

# **Localism and Cultural Identity: A Study based on Chandanapally St. George Orthodox Veliyapalli**

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St. George Orthodox Church is a holy place and a global Georgian pilgrimage site located in Thumbamon Bhadrasanam. Teeming with the fragrance of pilgrimage, Chandanapally village is located at a distance of 10 km South from the district headquarters of Pathanamthitta. It was once the meeting place of Buddhism and Hinduism. The rubric of the place, which combines the fragrance of sandalwood with the sanctity of the church, sheds light on the ancient history of the village. Historians recorded that the designation of the places ending with 'palli' were Buddhist centres earlier. According to researchers, Chandanapally is the headquarters of the thirty-fourth Buddhist monk, Chundan or Chandran. There is another opinion that the church was made of sandalwood and hence the name Chandanapally. In Kollam and Pathanamthitta districts of Kerala, Buddhism has a lot of influence. Most of the rituals of the Hindu and Christian religious institutions, festivals and ceremonies are borrowed from Buddhism.

The Sangam Literature themselves prove that the source of the first Chera dynasty that came into existence in Kerala during the Sangam period from first

century A.D to fifth century A.D was the Kodumon panchayat which included Chandanapally. There are references to Poneduthamkuzhi near Chandanapally junction and Kodumanni ( the term means land of Gold). Chandanapally becomes a holy land with the foot prints of Shakthibhadran, a contemporary of Sri Shankara who lived in the 9th century A.D and became immortalized in the cultural history of South India by composing a single Sanskrit play, ‘Ascharya Choodamani’. The Chenneerkara Swaroopam ruled by him was bordered by the earthen fort at Chandanapally. Marthanda Varma and Veluthambi Dalava who led a valiant struggle against foreign domination, also took refuge in this fort. The westerners, Ward and Corner, who had surveyed the whole of Travancore, had mentioned about the Chandanapally Mankotta. T. K. Velupillai’s Travancore State Manual has recorded about the Chandanapally village. In 1972, Professor George Menachery recorded the Chempeduppu (meaning picking of copper vessel) at Chandanapally veliyapally in The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia.

### **Christian migration**

Christian migration to this village took place in the late seventeenth century. A group of Christians who migrated from Kuravulangad and Nilakkal areas to Kumbanad and Thumbamon areas reached Chandanapally for their livelihood. There is a legend that even before the Christian migration, the pagan saint was worshiped here. There is a legend that a Hindu man in the guise of a foreign soldier appeared on horseback at the place where he is now crucified, and said, ‘I am the Saviour’s soldier, and this is the holy place’.

### **Stone Cross or Kalkurishu**

The Holy Cross at Chandanapally was first established in the seventeenth century. There is a reason behind the construction of kalkurishu at its place. It was one of the important trade routes of Tamil Nadu and the western coast of

Kerala in ancient times. Starting from Chenkotta, the road leads to Aryankavu, Kulathupuzha, Punalur, Pathanapuram, Koodal, Nedumankavu, Angadikal, Chandanapally, Kaipattoor, Harippad, Pandalam and ended at Alappuzha port and was one of the bus stops on the way. The place where the Chandanapally cross and the church stand is known as the street. The cross is the sanctuary of the ascetics. The stone carved cross is a rare and beautiful sight due to its ancient story and beauty. Images of saints and angels are inscribed on the kalkurishu. It is customary for the Hindu brothers who make the pilgrimage to Sabarimala to go here with their relatives and circumambulate the cross three times and return to Sabarimala, and when they return safely, circumambulate the cross again.

### **Kuthirathamburan (Chandanapally Punyalachan)**

Chandanapally is a place where the St. Gheevargese Sahada sleeps and awakens on hearing the hoofing of horse. When we visit here we will be able to examine the reality that is not believed to be heard or said with our own ears.

If you put your ear on the side of the road ...

If you pay heed to the doors of the church ...

If you enter the church premises at night ...

We can hear the hoof of a horse that is absolutely unbelievable but there are no horses anywhere. The elders of Chandanapally have been saying since ancient times that this remains the truth that is told and experienced in this locale.

Saint Gheevargese Sahada is the guardian mediator of the country and devotees affectionately call him Palliperumal. The church is seen by people of various castes and religions as an opportunity to unleash their hearts. Every devotee

returns blessed with their vows by lighting candles on the cross, offering everything in the tomb and offering the Qurbana.

## **Chandanapally Church**

The first Christian Church was established around 1790. The new church was built in 1875 when the Church made of bamboo caught fire. In 1986 the reconstruction of the church began according to the needs of the time. The largest church we see today was consecrated in 2000 by His Holiness Mathews II. It is the largest church in Asia named after St. George in appearance, size and sanctity. The church is a masterpiece of Indo-Saracenic architecture. The concept of a fusion of Christian, Muslim and Hindu architecture was used in the construction of this temple.

## **Kalthotti**

The story of Kalthotti in Chandanapally is a generalization of history and faith. Shakti Bhadran There are still people who light lamps and worship here.

## **Chempin**

### **moodu (Bottom of Copper Vessel)**

During the festival days, the main offering of Chandanapally is made of rice in a copper vessel. Chempinmoodu is the place where the copper vessel is placed. The copper vessel is placed in a kiln made of centuries old wild stones.

## **Kuthirapura (Horse barn)**

It was the stable of the Shakti Bhadra rulers. This is the place next to the cross. Festive rice brought from the Chempinmoodu is kept inside this stable. The stable has a history associated with the church. The people of Chandanapally experience the presence of the Holy Sahada for every festival. In the early days, the Shakti Bhadra rulers sent a royal envoy to accompany Raza

on horseback. Later, when Chenneerkara Swaroop was sent, that routine disappeared. Over time the large form of Sahada's horse was made of wood. On the day of the festival, a person dressed as Sahada will be riding on this wooden horse. This form was raised in Raza. This wooden horse was kept in a stable. A foreign bishop who was ignorant of folk customs destroyed the horse. The stable is the place where the horse was kept. The gold-plated image of Sahada, which evokes its memory, was kept in the church. It is showcased for public view during the festival days.

### **Chandanapally Perunnal**

Chandanapally Perunnal is famous for its religious harmony. The main festival of Chandanapally Valiyapalli is celebrated on May 7 and 8 every year. Chandanapally Valiyapalli Perunnal is an active symbol of the confluence and fusion of Hindu and Christian cultures. This festival is a magical instance of the ancient friendship of India. Moreover, it is the village as a whole, a place of devotion, vision and the blessing of God.

### **Offerings (Nercha kazhchagal)**

The main offerings here are rice, eggs, poultry and cattle. The vows are primitive, such as carrying umbrella (muthukuda), drawing money, offering a sacrifice, offering Qurbana and carrying copper vessel. Believers buy rice, pepper and coconut oil from the church and keep it at home as a symbol of prosperity and as a medicine for healing.

### **Chandanapally Chempeduppu**

Chempeduppu is a special practice in the cultural history of Kerala. The famous Chandanapally Chempeduppu is a ceremonial procession to the horse stables after the main vow of the big church is inscribed on the copper vessel. Copper is made by the pious people who come to seek the blessings of Sahada.

The rice was first offered in copper vessel by the Karanavars of the ancient Nair clan belonging to the north of Angadikal. Then people from various castes and religions from different parts of the country will perform this ritual. In the copper vessel, two copper bowls of eleven cubits each are placed. Half of this boiled rice is ceremoniously placed around the cross three times and then lowered into the Kuthirapura (stable). This vow is pleasing to the believers. This festival is also known as the Chandanapally Chempeduppu. Millions of devotees flock to the temple that day to touch the copper and participate in the Chempeduppu.

Chandanapally Valiyapalli is one of the great churches in the Malankara Orthodox Church with the presence of St. Gheevargese Sahada. It is a historical fact that today it is the only church in South Kerala that is included as a global pilgrimage centre and ushers relief and goodness to many people.

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