

Towns and cities of Thrissur –A case study of Irinjalakuda

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by

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Declaration

I, M M Shahina, hereby declare that this project entitled **Towns and cities of Thrissur – A case study of Irinjalakuda** 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 research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. George Alex, Coordinator, Department of English and History, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda.

Irinjalakuda

M M Shahina

March 2021

Department of English and History

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March 2021

Certificate

This is to certify that this project entitled **Towns and cities of Thrissur – A case study of Irinjalakuda** is a record of research work carried out by Ms. M M Shahina under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature submitted to the University of Calicut.

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M M Shahina

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Introduction

Perched at the confluence of two streams, Irinjalakuda stands out as a quiet small town, engulfed in age-old tales and traditions. The city is endowed with a distinct air of spirituality reverberating through the quaint temples and shrines strewn about its landscape. The serene old neighborhoods and stretches of greenery lining its narrow paths, give the town a rustic feel. According to legends, the city was created by the great Hindu sage Parasurama himself. The name Irinjalakuda is derived from the word ‘Irinjalikoodal’, which in Malayalam means the ‘meeting point of two rivers’. Creating a beautiful blend of different traditions and cultures, Irinjalakuda charms its way into every traveler’s heart.

Irinjalakuda is a small town that has left its mark on the historical aspect of Thrissur. The small town is known for its unique features and it has been fortunate enough to witness many eventful historical moments and to keep pace with the socio-cultural sphere.

A devout town, Irinjalakuda houses a number of sites that are popular for their religious as well as historical value. The iconic Koodalmanikyam Temple is an important Hindu shrine in the city. Dedicated to Bharatha, one of Lord Rama’s brothers, devotees visit the temple in large numbers. The aesthetic appeal of its traditional structure consists of an iconic Gopuram. The temple’s annual 11-day festival is one of the most auspicious ones in the state.

The Vishwanathapuram Temple located in the Tana¹ region of Irinjalakuda is another popular attraction of the city. Dedicated to Lord Subramanya, it was built in the early 20th century. The six-day festival Shasti Mahotsavam is a golden occasion to partake in the traditional

¹ A name that is given for the center of the town of Irinjalakuda. The name mainly means police station and a place for imprisonment.

festivities and rituals. The St. Thomas Cathedral, a catholic shrine is also worth visiting. Built in the 19th century for the benefit of the Catholic merchants residing here, the cathedral is renowned for its historical and aesthetic value.

Irinjalakuda is also known as varadhanangalude naadu, meaning the land of blessings. There are lots of place of worship but especially famous for Koodalmanikyam Temple. Here, there are two beautiful old churches. In this town maximum percentage of the population consists of mainly Christians along with the other religions.

The town is also known for cultural and social institutions such as Unnayi Warriar Kalanilayam, a renowned writer who gave immense contribution to the art of Kathakali the classical dance form of Kerala, and Yajurveda Patashala.

The main objective of the study is to bring out the historic and time established foundation and traditions of Irinjalakuda. The sources used for the study is mainly based on journals, websites and books concerning the topic. The project is presented in three chapters, starting with the first chapter explaining the whole history of Irinjalakuda. The second chapter depicts the legends and mythological stories that encircle the town. The third chapter sheds light on the most important historical places.

Chapter I

Legacy of Irinjalakuda

Irinjalakuda, also known as “Varadanangalude Nadu” is a Municipal town in Thrissur district, Kerala, India. Irinjalakuda is the headquarters of Mukundapuram Taluk. Irinjalakuda is known for the Koodalmanikyam Temple and the Thachudaya Kaimals who had princely status until 1971. Irinjalakuda is a revenue division and the headquarters of Mukundapuram Taluk. The name Irinjalakuda has been derived from "Iru" and "Chaal", meaning two streams.

According to another legend, the origin of the name Irinjalakuda came from 'Irinjalikoodal'. 'Koodal' simply means merge, merging of two rivers. So it shows that Irinjalakuda may have gradually developed, from 'Irinjalikoodal', that derived from 'Inangikoodal', means merge. At present there is no river in Irinjalakuda, only the myth of river. Irinjalakuda can be derived from 'iru njyaala koda' i.e., donation of two worlds, which is what Mahabali is said to have done in the story of the Vaamanaavataaram.

The economy of Irinjalakuda dates back to 18th century. In the 18th century, Shakthan Thampuran, the ruler of kingdom of Cochin, brought four Christian families to Irinjalakuda for improving commerce and trade in this place, when they struck gold in this field more and more Christian families migrated to this place, making it a stronghold of Christian community. Besides Christians, Irinjalakuda has a huge population of Hindus and Muslims too. During the time of Shakthan Thampuran, enormous economic development took place in this region and then the Kochi Diwan constructed a water canal link to Cochin to improve water transport of goods and hence the business. The canal still exists though it had lost its past glory.

In 1762 Maharaja Kingdom of Cochin formed Mukundapuram taluk by adding Mapranam nadu and parts of Nandilathu nadu to Mukundapuram nadu (Muriyanadu). In the last decade of the 18th Century the last Naduvazhi Nambiar of Mukundapuram nadu died and Sakthan Thampuran confiscated all the powers and properties of Mukundapuram Nambiar and Mapranam Nambiar. Sakthan Thampuran divided old Mukundapuram Taluk into six Proverties viz. 1) Thazhekkad 2) Areepalam, 3) Mukundapuram 4) Mapranam 5) Palathungal 6) Pudukkad for administrative and revenue purposes.

Five more sectors were added to Mukundapuram Taluk afterwards: Kodassery, Thirumukkulam, Koratty, Pathinettarayalam and Malayattur. Tipu Sultan's Army was based at Thazhekkad Proverty of Mukundapuram Taluk on 24 December 1789 to attack the Nedumkotta which is situated in the middle of Kochi Kingdom and was known as Travancore lines and attacked Konur Kottavathil in January 1790. When new Chalakudy taluk was formed in 2013 by bifurcating Mukundapuram taluk it lost more than 50% of its territory.

Some of the companies listed in Bombay stock exchange have its base in Irinjalakuda. Kerala solvent extraction LTD which manufactures cattle feeds, edible oils and dairy products has their roots in Irinjalakuda. Other major companies from Irinjalakuda include KLF Nirmal industries and their brand KLF coconut is one of the biggest brands in coconut oil. Irinjalakuda is a major centre of learning tool and its history dates back to centuries between 14th and 16th centuries, Kerala School of astronomy and mathematics which was believed to be founded here, made major contributions in algebra, arithmetic, astronomy, geometry etc.

Irinjalakuda has a rich cultural history associated with the UNESCO - recognised classical dance form Koodiyattam. Natanakairali - Research Training and Performing Centre for Traditional Arts, Irinjalakuda, is a prominent institution that imparts training on this ancient art form. Government-aided artists near Koodalmanikyam temple train artistes on Kathakali. The town also has other institutions that give training on classical dance forms and theatre arts. Walden Pond House is another cultural space in the town where artists and movie makers gather for workshops and movie shoots.

The Koodalmanikyam temple is one of the most significant landmarks in Irinjalakuda. The temple in Irinjalakuda, which is generally a brick area, is similar to the coastal areas to the west. Scientific studies on the seabed flakes in the area point to seismic potential. At the same time, the possibility of a possible receding sea and the resulting sand dunes is at an all-time high. The sand-rich land seen from the western side of the Koodalmanikyam temple, the remnants of creatures such as the oysters in the well water and the oysters appearing in the sand all point to such a possibility.

Detailed studies on the prehistoric period of Iringalakuda have not yet taken place. Although many foothills in the region have been excavated, the remains of the Nanangadi and the caves have been found, but the detailed analysis and research on the prehistoric age of the area is still in its infancy. The recent excavations of the small town of Muziris, not far from Kodungallur, have provided much insight into the possibility of documenting the history of cultural contributions to Iringalakuda and the region.

The Koodalmanikyam temple has a comprehensive picture of the properties at Pota through the inscription of Bhaskara Ravi Nambinar who ruled at the time. Iringalakuda was, according to the inscription, a village of 51 homeless people.

Chapter II

Legends and Myths around the Town.

According to the local legends and scholars, Keralolpatthi established 64 gramas or villages in Kerala and in that, figures nearly 10 village's head quarter established in Irinjalakuda. The "Chaturvarnia" system of society; which is largely based up on the "Manusmruthi" or caste system, was largely followed like other villages of this region.

Irinjalakuda was one of the most prominent among the Gramas or the village societies. A boundary of this grama extends up to Aloor in the east and Kakkathuruthi in the west and later extended to Koodapuzha in the east. Like the other Gramas this 'Gramas' also followed Sankara Smruthi which is a modified form of the 'Chaturvarnia' system of society with some Kerala model variations which lay upon caste system based on the 'Manusmruthi'.

Another legend suggests that the origin of the name Irinjalakuda were heard, "Irunnu Salayil Koodai", and "Virinja Alu Kuda". There is a huge Banyan tree still standing in the centre of the Irinjalakuda spreading the branches to the sky like an umbrella.

The Thachudaya Kaimal is a spiritual dignitary of Kerala Hindus and the temporal ruler of the Koodalmanikyam Temple and its Estates. The line goes back into antiquity and is mentioned in the Skanda Purana. The Arms of the Kaimal and that of the temple bear the insignia of a coiled conch-shell with the words 'Manikkam Keralar'. With the 26th amendment of the Indian constitution in 1971, the Princely order in India was abolished and the Thachudaya Kaimals lost their position in the temple and its estates. It is now managed by a Trust managed by the District Collector although a vestige of former power lies in his being the chief trustee of the temple. The

Devaswom was allotted land to accommodate institutions such as the Christ College, and for public use to facilitate development activities in the region. Much land that belonged to Koodalmanikyam was subjected to encroachment.

Another important Hindu mythology version is that, sage Parasurama successfully created Irinjalakuda in the ancient period. A lesser-known version regarding the name of the town Irinjalakuda is that it derived its name from a huge Banyan tree that still stands strong in the center of the town. In Malayalam language, “Irunnu Salayil Koodai” and “Virinja Alu Kuda” means two branched Banyan tree that stands like a huge umbrella.

During the 18th century, Sakthan Thampuran, the ruler of Kochi in order to improve the trade and commerce brought four Christian families to the place then known as “Chanthappura” and now known as Chandakunnu. It is to note that these families had struck gold in this field then Hindu and Christian population migrated and cause more than earlier human settlement in this region. Later on, even the Muslim community from north Malabar came across for the purpose of settlement.

It is to remembered that the person who founded the Kerala School of Astronomy and Mathematics, Madhava regarded as a prominent Kerala mathematician cum astronomer belonged to Sangamagrama, which was medieval town in Kerala, now strongly believed local legends to be the town of Irinjalakuda.

Irinjalakuda is mentioned in the Sangam period works known as the cornerstones of South Indian history. It is mentioned that in the eighteenth chapter of the origin of Kerala, Parasurama found a worthy priest and brought him to this village. Inscriptions of the time show that Iringalakuda was of special importance during the Perumal rule of the Kulasekhara period.

The Koodalmanikyam temple edict issued in the 11th year of the reign of Sthanu Ravi Varman, who began his reign in 844 A.D. During the reign of Perumal, the Thaliyathiriras of the Chingapuram Thali were the villagers of Irinjalakuda.

Another document of the period mentions that Ayirakkara, Kothai Kumaran, Uran Kumaran Kothai, Nakan Kannan and Uran Kandan Kumaran donated land for the establishment of a small town called Bhaskarapuram. It is speculated that Bhaskarapuram itself became Irinjalakuda. According to Dr. MGS Narayanan's book Perumals of Kerala, some traders from Bhaskarapuram were exempted from paying the so-called 'Ulk' duty.

There is an argument that the great temple of Irinjalakuda, Sri Koodalmanikyam, is an idol of the Jain Tirthankara Bharateshwar in the form of Upasana Murthy, and that the temple was renovated in the wake of the 8th century Hindu uprising. The fact that there is no worship of camphor here, unlike other temples, also supports this claim. The mention of Irinjalakuda as Nandigram in the documents also proves the Jain influence of the region. Like Iringa, 'Jain' is a term that can be found in the vicinity of Irinjalakuda, such as Nanthipulam and Nandikkara. The proximity of the famous Jain temple to Thrikkanamathilakam may have been a factor in the influence of Jainism here.

In the year 1957, after the reign of the church, Thachudayakaimal was elevated to the rank of temple priest. The word Thachudayakaimal can also mean the one who has the power to make repairs and the omnipotent.

The Koodalmanikyam bibliography refers to the siege of the hands as 'Karayimakaranamavith', written in the 177th Thulanjayat. The history of the gemstone which became the basis for the king of Kayamkulam to come to power in the temple is also mentioned in this book. Following the quarrel between the Namboothiris and the Peruvanam villagers of Irinjalakuda, the Irinjalakuda people went on a hunger strike at the edge of the Peruvanam temple at that time called 'Pattini' and the authorities took steps to prevent the Brahmahatya sin.

Chapter III

Historically Relevant Places of Irinjalakuda

Irinjalakuda is the hometown of many historically and culturally relevant landmarks of Thrissur. A devout town, Irinjalakuda houses a number of sites that are popular for their religious as well as historical value. The iconic Koodalmanikyam Temple is an important Hindu shrine in the city. Dedicated to Bharatha, one of Lord Rama's brothers, devotees visit the temple in large numbers. The aesthetic appeal of its traditional structure consists of the iconic Gopuram. The temple's annual 11-day festival is one of the most significant ones in Kerala. The enthusiastic celebrations give you a glimpse of the city's colourful culture.

The Vishwanathapuram Temple located in the Tana region of Irinjalakuda is another popular attraction of the city. Dedicated to Lord Subramanya, it was built in the early 20th century. The six-day festival Shasti Mahotsavam is a great occasion to partake in the traditional festivities and rituals. The nearby St. Thomas Cathedral, a catholic shrine is also worth visiting. Built in the 19th century for the benefit of the Catholic merchants residing here, the cathedral is renowned for its historical and aesthetic value.

The Koodalmanikyam temple:

Koodalmanikyam Temple is a Hindu temple in Irinjalakuda, Thrissur district, Kerala. The temple comprises a main structure, a walled compound with citadels, and four ponds around the main

structure one of which is within the walls. Koodalmanikyam Temple is the only ancient temple in India dedicated to the worship of Bharata, the third brother of Rama; however the idol is that of god Vishnu.

Koodalmanikyam is the Malayalam translation of the Sanskrit word Sangameswara. There is, however, another folklore about the name. One day the idol was found to give out uncommon brightness from its forehead. Being unable to identify the source of the brightness, some brought a Quartz in the possession of Raja of Kayamkulam for comparison. As they were comparing the brightness of the two, it is said the stone brought from Kayamkulam mysteriously slipped from the hand and merged with the one on the idol. The merging of the two manikyams led to the name 'Koodalmanikyam'. Similar brightness is reported to have appeared on the idol once again, much later in 1907.

"Sangameshwara" (the Lord of the Confluence) is another name associated with the deity at Koodalmanikyam. The temple is one of four in Kerala that form a set called "Nalambalam"², each temple dedicated to one of the four brothers in the epic "Ramayana" – Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. The Thachudaya Kaimal as "Manikkam Keralar" is the spiritual chief and the temporal ruler of the Koodalmanikyam Temple and its estates. The line goes back to antiquity and is mentioned in the sacred Skanda Purana.

The earliest historical reference to Koodalmanikyam Temple is found on a stone inscription attributed to the Chera Perumal king Sthanu Ravi Kualsekhara dated 854/55 AD, leasing out vast extents of land for the temple. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the temple must have

² Nalambalam is a set of four temples in Kerala. The temples are dedicated for the god Rama and his brothers. People from all over the country come over for pilgrimage to Kerala during the auspicious time of karkkidakam and visit the four temples.

been in existence for quite some time before this date and that even then Koodalmanikyam occupied a place of importance among the other temples.

The temple holds its chief annual festival for ten days each year in the month of Medam. The first day of the festival is calculated by the appearance of the uthram asterism and signified by hoisting a ceremonial flag. The start day falls one day after the famous Thrissur Pooram festival lowers its flag in nearby Thrissur.

Koothambalam:

The Koothambalam or the Natyagriha has been the privileged space for staging Koothu, Koodiyattam and Nangiarkoothu for centuries. Although Sanskrit theatre tradition existed in the different parts of India, It could not stand the test of time except in Kerala. The late Killimangalam Vasudevan Namboodiripad, scholar and aesthete, attributes the Kerala Brahmins fixation with temple rituals as the sole reason for the survival of the Koodiyattam and, therefore, the continued existence of its hallowed venue, The Koothambalam.

Of the architecturally exquisite Koothambalams, the one at Koodalmanikyam temple stands out in terms of structure, aesthetic ambience and ritualistic significance. As one enters the eastern portal of the temple, on the left side is the Koothambalam facing the sanctum-sanctorum. In the expansive compound of the temple, the Natyagriha bears a forlorn look. Devotees cum rasikas congregate, by dusk, on the days Ammannoor Kuttan Chakyar or Rajaneesh Chakyar perform Soothe or Koodiyattam. Believed to be built by Perumthachan 5,000 years ago, both priests and devotees treat the Koothambalam on par with the sanctum-sanctorum of the temple.

Ashtadikpalakas (guardian gods of the eight directions) are located there too. One of the characteristic features of the Koothambalam is that the pillars seldom intercept the vision of the Chakyars or the audience. Hence the communication between the performer and the beholder becomes direct, intimate and spontaneous. The ownership of the Koodalmanikyam temple and its Koothambalam was with the King of erstwhile Travancore. For a long period Thachudai Kaimal was its custodian as the representative of the King.

St Thomas Cathedral:

St Thomas Cathedral is the Syro Malabar Catholic cathedral of the eparchy of Irinjalakuda in India got its present existence under the nomenclature and the Canonical Status as Cathedral in the Wake of the Origin of the New Eparchy. This was affected by the amalgamation of the two independent and important parishes of the locality, namely, St. George's Forane Church and St. Mary's church, which amicably situated side by side for about a century.

The church was established in 1845 A.D. This originated at the request of the Christian merchants who migrated to Irinjalakuda during the regime of Rama Varma Thampuran, the king of Kochi. He invited the Christian merchants from the neighbouring ancient Catholic regions such as Velayanad, Mapranam, and Kalparambu etc. in view of trade and industry. Thus a small Church was constructed here and then was known as Kombarakunnu under the guidance of the Parish Priest of Mapranam Church. Later they tried for building a spacious Church. However, in 1874 the so called "Mellus Schism" affected the area and the majority succumbed to it. But a

ministry resisted and tried to continue in the papal allegiance. With that view they constructed a new and better Church in 1880 and dedicated it to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Kollati temple:

Kollatti Temple also known as Viswanathapuram Subramanya Swami Temple is located in Irinjalakuda, in Thrissur District of Kerala. It's located on the way from Irinjalakuda to Potta. The temple is dedicated to Lord Subramanya Swami. The temple was built according to the ideology of Sree Narayana Guru, one of the most famous social reformers of Kerala. Shashti Mahotsavam, which is a 6 day festival – is the main festival of this temple which attracts every one of the believers around the area.

The annual Shashti festival happens in the month of Makaram. It attracts a huge score of devotees from all over the state. It is observed that the festival falls right after the amavasya, the day when the moon is not visible. Melam, a traditional Kerala music, is performed as part of the ritual. Traditional performing arts, music and dance are staged during the period. The temple is traditionally decorated with plantain, coconut leaves, flowers, traditional lamps and lights. A major highlight of the festival is the possession.

Conclusion

Irinjalakuda is evidently one of the most significant historically relevant towns in the district of Thrissur. It contains a rich cultural history and still attracts many people from all over India. Mainly known for its places of worship, the town is an exceptional one.

This project depicts a study on Irinjalakuda and its well historic and time established foundations. Each of the chapters sheds light on the overflowing aspects of the town. Each part of the town is very special and contains a prestigious value of its own. The project will help understand the sheer high estimation.

Irinjalakuda's cultural history is very rich and mainly associated with UNESCO. There are many prominent institutions for traditional arts training on ancient art forms. Government-aided Unnayi Warriar Smaraka Kalanilayam near Koodalmanikyam temple trains artistes on Kathakali. The town also has other institutions that give training on classical dance forms and theatre arts. There are cultural space around town where artists and movie makers gather for workshops and movie shoots.

Irinjalakuda has a high literacy rate and has a very high socio economic and cultural standard. A number of small and medium industries add on to the prosperity of the area. The town has a distinct niche in the educational, cultural and social development of Kerala.

Even if it's the town's princely status or myths encircling the town, the town gets even more special as its dug deeper and deeper. The historical and traditional value never dies down, instead

becoming more valued day by day. The residents of the town play a huge part in keeping the rustic values and traditions alive as the time passes.

Given it's the rituals that they follow or the festivals hosted every year without absence, everything increases the value of the town. The system of education, health, and economic sector, industrial sector increases day by day. This shows how the town is developing rapidly with holding on to its traditions and values. The project covers almost everything that shines out in the town of Irinjalakuda.

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