

**The Social and Cultural History of Tirur: A Case Study  
of Thunchan Memorial Trust**

**Project submitted to the University of Calicut in  
partial fulfillment for the award of the degree**

**of**

**Bachelor of Arts in English and History**

**by**

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## **Declaration**

I, **Sruthi**, hereby declare that this project entitled **The Social and Cultural History of Tirur : A Case Study of Thunchan Memorial Trust**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the **Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History**, is a bonafide record of original research work carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. George Alex, Coordinator, Department of English & History (Double Main) Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda.

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## **Certificate**

This is to certify that this project entitled **Social and Cultural History of Tirur : A Case Study of Thunchan Memorial Trust**, a record of research work carried out by **Miss. Sruthi** under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Bachelor of Arts in English and History** submitted to the University of Calicut.

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## Introduction

History deals with the study of the present traces of the past. The important aspect of history is the present evidence. Many archaeological evidences enable the scholars to reconstruct the past. The memorials stand out as one of the reliable evidences in retracing the past. A memorial is defined as an object which serves as a focus for the memory or commemoration of something, usually an influential, deceased person or a historical tragic event. The memorials hold an indispensable position in the cultural and social life of the natives due to its historical significance.

Thunchan Parambu or Thunchan Memorial is one such memorial that is of profound importance to the natives of Kerala. The memorial is a cultural and research centre commemorating the father of modern Malayalam, Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan. The memorial situated at Tirur is believed to be the birth place of Ezhuthachan.

Thunchath Ezhuthachan is a 16<sup>th</sup> century Malayalam litterateur whose writings helped to develop Malayalam as a language with a script of 51 letters, vocabulary and literature. This great bard of Malayalam rendered the Indian epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana in his own style, brought a new light into the life common Keralites, who had no access to Sanskrit.

Thunchan Memorial is situated precisely at the same spot where the poet lived and taught in his open-air school. The iron stylus with which Ezhuthachan wrote his texts on palm leaves and the ancient *Kanjiram (Nux Vomica)* in whose shade he wrote his works and taught his students are treasured and exhibited here. The cultural leadership of

the memorial makes it one of the celebrated centers that endeavor to propagate the ideals of Malayalam language and arts. In this era where a person is least bothered about their roots it becomes inevitable to explore more about the past. Despite its significance the memorial has been not given the due importance it deserves. This project is an attempt to decode the legacy of Ezhuthachan and the foundation of the memorial from ruins to the present research and cultural centre.

### **Review of Literature**

There is only few authentic works about the memorial in the form of thesis papers, documents, and newspaper reports. As a part of imparting the legacy of Malayalam language and Ezhuthachan, the Thunchan Memorial Trust has published a book on the cultural history of the memorial in Malayalam titled as ‘Thunchan Smaraka Charithram’. The other sources includes brochures, pamphlets etc.

### **Objective of the Study**

- To explore the history of the memorial.
- To acknowledge the contributions of Ezhuthachan as the father of modern Malayalam language and social reformer as well.
- To decode the culture influence of the memorial in the lives of the natives
- To analyze the significance of the memorial according to Keralites.
- To delineate the role of the memorial in the cultural history of Kerala.
- To review the peculiarities of the memorial.

## **Scope**

The study of the memorial includes acknowledging the role of Ezhuthachan, a brief account of his life and contributions to the Malayalam Literature. This study traces the transformation of the memorial from ruins to the present state. It also studies about the cultural influence of the memorial. In short the study aims to depict Ezhuthachan's contributions, historical and cultural aspects of the memorial.

## **Sources**

The main sources of information for the study were Ezhuthachan's works, thesis and minutes report by the memorial trust, A Cultural History of Kerala and Kerala History and its Makers by A. Sreedhara Menon and the Thunchan Smaraka Charithram by Dr. K. Sreekumar. The other important sources include pamphlets, brochures, newspaper reports and interviews from the natives.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used in this study is mainly based on the historical analysis of data including documents, records and archival materials obtained from the memorial. This study is mainly based on the primary sources or first-hand information further improvised by the secondary sources.

## **Chapterisation**

The study is segregated into five parts including Introduction and Conclusion. The introduction deals with an overview of the topic, the aim and objective of the study,



sources, methodology and chapterisation. The first part is dedicated to Thunchath Ezhuthachan and his contributions to Malayalam literature. The second part delineates the trail of the memorial from remnants to a fully developed cultural centre. The third part explores the further developments and cultural leadership of the memorial. It also discusses about the most celebrated Thunchan Festival and Vidyarambam Festival.



## Chapter 1

### Through the trail of Thunchath Ezhuthachan, the Man of the Memorial

Thunchan Memorial has been set up in the memory of Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan who is hailed as the Father of Modern Malayalam. The memorial was established in 1964 endeavors to propagate the ideals of Ezhuthachan. Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan was a devotional poet, translator and linguist from Kerala who belonged to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He is rightly called the father of modern Malayalam language as he was the one who liberated the language completely from the shackles of Tamil and Sanskrit. Moreover with its use in literary compositions he imparted to the simple speech of the commoners a power and dignity of its own. He has also been called the “Primal poet in Malayalam”<sup>1</sup> as the circulation of his works was very much wide in comparison with other poets of premodern Kerala.

Apart from the contributions to literature, he has passed down a precious legacy in the fields of religion, philosophy and ethics. All these qualify him to be regarded as the pioneer of the great movement for social and cultural revival in the history of Kerala. Thus, Ezhuthachan stands out as the most noteworthy figure in the wide spectrum of the social and cultural history of medieval Kerala.

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<sup>1</sup> Pollock, Sheldon (2003). "Introduction". In Pollock, Sheldon (ed.). [\*Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia\*](#). University of California Press. p. 20.

## **His Early Life**

Ezhuthachan was born in the Thunchath home at present-day Tirur where now the Thunchan memorial is situated. Little is known about his early life. The names of his parents are unknown and there are disagreements regarding his given name as well. The name Ezhuthachan which means the father of letters was a generic title for any village school teacher in premodern Kerala. He was born into a traditional Hindu family. The stance about his caste is arguable. It is only known that he belonged to a lower caste (Shudra or Shudra-grade). Many arguments regarding his caste are prevalent, the most popular being him belonging to Ezhuthachan caste and Chakkala nair. A minority is of the opinion that he belonged to Kaniyar caste.

Ezhuthachan caste is socio-economic caste that has teaching as a traditional profession. According to Arthur C. Burnell, Thunchath Ezhuthachan belonged to the Ezhuthachan caste. Writer K. Balakrishna Kurup holds the same view in his book *Viswasathinte Kanappurangal*. Historian Velayudhan Panikkasery holds the same opinion.

While the Chakkala nair community had the right to enter brahmanical temples and they could take part in worship. The renowned Malayalam poet and historian Ullur .S. Parameswara Iyer agree to this alternate view that Ezhuthachan belonged to this caste. He arrived at this conclusion because it was not allowed for the Ezhuthachan caste to visit brahmanical temples while Ezhuthachan had visited such temples. William Logan

holds the same opinion and he mentioned Ezhuthachan as a man of Nair caste in his *Malabar Manual*.

Some sources consider that he belonged to Kaniyar caste. This community comprises traditional astrologers who were well versed in Sanskrit and Malayalam. During the medieval period the non Brahmins were not permitted to learn Sanskrit, only the Kaniyar community had the privilege to acquire knowledge in Sanskrit.

It is believed that as a boy he seems to have exhibited uncommon intelligence and he had shown signs of spiritual urge very early in his life. His early education was taken care of by his elder brother. After the primary level of education he travelled outside Kerala. In the heydays of his youth he set out on a long journey in search of knowledge. He travelled extensively in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh regions. This exposure enabled him to acquire the knowledge about some other Dravidian languages like Tamil and Telugu. He studied the classical works in Tamil in depth. He also mastered the *Vedas* and the *Sastras* the study of which was forbidden to non- Brahmins and he also delved deep into the Upanishads. On his return to his native place he started a school named as Ezhuthupalli to impart the knowledge he attained to the children of the locality. Simultaneously, he devoted his time in curating his masterpieces in literature. It is said that he had to deal with oppositions from the traditionally conservative Brahmins. Eventually they had to bow down in front of his knowledge and acknowledge his weighty contributions. Even renowned scholars like Melpathur Narayana Bhattatiri sought the guidance of Ezhuthachan.

## His Contributions

The honor of having broken the long-established Brahmin monopoly of Sanskrit learning and studies are attributed to Ezhuthachan and his writings helped develop Malayalam as a language with a script of 51 letters, vocabulary and literature. Thus, he made the education of the masses a reality. The significance of his work can be understood in its full essence only after having the knowledge about the cultural, political, social and economic conditions of the period.

Ezhuthachan has been allotted to the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the early decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He lived at a time when people were tired of wars and the aftermath horrors and what they wanted badly was a spiritual message to smooth the agony of human soul. This period in Kerala history is marked by mounting violence and conflicts. The period was extremely barbarous and it was Ezhuthachan who appeared on the scene as the man of destiny at this crucial moment and by his valuable services helped to revive and sustain the sagging morale of the whole society with his enlightened teachings.

His contributions to Malayalam language and literature are indeed commendable. His notable works are the transcreation of Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Linguists are unanimous while assigning the epics *Adhyatma Ramayanam* and *Sri Mahabharatam* to Ezhuthachan along with two shorter works *Iripattinalu Vrittam* and *Hari Nama Keerthanam*. The latter two texts are believed to be composed as texts for his disciples. His other works include *Kaivalyanavaneetham Kilipaattu*, the transcreation of a Tamil work by Thandavaraya Swamikal of Tanjore, *Devi Mahatmyam* and *Chintaratnam*, a vedantic treatise in verse. He adopted a genre of poetry known as Kilipaattu in which the

Kili (parrot) is the narrator. He achieved a high degree of success in effecting the merger of the Aryan and Dravidian elements in the language and thus shows this genius for synthesis.

There exists a criticism that his works were not original and they are mere transcreation. However his epics were not just mere translation of the Sanskrit originals into Malayalam, they bear evidence of imagination and originality. According to critic K. Ayyapa Panicker, those who see Adhyatma Ramayanam as a devotional work belittle Ezhuthachan. It was his consciousness about the importance of sound effect in poetry that produced the style of Kilipaattu.

“But it is worth listening when the later tradition assigns a primal role to Eluttacchan. It tells us something about the place of this multiform narrative, the *Ramayana*, in constituting the core of a literary tradition; about the enduring historical importance of the moment when a subaltern social formation achieved the literacy that in the South Asian world conditioned the culturally significant type of textuality we may call literature; and about literature as requiring, in the eyes of many readers and listeners, a particular linguistic register, in this case, the highly Sanskritized.”<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the contributions to literature, he is also credited with the revival of the Bhakti cult in medieval Kerala. The 16<sup>th</sup> century marked the rise of a new school in literature, art and philosophy with Bhakti as the guiding principle. Adhyatma *Ramayanam* is also a spiritual text that gave momentum to the Bhakti veneration in Kerala. Ezhuthachan along with Poonthanam Namboodiri was among the most prominent Bhakti devotional poets of that time. The Bhakti cult found its supreme literary

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<sup>2</sup>Sheldon Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (2003).

expression in Ezhuthachan's *Ramayanam*. Though it had predecessors like *Kannasa Ramayanam* and Cherusseri's *Krishnagatha*, they failed to make a profound impact on the masses due to some stylistic and linguistic shortcomings. By composing the *Ramayanam* with its much needed emphasis on Bhakti or selfless surrender to God in the form of Rama, in a style and language that had a mass appeal, he was able to stir the emotions of the people reviving their deteriorating morals.

The devotional verses in his work which sing the glories of Rama instilled the sense of piety and devotion in the minds of men. His works exhibit moral exhortations which have helped to improve the moral and ethical stands of the people. The Ramayana he wrote is even today read and reread in thousands of Hindu homes in Kerala and hence it is a great influence in moulding the outlook of the people and in improving the moral tone of the society. His version of *Ramayanam* is read and sung by Hindu families especially during the Malayalam month of Karkidakam.

Ezhuthachan has played an important role in bringing significant social change in Kerala. Being a non Brahmin it was very revolutionary of him to study the Vedas and sastras. Thus, he exposed the myth of divine right of Brahmanas in this regard. He began a movement providing elementary education to the commoners through *Ezhuthupallis* or village schools. His efforts to spread the education among everyone irrespective of their caste backgrounds helped in breaking the monopoly of the Brahmin elite.



“The Sankrit literature was, after this [translation by Ezhuthachan] no longer a secret, and there was perhaps no part of South India where it was more studied by people of many castes during the eighteenth century”.<sup>3</sup>

If Kerala can boast of its place of pre eminence in the literary map of India in the present day, the credit for the proud consummation should go largely to the pioneering efforts of this great savant. In the words of Dr.K. Ayyappa Panickar, “With his absolute sincerity, his adept skill in the use of language , his total dedication to poetry and religion, his disarming humility, Ezhuthachan was able to create and establish once and for all a language , culture and a people. In later times, whenever there was deviation or distortion in the cultural trend, the return to the central native tradition was facilitated by a true recognition and fresh realization of what Ezhuthachan had done and stood for. He is thus a magnificent symbol that, our greatest cultural monument”.

However, there are very few firm historical evidences for Ezhuthachan the author. The main historical sources of Ezhuthachan and his life are quasi-historical verses referring to Ezhuthachan (from Chittur Madhom). Towards the end of his life it is here in Chittur madam where he lived more or less in ascetic seclusion spending his time in meditation. An institutional line of masters or gurus, beginning with one Thunchath Sri Guru, is mentioned in one oral verse from Chittur Madhom. This lineage can be historically verified. Ezhuthachan’s importance in Malayalam literature is similar to that of Tulsidas in Hindi and Kambar in Tamil.

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur C. Burnell, *Elements of South-Indian Palaeography*(1874).

Thunchan Parambu, his birth place, is even today regarded as a hallowed ground the very sands of which possess the mystic power of inspiration. Children from far and near throng to the memorial every year on the Vijayadasami day for formal initiation into the world of the letters. Great men like him are like meteors that appear in the horizon but seldom. But he didn't leave without making an impression. He came with a specific mission and a message which was fulfilled and delivered a lasting benefit to the mankind. The name of Ezhuthachan is even now a source of living inspiration to the people of Kerala and its magic effect still remains a mystery.



## Chapter 2

# A Retrospect; Journey from the Relics to the Cultural Monument

Thunchan Parambu situated in Tirur is the birthplace of Thunchath Ezhuthachan, the father of modern Malayalam language. A memorial named Thunchan Smarakam for the great poet has been built in the premises with the prime objective of spreading the ideals of Ezhuthachan. Today, the memorial houses a fully fledged research centre, Malayalam literature museum, palm leaf library, auditorium for holding meetings, open air stage, guest houses, rest rooms, open space, Sarawasti Mandapam and children's library.

The journey from the relics – a pond, Kanjiram and a small piece of land to a fully fledged research centre and monument commemorating the greatest illuminaries of Malayalam language is indeed a tedious and remarkable one.

Thunchan parambu, the birthplace of Thunchath Ezhuthachan was the school where Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan pursuing his family vocation taught his students in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was here where Ezhuthachan modified the Malayalam alphabet and wrote Harinama Keerthanam. It is believed that he conducted the classes under the cool shade of the Kanjiram (*Nux Vomica*) tree that still stands in the compound. With the limited knowledge about his life after the birth of his daughter it is believed that he migrated to Palakkad. The condition and what had happened to Thunchan Parambu

aftermath his death is shrouded in mystery. Any authentic records about the same are still to be obtained.

During the lifetime of Ezhuthachan, Tirur was part of Vettathunadu. The actual place name of Thunchan Parambu is Annara near Trikandiyar. With the growing influence and spread of Ezhuthachan's glory it came to be known as Thunchan Parambu. For a long time there was only a shed in the premises. Gradually it was some devotees who improvised the shed and light lamp there. It was only recently it developed into a magnificent cultural and research centre. The memorial has been neglected and suffered misuse for a long time. The pathetic condition of the memorial had grieved many scholars and later it was their efforts that brought the deserved glory to the memorial.

Many natives thought that they should conserve premises and built a memorial worthy of the teacher who was born and raised in this soil. However the lack of a unified and coordinated approach delayed any progress. Things didn't go well and one of the main reasons was the lack of constructive leadership. For a long time they failed to draw the attention of the wealthy and powerful to the construction of the memorial.

### **The Initial Phase of the Foundation**

Eventually, it was in 1906 an extensive meeting decided to build a memorial for one of the greatest luminaries of Kerala. This was the first collective effort towards the conservation of the memorial. This event can be described as the laying of the first foundation stone of the Thunchan monument. In 1906, the meeting chaired by Maharaja Manavikramayettan Thampuran, the crown prince called the meeting of eminent writers and social workers at Thunchan Parambu to consider the ways of reviving the place. In

the meeting it was convened to construct the memorial for Acharya at Thunchan Parambu. About one thousand people took part in the meeting.

The meeting drew special attention of many great personalities. Fifty eight years later the detailed news of the meeting was republished in Matrubhumi daily on Jan 16, 1964. The committee formed for the construction of the monument was not active and the lack of response from the landlord prevented further activities, but the local language enthusiasts went ahead with their activities on a regular basis. Even small events attracted public attention and since Thunchan Parambu was privately owned large scale construction was not possible there.

When the Thunchan Memorial construction consultative conference of 1906 was in its infancy, the urge of the linguists gradually lightened. Rare activities that took place entirely locally however did not make any significant movements. It was in 1954 A.V. Srikanta Pothuval and A.C. Ponnuniraja came to visit the birthplace and writings of Thunchattacharya. Those linguists were perplexed by the plight of the writing gallery or Ezhuthukalari. They felt that it was utterly ungrateful attitude towards Acharya who gifted Kairali with a script, devotion and literature. It was decided that it would not be too late to erect a suitable memorial for the father of Malayalam language. They planned two immediate action plans. One of them was to write an article or an introductory speech in 'Matrubhumi' daily to make language lovers aware of the subject of monument construction.

The second meeting was convened in 1954 itself. The venue was set up at the Khadi Vastralaya in Tirur. There was positive news in the media, including Matrubhumi

about the meeting, which had serious discussions. K. Kumaran Nair, former secretary of the Thunchan Memorial Management Committee wrote: “On this auspicious day on the month of Dhanu, the death anniversary of Thunchan, Thunchan day was celebrated and a committee for future events involving prominent literary and cultural figures of Kerala. The Khadi Vastralayam was located near the Bhandarakkadavu in Trikandiyoor and on its spacious verandah about 50 people, including writers, cultural figures and local dignitaries took a decision to celebrate the Thunchan Day. The decision was made for the day and the cultural activities of Tirur and the presence of Tirur Lalithakala Samithi activists who were all vital to the meeting.

Sarvodaya leader and poet AV Sreekanda Pothuval took the helm of the discussions. The meeting decided to celebrate the Thunchan Day at Thunchan Parambu on the ‘Utram’ day of the month of Dhanu. It was decided that the first Thunchan festival would be celebrated extensively on the same day. Thunchan Parambu will be the venue for the first Thunchan day celebrations on the day of his death anniversary.

### **The Second Phase**

KP Keshava Menon made his entry on December 31, 1954. Thunchan Parambu became the venue for the first Thunchan Day Celebrations on Acharya’s death anniversary. Lalithakala Samithi activists and locals have been involved in the efforts to make venue more attractive. An excerpt from the memoirs of K X Anto reads;

“On the midnight of Dec 30 1954 cultural preparations for the first festival of Kerala are going on at Thunchan Parambu, where it had been dark until then, where the crocodile and cub were wandering, the Petromaxes happily lit up. Thus the light began to fall,

though dim and lingering in the dark cultural consciousness of Kerala. The Thunchan Road was tarred then. Instead there was only a slightly wider ridge. From there, you have to go the left side of the view and climb up the edge of the pond and pass the historic Kanjiram to enter the Thunchan Forest. Straps were lined up and the trunks were decorated from Poomgottukulangara to Thunchan Parambu.”

On the first Thunchan Day celebrations and conference was held without any disappointment to the expectation of the organizers. KP Keshava Menon, who became the staunch supporter of the Thunchan Memorial accepted the invitation of the organizers and reached Thunchan Parambu for the first time. The Thunchan Memorial Committee was formed. The Memorial Committee consisted of President KP Keshava Menon, Secretary Ramappisharadi and prominent members of the political, cultural and artistic circles of Kerala. With the construction of the monument in mind small scale fund raising has conducted. The first Thunchan day was literally a great success. It was also an achievement to have far sighted and consensual person like KP Keshava Menon to head the committee. The active presence of the famous poet V. Unnikrishnan Nair was another factor that has given impetus to the follow up activities.

Some writers and artists came to Thunchan Parambu and collaborated with the activities of the committee. Keshava Menon led the activities from Mathrubhumi in Kozhikode from time to time in Thunchan Parambu and he was ready to publish the news about Thunchan Parambu in Mathrubhumi with due importance . Although the development work in Thunchan Parambu did not have the intended effect, the Memorial Committee was able to hold the Thunchan day celebrations. Until 1960, Thunchan Day was celebrated in a grand manner in Thunchan Parambu.



Thunchan day celebrations were held on the last day of the monsoon month. There were morning assemblies and memorial sermons. There were other art activities also. The Lalithakala Samithi was in charge of the art events. The last item of the artistic program was the amateur drama presentation. The locals selflessly prepared the undeveloped Thunchan Parambu for a festive atmosphere.

For most of the years till december 31 1992, the Thunchan Day was celebrated under the leadership of the Thunchan Memorial Committee. The committee was unable to raise even a small portion of the money. KP Keshava Menon wrote in his autobiography 'Kazhinja Kaalam' that although the committee then approached the Government of Kerala, Pattom Thanu Pillai, the then chief minister of Kerala to look into the matter. He also gladly promised the help of the government.

Pattom Thanu Pillai, took the request seriously. He took the steps to buy Thunchan Parambu from its then heirs on behalf of the government. Keshava Menon found another way to speed up the steps taken by the government regarding Thunchan Parambu. In the cabinet of Pattom Thanu Pillai, K. Chandrasekharan who was in charge of the revenue department visited Mathrubhumi frequently. Keshava Menon utilized these visits to speed up the process of the government regarding Thunchan Parambu. With the enthusiasm of Chandrasekharan , the government took over the land and ordered to start the construction of the monument. According to revenue records, Thunchan Parambu is four acres and sixty cents. Formerly known as North Pullamkottu Parambu in Annara, Thunchan Parambu was bought from Vadakkumpatta subdivision for Rs 36,000.

The government had entered into an agreement with Diwan Peshkar Kunjunni Menon, a native of Puthussery. Kittapa Nair, the caretaker of Kunjunni Menon had initially conducted the 'Vidyarambam' at Thunchan Parambu. The committee paid Rs 11,000 and handed it over to the Chief Minister. Thus in 1961 itself, the land of Thunchathacharya became the property of the government.

Thunchan monument was the first mission undertaken by the memorial. The committee headed by Keshava Menon decided to build an attractive mandapam of Krishnashila as a memorial. The committee felt that it would be appropriate to make Pattom Thanu Pillai to lay the foundation stone. From that year onwards, it was decided to expand the Thunchan Day Celebrations and to lay the foundation stone at its inception. On these days of 29, 30 and 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1961 Thunchan day was celebrated as a national festival with various activities. On December 29 1961, Thanu Pillai laid the foundation stone for the Thunchan Memorial. Prominent figures from the cultural, social, political, artistic and literary sphere came to witness the festival.

The Krishnashila Mandapam is one of the highlights of the visitors of the Memorial. It was an idea put forward by Keshava Menon. It is unique hall where Acharya's presence and Acharya's seals are displayed on Acharya's soil. When he discussed the matter with other members of the committee they too took a positive stance. The support from the government assured and encouraged the committee to proceed. After the discussion with Ganpati Iyer, Assistant Executive Engineer, Public Works Department, a good plan was made for the hall.

The memorial committee decided to hold the Thunchan Day Celebrations in 1962. Meanwhile, Chinese troops infiltrated the border areas of India and provoked the people. In that case, the organizers had to abandon the proposed Thunchan day celebration. However, the following year on December 31 Thunchan day was celebrated at Thunchan Parambu. Two weeks later, on January 15 1964, another ceremony was held at the venue. The grand opening of the Krishna Shila Mandapam, the Thunchan memorial, the conference hall and the gallery which had the stone sculptures was done by Pattom Thanu Pillai himself after two years as the Governor of Punjab.

R Sankar who succeeded him as the Chief Minister was fortunate enough to adopt a favorable attitude towards Thunchan Parambu. In the same year government formed a 12 member committee to manage the memorial and to plan its further development. Gradually, this place came to be widely known among Malayalis and it evolved into a cultural centre.

The Thunchan Memorial Management committee headed by Keshava Menon took the charge of with the plan of conducting educational activities for children during Navarathri celebrations publishing biographies of Thunchath Acharyan by eminent authors and creating awareness among student and general public about Ezhuthachan's works and philosophy of life, educational, literary and artistic activities. From 1964 to 1970, Keshava Menon chaired two committees to develop the Thunchan Memorial as a centre of knowledge that would give moral impetus to the community. Though every goal was not achieved, small developments were done. He was able to take many steps that improved the condition of the memorial. There had been a considerable increase in the number of students visiting the Thunchan Parambu for Vidyarambam every year.

S.K. Pottakkatt succeeded K.P. Keshava menon as the second president of Thunchan Memorial Management Committee. From 1971-1982 he led the committee. He raised the issue at meetings to bring the Thunchan Memorial to more glory as a centre for linguistic and literary research. He played an important role in transforming the memorial as a cultural pilgrimage centre, closer to the students of new generation. A meeting conducted by him decided to request the university authorities to recognize the Thunchan Memorial as the language and literary research centre of Calicut University. After the unexpected death of SK Pottaikad, TN Jayachandran IAS, a former Additional Chief Secretary of Calicut, a former head of CUSAT University and writer was tasked with leading the activities of the Memorial.

### **The Final Phase**

In 1993 M.T. Vasudevan Nair took over as the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Kumaran Nair was the Secretary. The Thunchan Memorial Committee has played a pivotal role in the development of the Thunchan Memorial. The development process started since 1992 and was active till 1993. The leadership was of M.T. Vasudevan Nair as the Chairman. The plight of having to wait for a long time for government approval for even small things related to the development of the monument was discussed at that time.

Many construction activities of the monument were delayed due to the lack of government funding. To overcome this, demand for autonomy of the Thunchan Memorial Management Committee was raised as early as 1993. At a meeting that discussed ways to get income tax relief on the money raised for the Thunchan Memorial Research Centre.

Chairman M.T. Vasudevan Nair informed in the meeting convened the possibility of turning the Committee.

In 2001, the government converted the committee into a trust and granted substantial autonomy to it. The trust has seventeen members. Mr. M.T. Vasudevan Nair is the Chairman.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Peculiarities and Cultural Leadership of the Memorial**

Culture defines the humanity and civilization. The cultural significance of the memorial in the natives of north Kerala is unparalleled. Evolved from the relics to a cultural and research centre, the growth of the memorial in every small step is synchronized with the culture of Kerala. Ingrained in the long history of conducting Vidyarambam in Acharya's soil, the memorial shines in glory.

Now, Thunchan Parambu has a four and a half acre campus. Today it holds a position of eminence in Kerala's cultural arena. The trust conducts many seminars and conventions in the campus that are attended by renowned scholars, musicians, artists and dancers of India. Some of the peculiarities of the memorial include the Literary Museum, Grandhhappura or the House of Manuscripts and Thunchan Research Centre.

#### **Literary Museum**

The Literary Museum is a great attraction for visitors of Thunchan Parambu. The exhibits trace the evolution of Malayalam language and literature. The museum also has tools and articles associated with many eminent writers of the past apart from Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan. The history of the language is narrated through several media such as visual clippings, sound tracks, paintings and photographs.

## **Grandhappura: The House of Manuscripts**

The Grandhappura holds a precious collection of old manuscripts written on Palmyra leaves. It is one of the authorized centers of the National Manuscript Mission. The manuscripts cover an area that is wider than just literature and consist of many good documents that touch upon science and arts of ancient and medieval times. It is a valuable source of material for research scholars.

## **Thunchan Research Centre**

The Thunchan Centre is supported by the Thunchan Memorial Library and the Grandhappura is recognized by the Calicut University. Many scholars doing research for M.Phil and PhD rely on the resources of the Thunchan Research Centre. The serene atmosphere of Thunchan Parambu is eminently suited for the pursuit of knowledge.

## **Thunchan Memorial Library**

The library has a substantial collection of books ranging from rare old books to contemporary literature. It is a centre of attraction for scholars and researchers from all over the state. The rapidly expanding library is computerized and manned by trained personnel. Hence the visitors have easy access to the books.

## **Thunchan Parambu Tourism Project**

The Thunchan Memorial Trust has often asked the departmental authorities to finance the inclusion of the Tirur Thunchan Memorial as a cultural pilgrimage centre in the projects of the Tourism Department. The Kerala government took a decisive stand in

2017. The State Tourism Department has initiated an infrastructure development project at Thunchan Memorial at a cost of 2 Crores. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated the conference and laid the foundation stone of the Thunchan Parambu Tourism Project at 10 am on May 29, 2017 at a function held at Thunchan Parambu. The works to start an ecofriendly plan to prevent any damage to the existing trees and other plants. The tourism project was an initiative for the significant development activities at the Thunchan Memorial in the year 2018-19. Now cottages and dormitories with all modern amenities are available to visitors of Thunchan Parambu. The place has both open air and in house auditoriums.

The Vidyarambam and Thunchan Festivals are the two main cultural festivals of prominence.

### **The Thunchan Festival**

Every year the activities in Thunchan Parambu reach their peak with the Thunchan Festival. The whole town of Tirur rises to the occasion the festival is a rare combination of art, literature and enlightenment. The iron stylus is believed to have been used by the father of Malayalam language for writing on palm leaves is taken out in a grand procession led by eminent personalities from many parts of India representing diverse languages and regional cultures participates. The festival is attended by a wide cross section of people, students forming an important segment of the audience. Seminars on specific subjects are organized. The special session of poets at which eminent poets read out their creations is a great favorite. The festival is held in the first week of February every year.



## **The Vidyarambam Festival**

This is a very old ceremony that has existed in Kerala for centuries. Vidya means learning and Arambha means beginning. This festival marks the beginning of learning for young children. The Vidyarambam ceremony is known as Ezhuthiniruthu in Malayalam. The word may be broadly translated as the process of being made to sit down to write. It is held in two places on the campus. Traditional teachers hold it in the granite Mandapan. At the same time five or six eminent writers conduct the ceremony in the Sarawathy Mandapam. The child is asked to open his mouth and the Guru writes the first letters with a golden ring on the child's tongue. Then the guru holds the index finger of the child and leads it to write a whole line on rice that is spread on a platter. The ceremony ends with the child handing over the Dakshina – respectful offering to the Guru. This is usually a small amount of money placed on a betel leaf. The Ezhuthiniruthu has no parallel in any other culture and is one secular festival in which people of all communities take place.



## Conclusion

Memorials serve as a focus of memory for commemoration of something. The Thunchan Memorial, the birthplace of Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan is of profound importance to the natives of Kerala. The journey from relics to the cultural and research centre was a herculean task. The efforts of many eminent personalities paved the way for the realization of the dream to commemorate the birthplace of the primal bard of Malayalam.

The project delineates the significance of Ezhuthachan in the history of Kerala and his unparalleled contributions to Malayalam Literature. Apart from the contributions to literature, he is an accomplished social reformer. As K.Sachithananthan quotes Ezhuthachan been a Sudra is socially relevant as he was conventionally denied access to the Vedas and still managed not only to follow the Vedas and the Upanishads, but rose to be the first teacher of ancient Indian scriptures for entire Malayalam community.

Thunchan Parambu suffered disuse and neglect for over three centuries. In 1906, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October Vidwan Manavikraman Ettan Raja, the crown prince Zamorin called a meeting of eminent writers and social workers at Thunchan Parambu to consider ways of reviving the place. However, it was only in December 1954 when a committee was formed under the Chairmanship of Mr. K.P. Kesava Menon that the move took concrete shape. Black granite Mandapam and a small auditorium were built. The foundation stone was laid in December 1961 by Mr. Pattom Thanu Pillai who was the Chief Minister of the state. It is noteworthy that the buildings were inaugurated by the same eminent freedom fighter in January 1964. He was the Governor of Punjab then.

In 1964 the government formed a twelve member committee to manage Thunchan Parambu and to plan its further development. Gradually the place came to be widely known among Malayalis and it evolved into a cultural centre.

The Thunchan Festival and Vidyarambam are the main cultural festivals conducted here. Children gather here on the occasion of Vidyadashami for initiation of letters or Ezhuthiniruthu. During the Thunchan Festival litterateurs from all over India become a part of the event.

The Memorial Trust conducts many seminars and conventions in the campus that are attended by renowned scholars, musicians, artists and dancers of India. Thus, Thunchan Parambu holds a position of eminence in Kerala's and India's cultural arena as well.

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