warming sight is the reception with 'Para' and 'Nilavilakku' by the house wives and shopkeepers on either side of the route. Moving through the West Round, the procession culminates at the Brahmaswom Madhom at about 10.00 in the morning.

THE MADATHIL VARAVU

The myth behind the origin of Madathil Varavu states that, once upon a time, three golden caparisons or 'Nettipattam' were placed by a Tamil Brahmin in front of the Brahaswom madhom. Owing to the competition between the Thiruvambady and Paramakkavu sides, in order to score better, Thiruvambady wanted to take possession of this caparison, and approached the Brahmin for the same. The Brahmin obliged readily under the condition that the Nettipattam shall be given in return of the Madathil Varavu. This incident marked the onset of the most renowned Madathil



The famous Madathil Varavu of Thiruvambady, an event glorified by bards in immortal verse, started from the Brahaswom madhom at around 11.30 in the morning and, despite the sweltering heat of the torrid sun, surging crowds jubilantly move towards the celestial rendezvous. The procession starts with three elephants, augmented to seven as it reaches the West Round. The main highlight of Madathil Varavu was the masterly execution of Panchavadyam under the leadership of Kongad Madhu, and the icing on the cake for melam lovers was the participation of maddalam exponent Cherpulassery Sivan.

As the ensemble undulated the symphony of cascading climaxes, the swaying crowds delirious with 'rhythmic fever' moved in a frenzy into higher and still higher levels of ecstasy. The procession reached Naickanal on the Northern Round about 2.30 pm and was enlarged into a formation of 15 elephants. Accompanied by 'pandimelom', the procession moved towards Sreemoolasthanam.

THE PARAMEKKAVU EZHUNNALLIPPU & ELANJITHARA MELOM



On the day of the Pooram, Paramekkavu temple opened at 4 am after which the routine poojas were carried out which was accompanied by Arattu at 6 am. The Paramekkavu Devi starts her journey towards Vadakkumnathan temple at around 12.30 in the noon from her abode near the Eastern Round in glittering procession of 15 mighty tuskers, draped with all paraphernalia and accompanied by the best Pandi melam ensemble. The Pandi melam was led by the Kizhakkoottu Aniyar Marar, but the most famous Peruvanar Kuttan Marar was a significant part of the show. Under the rays of the mid-day sun, the entire pageant come alive with glitter and colour, providing a panoramic sight of rare never seen elsewhere.

The procession moved towards Vadakkumnathan temple, entered through the East Gopuram and re-aligned in the western courtyard for famous Elanjithara Melam! The 'Ilanjithara melam' for Paramekkavu temple was led by the most famous Peruvanar Kuttan Marar.



Peruvanar Kuttan Marar completes two decades of 'Pramanam' for the largest percussion assembly in the world, the 'Ilanjithara Melam', on 13th May 2019. He first took up the lead role, 'Pramanam', of the 'Ilanjithara Melam' in 1999 and has been in the lead role of the percussion ensemble all these years. It has been more than 43 years since he started drumming for the pooram.

THE DIVINE DURBAR AND 'KUDAMATTAM'

The Divine Durbar, the most awaited and most enchanting event of the day marks the climax of the day wherein the pooram partners align facing each other for a healthy competition on multifaceted aspects. The mini-poorams come, pay respect to Vadakkumnathan and then returns. These mini-poorams comes back only once this Kudamattam concludes.

During Kudamattam, care is taken by each side not only in the selection and matching of the elephants but also in the quality of each item of accoutrements, their designs and the colour combinations of the mega-parasols. The Divine Durbar lasts for an hour and is a sight to behold.

Both sides comes out of the temple initially with folded green umbrellas, Venchamaram and Alavattam. Then the Bhagavathy of the respective temple comes out. At around 5.30 pm, the Paramekkavu Bhagavathy accompanied by her contingents exist through the 'Thekke Gopura Nada', proceeds around the King's statue and pays respects, but the famous folklore articulates that Bhagavathy is not paying respect to the King but to 'Pazhayanoor Bhagavathy', who used to be present at the place at one point of time. After this they align at the South Round, facing north to the Southern Gopuram. The Thiruvambady procession enters the Maidan through the Southern Gopuram and face the Paramekkavu. The 15 caparisoned elephants stand in line for Kudamattam which is arguably the festival's piece de resistance. During the 2019 Kudamattam, Paramekkavu Temple started off the 1st Kudamattam at 5.30pm followed by Thiruvambady and each side altered around 50 stunning silk parasols. The stage was set for the spectacular 'Kudamattam' and every inch of space in the maidan, the roads and the balconies and terraces of the buildings in the vicinity were occupied by eager spectators.





The competition commences with one side changing in jiffy the entire set of 15 decorated parasols into a new vibe combination of alluring colours and hues; the elephants stand stock still gently flapping their ears, the alavattoms held aloft and the venchamarams sway up and down enhancing the beauty of the pageantry. The entire crowd cheered and dared the other side to show wares. This is answered by a similar impressive change of parasol by the opposite side and the crowd again breaks into a bigger cheer. The Durbar progresses this way, transforming from one vibrant combination to another, displaying multi-tiered parasols, floral innovations and so on, each side dexterously with 40 or more changes. New models of umbrella were displayed LED embedded parasol, printed parasols, then umbrella adorned with socially relevant themes like the Sabarimala Swami Ayyappan, Jawan umbrella paying respects to the Pulwama martyrs and these were the top attractions of the evening. Both the sides mark truce by lifting and waving the towels as though waving white flag marking the end of this healthy umbrella fight.

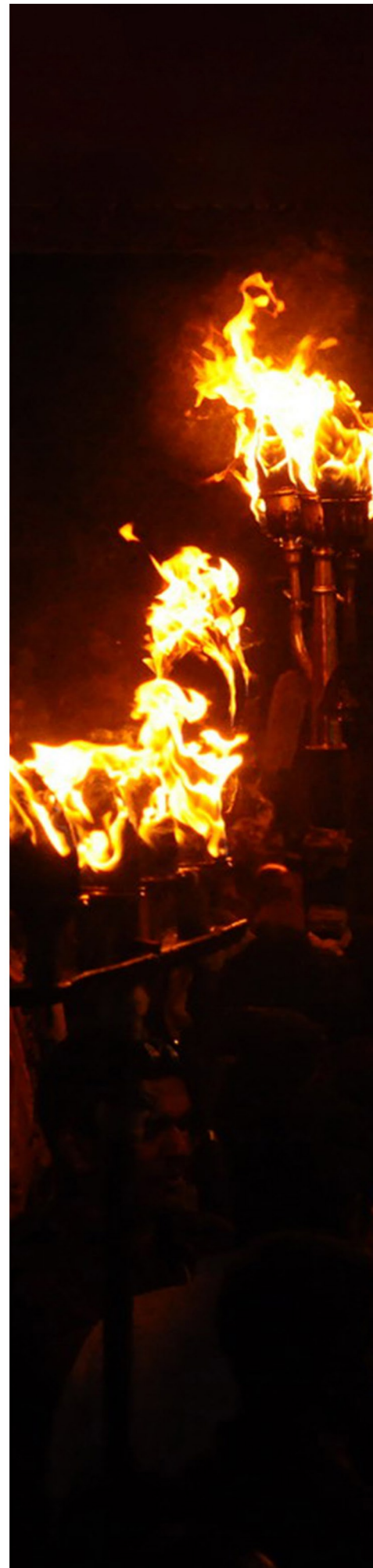
THE NIGHT

The whole city stays awake, and even if anyone intends to ignore the pomp and splendour, the army of fireworks lined up for the wee hours of daybreak will definitely not let you go out like a light.

The programmes for the night are similar to those of the day, albeit with some variations. The mini-poorams restart at 8 in the evening and goes on till around 2 am. The Paramekkavu starts from the temple at 11 pm in a procession of seven elephants with panchavadyam, and moves slowly through the ground to reach Manikantanal in the south by 2.30am. Similarly, the Thiruvambady re-enacts the Madathil Varavu to culminate at Naickanal in the north by 2.30 am. Thereafter both sides disperse their elephants, except the idol-bearers and await the most-sought-after item, viz., the pyrotechnic display.

FIREWORKS

An annual extravaganza of fireworks usher the crowd to remain glued to their positions late into the night to watch the climax. Though fireworks are a usual add-on and an inevitable part of almost all events in Kerala, the fireworks of Thrissur Pooram are distinct in character, performance, excellence and magnitude. The two temples compete with each other with an intention to provide their audience with the best and the most unexpected. Three major fireworks adorn the Pooram the 'sample fireworks' on the day before the Pooram, the most impressive event that marks the peak of Pooram celebrations in the early morning hours, and the final fireworks the following noon after the Goddesses bid farewell to each other marking the end of Pooram.



MAJOR FIREWORKS OF 19

Type	Date
Sample firework	7:45pm, 11th May 2019
Firework marking the peak of Pooram	3:45am ,14th May 2019
Final firework after Goddesses bid farewell to each other	2.15pm,14th May 2019

History behind the fireworks of Thrissur pooram states that, an active member of Thrissur Pooram committee witnessed a Chinese firework display during his visit to the Park Fare Exhibition at Madras about 80 years ago. Inspired by the spectacle, he brought some items of Chinese fireworks to Thrissur like poothiri, lathiri, moolipeevu, vaanam etc. The crackers were opened and the chemical powder inside was inspected and this triggered and fired popular imagination and the art was conceived by enterprising indigenous families, who developed it into the pulsating event that it is now. Every year new and never-seen-before items are added to the fireworks, with both the temples devoting a large share of resources for it. The earliest masters of fireworks display, like Kuriya, Ponnuveetil Gopalan Nair, Vellattu Narayana Panicker, Chelapadan Anthony, Vadakkethala Kochapu etc were not formally or technically trained in the art. They learned it through experience and experimentation and virtually developed it into a major industry. All the fireworks-managers of today are the followers of these pioneers. For a long time the responsibility of the Paramekkavu fireworks was vested with Karayarakattil Jose, who has now retired from the scene. It was only in the early 1970's that a fixed schedule for fireworks display was introduced. Until then whichever party - Paramekkavu or Thiruvambady - that reaches the pandal first would begin their fireworks display. As this led to a lot of misunderstandings and also untoward incidents, a rotation system was introduced. According to this, each temple would take turns to light their fireworks first. From then on, both the parties have followed this system.

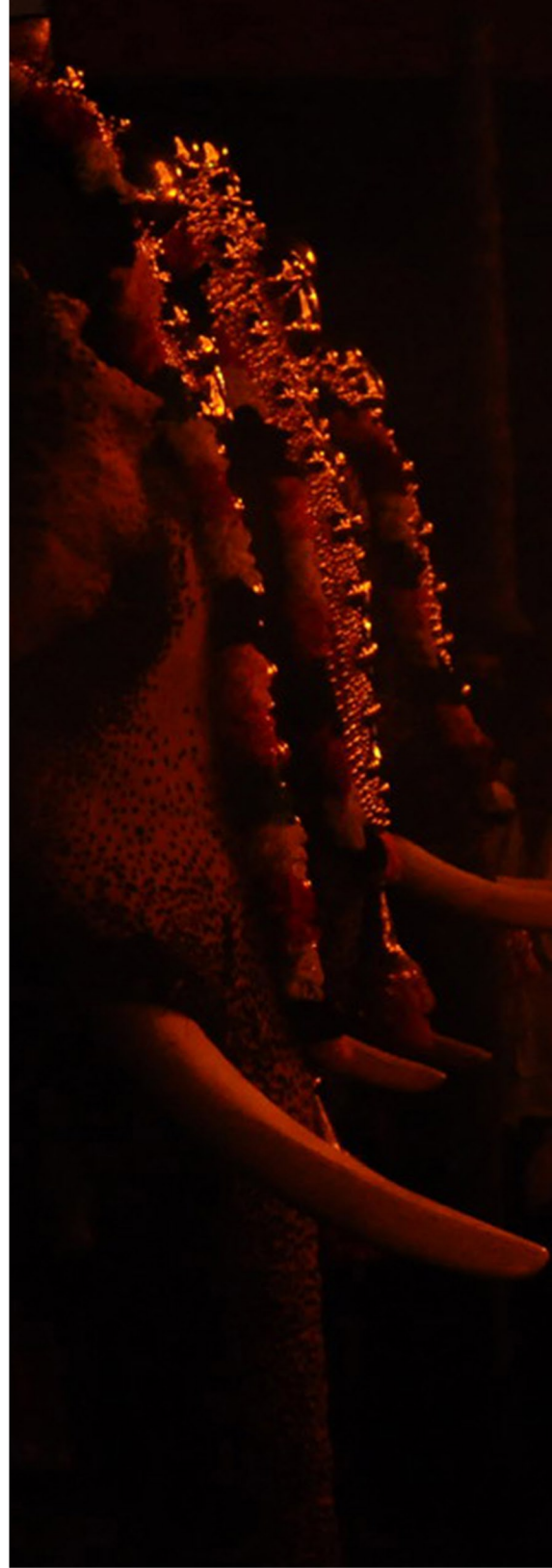
Pooram fireworks is the climax of the night festival and its distinctive feature is the competitive spirit; every item is duplicated and alternated between the two sides, enhancing multi-fold the suspense and the thrill. The venue too is ideal for the works as the sides operate from two juxtaposed segments of the Maidan, thus providing an excellent view to the million-size crowd filling up the annular space around the Maidan. The fireworks commenced on the 14th May early morning at about 3:45 am with the Thiruvambady firing the first round of fireworks marking the commencement of the show, followed by the Paramekkavu team with their sound and visual extravaganza.



14TH MAY 19'

THE GRAND FINALE

On the morning of the second day, around 8 am, the Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu re-align in formations comprising 15 elephants, drum and orchestra at the southern and northern peripheries of the maidan and proceed towards Sreemoolasthanam to continue the drum concerts till 12 noon. Thereafter, the two deities on elephants meet face-to-face, bid farewell, pay respects to Vadakkumnathan and leave for their respective abodes, this event is titled, 'Upacharam Chollal' ceremony. The popular mythology says that the Paramekkavu Bhagavathy and the Thiruvambady Bhagavathy are sisters and they see each other only once a year, that is to bid farewell after the enormous celebrations, with Vadakkumnathan as a silent witness to all this. Both Goddesses stood facing each other at around 12:45 in the noon and it is a fascinating scene to watch the two tuskers mutely wishing 'au revoir' through gestures with their trunks. The crowds melt away, masticating delectable moments of the festival, and looking forward for the next year's Pooram.



TRADITION IN TRANSITION

Thrissur Pooram, a tradition believed to have been initiated sometime around 1797 has now been a part of our tradition for more than two centuries. We all accept the fact that change is inevitable, and change is the only constant thing in life, hence Thrissur Pooram has also undergone additions, deletions and improvisations of practices over the years and has been depicted in the table below.

Feature	Then	Now
Lighting	During the initial days lighting was totally dependent on oil lamps, pressurized paraffin lamps (petromax) Probably as a remnant of this custom, flambeau or lit torch are to these days held	Now the scope of illumination increased tremendously colour bulbs, LED bulbs, laser beams etc. are used
Decoration	Materials used for decorating the pandal were limited to arecanut tree, tender coconut leaves, bunches of arecanuts, coconuts etc	The traditional materials were replaced by bamboo frames in an intermediate phase. Now the use of these traditional materials have been replaced largely by plastic
Pandal	The pandal never used to exceed 100 feet	More than 165 feet tall pandals are seen
Tuskers	The owners of Elephants were approached directly by the temple authorities of each of the competing sides to acquire the best tusker	Now a common list is made for both sides according to availability. This system of Common Committee Division started in 1964. Apart from the tuskers on the list, many of them are donated by the owners as an offering during the Pooram

Feature	Then	Now
Panchavadyam /Orchestra	<p>During those days Parisha Vadyam was performed. It was a genre of percussion music regarded as the 'Mother of Panchavadyam'. Percussion instrument, 'Maddalam', was hung on to the neck while performing, which was later tied to the waste taking into account easiness to perform. During early days, Kurumkuzhal, a wind instrument was used which is now replaced by Kombu. The chengila was used to maintains a steady beat and provide a musical background and is now replaced by cymbal</p>	<p>Panchavadyam use four percussion instruments and one wind instrument timila, maddalam, ilathalam, idakka and kombu. This change was brought about 100 years back during the Madathil Varavu of Thiruvambady. Even though the change was then resisted by the public, later they agreed in keeping the change after listening to it</p>
Kudamattom	<p>Traditionally 14 red and 1 green parasols were held by the mahouts, but 99 years ago, in an unprecedented occasion during the Thrissur Pooram, the Thiruvambady team, out of the blue took, out a new set of parasols and exchanged all green parasols for red and red by green. It was reported that this came as a total shocker to the Paramekavu side, who in their quest for victory, were said to have taken olak-kuda(traditional palm leaf umbrella)from onlookers and exchanged it with the umbrellas already held and this act was later named as the 'Kudamattom' and is still followed</p>	<p>Now the number of sets exchanged has increased tremendously, new designs, parasols with several tiers, and colours have been introduced</p>

ALAVATTAM AND VENCHAMARAM



Alavattam and Venchamaram are properties used to add prom and glory to the tuskers and ultimately helping them in scoring against the other team. These are essential elements to be held atop the elephants during the Thrissur Pooram. Each elephant will have two or three persons atop, one of whom is dedicated to hold a pair of Alavattam and Venchamaram. During special phases of the accompanying percussion orchestra, the person shall raise up on the back of elephant and hold the alavattams and venchamaram high up above his shoulders.

The families involved in making the Alavattam and Venchamaram has been hereditarily executing this for centuries now. Having interacted with Kadamattathu Chandran, who is currently running the show for the Thiruvambady side and has been doing this for almost half a century now. He recalls the days of their ancestors Kunduvalappil Krishnankutty Nair, Chattanathan Balakrishnan Nair, Lakshmi Kutty Amma and others who are still remembered for their gifted craftsmanship. Alavattam is a circular decorative shield or fan made exclusively from peacock feathers and is held by mahouts perching on elephant tops. The Alavattam is a product distinct to Kerala, and is closely associated by any Keralite to utsav, festivals and dances.

ALAVATTAM

The Alavattam is principally made of finely shaped and cut peacock feathers aligned in a circular fashion around a wooden or fibre plaque with traditionally dictated decorative patterns made of other natural objects such as sea shells. Making of an Alavattam starts with the centre piece called the Adipoovu, which is made by bending the stem of peacock feather into a floral shape with eight petals, and this forms the base for the whole Alavattam. The peacock feathers are woven onto the spine of palm leaves and designs are made from the stem of peacock feather. Designs are made separately and stitched on to a cardboard plaque. Then finishing touches are given by embedding decorative stones, papers and clothes. This is then attached to either wooden or chromium plated handle.

VENCHAMARAM



The venchamaram, a sophisticated version of flywhisk is made from the fur obtained from Yak's tail. Their hair is imported to Kerala from Himalayan region like Nepal, Sikkim etc. mainly during the utsav season. The fur generally comes in three colour combinations, pure white, black and white and sometimes a mix of copper or golden tint is seen. Pure white fur is the one in demand and hence deemed expensive.

The tail fur is cut with the help of scissors and plaited and tied into a long rope format almost 9 feet long. The knots of the fur is brushed off with a bamboo comb at this occasion. The fur is then wound on to a wooden baton and brass or copper handles are attached to it hereafter. Each venchamaram weighs around 25kgs.

The Alavattam and Venchamaran used once for Thrissur Pooram is never repeated but is either sold off or rented during other smaller poorams.



PANDAL

Sky-scraping pandals adorning and towering the Swaraj round are built by Paramekkavu and Thiruvambadi groups and these mark the turf of the city. Three pandals spring up around the town, wherein, it is customary to find one pandal by the Paramekkavu side being erected at Manikandal and two by the Thiruvambadi group at Naduvilal and Naikkanal. This also forms the assembling point for the various melom marking the positions to execute numerous rituals, for example, during the famous Madhotil Ezhunel-lethu, Thiruvambady Bhagavathy witnesses Vadakkunathan from Naduvilal pandal. This year the deity or the 'thidambu' paraded on elephant top was handed over to the famous tusker Thechikottukavu Ramachandran at Manikandal pandal.

Cheroor native, Manikandan Pallath, the architect of 110 feet Manikandal Pandal, with a width of 1089 square feet, has designed it with 6 tyres and 12 tastefully done corners, on top there is a royal gopuram or dome.

Pooram 2019, Naduvilall Pandal and Naikanal Pandal were conceived and implemented by Kannattukkara Dasan. Yet another speciality of this year's pandal is that, it is the 80th one laid by this great artisan. The Naduvilal pandal, 90 feet tall and 900 square feet wide, has disk-shaped centre and exterior constructed as 'Nalukettu' model, which is traditional architecture, 'Tharavadu model', exclusively found in homestead of Kerala.

THEKKAI MANNATH VEEDU

The Thekkai Mannath house, from where five generations have enjoyed the Pooram, stands in the Thrissur round as a reminiscent of the centuries old Thrissur town which has developed beyond comprehension, yet the Thekkai Mannath Veedu has stood tall against the tiding winds of change, a house that seems to be oblivious of the drastic vicissitudes that has been taking place all around her. Thekkai Mannath Veedu is the only house on the path of 'Pradakshina Vazhi of Thrissur Pooram" or the path which the pooram takes as it rounds the Vadakkunnathan temple along the Swaraj maidan. The house, more than 175 years old, harbours its present successor, Managing Committee member of Thriuvambady Dewasom, Shri. Gopalakrishnan, who fondly remembers this mammoth event which has always been close to the heart of Thekkai Mannath family.



The then planner of this house seems to have taken into consideration the immense sound produced by the fireworks of Thrissur Pooram-this is reflected by the presence of an inner room where there are no windows, ventilators or air holes, and hence the decibels that penetrate through these thick walls are much dampened, and this room is usually occupied by pregnant women, patients and anyone and everyone of the house who wants to shut themselves from the extremely loud clamour of fireworks of Thrissur Pooram.

CONCLUSION

Pooram brings together a captive crowd of 10 lakhs for a period not less than 12 hours and provides a unique sales outlet for local businessmen, hoteliers, etc. It also creates work opportunities for the semi-skilled and unskilled to the extent of 50,000 man-days, which is a significant contribution in the present context of growing unemployment. However, more important are the intangible gains that help to enhance the quality of life of the citizens. The communal amity built and reinforced year after year is a strong fabric of unity, and goodwill woven in active participation in the festivities go beyond the confines of a religious ritual and has made pooram an all-embracing festival involving the entire cross-section of citizens.



The prestige of Thrissur Pooram attracts a good number of international tourists. The coverage of the festival by the BBC and dissemination of information through websites provide opportunities to attract more tourists. Assistance by way of certified guides or even virtual guidance in form of authentic web-applications for groups of visitors would go a long way to popularize the festival further.

Thrissur Pooram, envisaged by Sakthan Thampuran some 200 years ago as a competition between two public temples and as a social instrument to unite the entire population, has grown into a national festival, acclaimed internationally as a unique extravaganza.

Thrissur Pooram captures the true spirit and essence of communal harmony, year after year. Pooram lives up to the expectations of its chief architect, Sakthan Thampuran, who visualized it as an event for bringing together the people of various sects who hail from different parts of Thrissur, and is symbolized by the participation of Khadaka poorams. Today it has grown in leaps and bounds and have outgrown all the barricades of caste, religion and region. It has been imbibed by Keralites as their very own festival and each and every one of them are eagerly waiting for the onset of the next Pooram on the 2nd May 2020...

THANKS TO

District Administration Thrissur

DeGS Thrissur

DTPC Thrissur

Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devaswom

Content Prepared by Remya R Kumar | DPM | DeGS

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Photographers- K K Arjunan(PRD photographer)

Anoop Krishna | Binto P Anto | Arjun Vinod

Mohammed Hilal M | Kiran Raj | Sajeesh Black Stone

Pranav C Subash | Shanu.Greenhat Photography

Sachin KB | Jittu Parannur | Ranjith Balan

