

**The Historical Study of The World Famous Thrissur  
Pooram**

**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, **Harisankar K**, hereby declare that this project entitled **The Historical Study of The World Famous Thrissur Pooram**, 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 **The Historical Study of The World Famous Thrissur Pooram**, a record of research work carried out by **Mr. Harisankar K** 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

Local history is the historical study or it is the history of a particular area or locality. The writing of local history becomes more popular in 20<sup>th</sup> century. The writing of local history is a study of history in a geographically local context and it often concentrates on the local community. The major objective of the study is to understand the historical background, to understand about the geographical and economic background, to study about the culture and tradition, to understand about the present condition of The Thrissur Pooram.

The Thrissur Pooram is an annual temple festival held in Kerala, India. It is held at the Vadakkunnathan (Shiva) Temple in Thrissur every year on the Pooram day—the day when the moon rises with the Pooram star in the Malayalam Calendar month of Medam. It is the largest and most famous of all poorams. The Thrissur Pooram or "Mother of all Poorams", as it was known, was the brainchild of Sakthan Thampuran. At the time, Arattupuzha Pooram was the largest temple festival in Kerala. Temples in and around the city of Thrissur were regular participants. Once, they were denied entry to Arattupuzha Pooram because they were late. All the late participant temples went to Sakthan Thampuran, then Maharaja of Cochin, and complained about the issue. Thampuran invited all the temples to bring their deities to Thrissur and pay obeisance to Lord Shiva, the deity of the Vadakkunnathan Temple. Thampuran classified the participants into two groups, the Western and the Eastern. The Western group consisted of the Thiruvambady, Kanimangalam, Laloore, Ayyanthole, and Nethilakkavu temples while the Paramekkavu, Karamukku, Chembukavu, Choorakottukavu and Panamukkampilly temples came under the eastern group.

Thrissur Pooram is a festival celebrated beyond the boundaries of caste and religion. It has grown as a festival celebrated across people of varied culture, community and diaspora, and has evolved into an expression of the peoples' craze for sound and color, beauty and splendor. While its universal appeal fascinates the young and the old and engulfs both the East and the West, Pooram also acts as a unique social instrument to weld together people of variegated castes and creeds in collective activity, thereby making a distinctive contribution towards fostering communal amity and inculcating a cosmopolitan outlook. The most remarkable thing about Kerala's landscape is that it is studded with thousands of temples; each one being a spring-board of an annual festival, comprising of religious rites, elephant processions, percussion orchestra, fireworks and cultural performances based on the temple and its folk arts. But Thrissur Pooram stands a class apart of all the aforesaid things. It has carved a unique position for itself much above the rest and is also recognized as a major national festival, one which is listed in the National Tourism calendar for international tourists.

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

drummers and pipers and the rest of the temple troupe. The expanse resonating with the music of Panchavadyam, an orchestra of five instruments.

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

This study is divided in to five parts including Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction includes the aim and importance of the study, the scope of the subject matter, and sources, etc. the First chapter comprises about The Shakthan Thampuran the creator of the great Thrissur Pooram, the Second chapter comprises of The 3 Major Temples Involved In Thrissur, and the Third chapter comprises of The Genesis And Events Of Thrissur Pooram, and finally the conclusion.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE BACK STORY - SAKTHAN THAMPURAN AND THRISSUR**

Rama Varma Kunhjippilla Thampuran (1751–1805), or Rama Varma IX, popularly known as Sakthan Thampuran (Sakthan meaning powerful), was the ruler of the Kingdom of Cochin. He was the King of the present-day southern Indian city of Kochi and his palace was in Thrissur, which was a part of the Kingdom of Cochin. The city of Thrissur is referred to as the Cultural Capital of Kerala owing to its many traditional festivals and historic temples. Sakthan Thampuran is considered the architect of the city of Thrissur. The festival Thrissur Pooram is considered to have been first started by him.

The modern day town of Thrissur owes its origin to Sakthan Thampuran. The reason for his love of the town was because his two wives were both born here. They belonged to the Kuruppath and Karimpatta families of Thrissur. Sakthan Thampuran transferred his capital from Thrippunithura to Thrissur to found the city. He cleared the 60acre teak forests around the Vadakkunnathan Temple and developed the Thekkinkadu Maidan, which is now at the heart of the city. After clearing the forest, he built a circular concrete road now known as Swaraj Round.

In 1762, ten tehsils (Kovilakathum vathukkals) and two Edavagas (semi tehsils) were formed in the Kochi Kingdom. But the previous feudal chieftains maintained their stronghold. After Thampuran ascended the throne of Kingdom of Cochin , he took over the land from the feudal chieftains and consolidated the royal power. At that time, the Vadakkunnathan Temple and Peruvanam Mahadeva Temple were controlled by the

Namboodiri community, called Yogiatrippads. The Yogiatrippads was elected from different temples in the Thrissur District. Thampuran wrested the control of the temples and abolished the system of Yogiatrippads. Thampuran's strict approach with criminals earned his name, Sakthan. During the British Raj, British authorities had good relations with Thampuran. He was also a personal friend of Dharma Raja of Travancore.

Born on 26 August 1751 AD at Vellarapally Palace to Anujan Namboodiripad of the Chennamangalam Mana and Ambika Thampuran of the Cochin Royal Family. His mother died when he was only three years old. The prince was brought up by his maternal aunt, famously known as Chittamma (meaning mother's younger sister) Thampuran. His early education took place under the tutelage of scholars such as Kallenkara Pisharody. Sakthan Thampuran was considered as an extremely powerful Maharaja as his name indicates. The Shakthan Thampuran Palace Named after Shakthan Thampuran, the palace is spread over 6 acres (2.4 ha) of Thrissur and was earlier known as Vadakkechira Kovilakam. It is one of the most historic cultural and architecturally relevant palace of the erstwhile Maharaja of Cochin, which has now been converted into a heritage museum. The palace is now a blend of traditional Kerala and Dutch architectural styles following its 1795 reconstruction.

Sakthan, as a young Prince, grew up in one of the worst periods in the cheered History of Cochin. The Namboothiris, deriving immense wealth and power through the control of temples and their vast domains, were insolent and challenged the suzerainty of the King. They even manoeuvred to bring the Thrissur Palace under the occupation of the Zamorin of Calicut. The humiliation was further augmented by the invasions by Hyder Ali and later by Tipu, as also the surreptitious machinations of the Dutch, the Portuguese

and the English. Thrissur symbolized Sakthan's iron determination to reestablish order and retrieve the State's honor.

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

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

Sakthan Thampuran was a powerful leader, commendable administrator and above all an ardent patron of art too. The planned city of Thrissur was built by Sakthan Thampuran and the renowned Vadakkumnathan temple, which had been demolished during the attack of Tippu was rebuild then in accordance to the principles enshrined in

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

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE TEMPLES IN THE THRISSUR POORAM**

#### **THE VADAKKUNNATHAN TEMPLE**

Vadakkunnathan Temple is an ancient Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva at city of Thrissur, of Kerala state in India. This temple is a classical example of the architectural style of Kerala and has one monumental tower on each of the four sides in addition to a kuttambalam. Mural paintings depicting various scenes from the Mahabharata can be seen inside the temple. The shrines and the Kuttambalam display vignettes carved in wood. The temple, along with the mural paintings, has been declared as a National Monument by India. According to popular local lore, this is the first temple built by Parasurama, the sixth avatar of Vishnu. Thekkinkadu Maidan, encircling the Vadakkunnathan Temple, is the main venue of the renowned Thrissur Pooram festival. In the year 2012 the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has recommended 14 sites, including Vadakkunnathan Temple and palaces, from Kerala to include in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The temple is also the first one among the 108 Shiva Temples in ancient Kerala, established by Parasurama.

The temple was built at the time of Perumthachan from Parayi petta panthirukulam.<sup>101</sup> It is said that Perumthachan lived during the second century, so the Koothambalam may be more than 1,600 years old. According to Malayalam historian V. V. K. Valath, the temple was pre-Dravidian Kavuvu (shrine). In the early days, Paramekkavu Bhagavathi was also situated inside the vadakkunnathan temple. Subsequently, a new temple was built outside and the idol of the goddess was moved to

that location. For comparison, Koodalmanikyam Temple, Kodungallur Bhagavathy Temple and Ammathiruvadi Temple, Urakam are older than the Vadakkunnathan temple, according to temple documents. Some suggest that there have also been influences from Buddhist and Jain temples.

The Nambudiris who were entrusted with looking after temple affairs were called Yogiatrippads. When Nambudiris gained control of the region, the temple also came under their domain. The Yogiatrippads were elected from Thrissur desam. Prior to Sakthan Thampuran's reign, the Yogiatrippad system declined. Later, the Maharaja of Cochin gained presiding authority over the temple.

The main deity of this temple, Lord Shiva, is worshipped in the form of a huge lingam, which is covered by a mound of ghee, formed by the daily abhishekam (ablution) with ghee Over the years. A devotee looking into the sanctum can now see only a 16-foot-high (4.9 m) mound of ghee embellished with thirteen cascading crescents of gold and three serpent hoods on top. According to traditional belief, this represents the snow-clad Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiva. This is the only temple where the lingam is not visible. It is said that the ghee offered here for centuries does not have any foul odor and it does not melt even during Summer in the outer temple, there are shrines for Krishna (Gosala Krishna; or Gopala Krishna; Krishna as a cowherd), Shiva's bull vahana (vehicle) Nandikeswara, Parashurama, Simhodara, Ayyappa (Shiva's son, especially venerated in Kerala), Vettekkaran (Shiva as a hunter), Serpent deities and Adi Shankara. Outside the main temple, there are shrines for Lord Subrahmanya and Lord Ganapathi. Located on the verandah of the Nalambalam is a large white bull Nandikeswara.

## **THE THIRUVAMBADY TEMPLE**

The Thiruvambady Temple and Thrissur Pooram festival are today almost synonymous to the general public. However the latter is the climax to the sustained round the year activities of divine worship aimed at providing a spiritual avenue for peace, tranquility and mental uplift of thousands of devotees far and near. The temple is located 1 km north of the Vadakkunnathan Temple and 800m from Swaraj Round, on the Shornur Road. It is only 10 meters drive from Thrissur Railway Station and Bus stand. The Punkunnam Railway station, which is a C-grade station, is only 250 meters from the temple. In physical appearance the temple is a small one; but in quality and immensity of rites of worship, it stands on a par with the Mahakshethras here. The main deity at Thiruvambady is Unnikrishna (Lord Krishna in infant form). Goddess Bhagavathy is consecrated in a shrine just on the left of Lord Krishna and worshipped with equal ardor. Lord Ganesh, Dharmasastha and the founders of the temple are worshipped in separate shrines outside the Nalambalam. Deities known by Dravidian names- Kukshi Ayyapa, Manikanda, Ghandakarna, Raktheswari and Bhairava are also enshrined here, just outside the walls of the temple.

The original seat of the deity was in a village named Edakkalathur, located around 15 km away from Thrissur town towards the north-west. It was also named Thiruvambadi Temple, with the deity installed there as Parthasarathy, meaning the charioteer of Partha (Arjuna). There was another shrine for Lord Shiva too inside the temple, with equal importance. The in had almost all the features of a Mahakshetra, like golden flag mast. Unfortunately, due to external conflicts, the pious Namboothiris of Edakkalathur were

forced to migrate to Thrissur, with the idol of Lord Krishna as Parthasarathy with them. They installed the idol in a Brahmin home named Kachanappaly Mana (now extinct), located 200 m away from the present temple. The pious, but childless Brahmin couple of the Mana installed the idol inside their homes, and the idol suddenly turned into the form of child Lord Krishna. After the Mana was extinct, a small temple was built in the form of Shala, and installed the idol of Lord Krishna there. This is how the idol of Lord Krishna came here. The family head of Kachanapally Mana was a devotee of Goddess Bhadrakalil of the famous Kodungallur Temple, located 40 km away from Thrissur towards the south-west. He regularly used to visit the shrine once in a month. Unfortunately, due to old age, he could not travel to Kodungallur. The dress code is a must with no modern dresses allowed.

### **THE PARAMEKKAVU TEMPLE**

Paramekkavu Bagavathi Temple is one of the largest Bagavathi temples in Kerala located in Thrissur City. Sakthan Thampuran ordained the temples into two groups, namely "Paramekkavu side" and "Thiruvambady side" for Thrissur Pooram which is the biggest festival in South India and Kerala. These two groups are headed by the principal participants, Paramekkavu Bagavathi Temple at Thrissur Swaraj Round and Thiruvambadi Sri Krishna Temple at Shoranur road. The two temples are hardly 500 meters apart. Thiruvambadi Sri Krishna Temple is one of the two groups participating in Thrissur Pooram. The Paramekkavu temple devaswom have a school known as Paramekkavu Vidya Mandir, MLA road near Kutoor and one KG section near to the temple itself.



This is one of the largest Bhagavathy temples in Kerala, located in the outskirts of the Vadakkumnathan temple ground, Paramekkavu, in Thrissur District. The main deity of this temple is Devi Vaishnavy, an incarnation of Goddess Durga, who believed to have come here along with Kuruppal (head of an aristocratic Nair family) from Thirumadhankunnu, on his umbrella.

This is considered as one of the largest Devi temples in Kerala and is also one of the participating temples of the famous Thrissur Pooram festival. This ceremony has a procession of fifteen decorated elephants, who walk from Paramekkavu to the Vadakkumnathan temple, where the Pooram festival is celebrated. A large number of tourists visit this place to witness this auspicious event, which is truly captivating and exciting

## CHAPTER 3

### THE GENESIS AND EVENTS OF THRISSUR POORAM

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

Ooralars/local chieftains of eight other temples declared their support to this new idea that Sakthan Thamburan had raised and appealed to him to save them from the disgrace inflicted by the ban on participation in the Arattupuzha festival. The King graciously allowed these temples to participate in the Thrissur Pooram on the Pooram aster of the month of Mesha (April 14 to May 14 mostly) as per the Malayalam Calendar Days of meticulously planning the event followed, Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu were to be the live wire of the festival and were to compete with each other, while the others were to bring their deities to the precincts of the

Vadakkumnathan Temple, offer obeisance to Lord Siva, the presiding deity, and then depart.

Decorations, firing of pop guns and fireworks could be done only by the two partners, Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu. However, the others could conduct their processions in their time schedules, as colourful as possible, subject to the condition that the number of elephants could not go beyond 14. The Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu could field 15

elephants each. It remains a pleasant surprise that the prescription laid down by Sakthan Thampuran in the 18th century is meticulously followed even today.

### **THEKKINKAD MAIDANM (THE VENUE)**

Thekkinkadu Maidanam is situated in the middle of Thrissur city of Kerala state in India. This hillock which seats the Vadakkumnathan Temple, is an open ground in the center of the Thrissur city which is under the custody of the Cochin Devaswom Board (CDB). It hosts the spectacular cultural festival Thrissur Pooram, which is considered the Mother of all Poorams in Kerala. Thekkinkadu Maidan was a dense forest in olden days. All kinds of wild animals used to roam in the forest where wanted criminals of Thrissur were executed. The soldiers used to push the criminals in to dense forest from one of the Vadakkumnatha Temple gates. Later, Maharaja of Cochin, Rama Varma Sakthan Thampuran cleared the Thekkinkadu Maidan despite the resistance of Brahmin priests and other orthodox section of people. Till 1970, there were no teaks in the Maidan. In the 1970s Cochin Devaswom Board planted some teaks trees. Till 1928, the Thekkinkadu Maidan was with the Sanitary Board. In 1928 it was handed over to Thrissur Municipality when it was formed. In 1934, Diwan Paruvakad Narayanan Nair gave the Maidan to Cochin Devaswom Board. The only condition for the transfer was that any organisation can organise meeting or festival without any problem.

### **PARTICIPANTS OF THE POORAM**

Western Group (Thiruvambady side) :-

Thiruvambadi Sri Krishna Temple

1. Kanimangalam Sastha Temple

2. Laloer Bhagavathy Temple
3. Sree Karthyayani Temple at Ayyanthole
4. Nethilakkavu Bhagavathy Temple

Eastern Group (Paramekkavu side) :-

1. Paramekkavu Bhagavathy Temple
2. Chembukkavu Bhagavathy Temple
3. Panamukkumpally Sastha Temple
4. Choorakkottukavu Bhagavathy Temple
5. Pookattikkara or Karamukku Bhagavathy Temple

### **KODIYETTAM (FLAG HOISTING)**

The pooram officially begins from the event of flag hoisting. The flag hosting ceremony (Kodiyettam) begins seven days before Thrissur Pooram. All the participating temples of Thrissur Pooram are present for the ceremony, and there is a light fireworks to announce the commencement of the festival. The vision of Sakthan Thamburan was deeply farsighted and entirely holistic that even minute items still has his signature on it and he had fixed the family whose descendants will be the fabricator of Kodimaram for both temples. The kodimaram of Paramekavu was decided to be crafted by the descendants of Paravathany Chembil Kudumbam and that of Thiruvambady was chosen as the progenies of Kanattukkara Thazhettu Purakkal Ravunni.

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

## **POORA VILAMBARM**

Poora Vilambaram is a custom where the elephant pushes open the south entrance gate of the Vadakkunnathan Temple, which hosts the Thrissur Pooram, with the idol of 'Neithilakkavilamma' atop it. The poora vilambaram is made by the opening of the "Thekke gopura nada" of the Vadakkunnathan Temple by Tusker Techikkottukavu Ramachandran carrying the Kolam of the Neythilakkavu Bhagavathy. Since last few years tusker Techikkottukavu Ramachandran is in charge of the poora vilambaram.

## **DISPLAY OF CAPARISONS (CHAMAYA PRADARSHANAM)**

The golden elephant caparison (Nettipattam), elephant accoutrements (Chamayam), ornamental fan made of peacock feathers (Aalavattom), royal fan (Venchamarom), sacred bells and decorative umbrellas are prepared new by Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devawsoms separately. Paramekkavu Devaswom exhibits this at the Agrasala in Thrissur City, and the Thiruvambady Devaswom displays the caparisons at the Church Mission Society High School in Thrissur City on the fourth and fifth day before the Pooram.

## **THE SAMPLE FIREWORK DISPLAY**

The first round of pyrotechnics, known as Sample Vedikettu, happens on the fourth day after the flag hoisting of the Pooram. It is a one-hour show presented by Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devaswoms. Swaraj Round is venue for this fireworks and starts at 7:15 pm. The display usually has innovative patterns and varieties of fireworks.

## **THE MINI POORAM (KHADAKA POORAM)**

The Mini Poorams, star of the day, has the entire forenoon reserved for the eight invited deities from the minor temples in and around the town. The only activity that happens apart from Mini pooram in the forenoon slot is the ezhunnallippu procession of the deities from Thiruvambady temple to the Brahmaswom Madhom (vedic centre). The Mini pooram started arriving at the maidan from 7:45 in morning with the habitual practice of Kanimangalam Sastha entering first through the Thekke Gopura Nada and exists through west nada. The melam by the Khadaka Pooram starts at Sree

Moolasthanam and the rest in the lot was Pandi melam by Kehlata Sundaran leading the exemplary show by the Kanimangalam Sastha temple team, The melam was a treat to our ears as well as to our eyes, to watch the seven mighty caparsoned tuskers accompanied by the high-voltage performance of pandi melam, this continued till 8.30am, with that the first team exited to return back in the evening after Kudamattam. The custom is continued for all the associated temples, where idol depicting the respective deity is carried on elephant tops, flanked by 2 to 13 elephants. Accompanied by a high spirited orchestra, they gracefully find their way towards the Vadakkumnathan Temple, where they pay obeisance to Lord Siva and depart. The strength of elephants and the time schedule of each mini-poorams departure from their respective temples and arrival at the venue are fixed by tradition, and each of them operate within the allotted time frame so that one does not come in the way of the other. Thus, from morning till noon Thekkinkad Maidan is replete with the cascading processions of the mini poorams.

The 36-hour-long pooram follows a strictly prescribed route to pay obeisance to Lord Vadakkumnathan. The pooram flags off with the mini poorams marked by the ceremonial entrance of the 'Kanimangalam Sastha' pooram through Southern Gopuram at 7am and this is succeeded by the arrival of Panamukkampilly Sathavu, Chembookavu Karthiyani Devi, Karamukku Karthiyani Devi, Choorakkottukavu Durga Devi, Ayyanthole Karthiyani Devi, and Naithalakavu Bhagavathi, Paramakkavu Bhagavathy and Thiruvambady Bhagavathy escorted by Krishna. The "Kanimangalam Sastha" enters Vadakkumnathan through the Southern gopuram and exits through the Western gopuram, whereas the Chembookavu Baghavathy, Panamukkumpilly Sastha and Paramakkavu Bagavathy enters through Eastern gopuram and leave through Southern gopuram. The

poorams of Laloor, Ayyanthole, Naithalakavu, Choorakottukavu, move to Thekkinkadu maidan from Naduvilal (west) and enters Vadakumnathan through the Western gopuram and leaves through the Southern gopuram. Karamukku bagavathy enters through the Western gopuram and leaves through the Southern gopuram. Thiruvambady moves through Naikanal (North) and enters Vadakumnathan through the Western gopuram and leaves through the Southern gopuram.

## **THE MAIN POORAMS OF THIRUVAMBADY AND PARAMEKKAVU TEMPLES**

The pooram starts at the time of Kanimangalam sathavu ezhunnellippu in the early morning and is followed by the ezhunnellippu of other six temples. Even though all the participating ten temples are an integral part of this festival, Pooram is mainly a healthy competition between two main, parties The Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu temple.

## **THE MADATHIL VARAVU**

The myth behind the origin of Madathil Varavu states that, once upon a time, three golden caparisons or 'Nettipattam' were placed by a Tamil Brahmin in front of the Brahmaswom madhom. Owing to the competition between the Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu sides, inorder to score better, Thriuvambady wanted to take possession of this caparison, and approached the Brahmin for the same. The Brahmin obliged readily under the condition that the Nettipattam shall be given in return of the MadathilVaravu. This incident marked the onset of the most renowned Madathil, The famous Madathil Varavu of Thiruvambady, an event glorified by bards in immortal verse, started from the Brahmaswom madhom at around 11.30 in the morning and, despite the sweltering heat of



the torrid sun, surging crowds jubilantly move towards the celestial rendezvous. The procession starts with three elephants, augmented to seven as it reaches the West Round. The main highlight of Madathil Varavu was the masterly execution of Panchavadyam under the leadership of Kongad Madhu, and the icing on the cake for melam lovers was the participation of maddalam exponent Cherpulassery Sivan. As the ensemble undulated the symphony of cascading climaxes, the swaying crowds delirious with rhythmic fever moved in a frenzy into higher and still higher levels of ecstasy. The procession reached Naickanal on the Northern Round about 2.30 pm and was enlarged into a formation of 15 elephants. Accompanied by pandimelom, the procession moved towards Sreemoolasthanam.

### **THE PARAMEKKAVU EZHUNNALLIPPU AND ELANJITHARA MELOM**

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

The procession moved towards Vadakkumnathan temple, entered through the East Gopuram and re-aligned in the western courtyard for famous Elanjithara Melam! The

'Elanjithara melam' for Paramekkavu temple was led by the most famous Peruvanam Kuttan Marar Peruvanam Kuttan Marar completes two decades of Pramanam' for the largest percussion assembly in the world, the Elanjithara Melam. He first took up the lead role, 'Pramanam', of the Elanjithara Melam in 1999 and has been in the lead role of the percussion ensemble all these years. It has been more than 43 years since he started drumming for the pooram.

### **THE DIVINE DURBAR AND THE 'KUDAMATTAM'**

The Divine Durbar, the most awaited and most enchanting event of the day marks the climax of the day wherein the pooram partners align facing each other for a healthy competition on multifaceted aspects. The mini-poorams come, pay respect to Vadakkumnathan and then returns. These mini-poorams comes back only once this Kudamattam concludes. During Kudamattam, care is taken by each side not only in the selection and matching of the elephants but also in the quality of each item of accoutrements, their designs and the color combinations of the mega-parasols. The Divine Durbar lasts for an hour and is a sight to behold. Both sides comes out of the temple initially with folded green umbrellas, Venchamaram and Alavattam. Then the Bhagavathy of the respective temple comes out. At around 5.30 pm, the Paramekkavu Bhagavathy accompanied by her contingents exist through the 'Thekke Gopura Nada' proceeds around the King's statue and pays respects, but the famous folklore articulates that Bhagavathy is not paying respect to the king but to Pazhayanoor Bhagavathy, who used to be present at the place at one point of time. After this they align at the South Round, facing north to the Southern Gopuram. The Thiruvambady procession enters the Maidan through the Southern Gopuram and face the Paramekkavu.

The 15 caparisoned elephants stand in line for Kudamattam which is arguably the festival's piece de resistance. During the 2019 Kudamattam, Paramekkavu Temple started off the 1st Kudamattam at 5.30pm followed by Thiruvambady and each side altered around 50 stunning silk parasols. The stage was set for the spectacular "Kudamattam" and every inch of space in the maidan, the roads and the balconies and terraces of the buildings in the vicinity were occupied by eager spectators.

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

## THE MAJOR FIREWORKS

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

History behind the fireworks of Thrissur pooram states that, an active member of Thrissur

Pooram committee witnessed a Chinese firework display during his visit to the Park Fare Exhibition at Madras about 80 years ago. Inspired by the spectacle, he brought some items of Chinese fireworks to Thrissur like poothir lathiri, moolipeevu, vaanam etc. The crackers were opened and the chemical powder inside was inspected and this triggered and fired popular imagination and the art was conceived by enterprising indigenous families, who developed it into the pulsating event that it is now. Every year new and never-seen-before items are added to the fireworks, with both the temples devoting a large share of resources for it. The earliest masters of fireworks display, like Kuriya, Ponnuveetil Gopalan Nair, Vellattu Narayana Panicker, Chelapadan Anthony, Vadakkethala Kochapu etc were not formally or technically trained in the art. They learned it through experience and experimentation and virtually developed it into a major

industry. All the fireworks-managers of today are the followers of these pioneers. For a long time the responsibility of the Paramekkavu fireworks was vested with Karayarakattil Jose, who has now retired from the scene. It was only in the early 1970's that a fixed schedule for fireworks display was introduced. Until then whichever party-Paramekkavu or Thiruvambady that reaches the pandal first would begin their fireworks display. As this led to a lot of misunderstandings and also untoward incidents, a rotation system was introduced. According to this, each temple would take turns to light their fireworks first from then on, both the parties have followed this system.

### **FAREWELL CEREMONY (UPACHARAM CHOLLAL)**

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

## **THE ALAVATTAM AND VENCHAMARAM**

The Alavattam is principally made of finely shaped and cut peacock feathers aligned in a circular fashion around a wooden or fiber plaque with traditionally dictated decorative patterns made of other natural objects such as sea shells. Making of an Alavattam starts with the centre piece called the Adipoovu, which is made by bending the stem of peacock feather into a floral shape with eight petals, and this forms the base for the whole Alavattam. The peacock feathers are woven onto the spine of palm leaves and designs are made from the stem of peacock feather.

Designs are made separately and stitched on to a cardboard plaque. Then finishing touches are given by embedding decorative stones, papers and clothes. This is then attached to either wooden or chromium plated handle.

The venchamaram, a sophisticated version of flywhisk is made from the fur obtained from Yaks tail. Their hair is imported to Kerala from Himalayan region like Nepal, Sikkim etc. mainly during the utsav season. The fur generally comes in three colour combinations, pure white, black and white and sometimes a mix of copper or golden tint is seen. Pure white fur is the one in demand and hence deemed expensive. The tail fur is cut with the help of scissors and plaited and tied into a long rope format almost 9 feet long. The knots of the fur is brushed off with a bamboo comb at this occasion. The fur is then wound on to a wooden baton and brass or copper handles are attached to it hereafter. Each venchamaram weighs around 25kgs. The Alavattam and Venchamaram used once for Thrissur Pooram is never repeated but is either sold off or rented during other smaller poorams.

## THE PANDAL

Sky-scraping pandals adorning and towering the Swaraj round are built by Paramekkavu and Thiruvambadi groups and these mark the turf of the city. Three pandals spring up around the town, wherein, it is customary to find one pandal by the Paramekkavu side being erected at Manikandal and two by the Thiruvambadi group at Naduvilal and Naikkanal. This also forms the assembling point for the various melom marking the positions to execute numerous rituals, for example, during the famous Madhotil Ezhunellethu, Thiruvambady Bhagavathy witnesses

Vadakkunathan from Naduvilal pandal. This year the deity or the 'thidambuparaded on elephant top was handed over to the famous tusker Thechikottukavu Ramachandran at Manikandal pandal. Cheroor native, Manikandan Pallath, the architect of 110 feet Manikandal Pandal, with a width of 1089 square feet, has designed it with 6 tyres and 12 tastefully done comers, on top there is a royal gopuram or dome. Naduvilal Pandal and Naikkanal Pandal were conceived and implemented by Kannattukkara Dasan. Yet another specialty of this year's pandal is that, it is the 80th one laid by this great artisan. The Naduvilal pandal, 90 feet tall and 900 square feet wide, has disk-shaped centre and exterior constructed as 'Nalukettu' model, which is traditional architecture Tharavadu model, exclusively found in homestead of Kerala.

## CONCLUSION

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

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

The prestige of Thrissur Pooram attracts a good number of international tourists. The coverage of the festival by the BBC and dissemination of information through websites provide opportunities to attract more tourists. Assistance by way of certified guides or even virtual guidance in form of authentic web-applications for groups of visitors would go a long way to popularize the festival further. Thrissur Pooram envisaged by Sakthan Thampuran some 200 years ago as a competition between two



public temples and as a social instrument to unite the entire population, has grown into a national festival, acclaimed internationally as a unique extravaganza.

This is the study about the *Thrissur Pooram*. I got a golden opportunity to study and write the history of my home town festival as a history student. I also got chances to know about many persons whom are the mainstreams of *The Thrissur Pooram* and I got many ideas for the construction of this study. And got chance to refer historical books regarding *The Thrissur Pooram* for the purpose of this study. The chapters will help to understand about *The Thrissur Pooram* while reading this project. There is the important fact that can see through this project that The Pooram was improved in all of its aspects than the old. This is the study of local history of local festival of the Thrissur, *The Thrissur Pooram*, I think this project covered almost of the historical aspects, events and knowledge about *The Thrissur Pooram*.

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