

PONNANI PEPPER PROJECT





HISTORY

Ponnani is popularly known as “the Mecca of Kerala”. As an ancient harbour city, it was a major trading hub in the Malabar region, the northernmost end of the state. There are many tales that try to explain how the place got its name. According to one, the prominent Brahmin family of Azhvancherry Thambakkal once held sway over the land. During their heydays, they offered ponnu aana [elephants made of gold] to the temples, and this gave the land the name “Ponnani”. According to another, due to trade, ponnu [gold] from the Arab lands reached India for the first time at this place, and thus caused it to be named “Ponnani”. It is believed that a place that is referred to as “Tyndis” in the Greek book titled Periplus of the Erythraean Sea is Ponnani. However historians have not been able to establish the exact location of Tyndis beyond doubt. Nor has any archaeological evidence been recovered to confirm this belief. Politically too, Ponnani had great importance in the past. The Zamorins (rulers of Calicut) considered Ponnani as their second headquarters. When Tipu Sultan invaded Kerala in 1766, Ponnani was annexed to the Mysore kingdom. Later when the British colonized the land, Ponnani came under the Bombay Province for a brief interval of time. Still later, it was annexed Malabar and was considered part of the Madras Province for one-and-a-half centuries. Until 1861, Ponnani was the headquarters of Koottanad taluk, and with the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956, it became a taluk in Palakkad district. In 1969, Ponnani was included in the newly created district of Malappuram.

PROMINENT POLITICAL LEADERS

The land is renowned for its contribution to the Indian freedom struggle too. None perhaps epitomized the culture of selfless service as E. Moithu Maulavi who contributed immensely to the nationalist movement.

E. Moithu Maulavi (1886–1995)

E. Moithu Maulavi joined the Indian national movement in 1919. He was not only a skilled orator but an efficient organizer as well. As the founding secretary of the Majlisul Ulema, an organization formed for social reform of the Muslim community in the region, he tried to inspire fellow-Muslims into the national freedom struggle. Not long afterwards, Maulavi was arrested and he had to undergo rigorous imprisonment during the Khilafat Movement in 1921. Another spell of imprisonment for a period of nine months had to be borne in 1930 for his participation in the Payyannur Salt Satyagraha struggle. Yet again he was given jail terms for a period of three years for taking part in the Quit India Movement. He was released in 1947 after the Congress party came to power in India.





Ali Musaliyar (1861 - 1921)

Musaliyar, one of principal leaders of the 1921 Mappila Rebellion, had studied at the Ponnani madrasa. He was an Islamic scholar, chief orator of the Khilafat Movement in the region, and served as Imam of Thirurangadi mosque from 1907 till his execution in 1921. He organized landless peasants and agricultural labourers against cruel Hindu landlords and the British rulers. The British government used force to suppress the rebellion and imposed martial law. The so-called rebels were captured and sent to the Central Prison in Podanur in a closed railway goods wagon, and this led to the infamous Wagon Tragedy. Although the Mappila Rebellion was not seen favourably during that time by the Indian National Congress, and was not considered part of the mainstream nationalist movement, later historians evaluated it as an attempt to question British supremacy and overthrow it. In 1971, the Government of Kerala recognized the participants of the Mappila Rebellion as freedom fighters.



K. V. Raman Menon (1900–1974)

K. V. Raman Menon, known as Ponnani Gandhi, was a reputed Indian National Congress leader of the time who actively participated in the freedom movement against the British in Malabar district. He was a social reformer and a leading lawyer of the Court of Ponnani.

Geographically too, Ponnani is uniquely blessed in that this is where the Bharathapuzha the second longest river of Kerala, finally comes to the end of its long, winding journey through Malabar and joins the Arabian Sea. The place has long been considered as a prominent scenic coastal town as it is bordered by an estuary on the northern side, backwaters in the south and the Arabian Sea on the west. Ponnani has huge tracts of land that are close to either the sea, rivers or canals. This gives the land many kinds of soil, like sand, clay, gravel, and so on. Forests, marshes, rocky outcrops and hills are conspicuously absent in this area. The land itself was reclaimed from the sea several centuries back. Therefore, 0.06 % of the municipal area is covered by mangroves. This acts as a buffer and helps maintain the purity of inland water bodies by preventing infiltration of saline water. More than 35% of the total land area is under cultivation. The major crop is coconut and arecanut, followed by paddy and cash crops like pepper, turmeric, nutmeg, betel leaves, ginger and so on. Much of Ponnani's economy is sustained and boosted by agriculture, fishing and coir industry. The beedi industry used to flourish until mid-20th century, with numerous brands flooding the market. Today it has declined considerably, and is confined to a few homes. Paddy cultivation has also lost its earlier popularity with the younger generation opting to take up office jobs, and filling up paddy lands to build concrete houses. The panchayats have initiated many projects and subsidy schemes to revive interest in agriculture, but the picture does not look very rosy at present.





CULTURE

Ponnani has had contacts and trade relations with the outside world since time immemorial. This has caused a great deal of cultural interaction and assimilation. Some of the major gains of Ponnani because of this phenomenon are to be seen in the fields of language and performing arts. Persian and Arabian art forms reached the shores of Ponnani. So did the culture of North India. Qawwalis and ghazals became hugely popular among the natives here, and slowly spread across the state. Ponnani boasts of a cultural collective, a gathering of literature lovers and writers, that has been in existence since 1930. It is locally known as Ponnani Kalari. The most prominent among them in the initial years were Akkitham, Krishnankutty Marar, E. P. Sumithran, E. Narayanan, MRB, Premji, N. P. Damodaran and others. The famous poet Edassery Govidndan Nair was the driving force behind this movement, and he was inspired and directed by stalwarts like V. T. Bhattathirippad, M. Govindan. During those days, when there were no University departments to nourish the language, these litterateurs did their best to sharpen the language and improve its rhetorical power. The other giants in the arena were P. Krishna Warriar and Uroob. Their legacy is continued by the present day writers like P. P. Ramachandran, Mohanakrishnan Kalady, Alancode Leelakrishnan, P. Surendran, C. Ashraf, M. Kamaruddin, Riyaz, Ramakrishnan Kumaranelloor, V. Mohanakrishnan, Ibrahim Ponnani, Abhirami, Viju Nayarangadi and others.



DANCE FORMS

Oppana

This is a very popular dance form among the Muslims of Kerala, especially of Malabar. It is performed by girls as part of the celebrations that accompany a wedding ceremony, and is conducted on the eve of the wedding day. The bride, dressed in finery and gold ornaments, sits in the middle while 10 to 15 friends of hers dance around her in a particular rhythm. The steps are simple and the dancers clap each other's hands in sync with the music which carries a heavy strain of Arabic folk culture.



Mouthala

This is an indigenous dance form of Ponnani, a male version of Oppana. Here the bridegroom in his best attire sits in the middle of a room. His friends sit on either side, clap their hands, and sing songs in a particular rhythm. The lyrics contain the noble qualities of the groom, and are meant to present him in the best possible light in front of the friends and relatives of the bride.



Kolkali

Kolkali is performed almost exclusively by the Muslim youth of Malabar. Of late, women and children too are seen to participate in this dance form. Eight to ten pairs of men, dressed in half-sleeved undershirt, lungi [a dhoti that carries patterns] and bandana, carry small sticks (kol) with or without bells, and

Oppana





and dancer rhythmically in circles. As the song progresses, the circle expands and contracts. Towards the end, the song picks up speed and volume, and the beating of the sticks reaches a crescendo. There are 60 varieties of Kolkali. Some of them are Vandanakkali, Chuttikkol, Thettikkol, Irunuukali, Thaduthukali, Thalakkali, Chavitti Chuttal, Churanju Chuttal, Chinthu, etc.

Duff muttu

Duff is a tambourine-like musical instrument made of wood and animal hide, without the zills. Duff muttu is a dance form performed by the Muslim youth of Malabar on the occasion of a wedding or during other cultural programmes. The dancers squat, stand, move and sway to the various tunes of songs that mostly praise the valour of great Muslim warriors and heroes of the past.

Ratheeb

This is a Muslim ritual seen in the hinterlands of Ponnani. It is conducted as a kind of votive offering, either following a cure from a severe disease or after the successful overcoming of a difficult crisis. Different types of songs (ratheeb or byth) are sung to the accompaniment of drumming on the Duff. The votive offerings are done in two ways. Either the person concerned sings in order to make his offering; or, while he sings he uses a pointed knife to inflict small, harmless bruises on various parts of the body like the tongue, the stomach, the ears and so on. Ponnani taluk is made up of five grama panchayats – Maranchery, Veliyamcode, Nannammukku, Perumpadappu and Alamcode.



Duff muttu



MARANCHERY GRAMA PANCHAYAT

Maranchery panchayat is an agricultural village situated in Ponnani taluk which forms the southernmost end of Malappuram district. It was created in 1943, more than a decade before the formation of the state of Kerala. Maranchery is rich in natural resources, surrounded on three sides by water, and fed by backwaters, lakes, canals, rivers and tiny streams. This has aided paddy and coconut cultivation extensively, and promoted the poultry and the fishery sectors too. Such an agrarian economy (boosted by remittances from natives working abroad) has tended to sustain a laidback lifestyle, and contributed hugely to a rich, indigenous culture, both of which attract tourists from all over the globe. As a result, Ponnani features prominently in the state's Pepper Project that is associated with Responsible Tourism Mission.

Nature's Bounties

Maranchery shares a rare feature with certain areas of Alappuzha and Thrissur districts of Kerala. Situated slightly below sea level (ranging from 0.5 to 1 metre), it has vast stretches of waterlogged paddy fields, covering 3445.3 hectares of land. These places are called "Kole" lands. At Maranchery, they maintain rich ecosystems that include 114 species of plants, 21 mammals, six types of amphibians, and 244 species of birds.





The fertile soil that comes along with rainwaters flowing from the eastern range of mountains enriches the area, and makes it highly favourable for paddy cultivation. Perhaps the most unique feature of this farming is that the entire process is conducted in a matter of three months. The fields are prepared for sowing in the months of December or January, and the harvest is done in March or April. The natives have evolved indigenous ways of regulating the water level in the fields. One such contraption is Pettiyum Parayum which replaced the water wheel. The farmers also put up bunds or mud embankments for the same purpose. Several varieties of fish are grown in these fields and caught using traditional methods. The bunds have become very popular among tourists. Some of them are motorable, and tourists love to walk along them to get first-hand experiences of or simply watch the various processes of farming and fishing. These bunds also give excellent opportunities to watch various birds and understand the biodiversity of the land.

Biyyam Lake

The Biyyam lake is one of the chief attractions of the area. Tourists flock here in huge numbers during the Malayalam month of Chingam [August-September] to watch water sports of various kinds, especially boat racing. Arrangements have been made for tourists to use speed boats and house boats to enjoy the serene beauty of the landscape.

Biyyam Lake



Kaakka Thuruthu(Crow Island)

Situated in the middle of Kole lands in Kanjiramukku Irumbe is a single island, locally called Kaakka thuruthu. It derives its name from the fact that it is inhabited almost exclusively by crows (kaakka). The birds leave their nests by 5 in the morning, fly in different directions in search of food but unfailingly return by dusk. This is an island untouched by humans, and can be accessed only by boat. Natives believe that there is another island close by called Kokkin Thuruthu, a haven for storks (kokku), as the name implies.

PROMINENT CONSTRUCTIONS

Conolly Canal

The Conolly Canal links the districts of Kozhikode, Malappuram, Thrissur and Ernakulam. The idea of linking rivers was floated as far back as in 1848 by H. V. Conolly, Collector of erstwhile Malabar District. (As the District Magistrate, he had been critical of the Mappila Rebellion. As a result he was most savagely murdered in front of his wife at his Calicut Bungalow in 1855 by four Mappila convicts.) He commissioned the construction of the canal from Kozhikode to Kodungalloor. This helped in ferrying people and transporting cargo. The segment that runs through Maranchery is a great asset to the Department of Tourism.





Conolly Canal





Biyyam Regulator cum Bridge

The Biyyam bridge connects Maranchery panchayat to Ponnani corporation. The Regular cum Bridge that was designed to safeguard Ponnani from salt water inundation was inaugurated in February 2011. The earlier version built in 1937 had collapsed earlier and caused saline water to rush in and cause extensive damage to paddy lands. The new one is 108 metres long and 6 metres wide (including a pedestrian walk). Fitted with ten shutters, the Regulator can protect the fields from up to one-and-a-half metres of saline water.



Biyyam Lake Park

A children's park near the Biyyam Regulator cum Bridge is a vast and elegant construction. Built as part of Tourism project, it has many garden benches, ornamental lamps and pedestrian walks. The park gives a beautiful view of the backwaters as well as the Kole lands.



Pullikka Kadavu Hanging Bridge

This 100 metre-long hanging bridge across the Biyyam lake is a major tourist spot in Malappuram. It is one of the longest in the state. Suspended six metres above water, it is one-and-a-half metres wide and can carry 250 people at a time.



Biyyam Regulator cum Bridge



PLACES OF WORSHIP

Maranchery has many ancient temples and mosques that stand testimony to the culture of religious harmony that flourishes in this land.

Kodenchery Mosque

Built in Kerala style of architecture, this mosque looks majestic and quaint at the same time. Equally attractive is a large pond in the premises, which has many series of steps cut in laterite stone leading to it. Relics from the graveyard nearby attest to the fact that the mosque is at least 800 years old. The various dates carved on the wooden beams and rafters of the mosque indicate that the structure has been renovated several times. The mosque has a historical connection with India's freedom struggle too. When Veliyancode Umer Qazi, a Muslim scholar, freedom fighter and poet, refused to pay tax to the British government, orders for his arrest were issued. Qazi went into hiding, and it was this mosque that gave him protection from the British police. There is a very interesting legend behind the birth of this mosque. Long back, the ruler of Perumpadappu swaroopam, that is, the king of Kochi, reared a black ape in a cage, and used it to punish wrong-doers. Once it jumped out of the cage and all efforts at tracing it went in vain. Finally the ruler issued a proclamation stating that the person who recaptures the animal will be suitably rewarded. One man, named Muttikalayil





Hydrose, succeeded. When the king asked him what he wanted in return, Hydrose said he wanted a mosque in the area because he had had to go a long way to offer prayers at a mosque until then. The king granted him land to the west of the residence of Azhvanchery Thambakkal, a prominent Brahmin family of the region. The humble building that was put up there was the original structure of the Kodenchery mosque of today.

Maranchery Shiva Temple

It is said that Maranchery Shiva temple is mentioned in Koka Sandesham, a messenger-poem written in the 14th century, and is one among the 64 temples established by Sage Parasurama. Originally, the temple was jointly owned by the powerful Brahmin families of Azhvanchery Thambakkal and Naranathu Mana, and came under the jurisdiction of the Raja of Kochi. The landed property of the temple stretched to many thousands of acres. According to a legend, the Zamorin of Calicut attacked and defeated the Raja of Kochi. The latter fled in fear, and the Zamorin took Azhvanchery Thambakkal to Athavanad. Later, the other Brahmins also decamped when the threat of Tipu Sultan's attack became serious. Gradually, the temple, due to the absence of patrons, fell into ruin. Its land was taken on lease by many individuals. Today, the temple owns only-and-a-half acres of land. Since 1978, a people's committee has been running the temple.



Kodenchery Mosque





PROMINENT FAMILIES

Azhvanchery Thambakkal

For a long time, the Azhvanchery Thambakkal who resided here formed the spiritual axle of the entire area. The scions of this prominent Brahmin family were consulted on matters related to temple rituals and traditions all over Malabar, Travancore and Kochi (which constitute today's state of Kerala), and theirs was considered the last word. They were also chief priests who presided over the anointment rituals in the princely states which were necessary in formally elevating members of the royal family to the kshatriya status. In course of time, Azhvanchery Thambakkal left Maranchery and relocated to Athavanad. There are some who believe that the name Athavanad itself is derived from the phrase "Azhvanchery Thambakkal vazhum Nadu".

Cherai Panikkan

The Cherai Panikkan family was also a prominent community in Maranchery, with their ancestry stretching back to over 300 years. Their mastery over martial arts, academic scholarship and contributions to medical care were held in great awe during their heydays. They are believed to be the descendants of the Kalarippayattu asans [masters] who tutored Thacholi Othenan, one of the most famous warriors of the land, whose





exploits are mentioned in the fabled Vadakkanpaattu [Northern Ballads of Kerala]. Consulted for cures for various diseases, the Cherai Panikkan family offered their services in Marmachikitsa [treatment of the vital points of the human body], Balachikitsa [paediatrics], Vatachikitsa [treatment for arthritis] and so on. Their kalaris [training centres] initiated generations of children into martial arts as well as academic learning.

Maranchery Shiva Temple

It is said that Maranchery Shiva temple is mentioned in Koka Sandesham, a messenger-poem written in the 14th century, and is one among the 64 temples established by Sage Parasurama. Originally, the temple was jointly owned by the powerful Brahmin families of Azhvanchery Thambbrakkal and Naranathu Mana, and came under the jurisdiction of the Raja of Kochi. The landed property of the temple stretched to many thousands of acres. According to a legend, the Zamorin of Calicut attacked and defeated the Raja of Kochi. The latter fled in fear, and the Zamorin took Azhvanchery Thambbrakkal to Athavanad. Later, the other Brahmins also decamped when the threat of Tipu Sultan's attack became serious. Gradually, the temple, due to the absence of patrons, fell into ruin. Its land was taken on lease by many individuals. Today, the temple owns only-and-a-half acres of land. Since 1978, a people's committee has been running the temple.



SPECIAL FEATURES

Thanneer Pandal

In times when mechanized mode of transport was not available and people had to travel long distances by foot, villages had their own ways of extending help and hospitality. Thanneer pandals were water stalls that were put up at various points so that weary wayfarers, pilgrims and traders could slake their thirst and continue their trek. Maranchery too was part of such a culture, as people stopped over at this village on their way to prominent places of worship like the Guruvayoor temple. As the number of travellers increased, the enterprising villagers saw business potential at these spots and set up markets. In course of time, the markets expanded in a big way, selling a huge range of products from the humble lime paste to exotic gold jewellery. Old timers say that Thanneer pandals were what triggered this entrepreneurial spirit in the land. The founder of the market was Elayedathu Mammu Musaliyar, the elder brother of E. Moithu Maulavi, the freedom fighter.

Arts and Culture

Maranchery is famous for indigenous music and dance forms like Poothamkali, Thottam, Thuyilunarthu Paattu, Onakkali, Oppana, Duff Muttu, Arabana Muttu, Kolkali, Villinmel Thayambaka and so on. Besides, Parichamuttukali and Kinnamkali, performed by the Ezhava community are also well known.





Thottam

Thottam is a small-scale version of Theyyam, when the kolakkaaran [artiste] performs in front of the deity, to the accompaniment of song and instrumental music (primarily chenda, the drum) on the eve of the Theyyam performance. He does not dress himself in full majesty, nor wears any make-up. Instead he wears a nominal headgear and red silk, and sometimes dances in a frenzy. The song sung on this occasion is called Thottam Paattu.

Thuyilunarthu Paattu

This is a song rendered by a caste of wandering minstrels called Pananar during the beginning of the monsoon. The Pananar and his wife go to each and every house in the village, singing songs, and it is believed to usher in a period of prosperity. The musical instrument on which the Pananar plays is a drum called thudi, which has an hourglass like figure. They drive away Moothevi (evil spirit) and invite Cheepothi (Sree Bhagavathy, the goddess) into each household. There is a very interesting story behind the genesis of Thuyilunarthu Paattu. Thiriuvankan, the first Pananar, had the good fortune of reviving Lord Shiva when He fell into a swoon. A grateful god gave the man exclusive rights to sing as he ranged the mountainous regions, and this right has been passed on from one generation to another. The condition is that the Pananar should visit only seven houses every day. Their songs mention how their ancestor won the right to sing from Lord Shiva, and also sing praises of Lord Vishnu reclining on the coils of Anantha in the Ocean of Milk. Thuyilunarthu Paattu sung in the southern parts of Kerala are slightly different.



Poothan Thira

This is an indigenous folk dance usually performed in kavus [sacred serpent groves] and Devi temples in Thrissur, Palakkad and Malappuram districts. The roles of Poothan and Thira are played by male members of a community called Mannan [washer man caste] who consider it their sacred right. Poothan is a member of Shiva's devotees [ganas in the vernacular] and Thira is Goddess Bhadrakali. The youth chosen to don the role of Poothan wears a mask, a huge headgear ringed with peacock feathers, a huge breastplate, wrist bands and other ornaments (all made from light wood) and large metal anklets. The youth who plays Thira wears light make-up and a heavy disc-shaped wooden headgear that carries figures of Bhadrakali and her devotees, etched in high relief. The headgear is 20 to 25 kgs heavy and it requires enormous muscular strength and dexterity to dance bearing this load. The two figures don their costumes, seek the permission and blessings of the goddess to enact her role, and set out to visit every Hindu house in the locality. Thereafter they are considered living gods or divine figures. Devotees arrange a formal welcome with a lighted lamp and offerings of rice, paddy and money as Poothan and Thira sway, swirl and rotate to the rhythms of drums in their courtyards. While Poothan dances to slow rhythms, Thira makes a more energetic performance, matching "Her" movements to be in sync with the increasing tempo of the drummers. There are 18 rhythms that Thira dances to, and it takes exceptional practice and power to execute the dance recital at every



house, and tour the village. Their performances alert the villagers to the Pooram [festival] that is to follow. In the evening, all devotees gather at the temples to offer prayers and show gratitude for the abundant harvest, while Poothan and Thira bring their performance to a close in front of the sanctum sanctorum.

Kala Vela

Kala Vela, like most indigenous temple rituals in Kerala, is a symbolic manner of celebrating the gift of life and showing gratitude to Nature for blessing humankind with riches. It takes place during the months of March and April with processions of huge effigies of bulls, made using wood, leather, bamboo, clothes and hay. The size of the bulls and the ornaments as well as festoons draped on them may vary from region to region but essentially, the ritual is meant to remind all of their indebtedness to the earth.

VELIYAMCODE GRAMA PANCHAYAT

Veliyamcode panchayat in Malappuram district is, geographically speaking, a largely level land. Located close to the coastline, the major crop grown in the area is coconut. Besides, paddy, banana, arecanut, pepper, vegetable, tapioca, cashew and mango are also cultivated on a large scale. Betel leaves, ramacham (a fragrant grass also known as 'vetiver' that is used to make flavoured herbal drinks) and pineapples also feature in the farming sector, though on a much lesser scale.



Kandalkkad Mattummal Thuruth





Kodenchery Mosque





Historical Nuggets

Veliyamcode was a fairly busy port in ancient times, and ships from a few European countries and the Arab lands used to anchor here. The foreigners went back with coconuts, copra, coir and dried fish. However, not all intentions were friendly, and not all interactions harmonious. There are records of altercation between foreigners and the natives, some of which ended in bloodshed. A book written by Sheikh Ahmad Zainuddin Makhdoom bin Sheikh Muhammad Al Gazzali titled *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, which records the struggle between the Mappila Muslims of Malabar and Portuguese colonial forces in the 16th century, mentions one specific incident that took place in Veliyamcode. Once, a Portuguese sailor came ashore and forcibly took away a woman with him. A man named Manathparambil Kunjimarakkur Shahid from the locality tried to stop the intruder, and in the fight that ensued Kunjimarakkur Shahid was killed. This book also reveals that Vasco da Gama alighted at the Veliyamcode port before he set foot on Kozhikode soil. This land was also witness to Tipu Sultan's invasion when he attempted to wrench Malabar from the grasp of the British. One of the major roads that he constructed, and the place he camped in during that period carry his name even now.





PROMINENT FAMILIES

Veliyamcode had two very prominent families in the past – Chennas Mana and Pandambarath Mana. This land was also witness to Tipu Sultan's invasion when he attempted to wrench Malabar from the grasp of the British. One of the major roads that he constructed, and the place he camped in during that period carry his name even now.

Chennas Mana

One of the most famous members of Chennas Mana was Narayanan Namboodiripad, a 15th century mathematician, who was considered an authority in the fields of Vaasthusaastam (science of Indian architecture), Mathematics and Tantram. A member in the court of the Zamorin (ruler of Malabar), he authored a book titled Thantra Samuchayam which is still considered as the authentic reference manual in the field of temple architecture and rituals. One of his descendants too is equally famous in these parts. Puzhakkara Parameswaran Namboodiripad, a tantri [priest] at the Guruvayoor temple, was a humanistic feudal lord who was the first person to give away his lands to his tenants as soon as the Land Reforms Bill was enacted in the state of Kerala.





Pandambarath Mana

A huge earthen jar in the possession of Pandambarath Mana stands testimony to the foreign trade that thrived in the region once upon a time. There is a reference to it in Kottarathil Sankunni's famous collection of the folklores and legends of Kerala titled Aithiyamala. According to the account, once there was a shipwreck off the coast of Veliyamcode. A few foreign traders escaped with their lives but also managed to smuggle out their hoard of gold coins in earthen jars. They stumbled into Pandambarath Mana, and left the jars with the patriarch for safe-keeping, promising to come back to collect them later. Many years passed and when the foreign traders returned, they saw that not only was their property safe; there was even an extra earthen jar awaiting them. Pleased with the honesty and integrity of the family, they gifted the extra jar to the mana.



PLACES OF WORSHIP

It is believed that Islam came to Kerala as soon as it began to be propagated across the world. As Veliyamcode had a port in ancient times, Islamic religious leaders came in ships along with traders from Europe and the Middle East.





Sri Subramania Temple, Kavalangad

This temple began in a humble fashion when a resident of Kavalangad named Aramugham Pooshali, an ardent devotee of Lord Subramania of Palani (Tamil Nadu), brought home an idol of his favourite deity, placed it in a room in his house and began worshipping it. Later he set up a small temple and invited a Bhattathiri (Malayali Brahmin) to do the daily worship and ablution. Following his death, his daughter took over the responsibility until one-and-a-half years back, when the temple structure collapsed suddenly. That very day, devotees saw a peacock (believed to be the mount of Lord Subramania) visit the site, and leave. The next day, the neighbouring Vishnumaya temple fell, and a snake (believed to represent the serpent deity on whom Lord Vishnu reclines in the Ocean of Milk) was observed slithering away from the area. Disturbed at these phenomena, the locals consulted an astrologer and after deliberations, a decision was taken to rebuild the two temples. With generous contributions from the people of the region, the plans were executed and the idols consecrated to the accompaniment of prescribed rituals and celebrations.

Bhagavathy Temple, Kannenkavu

Said to be nearly 600 years old, the Bhagavathy temple was initially owned by the Vadassery family. Today it is under the administration of a people's



trust. The most important festival associated with the temple takes place in the Malayalam month of Kumbham [February-March] on the day of Bharani asterism. It is celebrated for seven days. The idol is decorated in silks, flowers, crown and other ornaments, and she is worshipped with offerings of turmeric, rice grains, puffed rice and beaten rice. The sanctum sanctorum is lit with traditional lamps and a procession of caparisoned elephants is taken out. On the occasion, several indigenous temple dance forms like Thira, Karinkali, Theyyam, Pookkavadi and so on are also staged. Elaborate fireworks are arranged on the last day of the festival after which the temple closes for a week.

Kapyarathu Hanuman Temple

This temple originally belonged to the Kapyarathu family. Later it was taken over by a trust run by the natives. The main festival takes place in the Malayalam month of Kumbham [February-March] on the day of Punartham asterism. This is one of the rare temples in Ponnani taluk that conducts the most number of Udayasthamana pujas [worship from dawn to dusk]. The anniversary of the consecration of the idol is celebrated with great fanfare. Caparisoned elephants, panchavadyam [traditional musical ensemble of five instruments], fireworks and folk art recitals are conducted with the active participation of the local populace.



Sri Vettakkorumakan Temple, Perumudissery

Though the temple is in a state of disrepair now, it had a glorious past. It is situated in Vannery which was once the headquarters of the Perumpadappu swaroopam, that is, the king of Kochi. Besides Vettakkorumakan, Lord Vishnu, Shiva, Bhagavathy, Ganapati and Ayyappa are worshipped here.

Keezhkavu Temple, Perumudissery

The deity worshipped at this temple is Lord Ayyappa. During the season of Sabarimala pilgrimage, more devotees flock to this place, especially for malayidal [the ritualistic donning of the consecrated bead chain that marks the beginning of 41-day fasting and abstinence]. Ayyappan vilakku is a major ritual conducted here to commemorate the friendship between Lord Ayyappa and Vavar Swami [a Muslim warrior who challenged Lord Ayyappa, fought a duel and, on being vanquished, forged a lifelong bond of friendship]. Special, temporary Ayyappa temple and Vavar mosque are put up in the premises, using banana stem and tender coconut leaves. Women from the neighbouring Shiva temple come in a procession, each holding a platter (with lamps, flowers and other holy objects), singing songs that celebrate the camaraderie between Lord Ayyappa and Vavar Swami. Oracles dressed as Lord Ayyappa and Vavar Swami



accompany the procession and dance rhythmically to the songs. Devotees offer worship at these temporary shrines and circumambulate them. Finally, the festival ends with oracles dancing over embers. Devotees of the locality proceeding to Sabarimala conduct their kettunara ritual [preparation of two packets of puja items carried on the head] at this temple.

Juma-at Mosque, Eramangalam

This mosque is said to be more than a century old. Its tiled roof was demolished in 1983. People from far and wide come to this mosque to get their wishes fulfilled or to offer worship as part of their pilgrimage.

Juma-at Mosque, Veliyamcode

The graveyard close to this mosque holds the mortal remains of the revered Veliyamcode Umer Qazi, a Muslim scholar, freedom fighter and poet. He passed away more than a century ago but his memory remains fresh in the minds of the people of this land. He provoked the British government by refusing to pay tax and had to suffer imprisonment for it. His maqbara or grave is visited everyday by people belonging to all religions.



Padathakayalil Mosque

In the vicinity of this mosque is the gravestone of Sheikh Mohammed Swalih Maula, a religious scholar and Sufi mystic. Born in 1888 as the eldest son of Ahmed of Padathakayalil house and Aishakutty, he showed spiritual inclination from a very young age. His father sent him to a major madrassa at Ponnani, and before long he attained a profound knowledge of the Quran. Later, drawn to Sufism, he went on a spiritual quest to Kavaratti island and became the disciple of Sheikh Mohammed Maula Jalal Mastan Bukhari for 18 years. When Sheikh Mohammed Maula Jalal Mastan Bukhari visited Veliyamcode, he advised that a mosque be built. The mosque was known by the master's name initially. Today it is more famous as Padathakayalil mosque.

NANNAMMUKKU GRAMA PANCHAYAT



Old-timers believe that the panchayat derives its name from the fragrant winds that pervaded the whole area, as they came wafting over the luxuriant screw pine thickets lining the banks of the backwaters. Others believe that the name came from the Nannattu Nairs, a prominent family in the region, who represented the ruler of the land, the Zamorin (king of Calicut). The grama panchayat is surrounded on three sides by Kole lands that are rich in biodiversity. These lands sustain agriculture and provide a means of livelihood for thousands of people. Paddy, banana, coconut



Pakaravoor Tharavaadu





Pakaravoor Tharavaadu





and arecanut are the main crops cultivated here. The wetlands also offers scope for fish cultivation in a big way. The historical significance of this area is considerable. Adi Sankaracharya is said to have crossed this land and set up six temples in this area which became Nannammukku panchayat in 1955-56. During his invasion of Malabar, Tipu Sultan and his forces camped in this land before returning to Mysore. It is said that a senior Paniker of Velayattu kalari [training arena], situated in a place called Pallikkara in the panchayat, was Tipu Sultan's asan [master] in Kalarippayattu. Legend has it that Tipu Sultan offered gold coins to the Kulapparambil family, bought their lands and gifted them to Paniker as his Gurudakshina. Originally much of the land was in the possession of a few prominent Brahmin families like Pakaravoor Mana, Erkkara Mana, Azhvanchery Mana, Manjiyoor Mana and Pandavoor Mangalatheri Mana and soon. With the Land Reforms Bill coming into force, the commoners could realize their dreams of owning small pieces of land.

PROMINENT INDIVIDUALS

Erkkara Raman Namboodiri who gained fame for conducting more than a hundred yagas hailed from this panchayat. So also Perumbilavil Kelu Menon, who learned Kalarippayattu from Changapilly Gurukkal, and used his mastery over this indigenous martial art to rob the rich and feed the poor.





Kalapoottu Kandam

This is a square piece of land located close to the Kole lands of Pallikkara. Until recently it was famous for being the venue of bull race, an event which excited all the natives, especially the farmers of the region. It is said that people would come with their bulls from faraway places to compete. High stakes were involved, often reaching a couple of lakhs. Of late, however, it has fallen out of favour among the youth. The nationwide ban on such events has also contributed to its lack of patronage and loss of popularity.

PERUMPADAPPU GRAMA PANCHAYAT

Perumpadappu was once the headquarters of the Kochi kingdom, a very powerful royal family whose rights over temples from Thiruvalloor to Thiruvalla were undisputed. Its fortunes however changed in the latter half of the 13th century, when the Zamorin (the king of Calicut) launched an attack and annexed the region to Malabar. The Kochi royal family fled to Mahodayapuram or Kodungalloor to the south, and later to Kochi. The unprecedented floods of 1341 must have been one of the major reasons to cause the relocation. Nevertheless, the anointment ceremony of the king of Kochi continued to be held at Perumpadappu. There was also another custom that was religiously adhered to. Whenever a child was born in an the royal family, it was taken to a place called Vannery in Perumpadappu, and placed on its soil, perhaps to reinforce the ancient link to the land and pay tribute to it.





Cheravalloor Bund (Paddy Fields)





Cheravalloor Bund (Paddy Fields)





PLACES OF WORSHIP

Puthen Palli

Perumpadappu is famous for its Puthen Palli, a mosque which contains the maqbara of a renowned Sufi saint Sheikh Kunjahmed Musaliyar. Devotees believe that his blessings are what keep the place safe and radiant. They come here every year in huge numbers with votive offerings. The consecrated water offered at this place of worship is believed to have divine powers. People from other religions too come here to have a sip of water drawn from the well or sprinkle a few drops on the head because it is believed to reduce labour pains, remove snake venom and so on.



ARTS AND CULTURE

The Muslims of Perumpadappu engage themselves in Oppana, Ratheeb, Duff muttu and Kolkali. The Hindu dance forms of Kathakali and temple art forms of Chakyarkoothu are also patronized here.





Chavittukali

This is a kind of impromptu song-and-dance performance of farmers and their families, done largely for relief from hard physical labour. Precisely for this reason, the songs are made on the spur of the moment, the steps are chosen at random, and everyone is welcomed to join in. The performance is peppered with rhythmic claps and vaaythaari [strings of sounds that have no specific meaning but are sung tunelessly in chorus]. The dance of the men are called Aankali [Men's dance] and that of women, Penkali [Women's dance].



ALAMCODE GRAMA PANCHAYAT

There are varying accounts regarding how this region got the name "Alamcode". According to one, the segment aalam means "water". Hence the word means "the land of water". This name seems appropriate considering the fact that there are several canals and ponds amidst large stretches of paddy fields encompassed by many elevated regions named Pandamkunnu, Kiliyamkunnu, Kalamkunnu in the village. According to another, aala means "smithy", thus suggesting that this land was famous for forging weapons. In olden times, when this area was part of the princely state of Kochi, weapons were indeed made, and blacksmiths were in great demand.





PROMINENT INDIVIDUALS

Divakaran Somayajipad of Pookkuzhi Mana gained renown and spiritual powers by conducting somayagas. Although a somayaga is a fire sacrifice ritual performed for appeasing the celestial beings in Hinduism, it is primarily performed to promote the wellbeing of all humanity. The ritual is based on methods prescribed in the Vedas. Though well-versed in the Vedas, or perhaps because of it, he found the domineering ways of the Brahmins offensive. In defiance of the varnashrama, he eventually quit his priestly position and wandered about like a mystic. Those were the times when the very sight of a lower-caste individual from a distance was thought to pollute the upper caste. Divakaran Somayajipad went to the shacks of the lower-caste people of the region and even stayed there. The Brahmin community was quick to excommunicate him but he was undeterred by such acts. As a revolutionary, his thoughts and acts went beyond the dictates of the varnashrama, and he continued to carry this spiritualism till his last days. Hence, he was called Athyashrami, the one who has transcended the ashramas. A small shrine has been built for him within the premises of the Narasimhamoorthy temple. Another spiritual leader of the region was an Islamic scholar Shaikhunam Abubacker Musaliyar (al Haji). The devout from as far as Mumbai and Madras would flock to him for his blessings.



HISTORY

Alamcode is one of the rare villages in Kerala that have remnants of an ancient culture. They are known locally as kudakkallu or “umbrella stone”. Historians and archaeologists say that these are huge gravestones set up by our ancestors over the mortal remains of the dead. Remains of bones, pieces of prayer beads and slivers of earthen pots have been excavated from underneath them. Thopikkallu also known as a “hat stone” is a variant of these gravestones. Typically, it is a hemispherical stone that is used as a lid on a burial urn. All these megalithic structures are made out of laterite that was locally available and could be easily cut into required shapes and sizes. Scholars believe that it was part of the culture of animism practised in the tribal belt in this region many centuries back. Burial was the method followed for the disposal of dead bodies among the tribals. Historians are of the opinion that the custom of cremating the dead came only with the Aryans. The tribal settlements that we see at Alamcode today suggest they are descendants of this ancient group, and the ritualistic folk art forms of Kaala, Pootham, Mookkanchathan, Thira, Theyyam and so on that are popular among them even to this day seem to indicate an uninterrupted continuity of the old culture. Alamcode also carries vestiges of Aryan history. The Narasimhamoorthy temple, believed to have been established by the Ashtavasus [eight attendant deities of Lord Indra, the king of the gods, according to Hindu mythology], and the Shiva temple said to have been built by Khara Maharshi are pointed out as evidence of





Aryan culture and Brahminical dominance in the region. Not long afterwards, Alamcode came under the grip of feudalism. Brahmin feudal families like Perumukku, Changariyode, Kakkad, Kariyannur, Pookkuzhi and other held sway for a long time.

PLACES OF WORSHIP

Karekkad Bhagavathy Temple

The deity of this temple is Goddess Bhadrakali in her ferocious form, immediately after she has decapitated Darika the demon. Devotees believe that though quick to anger, she is extremely compassionate to the pious. The temple is generally thought to have been built in the 5th century. Initially, the idol was installed in such a way that she faced the east. Cocks were sacrificed to propitiate her and seek her blessings. In course of time, the deity's power became so strong that devotees found it impossible to walk anywhere near its vicinity. In a bid to scale down her power, the idol was shifted to face the west. Devotees believe that a similar phenomenon took place at Kannenkavu temple where the deity is supposed to be Bhadrakali's sister.



TEMPLE RITUALS

Paana

One of the most attractive votive offerings made at this temple is called Paana. It is usually a four-day long ritual, conducted to propitiate Goddess Bhadrakali and also to get cured from any of the 96 known illnesses or to have one's wishes fulfilled. Paana is performed only in 18 Bhagavathy temples in Palakkad and Malappuram districts. The story of Bhadrakali's battle with Darika and her beheading of him is sung in 4,444 verses. A special, elaborately decorated pandal is put up on 64 legs. Festoons of tender coconut leaves are strung everywhere, and plantain stems bearing the bunch of fruits are also placed at various spots. Special areas are marked out for deities like Bhadrakali, Vettakkorumakan and Shastavu. The drummers and singers have another section earmarked for them. A holy lotus symbol is created on the consecrated floor using powders. Puja is performed with lighted lamps and torches to the accompaniment of music. Thottam songs are sung to propitiate the deities. Thereafter, the devotee becomes the oracle. The oracle circumambulates the different shrines on the pandal before the pandal is consigned to the flames. Paana is usually conducted in the month of Idavam [May-June] on the day of Pooradam asterism. Annadanam or offering of rice to the poor is conducted on that day. The neighbouring panchayats also participate in the festival with zest.



Kuruthi

This is one of the pujas usually conducted at Devi temples. It is an ancient practice that was in currency even before the Aryans came down to the south of the peninsula. In its earliest form, goats or chickens were killed and their blood offered to worship this personification of Shakti (cosmic power). The Brahmins of Kerala however did not sacrifice living animals or birds. Instead, they prepared Kuruthi by mixing a fixed proportion of turmeric and lime paste in water. The resultant liquid that looks deep red in colour symbolizes blood, and this is offered to Bhadrakali and her attendants who relish it. Bhadrakali is worshipped as Raktheswari when Kuruthi is offered to her.

Chozhikkali

In the Malayalam month of Dhanu [December-January], from the midnight of Makayiram asterism or the early morning of Thiruvathira asterism, the people of this region, especially the menfolk, set out from the temple and go to each and every house in the village to spread cheer of the spring season. They are dressed as Chozhikal (the attendant spirits of Yama, the God of Death in Hindu mythology), and dance to the rhythms of chenda (a drum) and cymbals. Occasionally, small children also play these roles. They wrap themselves in the dry leaves of banana from top to toe leaving out only the eyes. The rustling sounds of the dry leaves rubbing against one another as the Chozhikal walk and dance add to the musical performance.

Sarpa Paattu



This is a temple ritual conducted where serpents are deities. Occasionally, they are conducted in the houses of devotees too. Those involved in it undergo seven-to-nine day fasting and cleansing before participating in it. A pandal is erected and an image of the serpent god is prepared on the consecrated floor using rice powder or holy ash in the morning, and multiple colours in the afternoon and at night. The image is called kolam. The entire pandal is lighted up with traditional lamps. Materials like paddy, rice grains, coconut, betel leaves, arecanut inflorescence, etc. are kept around the image. After the puja is over, the women are led into the pandal. It is said that they take in the spirit of the various deities – Nagaraja, Nagayakshi, Sarpayakshi, Maninaga, Erinaga, Karinaga and so on – go into a trance and begin to dance. With raucous cries, ululation and instrumental music reverberating in the background, the women pick up the bunches of arecanut inflorescence and step into the kolam. When the beat of the music quickens, the women dance with rapid steps. They now become oracles and make pronouncements. Eventually they roll on the kolam and destroy the pattern completely. Sometimes, Sarpa paattu is conducted for seven days or more. The entire ritual is done under the leadership of members of a caste named Pulluva.



Vettekkorumakan Paattu

There is an interesting story behind Vettekkorumakan. Once Arjuna the Pandava set out to propitiate Lord Shiva in order to gain Pashupathastra, the divine weapon. Although he sat in meditation for long, Lord Shiva remained unmoved. Eventually he donned the garb of a hunter (Vettakkaran in Malayalam) and set out from Mount Kailas. Disturbed at her consort's strange attire and the delay in granting Arjuna the boon, Goddess Parvathy asked him the reason. Lord Shiva said that he had to subdue Arjuna's pride before blessing him. The goddess turned herself into a huntress and accompanied her divine husband to the forest where the Pandava sat in deep meditation. The son they had as a hunter couple is Vettekkorumakan. Vettekkorumakan Paattu is a ritual conducted by members of a caste called Kurup. As in Sarpa paattu, kolams of the deity are drawn in black, white, yellow, green and red, using organic powders. Songs are sung in praise of the god to the accompaniment of instrumental music while the oracle dances as if possessed, rubs off the kolam and breaks the consecrated coconuts that are given as offerings.

Karinkali Theyyam

Karinkali is believed to have been born from the third (destructive) eye of Lord Shiva. Devotees take her to be Bhadrakali who secures deadly weapons through the power of meditation, mounts a vetala (ghoul), and sets out to kill asuras (demons). Said to respond to black magic, she is propitiated by



the Brahmin families of Kuruveli Attoli illam and Athiyadathu Madhavapalli illam. The Karinkali theyyam is a ritualistic art form conducted by members of the Vannan caste in these houses. In other places, members of the Paraya caste wear the costume of Karinkali and dance the theyyam near kavus (snake groves) and temples and on festival grounds. But they take care not to go into the temple premises. Special pandals are erected at a distance from the temple and they dance to the rhythms of the chenda (drum).

Mookanchathan

Mookanchathan is considered to be one of the 36 gods who erupted out of Kalladikodan hill. He is considered to be the representative of goddess Bhagavathy. Members of a community called the Paraya dress themselves in small red-black-white coloured skirt worn over brand new mundu (dhoti), waist belt and a crown made of tender coconut leaves, hold two small sticks, and visit every house in the village to announce the advent of the festival, one week in advance. As the goddess's representatives, they are believed to have divine powers as they don this costume. The villagers welcome them and accept their blessings with devotion and fervour.



kudakka llu





Pavittappuram kokoor Juma Masjid





Othaloor Bund



Cuisine

The curries, snacks and savouries prepared in all households in Ponnani, using locally available resources, is mouth-watering to say the least. The natives of the land claim that many of their choicest food items are not made anywhere in Kerala. Some of them are made on all occasions. Others are prepared exclusively in connection with festivals or seasons. A couple of the most famous items are Muttamala, Kumbil appom, Chukkappom, Irachipidi, Mutta surka, Unnakkaya, Koondal nirachathu, Kozhivada, Chirattavada, Pinjaniappom, Manda and so on. Among the most exotic non-vegetarian dishes available in these parts is Karimeen pollichathu (in which Pearl spot fish is marinated, placed inside banana leaf and fried).







