

AMMINIKUTTY & KUNJOMACHEN

THE STORY THAT MUST BE TOLD

Chirayil



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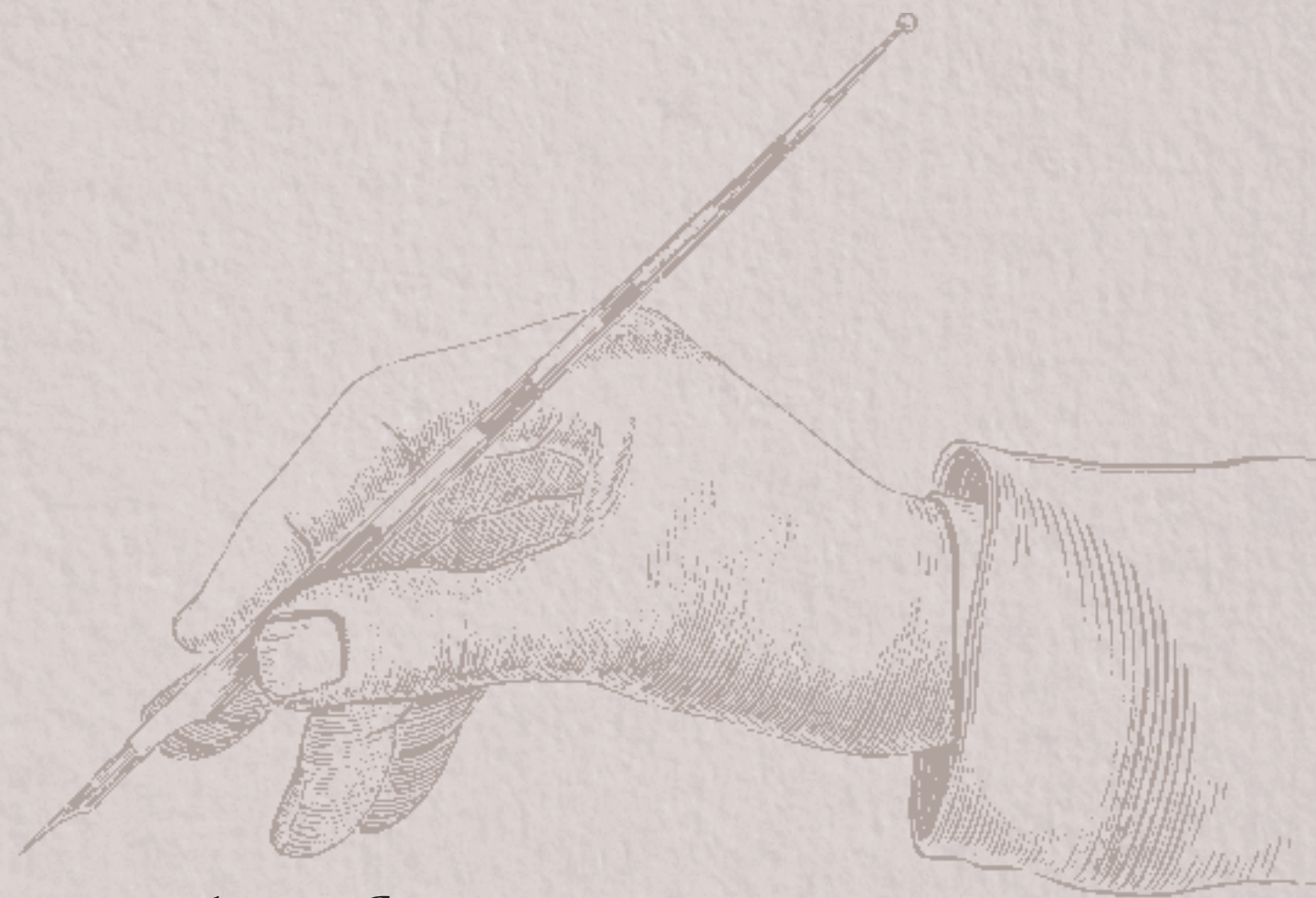
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Straight from My Heart

*My heart swells with memories,
Sweet, strong and nostalgic,
Of my own very special place,
Dear to me and many of my kind.*

*Embracing one with endless love and warmth,
Spreading cheer to all who come,
The grand abode of my grandparents,
Stands tall, majestic and magnificent.*

*Firm in faith and all things divine,
Magnanimous in thoughts and deeds,
Achen and Ammachy,
Lead a life worth emulating*

*Lessons taught and learnt,
Stories shared and heard,
To better ourselves are often retold,
And imbibed by generations spread across oceans and continents.*

*Far out of sight though they are,
Yet forever in our hearts,
Remains the sweet scent,
Of the legacy left behind by my grandparents.*



Anjana



FOREWORD

*“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching,
for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.”*

Proverbs 1:8-9

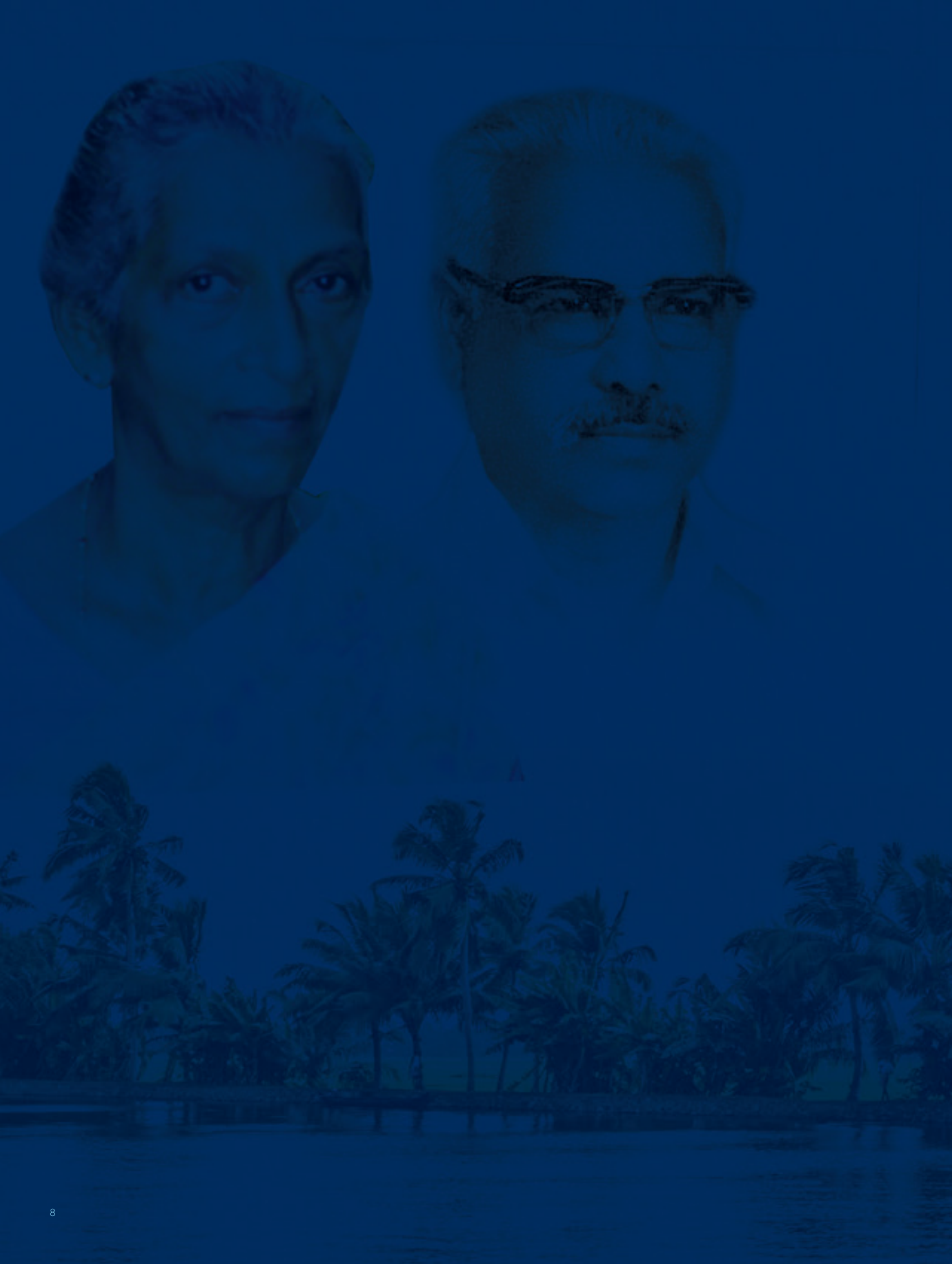


From the very beginning, our parents - Thomas V. Chirayil and Ammini Thomas (*Kunjomachen* and *Ammunikutty*, who we call *Achen* and *Ammachy*) imparted lessons of compassion, charity, faith and togetherness amongst us siblings. The way they lived their lives is nothing short of an ideal. On our journey to the 100th birthday of our father, we twelve siblings, along with our spouses, children and grandchildren, decided to come together to create a lasting tangible memory in physical form to honour and cherish this amazing man and woman, who in rural Kerala raised us and made us what we are today. They raised not only a family but also a community. Their lives are lessons for anyone who pays attention to them.

As fate would have it, the seeds for this book were sown at the most unexpected of places - a horse riding club in Delhi. Danny’s love for nature and interest in horses got us to the riding club and Georgy’s exceptional social skills even at the age of two (both my grandchildren) led to introductions with a distinguished lady advocate Mrs. Anusuya Salwan, and her daughter and grandchildren. As conversations flowed, we got to know that her daughter, Samrata, founded Family Fables Co. which documented family histories for people. Two months after this meeting, we contacted Samrata and started the journey of this book.

This is a record of the experience of the children, grandchildren and immediate family members to express appreciation of and gratitude to *Achen* and *Ammachy*. The stories and images here are an attempt to recapture that wonderful period. They are stories, values and life lessons as remembered and retold by children and grandchildren to pass on to future generations. With this book, we hope that our future generations are made aware of the grit and selflessness of our parents that enabled the family to prosper and grow beyond the boundaries of the village, much more than anyone could have imagined. In view of the extraordinary lives of Thomas V. Chirayil and Ammini Thomas, this one book can but record a small fraction of their influence on the lives they touched. Many contributions and personalities could not be mentioned or given full credit due to the limitations. The main intention of this book is to retell their sacrifice, express gratitude and pass down the lessons learnt for future generations.

— George Thomas



The strong trunk and branches along with the widespread root system represent the family's strength and global presence. The two large and prominent golden leaves represent the legacy of Thomas V. Chirayil and Ammini Thomas, reminding the family members of the crowning position they occupy. The smaller leaves in gold and silver stand in place of the twelve children, their spouses and future generations. This conveys the bonding, unity, care, love, protection, peace, and trust that are imbibed in the family from the lessons learnt and passed down.

AMMINI THOMAS & THOMAS V. CHIRAYIL

Rosamma George & George John Kanamcherickal, Vaipur

Jojo John George & Anjali Paul, Mazhuvancherry, Edappally

Johan George John | Joe Paul John

Rejo Thomas George & Meera Joseph, Kizhakkekara, Pala

George Thomas

Teresa Rani Paul & Paul Joseph Mathichiparampil, Changanacherry

Anu Paul Philip & Philip Abraham, Thekanal, Paduthodu

Michele Elsa Philip | Kristine Teresa Philip

Arun Paul Joseph & Prakrathi Purushotham, Amin, Mangalore

Vihaan Paul Joseph

George Thomas & Leena George, Karippaparambil, Kanjirappally

Anupa George & George Kuriakose (Chackochan), Mooleplackal, Cheruvally

Michael George | Dominic George

Swarupa James & James Jacob, Kalathil Vazhakoottam, Pulincunnu

Daniel Jacob James | Isaac James | Joseph James

Mathew Thomas Chirayil & Lizzy Mathew, Parayil, Ezhupunna

Anjana Naveen & Naveen Thomas, Urumbath, Aluva

Maria Naveen

Roshan Thomas Mathew & Bidha Roshan Chirayil, Vairasseril, Edayaranmula

Mathew Roshan Chirayil | Susanna Teresa Chirayil | Josephine Maryam Chirayil

Ivan Thomas & Susy Ivan, Valakuzhy, Mallapally

Rithu Ivan & Rakesh R Menon, Korathattu, Ernakulam

Rohan Ivan

Jacob Thomas Chirayil & Jolly Jacob, Vachaparambil, Trivandrum

Tom Jacob Chirayil & Anu Jose, Pattam, Pulincunnu

Jacob Tom Chirayil | Joseph Tom Chirayil

Teena Jeffy & Jeffy Sam Thomas, Mattackal, Niranam

Taniya Rose Jacob

Kusumam Mary Jacob & Jacob George Thomas, Kadathukalam, Pacha

Liya Elizabeth Jacob & John Johnson, Ayanthiyil, Kozhencherry

Noah John

Sera Susan Jacob & Joseph Shibu, Vattooparambil, Changanacherry

Samuel Thomas Jacob

Pushpam Thomas (Achamma) & Thomas Polachirackal Thomas, Kuttoor

Ashwin Thomas Polachirackal & Greeshma Jose, Plackal, Kurumassery

Thommen Polachirackal Thomas

Shruthi Elizabeth Thomas & Subin Rajan Marattukalam, Changanacherry

Paul Thomas Chirayil & Usha Antony, Mampilly, Ernakulam

Joel Paul | Joanne Susanna Paul

Anto Chirayil Thomas & Kavitha Joseph, Chackungal, Ernakulam

Noel Joseph Thomas | Joshua Antony Thomas

Rojan Martin Thomas & Jyothy Elizabeth Martin, Ettuparayil, Ernakulam

Hannah Susan Martin | Thomas Rojan Martin

Jojo S Thomas & Sheeba George, Chennattucherry, Ramankary

Nirmal Jojo | Georgy Jojo Chirayil

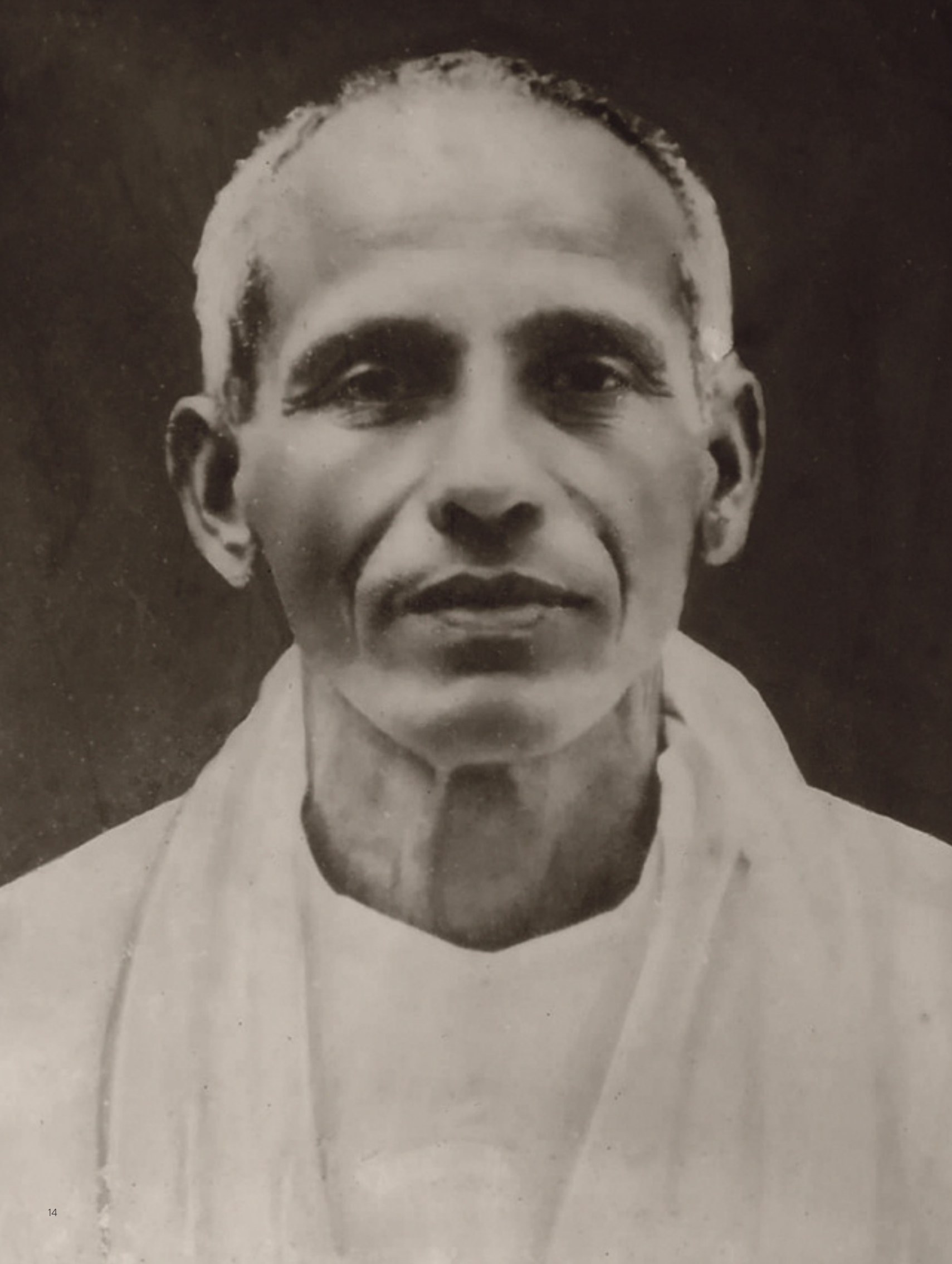
Chapter 1

Genesis

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
All those who follow His commandments have a good
understanding; His praise endures for ever.*

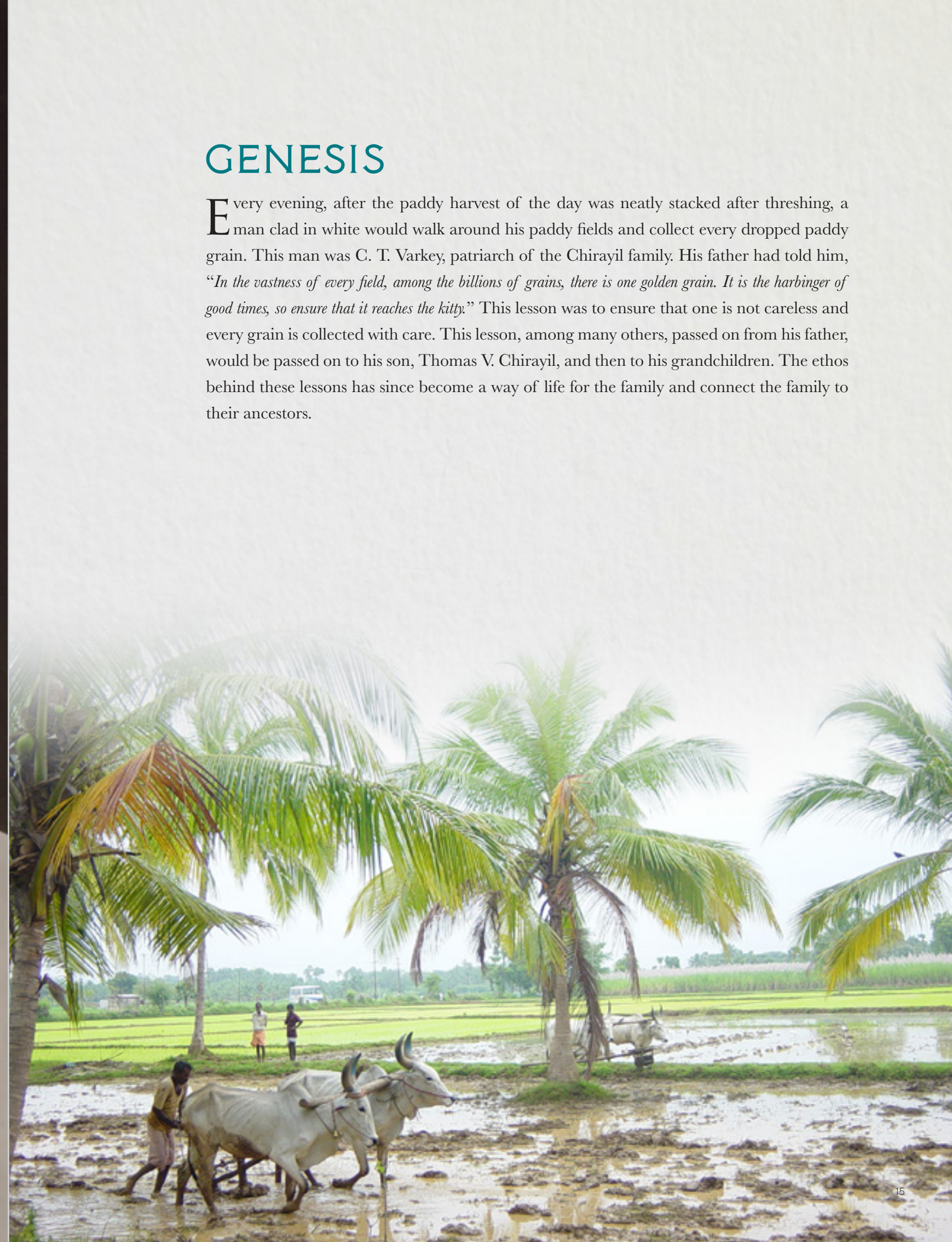
Psalms 111:10





GENESIS

Every evening, after the paddy harvest of the day was neatly stacked after threshing, a man clad in white would walk around his paddy fields and collect every dropped paddy grain. This man was C. T. Varkey, patriarch of the Chirayil family. His father had told him, *“In the vastness of every field, among the billions of grains, there is one golden grain. It is the harbinger of good times, so ensure that it reaches the kitty.”* This lesson was to ensure that one is not careless and every grain is collected with care. This lesson, among many others, passed on from his father, would be passed on to his son, Thomas V. Chirayil, and then to his grandchildren. The ethos behind these lessons has since become a way of life for the family and connect the family to their ancestors.



A NOTE FROM THE PAST

The ancestors of the Vaniapurackal Chirayil or the Chirayil family hail from the picturesque village of Kudamaloor in Kottayam district, Kerala. The village lies on the banks of River Meenachil. During the 11th century, the place was the headquarters of the erstwhile *Chembakassery* dynasty. They had a strong naval power with a huge collection of a special type of boat known as *Chembaka* and so they came to be also known as *Chembakassery Raja*. The family of C.T. Varkey went by the name *Kīzekethalakal* in Kudamaloor. His father, Thomas Varkey was the sixth son of the *Kīzekethalakal* family.

C.T. Varkey's parents, Thomas Varkey and Mariamma, had three children – C.T. Varkey, C.T. Jacob and Annamma. C.T. Jacob was a teacher and later a headmaster - an extremely respected position then.

At that time, the entire Kuttanad area, which included the present-day Alappuzha, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts were underdeveloped. The *Kīzekethalakal* family decided to migrate to the nearby village of Edathua. The village is located at the crossings of a number of waterways. The market was on the banks of the waterway, a hub of activity sourcing groceries from the markets of Changanacherry and Kottayam. From early evening to late



C.T. Varkey (left) with his brother C.T. Jacob.



C.T. Varkey with his sister Annamma.

night the waterway was crammed with heavy-laden canoes, working their way to the interior hamlets and fields. They sported a kerosene lamp at the bow to avoid collision with boats coming the opposite way. In low visibility the navigation was difficult and the punter yelled out “keep left” in Malayalam i.e. “Edathua”. That is how the place got its name.

Thomas Varkey built the first and best house in a slowly developing Edathua. The brothers, C.T. Varkey and C.T. Jacob then built another house on the land, which their father had bought.

The family was primarily involved in farming and all the farming activities were discussed by both the brothers and carried out by C.T. Varkey. Later when the families separated, everything was partitioned equally. Even the smallest of things like ladles were divided equally. Interestingly, the ladles were made out of coconut shells with a small wooden handle! Even after separation, both the brothers took up projects in farming with mutual funds and deliberations through *Kuttichayan* (as C.T. Varkey was called).

Thomas and Mariamma's daughter, Annamma, was married to Madathilakal in Kavalam. Grandson Jacob recalls having heard, “*She often visited her brothers. She would be dressed in white mundu and chatta and a big kunukku in the ear- the only exterior accessory. Like the women of her times, she exuded simplicity with elegance.*”

The Chirayil family slowly and steadily made Edathua their home and the place has since then nurtured several generations of the family.

THE HUMBLE ABODE - EDATHUA

Located in the Kuttanad region of Alappuzha district, Edathua has been home to the Chirayil family for several generations. The lush green village is dotted with paddy fields and coconut trees, with a scenic crisscross of riverlets from the nearby Pamba river. Established in 1810, the revered St. George Forane Church of Edathua stands tall on the banks of this river and is an important part of the village community. The Chirayil family has been active participants of this Church community.



St. George Forane Church, Edathua

The ancestral home of the Chirayils
is located on the bank of a riverlet.
Three generations of the family have lived
and prospered in this ancestral home
– C. T. Varkey, his son Thomas V. Chirayil,
and now the youngest of his grandchildren,
Jojo and his family.



Left to Right (Back Row): Jacob, Ivan, George, Mathew.
Left to Right (Front Row): Rani, Rojan, Pushpam, C.T. Varkey, Paul, Anto, Rosamma, Jojo (in lap), Kusumam



Lock used for the safe.



The door of arra. In traditional Kerala agrarian houses,
the central part of the house was a secure wooden
granary called arra to store paddy grains until it
could be sold. It was rodent proof and raised several
feet above ground level to avoid flooding during the
monsoons.





Entrance of the ancestral home in Edathua.

The ancestral home of the Chirayils is located on the bank of a riverlet. Three generations of the family have lived and prospered in this ancestral home – C.T. Varkey, his son Thomas V. Chirayil, and now the youngest of his grandchildren, Jojo and his family. A combination of old and new, the house was built in a traditional style and was gradually extended as more members were added to the family. Rani, the second eldest granddaughter recalls, *“When I was a child, there was one basic house which was made of cement and next to it was another large mud house with a thatched roof where all the food was cooked.”*

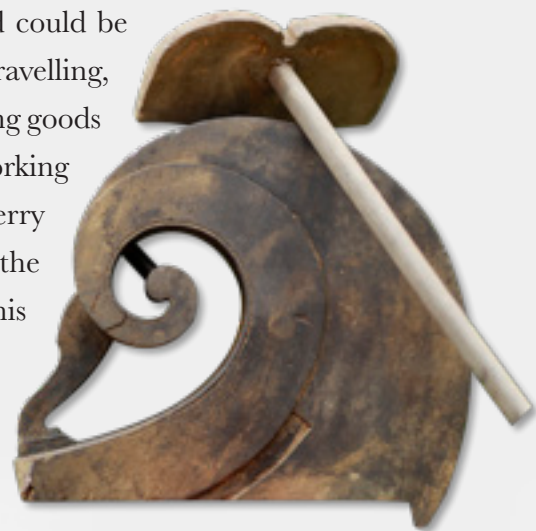
The important features of traditional houses are firstly, that some parts of the house are completely made of wood and secondly, the presence of an *arra* or a wooden silo. Granddaughter Kusumam recalls that the house has two *arras*- one big and one small, *“to house rice grains after the harvest. The arra was kept inside the house at an elevation. The grains were stored there till the next season.”* Whatever rice was used in the house came from the many paddy fields that the family owned and worked on.

The dining room is at the heart of the house. It is where the family gets together for celebrations even today – Easter, Christmas, Onam, birthdays and weddings. The dining table is the length of four regular dining tables put together. The family has eaten several grand meals around this exceptionally long table. The food eaten at this home has been influenced by the local flora and fauna. Fish finds its way to the dining table quite often, along with duck. Kusumam remarks, *“Everybody will have ducks in their house in this village. Duck is a speciality of the Kuttanad region. Whenever we came home for holidays, my father bought around 200 ducks so that during holiday time we would have enough ducks for the table.”* It was fairly easy to maintain a huge flock of ducks because of the presence of multiple riverlets in the village. *“One didn’t have to worry too much about feeding them, the rivers would provide abundant food for them,”* Kusumam remembers.



The ancestral home of Chirayil family.

Ducks weren't the only thing that these riverlets helped with - they were also an essential mode of travel and transportation, where wooden canoes called *vallams* were used. Some *vallams* were hewn from a single large piece of wood. The log is scooped out in the shape of a big *vallam*. It was done with such precision that the inner portion of wood could be converted into another small *vallam*. Apart from travelling, the boats were used for different purposes like carrying goods or taking lunch and refreshments to the farm on working days. Bananas were taken to nearby Changanacherry market in a *vallam* specifically used for this. Since the Malayalam word for a bunch of bananas is *kula*, this *vallam* was known as *kula vallam*.



Churulan valla thala is the curly wooden piece that is the headpiece of the vallam (mainly for decorative purposes). In the picture above, it is dismantled from the main body of the vallam. The implement on the top is called a vitheti. It is made of seasoned coconut wood and is used to spread paddy grains on the mat while it is drying in the sun (to allow even drying by intermittent redistribution of the paddy grains).



The family owned many such *vallams* as there were very few cars or motorboats and roads were not up to the mark. Pushpam describes the water transport system in Edathua in great detail, “We had a fairly large vallam hollowed out from a single log, lovingly named *Chakalika vallam*. At the time, it was highly prestigious to travel in this vallam. A special semi-circular covering made of decorative copper sheet called *valavara* was placed on top of the boat when we travelled to *Kavalam* to visit our grandfather's sister and other special places.” Having a *Churulan vallam* with a *valavara* canopy cover for travellers was equivalent to having a limousine now. Dishes, rarely made nowadays, like *Kaalan*, were made in mud pots and taken along for longer journeys. Pushpam also remembers that a person by the name of Ouseph would generally handle the *vallam*, which was propelled by a long bamboo push pole.

Up until the 1970s, the family had privately maintained water channels within their property. These channels were large enough to be used for transporting material by boats and water supply for irrigation, apart from other utilities. Their maintenance was a fairly large event every year. Before commencing the manual removal of silt from the water channels by a large team of workers, all the *vallams* were hauled to dry on high ground for repair and waterproofing with fish oil (another large event by itself). After overall maintenance of the boats and the water channels, the boats were launched into the water, ready for another year of service.

The ancestral house, where the youngest son Jojo and his family reside, is a constant reminder to the family of their humble beginnings and the grit of their ancestors. Today, the family is spread all over the world, but their feet are firmly rooted in their ancestral home in Edathua.



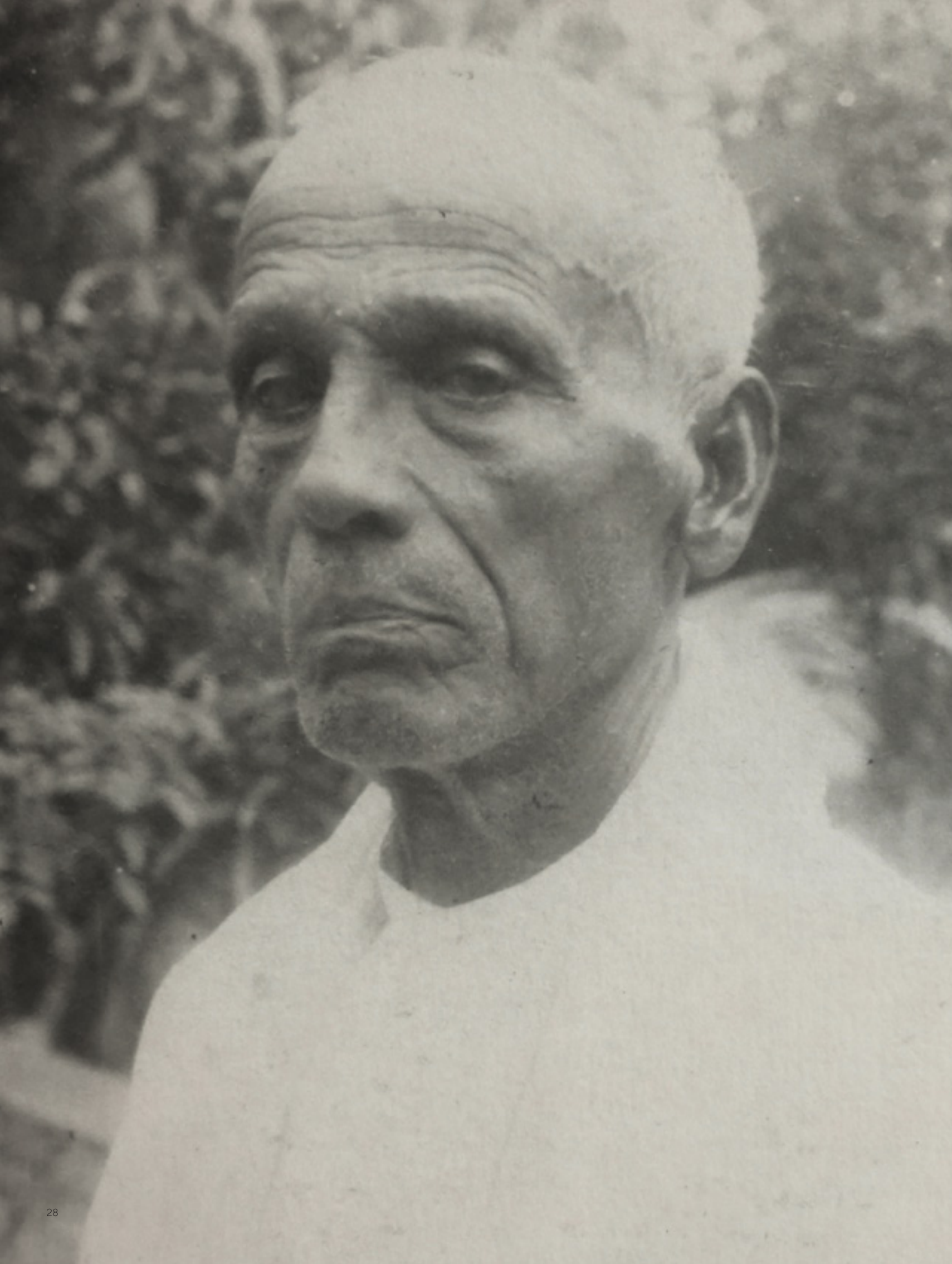
Vallams

Chapter 2

The Family Foundations- Grandparents

*Lord, only your Grace is sufficient for me.
Make me worthy of a good death and
worthy of purity of heart, mind, body and soul.*





A MAN OF FAITH-THE ROCK-VALLIAPPACHEN

God-fearing, humble, hardworking and simple are the words that the family uses to describe its former patriarch – C. T. Varkey. Born on December 26, 1891 in Edathua to Thomas Varkey and Mariamma, he was the second son of his parents. His father passed away when he was a young boy of 16. He got married at the age of 22 to Rosamma Varkey or *Valliammachy*, aged 16. From an early age, he shouldered the responsibility of his family. He was an earnest man who led by example and lived a grounded life. Tall and lean, his grandchildren remember their *Valliappachen* as always dressed in a clean and crisp white *mundu* and shirt. He did not care much for material belongings. His wardrobe, as described by his grandson Ivan, consisted of four cotton and one silk *jubbas* - all white. “Possibly four cotton *mundu* and two *shawls* for when he did not wear a *jubba*, all neatly pressed and kept in a wooden box where no worm or insect could enter.” He insisted on having just the bare minimum.

Left to Right (Standing): Mathew, Ivan, Rojan, Pushpam, Anto, Rani, Arun, Dr Rosamma, Dr Jose, Jojo (in arms)
Left to Right (Sitting): Anu, Thomas V. Chirayil, C.T. Varkey, Jojo, Ammini Thomas



He always told his son Thomas, *“One should not increase one’s standard of living when one gets more money because sooner or later most people go through a period of reduced income. It will then be embarrassing to reduce one’s standard of living.”* This advice always stood him in good stead.

Ivan also remembers the pleasant ayurvedic fragrance that surrounded him. *“It was especially strong in the evenings after his bath. I always found a place near him during evening prayer time to get a few deep whiffs of that magical aroma,”* he remembers. *“It still lingers in his room,”* Ivan adds.

Valliappachen’s day would consist of overlooking the working of the farm and the labour. *Valliappachen* owned farmland as well as took land on lease to grow paddy. Mathew remembers, *“He single-handedly looked after 30 acres of paddy cultivation.”* He networked with a *Mangombil patteru* Brahmin who gave large areas of land on lease for paddy cultivation.



C.T. Varkey



Para (pronounced as purr ah) is used to measure paddy. It is made of select seasoned coconut wood and with brass ornamentation. The chain and the rod above are used to level the paddy to the container edge levels. It is about 25 cm in height and one para of paddy is about 8 kg. Para was the standard terminology used not only to measure paddy but also to describe the yield of a plot of land.



Mupara Kotta was meant to handle paddy. Its approximate volume was three paras.

Unlike today, the interest was given in kind and trading was mostly done by barter. The British and the local ruler's currency was used in financial transactions too but since money was scarce, very few were able to use them. Money was still not popular in Edathua and payments were done with paddy. The measuring unit was a *para*. There were two sizes for this *para*-one was to measure wages and the other one used by people who gave farms on lease had a bigger sized *para*. Whenever one had to measure paddy for payments, they would stand up to do it. This was done because the thrust with which the grain fell would push more grain in the *para*, preventing vacuum spaces. This practice was misused by people who gave farms on lease. They would extort more paddy grains from the farmer than what was due for payment.

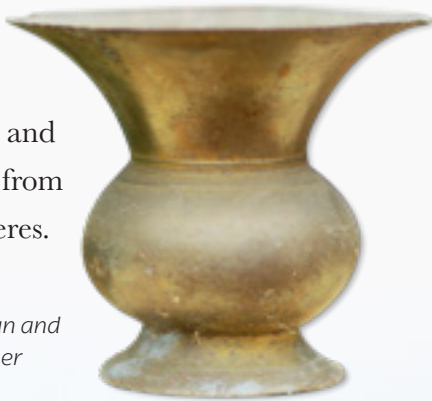


Chakram or spoked wheel was used for water management in paddy fields. A labourer sat on a wooden frame and used his feet to spin the *chakram*, which was positioned between paddy fields to move water from one field to the next. It often took days. It was used temporarily and then stored in a shed in the farmhouse.

An avid agriculturist, *Valliappachen* would examine each and every tree. The sprawling farm was full of trees of all kinds - coconut, tamarind, mango, jackfruit, cloves, coffee, cocoa, nutmeg and breadfruit, among others. People around him believed that he had a green thumb. Grandson Jacob remembers having heard, “*the lines on his palms resembled a stalk full of rice grains.*” He was often invited by the neighbouring farmers to take a walk along the *varambu* (the raised mud boundary between farms) and take stock of their crop.

Unlike today, paddy cultivation was extremely labour intensive, which meant employing hundreds of women to replant paddy, de-weeding and harvesting, which lasted over a month. Jacob recalls, “*The work in the farms would start as early as eight in the morning and go on till three in the afternoon with an hour's break for lunch. Valliappachen, along with his coordinator, would leave for the farm in one vallam. Another vallam followed them with lunch, tea and other essential items. The food was packed for Valliappachen and for a family that lived near the farm with whom he would have lunch daily in their house. This family rarely made enough for sustenance and hence, food was packed for them from home.*”

The many paddy fields around the house supplied the household with rice. Rani remembers, “*During harvest, a lot of workers would be working on the farm. They stayed on the premises of our house.*” After the harvest, when the paddy was threshed to separate the grain from the stalk, it would be kept in heaps on the ground. Rani recalls that *Valliappachen* would walk around the grounds and pick the grains lying around and put them in the heap. It was a lesson that was passed down from one generation to the next and to which the family still adheres.



Kolambi is a brass spittoon used to spit intermittently while chewing paan and tobacco. It is made of brass and usually accompanied by a brass container with a spout to rinse the mouth with water.





Valliappachen

Among many such lessons passed down the generations, a very important lesson that was passed down by *Valliappachen* was his undeterred faith in God. Grandson George remembers an incident when during the rainy season his father (*Achen*) wanted to put grains out for drying but was worried about the rains, *“He went to Valliappachen and told him the problem. Valliappachen went to see the paddy and then told Achen to put the paddy to dry in the sun. Achen expressed concern about the rain. Valliappachen just said, ‘Don’t worry, I have prayed - it will be fine.’ And indeed, it didn’t rain, instead it was a bright and sunny day.”*



Valla kasera translates to canoe chair. It was placed in a vallam for people to sit comfortably.

This British made wall clock was in the central hall of the house. Its spring had to be wound once a week. Its chime is a very familiar sound to everyone and a part of their earliest childhood memories. It was like the Greenwich mean time of the household.



Every day, till the twilight years of his life, he would rise up at dawn, get ready and head to Church for the daily mass. Later in life, when he could not move around unassisted, grandson Jacob would dutifully take him to Church every morning. In the evening, at precisely 7 o’clock, *Valliappachen* would assemble the family for prayer in the dining hall. *“At 6:55pm, he would stand near the dining room clock and as soon as the clock struck 7, he would call everyone for prayer,”* remembers Kusumam. She was the first to be called as she was her great-grandmother’s namesake (Mariamma). *“In the dining room, I would put one long mat and my Grandfather would sit in the centre and all the grandchildren on both sides. That has inculcated in us the habit of praying every day,”* she adds.

So devoted to God *Valliappachen* was, that he kept a collection of plain wooden crosses above the berth of his bed, remembers his grandson Jacob. Once when Jacob and Pushpam were with him to join the Way of the Cross, he bequeathed the wooden crosses to them. *“Such was his devotion that he would kneel down on the hot smouldering tar roads on Good Friday. His calloused knees showed his life spent on his knee in surrender to God,”* recalls Jacob.

Till the very end of his life, he maintained humility and believed that, *“in order to appreciate the good things we have, it is important for us to visit orphanages, disabled and homeless as part of our life”*, says grandson George. His conduct garnered him immense respect, not just from his family but from his community as well. Rani remembers hiding, out of both fear and respect, when they heard him come home. In earlier days, in most families, children, out of respect, would not sit in front of their fathers while talking. The children would stand while talking with their father or grandfather.

Lean and fit, one could see him making rounds of the farm throughout the day. No one remembers him ever visiting a hospital. Even when he was older, he could easily climb trees. George remembers one such incident, *“As is customary for us, we show our respect to our elders with a stuthi starting with the eldest. On one of my visits home, on finding my mother in front of the house, I walked up to her to give her a stuthi. But she redirected me saying that Valliappachen is somewhere in the front plot and asked me to go to him first. After a brief search, I found him perched on top of a coconut tree. He had climbed up to attend to some chelli (bug) problem that he noticed. He was in his eighties at the time.”* Agriculture wasn’t the only thing *Valliappachen* was involved in.



Grandson George with Valliappachen.

He also owned the chit fund in the village. He would walk many miles to collect money for the fund. He would leave early with lunch packed in a banana leaf to organise the legal services and manage the fund.

He was a man of few words and granddaughter Pushpam recalls, *“Very rarely did we see him laughing loudly or making small time jokes. Some of his relatives, even those of his age, were afraid to speak when he was near. He had lost his father when he was very young. He therefore had to take care of many family requirements right from a very early age. This made him mature beyond his years.”*

Valliappachen was very loving towards his grandchildren. Pushpam remembers that every day after lunch, he would lovingly feed his grandchildren a special pudding that he made by mixing little rice with a ripe banana, sugar and curd. *“Seeing him mixing and squeezing the ingredients with his hand was itself mouth-watering. He took special care to give a small quantity to the grandchildren around him at the time,”* she remembers delightfully. But the rice pudding was not the only thing that made the grandkids tail Valliappachen. Kusumam recalls, *“My Grandfather always kept one big jar of Parry’s toffee in his cupboard. His room had two doors: one door connecting to the house and the other, to go outside the house. We would enter through one door and just walk slowly through his room until he would call us and say ‘come take toffee and go.’ So every time one of us wanted toffee, we would go to his room.”*



Left to Right (Back Row): Molly Philip, Sunil, Philip Jacob, Thomas. V. Chirayil, Thomas Jacob, Marykutty, Anitha
Left to Right (Front Row): Seema, Sindu, Annamma Olassayil, Anju, Aiswarya

Although not much of a conversationalist, Valliappachen always made it a point to enquire about his grandchildren’s welfare. Granddaughter Rosamma recalls, *“He would always ask me to keep my long hair oiled and would also ask everybody to take care of their hair. He would also enquire about everyone’s studies and about our boarding school.”*

Valliappachen’s compassion and care was not only limited to one family but also extended to anyone who needed it, especially during a natural disaster. Granddaughter Rosamma recalls, *“Whenever there was a flood or any other calamity, he was always there to help the villagers. He was at the forefront of helping the community. He would give them food, shelter or any other support they needed. In Edathua, there was a flood every year during monsoons, and during that time, people would start panicking but Valliappachen was always ready to support them.”*

Reminiscing about Valliappachen’s later years, granddaughter-in-law Leena remembers, *“In spite of his loss of memory, he ate his food without spilling or wasting a grain of rice. He made it a point to regularly give part of his meal to the domestic animals, especially the cows at home.”* Rani adds, *“He loved the cows. So when he lost his memory, whatever he got, chocolate or just any food cooked in the kitchen, he would carry it to give to the cows.”*



Valliappachen

Valliappachen's Signature

“When he turned 90,” remembers Jacob, “he informed every visitor that he had only one tooth left and he went to Church every day.” With old age, as Valliappachen’s memory started fading, one thing that didn’t fade was his devotion to God. Leena recalls, “I had the privilege of spending more than a year with him at home. I am lucky and grateful that I could help and support him in his daily chores like bathing and give him company throughout the day. He was very aware of the time for daily prayers and going to Church daily in the mornings.” He would keep a lookout for the time for the morning Mass. Many times, he misunderstood the time and went to Church at midnight. Jacob remembers, “He walked around the Church at midnight to see if it was open and on seeing him, people in the village brought him home. The Church was a kilometer away from the house. From deep within, grew his faith, love of God and his storehouse of values imparted to us.”

Valliappachen, especially towards the end of his life, was often heard repeating, “Lord, only your Grace is sufficient for me. Make me worthy of a good death and worthy of purity of heart, mind, body and soul.”

As years passed, and the grandchildren moved away from home to make their mark in the world, their connection with Valliappachen did not change. As the time drew closer for Valliappachen to leave for the heavenly abode, grandson George had a foreboding. He recalls, “I had just got married and taken up work in Saudi Arabia. The job was hectic and demanded a no-leave period of almost a year and a half. It was during this time that I had a dream that I should visit my Grandfather. Taking the message seriously, I applied for leave. I insisted on getting leave sanctioned, even after my boss reminded me that I was on a no-leave period. Nonetheless, I reached home to be with Valliappachen in the final moments of his life. This, to me, has immense significance and sustained me throughout my life.”

On October 23, 1982, at the age of 92, Valliappachen passed away at his home in Edathua. There isn’t much that the family hasn’t learned from their Valliappachen. His life lessons and advice are nothing short of an heirloom for the Chirayil family. He instilled the values of honesty, hard work, empathy and dignity of labour in his son and subsequently, his grandchildren. His life, however, is incomplete without the mention of his devoted wife, Rosamma Varkey or Valliammachy.

AN IMAGE OF GRACE-VALLIAMMACHY



Rosamma Varkey



Sister Rosalia, Rosamma's sister.



Oueseph Joseph, Rosamma's brother.

Born on August 15, 1894 into the Perinjerimannil family, Rosamma Varkey grew up in a small village called Vaipur in Pathanamthitta district, on the banks of river Manimala. Although not formally educated, she was sensitive to her surroundings. Rosamma or Valliammachy, as she was called by her family, was short in height but not in stature. The clothes she wore were simple and modest, and always pristine white and starched, remembers Rani. “Clad in a white mundu, she always wore big earrings. Behind the mundu a fan-like fold was placed; it must have been a way of modesty for women. She always draped a small white shawl over the top, which she wore above the mundu.”



C. T. Varkey and Rosamma Varkey

At the age of 16, she married C.T. Varkey. Together they raised four children - three girls and a boy. *“She may not have known to read or write languages, maths and have a formal education, yet she stood tall as a mother and wife, and fulfilled the responsibility of motherhood, wife and family,”* remembers Rani. Like her husband, she was very firm in her belief in God. Every morning, after having their morning coffee, she accompanied her husband to Church. They shared a very serious relationship, where communication was limited to the nitty-gritty of running the household, making Rani always wonder, *“did this couple ever enjoy a light-hearted chit-chat.”*

Valliammachy was the epitome of grace and compassion. All her grandchildren remember her being considerate towards the underprivileged. Rani recalls, *“Being in a household with plenty of agricultural produce, she saw pain and struggle and quietly donated some of these goodies to the most needy living in mud walled and coconut leaf thatched huts.”* Being the eldest, *Valliammachy’s* namesake, Rosamma remembers accompanying her grandmother to visit the underprivileged localities of Edathua, *“After the Church mass in the morning, she would take me to the colony. She always had something to give them. Either eggs or rice, or something else of need. She would always carry something like that. We would go to the houses in the colony and give them things. She used to always ask them what they needed and then do things accordingly.”* The charity she did was out of her own accord without anyone in the house knowing. Rani recalls, *“She had a habit of hiding things in the house-grains, coconuts, eggs, milk and anything else that was harvested. She used to hide it from everyone in the house and quietly give it to the poor.”* She especially did this during the rainy season when most of the villagers were out of work.

Valliammachy was a doting mother and a grandmother. When the grandchildren were home from boarding schools, she would feed them sumptuous curries. Rosamma recalls, *“She used to make a fish curry which we loved very much. But unlike the traditional curry, her curry was not reddish (with chillies) but was made with coconut and mangoes.”* At night she would enthrall them with bed-time



Chembu Kalam, a hammered copper pot used to cook.



Annamma, Pennamma (Marykutty), Kunjomachen, Achamma.

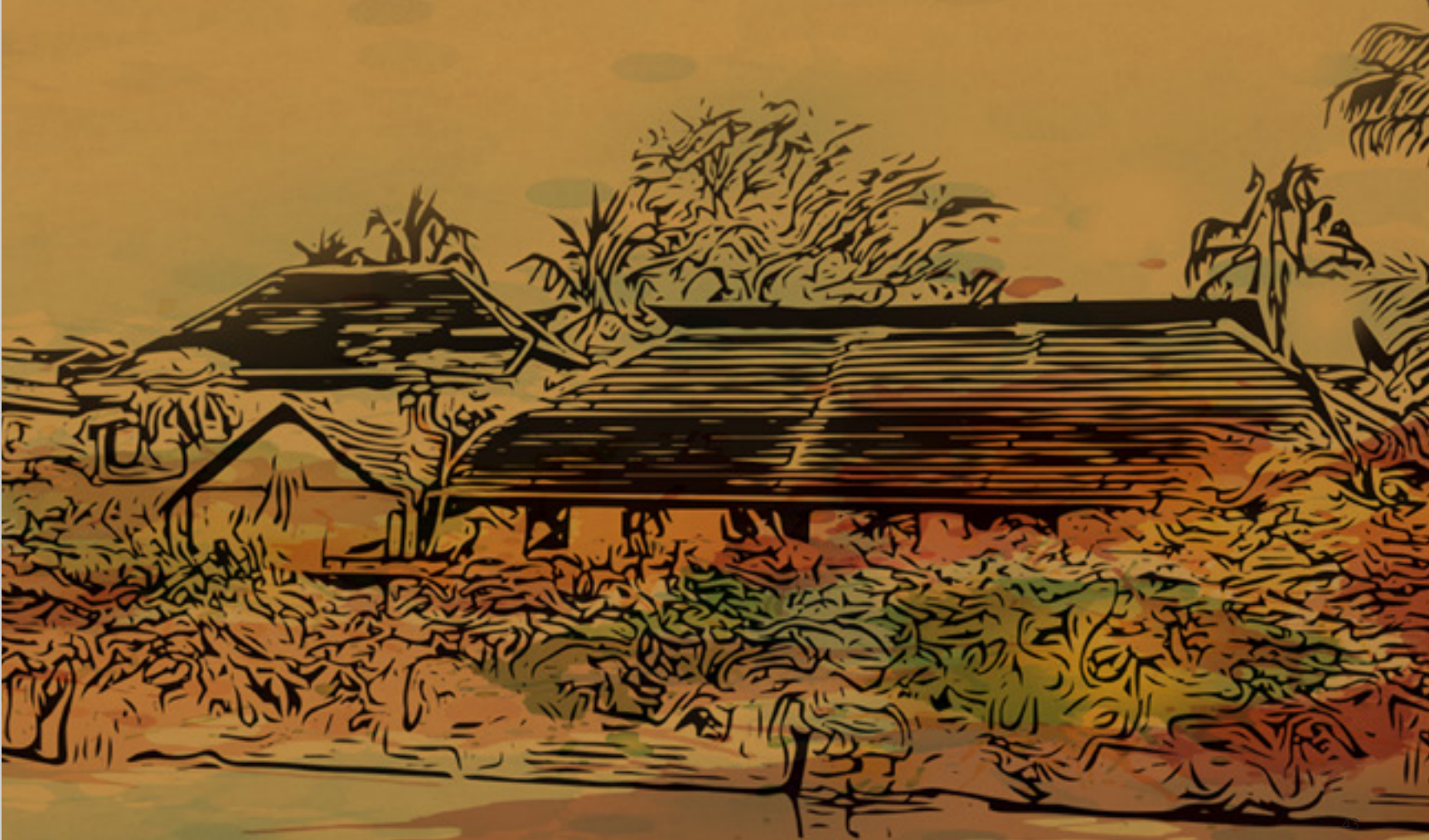
stories. It was after one such story-telling session with her granddaughters, that *Valliammachy* passed away peacefully in her sleep. Rosamma recalls, *“It was after my 11th standard. We were at home and that night she was telling us stories. After we slept, she went up to her bed and retired for the night. In the morning, I heard my Grandfather calling out to my Father asking him to check why she was not getting up. She passed away suddenly. She was alright the day before; she even went for Mass that day.”*

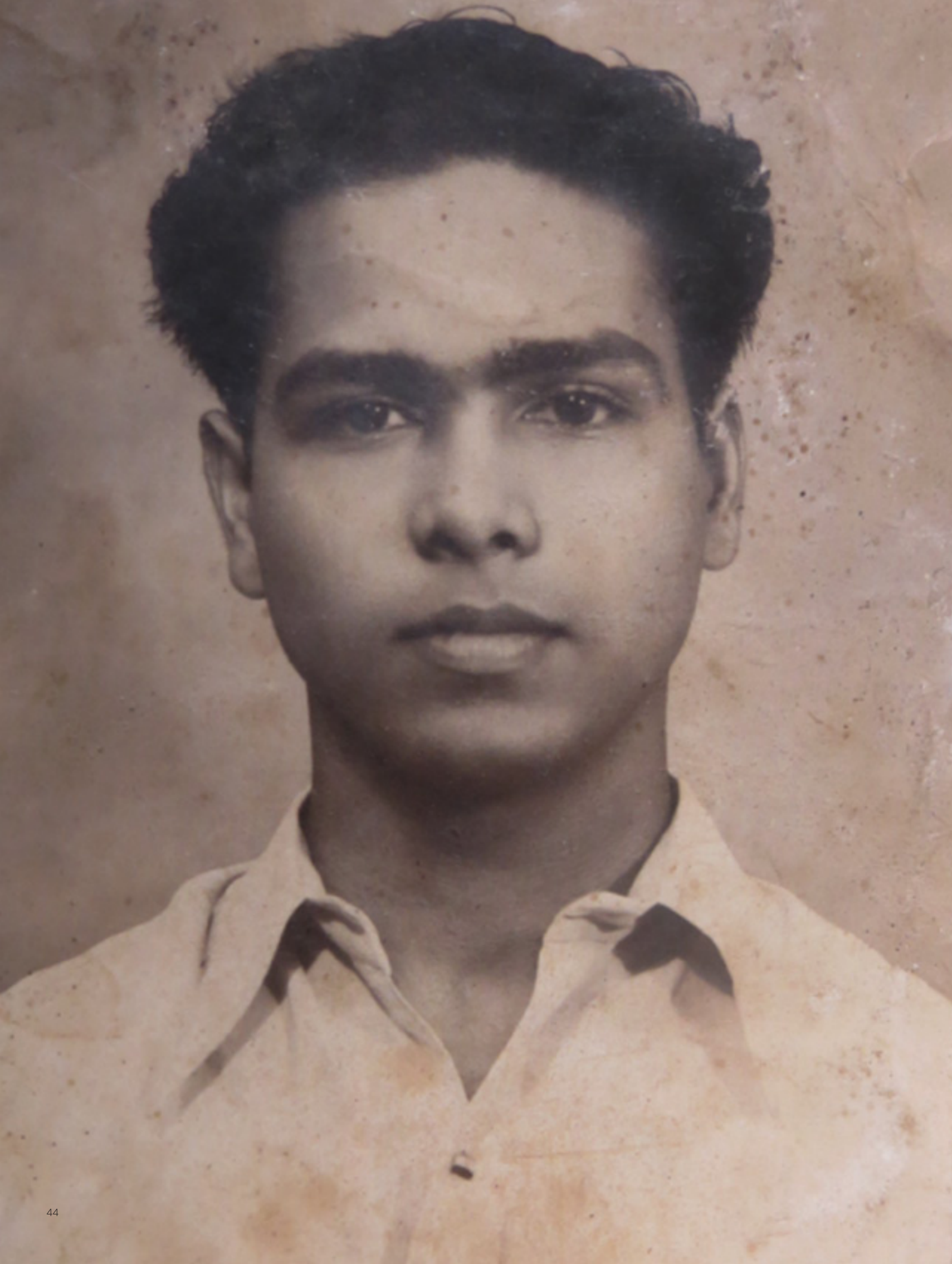
Valliammachy passed away on December 8, 1968. After her death, the family took a long time to come to terms with the void she left behind. George recalls, *“My grandmother left us for her heavenly life when I was in my junior school days. Unlike most childhood stories you hear about memories of grandmothers about good food and fairy tales, mine I feel is very different. I cherish my grandmother for several reasons, one of them being what I have heard her say about me to others several times, ‘I wait for him to come for his holidays from school because he can fix any problem in the house be it electrical, plumbing or even work outside the house.’ At that age I believed without question she was serious about what she said. I also recall having stretched myself to get some of the things fixed, though I had no clue about it. I made sure that somehow, I got to learn about the problem or took a determined dive into it. More often than not I was able to resolve the issues and see the smile on her face. Even in later years, I have several times told myself that she was really serious about her remark. Looking back I am happy that she gave me the start to face confidently and take up challenges that come our way. A few days after Valliammachy passed away, I observed how everyone around me realised that I missed Valliammachy. One time when I was sitting alone in the south side of the house (generally a quiet place), I overheard Ammachy’s answer to a visitor from outside asking if things have settled down. She said, ‘Georgekutty has still not gotten over it yet’.”* *Valliammachy* left behind lessons of compassion and strength of character for the family to follow.

Chapter 3

Of Courage & Conviction-Life and Times of Thomas V. Chirayil

*The heights by great men reached and kept were
not attained by sudden flight, but they, while their
companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.*





MARY'S MIRACLE-CHILDHOOD

On May 23, 1752, the small island of Vallarpadam in Kochi witnessed a miracle. A boat carrying a few people including a mother and her infant overturned in a storm near the island. The same night Father Miguel Correya, the Parish priest of the Church had a strange dream, where Our Lady of Vallarpadam implored him to rescue the mother and the child from the backwater. The following night he had the same dream again, but this time he took action and set out to look for the mother in the morning. As fate would have it, a few fishermen pulled the mother and her child out of the water alive after three days.



173 years later, the Virgin Mary performed another miracle when she blessed C.T. Varkey and his wife Rosamma with their son, Thomas V. Chirayil. For many years, the couple had longed for the birth of a son after a daughter. They decided to visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom, Vallarpadam, Ernakulam and pray for the birth of a son. Their granddaughter Rosamma remembers being told, *“C.T. Varkey and Rosamma stayed at the Church for a week where they fasted and prayed to our Lady and she blessed them with a child.”* Thomas V. Chirayil was born on September 8, 1925 in Edathua. He was the second of four children.

Being the only boy, Thomas V. Chirayil or *Kunjomachen* (Little Thomas) as he was lovingly called, was both pampered and protected by his mother and sisters. Rosamma recalls being told, *“Since there was water all around the house, he was kept under a strict watch.”*

Under the guidance of his uncle, C.T. Jacob, *Kunjomachen* was sent to the local school in Edathua. After completing his schooling, he joined the Sacred Heart College in Thevara, Kochi for higher education.



Kunjomachen, as Thomas V. Chirayil was fondly known.

COMING OF AGE

Kunjomachen graduated in Bachelor of Arts (Literature) from the prestigious Sacred Heart College, Thevara. At that time, water transportation was the main mode of travel. His son Jacob remembers being told, *“During college days he used to go from Edathua to his college in Cochin by boat. This journey of about 70 kilometres, started at about 7 p.m. and ended by reaching the destination at 7 a.m. next morning. There was one stop in between for dinner, which was of course packed from home by Valliammachy. Usually, an extra meal was also packed to cater for the next day.”*



Sacred Heart College, Thevara.



Kunjomachen at his graduation.

In college, *Kunjomachen* got an opportunity to not only interact and bond with people from different walks of life but also to nurture his creative side by taking part in various co-curricular activities. He acted in an adaptation of William Shakespeare’s tragic play *Othello* and won the first prize. Later in life, he would enjoy watching Malayalam plays. Kusumam, who often accompanied her father to these plays, remembers how he would savour theatre, “*I used to go for these shows with him, which were organised by the Alleppey Theatres troupe, a renowned drama troupe. He would sit in the first row and relish them thoroughly.*” Rosamma remembers her father discussing English classics with his friends, “*He had two or three friends in Edathua who also studied English literature with him. They frequently sat together to talk about Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream and other related subjects. He would always be very happy to discuss literature with them.*” Their discussions kindled a love for books in Rosamma.



Kunjomachen during his college days.

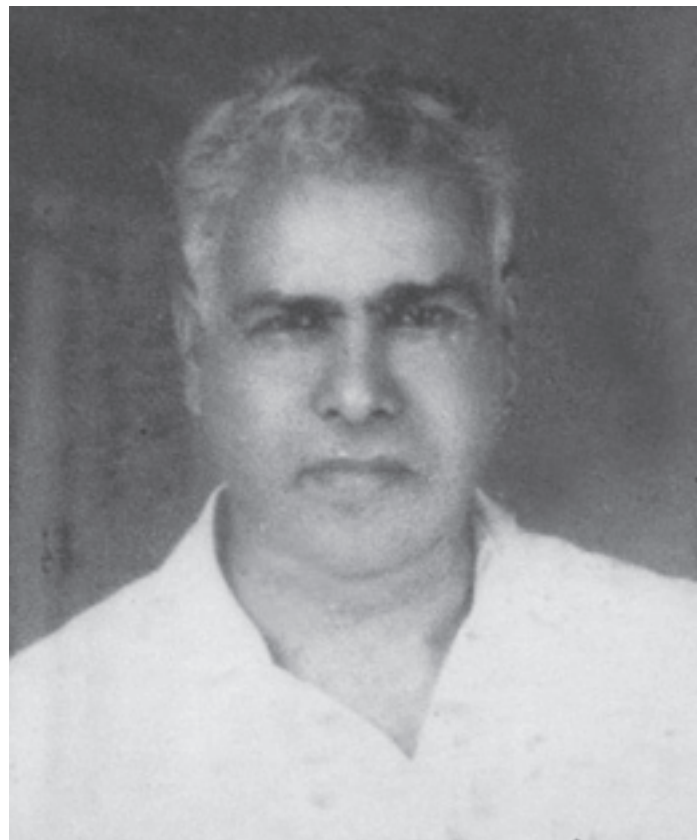
Kunjomachen’s enterprising nature began to blossom while he was in college. During his hostel days, he observed that his fellow boarders often ran out of essentials at odd hours and they were unable to find any alternatives. Taking cue from the observations, he set up a shop in his hostel. The shop was simply a table that displayed items that young men in hostels would call essentials. This business ran quite successfully despite the makeshift settings, and fellow students would write down their dues in a notebook that was kept precise and up to date by the budding businessman. “*In addition, he also traded in John Player Special cigarettes to make some pocket money,*” remembers Paul.

Kunjomachen completed his education from Sacred Heart College and returned to Edathua with a plan for his future. “*Along with his friend, Joseph, he decided to buy land in Bangalore and settle there,*” recalls Kusumam. But fate had other plans for him. His idea of settling anywhere other than his village was disapproved by his father. And the obedient *Kunjomachen* did not think twice before shelving the idea.

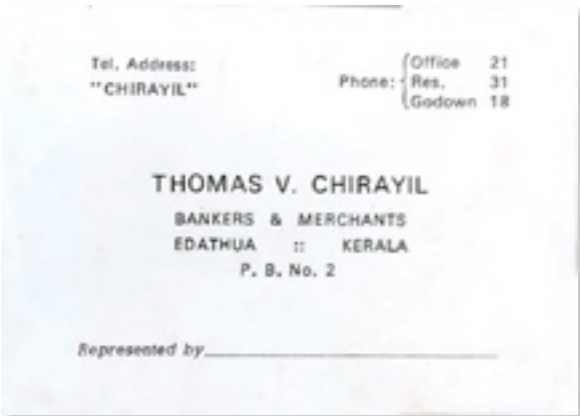
EXPANDING THE HORIZONS - BUSINESS

Although the opportunities in Edathua were highly constrained, it did not stop *Kunjomachen* from making his mark on the canvas of the village. Jacob believes that his grit and determination were bequeathed to him by his father. *“In both, our grandfather and father, we saw tremendous human potential, networking ability, and wisdom in a time in history without phones, buses, or other facilities we see today. They woke up early, walked miles with food packed in a banana leaf, and got their work done. Both had golden palms and values. Not born with a silver spoon, both were trailblazers, creating a new world, a new village and subsequently, opening new paths for the community,”* he says.

Kunjomachen did not believe in giving up in the face of adversity. Kusumam remembers him guiding her, *“You have to be like a cockroach - alert, observing everything, collecting information and evaluating it constantly.”* She used to watch him practice the same thing. He found opportunities where there were none, which benefited not only him but all those around him. Another thing he would repeat to his children, *“Never use the words ‘Illa’ (No/don’t have), ‘Venda’ (Don’t want) or ‘Pora’ (Not enough). Instead, say ‘Mathi’ (Enough). Be content with what you have and look at the less fortunate to know the blessings.”* The family has imbibed this mantra into their lives.



Kunjomachen



Business card of Thomas V. Chirayil.

After leaving college, *Kunjomachen* joined his father in taking care of the land and the grocery business. He supervised the farming of about 30 acres of paddy. He was involved in every activity on the farm to check that things were in order and caught problems in the bud, a lesson he had learnt from his father. There was a time when eight large *vallams*, two medium ones and two smaller ones were used for transporting paddy, coconut and other goods from the farm. They were rented out when idle.

At home, there were six to seven cows, many pigs, goats, countless chickens, ducks, and several dogs. Most of the food for these animals and birds were recycled from the kitchen and the farm. Hence resource utilization was optimum. There even was a *gobar* gas plant to recycle waste into energy.

Kunjomachen was a generous and kind-hearted person who always lent a helping hand to the poor and needy. He was an understanding employer to all his workers. The work timings in the paddy field were strictly from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm (when working in water). No land-lord would allow workers into the fields if they came late, but *Kunjomachen* was lenient in such matters. Ensuring that he was not taken for granted, he often permitted people from poor backgrounds, who came late after fulfilling their responsibilities at home, to join the workers who started off early in the morning and still gave them the same wages.

While on one hand, *Kunjomachen* was very generous and considerate, he did not appreciate slacking. *“Once when he encountered irresponsible workers,”* recalls Paul, *“he commented that they had an attitude of ‘kattile thadi, theverude anna, pidi eda pidi’, which roughly translates to ‘they had no skin in the game’.”*

Kunjomachen expanded the grocery business and obtained a wholesale license for ration as well as sugar, but not without hurdles. Jacob recalls, *“Achen had the ration wholesale licence which he obtained with great difficulty. The Government Food Authority was in Alleppey and going there was a long*

Kunjomachen came up with an idea to start a private bank, Chirayil Bankers, thereby channelising these idle funds into his business ventures.

journey, mainly by boats (Government public water transport) as there were very few roads. This licence was for the supply of ration material to the ration shops. On a similar note, Achen also had a sugar wholesale licence when sugar was not as easily available. He collected sugar from the manufacturers and distributed it to the shops.”

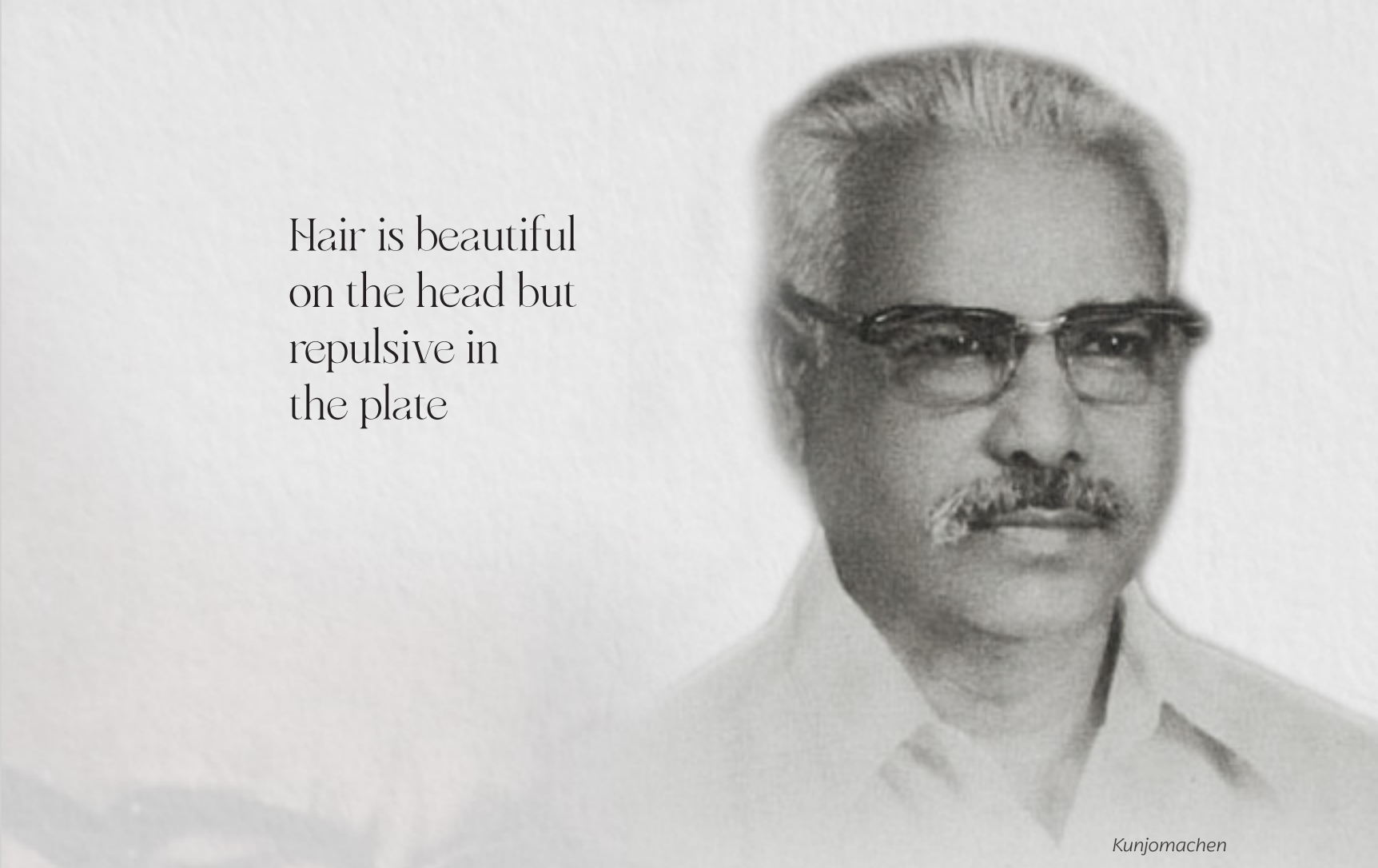
On realising the amount of idle funds in the community, *Kunjomachen* came up with an idea to start a private bank, Chirayil Bankers, thereby channelising these idle funds into his business ventures.

With time, *Kunjomachen* built a reputation for himself. He commanded respect from everyone he met. Like his father, he was a stickler for punctuality and discipline. Daughter-in-law Jolly remembers, *“Every morning he used to dress well in a neatly pressed jubba and wear a tulasi wood mala. He would pray and then come down to monitor the paddy fields near Chirayil 140 (the name of the paddy cultivating area). He could be heard from far since he would be repeating ‘Karthave kaniyaname’ (Lord have mercy) and one would know that he had arrived.”*

“I fondly recall serving him his favourite hearty breakfast, ‘Njavara kanji’ along with fish curry or curd and some vegetable dish. In fact, knowing the health benefits of ‘Njavara’, he even cultivated the Njavara variety of paddy in one part of the fields,” recalls Jolly.

Once a family friend, Dr. Thomaskutty, asked him, *“How come for me the harvest is good one year and bad another year, but for you it is always good.”* *Kunjomachen* replied, *“A lot depends on how much heart and soul you put into your work. You need to feel with the plants and love what you are doing. Only then you can take the right action at the right time. Good action with good intentions at the wrong time is of no benefit.”*

Hair is beautiful
on the head but
repulsive in
the plate



Kunjomachen

Like the knack for entrepreneurship and hard work, his father also passed down his devotion and faith to *Kunjomachen*, who never ceased to thank the Almighty for his blessings. *“When the ration wholesale licence was finally obtained, Achen gave Varkey Chettan (a childhood help connected with both, home and shop) ₹ 10 to buy candles and light in the altar as thanksgiving,”* remembers Jacob. Varkey known fondly to the 12 children as Varkey Chettan was very close to the family and was associated with the Chirayil family up to his last days. He was also very concerned about the children’s wellbeing.

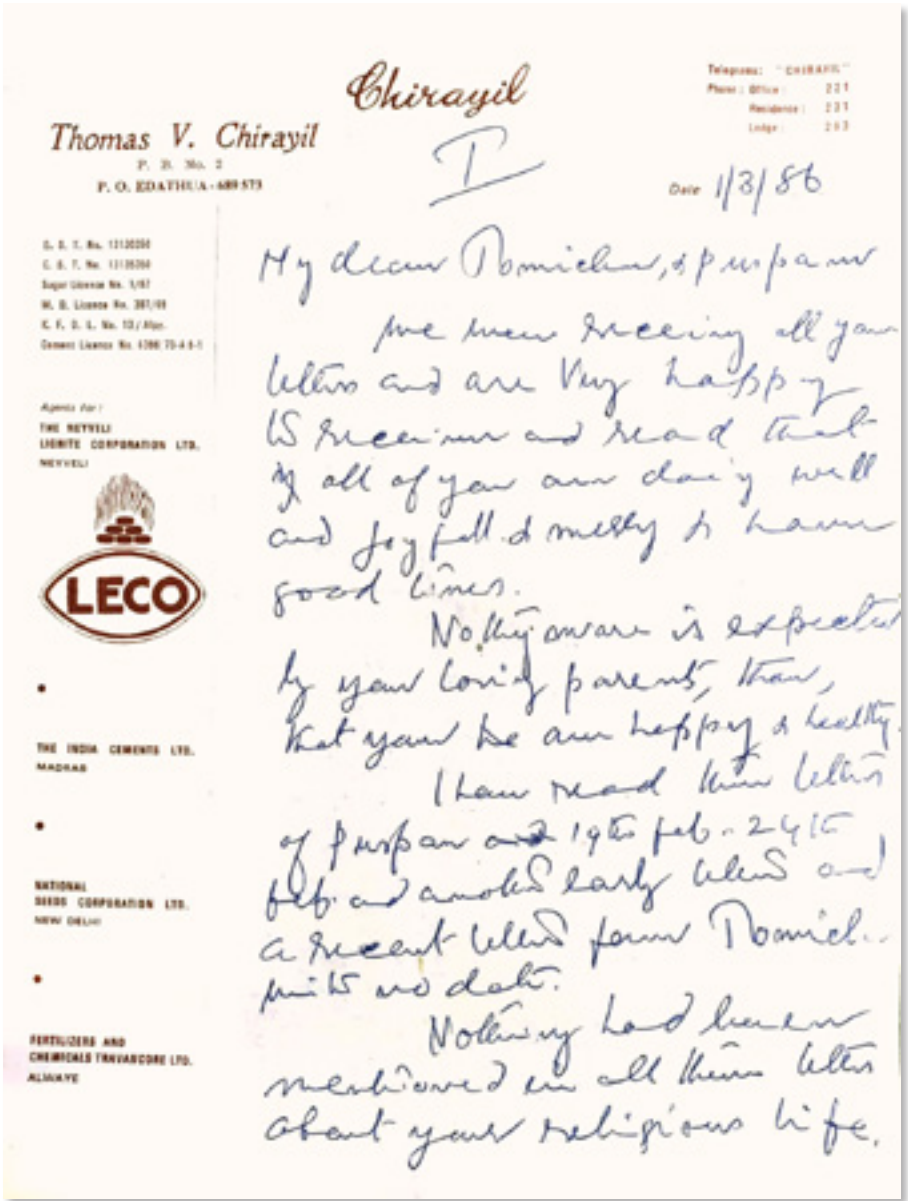
The paddy wholesale and other businesses were so good that goods were not kept in store but directly transferred from the source to the purchaser, thereby avoiding double handling and storage costs.

Kunjomachen was a visionary in the true sense. He had an inherent eye and ear to spot opportunities. He often found people who gave him business in the most unlikely places - in people he just met, or someone he gave a lift to or in a casual meeting. Jacob feels, *“His curiosity of mind and his open and questioning attitude led him to new opportunities.”*

Kunjomachen found a business associate in Hajee Hassan Yacoob Sait, a Gujarati businessman from Kutch settled in Kayamkulam, Kerala. Just like a bee is attracted to honey, they both, with their intuitive business instincts, were drawn to each other. This Gujarati family was often hosted in the guest room of the family house.

Kunjomachen's table and chair in his office were placed strategically so that he could see people getting on and off the public transport bus. George recalls, “*His level of contact and intimate relationship with people was demonstrated by the fact that if he did not know someone who got off a bus, he would send one of his staff and invite that person for a cup of tea and get to know them.*”

Kunjomachen would easily make friends with people from different walks of life. Son Rojan adds, “*I have always observed how Achen dealt with people from different walks of life and I learnt a lot from him. He had many priests as friends. He had many friends in Alappuzha RTO office, Pola Reddiar and Uthaman at Ambalapuzha, Joseph Pallan and Sible aunty at Palarivattom, Fakeer of Kuttalam, Tamil Nadu and Philipkutty from Kudavechoor. Leaders like K.C. Joseph, M.M. Jacob, K.M. Mani, E. John Jacob and Babu Karimattom were some of the names always heard of and which are still in my memory.*” His friendly nature helped him form many long term associations both in business and in life.



A letter in *Kunjomachen's* handwriting to his daughter and son-in-law, on his letterhead.

LECO

In search of new avenues for growth, *Kunjomachen* decided to bring LECO to Edathua (a brand name for a type of coal, in brick form called lignite, mined in Neyveli, Tamil Nadu). He came to be known as LECO *Appachen* in the area. LECO was soon used as a fuel in hospitals, manufacturing, hotels, as well as homes. It was beginning to replace firewood as the traditional source of energy. Jacob remembers, “*Loads of trucks carrying LECO came in. It was a very exciting time for the community at large.*”

After the LECO business was a success, *Kunjomachen* took up an agency for India Cements which too, turned out to be a huge success, as the village's infrastructure had started developing. The cement business was the main income-generating enterprise for a very long time. It helped him to cover the ever-growing family expenses with ease.

Once while travelling to Neyveli by car late at night, he came across a person standing next to a broken down car, asking for a lift. *Kunjomachen* decided to give this stranded man a lift to the next town. He happened to be the Managing Director of India Cements. He was so impressed by *Kunjomachen's* LECO business and entrepreneurship that he offered him an agency of Sankar Cement. “*It was his social nature and goodwill that helped him get the Sankar Cement agency in a small village at a time when big towns like Thiruvalla, Changanacherry, Chengannur and Alleppey had no agents,*” says Jacob.

With his endeavours, *Kunjomachen* not only paved a way for his family and community, but also created a window of opportunity for nearby villages.



Kunjomachen's driving licence.

Kunjomachen always thought through all his investments. Mathew recalls, “*He was the first person to own a car in Edathua. He maintained a car all through his life. This was when there were very few cars on the road. He was very particular about changing the car once every 3 to 5 years. The reason being that for the first five years the vehicle is maintenance free. He always went for new cars- use it for 3 to 5 years and then sell it off. Depreciation was being claimed in the books of accounts.*”

Kunjomachen travelled a lot for his business and made long term connections with the people he met. Once while going to Tirunelveli for some work for the LECO business, his car hit a goat and broke its leg. The shepherd demanded a very high compensation. It was during this time that he met Fakeer Mohammed. He used to be a shepherd and helped *Kunjomachen* settle the issue. That was the start of a lifetime of friendship between *Kunjomachen* and Fakeer. He even helped Fakeer start a distribution business in fertilizers without taking an advance payment as he was short of funds. Due to *Kunjomachen*’s generosity, he later opened four shops in his region and subsequently got both Mangalore Chemicals and Fertilizers Limited (MCF) and the Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Limited (FACT) agencies.

Kunjomachen participated in the Nehru Trophy boat race. This premier snake boat race is held in Kerala on the second Saturday of August every year and draws in a huge crowd. People gather in large numbers to watch nearly 100 feet long boats compete against each other to the tune of old boat songs.

Each racing boat had a *kalavara vallam* (for food) and a motor boat for its support. Mysore Fertilizer Company’s Lotus brand had become a popular fertilizer in the area by *Kunjomachen*’s efforts, so he requested them to be the sponsor and they agreed. It was a very big event at the time.



Rubber plantation.

Kunjomachen saw potential when people saw none. George remembers, “*At one point in time, he bought 150 acres of barren land with no approach road in Malabar and with his hard work, converted it to an enviable rubber plantation. For many years, he walked long distances to develop the land. It was real hard work to turn it into a yielding rubber plantation.*”

He did not shy away from trying out new things in the farms as well. Although the type of soil and water did not suit cultivation of Basmati rice, *Kunjomachen* did not hesitate to try it out. He pioneered the cultivation of Basmati rice in the area. He also introduced the cultivation of cocoa in and around Edathua. Another time he planted *perumaram* (a fast growing softwood) for making matchsticks. His target was Rs. 50 lakhs as sales proceeds after 15 years. Even though his target was not achieved, he made a lot of money from the crop. He never lost hope.

Kunjomachen was always looking for ideal land available at affordable prices and therefore considered cash-rich by the community. Mathew shares, “*There were instances when anyone wanting to sell a property would say that Thomas V. Chirayil is looking out to buy the property – so as to attract more buyers and to get a better price. Some even asked him to act as if he was interested in purchasing it, so that the seller got the best price.*”

Kunjomachen adhered to the saying ‘*don’t keep all your eggs in one basket*’. He diversified his business from time to time. He set up a number of warehouses, a jewellery shop called Ranees Jewellery and built a lodge as well. Such was his dedication to his work that he picked up skills easily. During the period when he was in the gold business, he had developed the skill of estimating the weight of gold by manually assessing it.

The plot for the lodge building was 12 cents of land in the central market area of Edathua. Interestingly, it was a time when cement was not easily available so 2000 bags of cement were stocked in advance. The lodge building was constructed manually, including concreting and steel work; no machinery was used. All material was manually lifted to the various floors. *Kunjomachen* was an amateur Civil Engineer and had all the necessary skills to plan and execute the construction of several small and medium projects. Looking at the range of buildings he constructed over time, one is forced to wonder what he would have been capable of, had he been a trained engineer. Once the lodge building was completed, it was used as a hotel on one floor, a lodge, auditorium, and government offices on long term lease on other floors.

In 1977, he even ventured into manufacturing aluminium utensils. It was at this time that he also dealt with products of Kerala Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation, popularly known as MILMA. Milk came in cans and had to be boiled on arrival and sold in retail. All this was very time consuming. Ivan remembers asking his father if it was worth it, to which prompt came the reply, *“At least more people will come to the shop.”* He was thinking of foot falls and brand extension much before the number crunching MBAs came to the scene; such was his foresight.

Another business that *Kunjomachen* ventured into was furniture. He had an agency for Susan Furniture, manufactured in Alleppey. When the business had to close down due to less than expected sales, *Kunjomachen* took the loss in his stride, in spite of having some unsold inventory. Ivan vividly remembers his comments, *“In business you don’t make money every time. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Keep your eyes open and grab opportunities.”* He also advised him to spend money judiciously, *“If you make money, don’t try to find ways to spend it. Consider that your books of accounts are bearing the loss of profit. Use your money to live well and help others.”*

The construction of St. Paul’s building in the 60s was another landmark. Mathew recalls, *“He used the profit from other businesses to venture into buying some properties. Around the year 1970, he purchased a plot of land (6 cents) for Rs. 600 and built a two-storied building there.”* The building took the name of Pope Paul IV, who visited Bombay in 1964. Commemorating the Pope’s visit, the building was called St. Paul’s. He shifted his wholesale provision shop on the ground floor and his banking business on the first floor. He soon developed this into a distributorship of various items to Alleppey and other nearby districts. Washing Soap 501 became a famous brand all-around and shop owners from far flung areas came here to buy it. Dry fruits like dates and many other things available here, could not be found in Kuttanad, Kottayam or Alleppey.



Inauguration of hotel Thara.

For *Kunjomachen*, his father’s blessings were of foremost importance, therefore a special chair was kept for *Valliappachen* to come and sit at the shop. Taking the blessings of his father was a ritual before any new business venture. Even if *Valliappachen* did not fully understand the entirety of the business, if he disapproved, then *Kunjomachen* would not go ahead with the idea. He believed it was unwise to start a new venture without the blessings and goodwill of his father.

Around this time, *Kunjomachen* felt the agriculturists in Kuttanad were not able to get agricultural loans at low interest rates that the State Bank of India (SBI) was providing. He corresponded with the Central Finance Ministry and Reserve Bank of India and got a SBI – ADB (Agricultural Development Branch) sanction for Edathua. The Alappuzha Branch of SBI was entrusted with the job of opening this branch at Edathua. The Branch Manager there delegated *Kunjomachen* to find a suitable place to house the branch. Since there was no suitable building to house the SBI branch, *Kunjomachen* finally had to face the option of losing

the sanctioned branch or vacating the St. Paul's Building, and finding other premises for his own banking and wholesale provision store.

Not able to find a suitable place for the wholesale provision store, it was wound up and the banking business was shifted to a place on Boat Jetty Road, owned by the Church. SBI occupied both floors of the building for about 25 years before shifting to a different address. Now that building is occupied by other tenants and generates a rent 100 times the cost of the land. This speaks volumes about his farsightedness and commitment to the welfare of the local community.

Around the year 1975, when there were Government restrictions on Private Banks, he invested in building the St. George Tourist Home Complex and later, the Chirayil Towers. He believed that investments in land and buildings would never be a failure in the long term as it was the best investment to beat inflation. His thinking proved right and till today the family reaps its benefits.

For many years, *Kunjomachen* had a store and office right in the center of Edathua town from where he conducted numerous businesses. This was in a rented space owned by Edathua Church. In the mid 80s, all tenants in the building got an eviction notice from the Church that they needed to vacate the building as the Church planned to rebuild it. *Kunjomachen* had



Valliappachen inaugurating the auditorium. Also seen in the picture are Mathew and Kunjomachen.

to vacate the building and move his storefront and office to the erstwhile “*Car Shed*” building that he owned, which was away from the center of town.

It was around this time that *Kunjomachen*'s business started to decline. There were many reasons but it was primarily his poor health and the changing socio-economic conditions in Edathua with better roads and transportation and competing businesses in the area.

It was in these circumstances that the Edathua Church decided to sell by auction the last empty plot of land in Edathua town. This is the plot where Chirayil Towers stands today. Rojan recalls, *“I still remember his confidence the day before the auction for the property of Chirayil Towers owned by Edathua Church. Achen told his children at home confidently the previous night that for sure he will get the property in auction because it was very important for his business continuity as he had been requested to leave his old office in the center of Edathua.”* Son Anto was at home at this time and *Kunjomachen* requested him to accompany him to this auction at the Edathua Church. Anto recalls, *“On our walk to Church, Achen told me that he'd like to buy this plot as it was the last one in the town center and he wanted to ensure that if any of his children wanted to do business in Edathua in the future, they had a place in the center of town to operate out of. He also told me that if we win the auction, we have to immediately deposit 10% of the bid amount as earnest money and pay the rest in 30 days and he had no money. But he has faith that God will show the way.”*

At the auction, all prominent businessmen of Edathua were in attendance as this was the last plot of land in the town center. The market price of this plot was around Rs. 1 lakh, but due to strong interest and counter bidding, the price rose to more than Rs. 3 lakhs. At 3 times the market price, bidding stopped and *Kunjomachen* placed the winning bid. But he did not have money to pay the 10% earnest deposit. As we walked out of the auction room, he chatted up three other prominent businessmen in Edathua and borrowed the money they had brought with them for the earnest deposit in the event that they won the bid. Such was his reputation, no one refused him and gave him a loan on his word alone. Within an hour after the auction ended, we went to the Church counter and paid the earnest deposit. This was the beginning of Chirayil Towers where all his twelve children were given at least one room to do business, if they so desired.

There are two lessons from the story for future generations, says Anto, and both of these are ones *Kunjomachen* repeated often to his children. *“One is to have faith in God and He will show the way. And two, the reputation and credit you have in society is not something to be taken for granted, but something you need to build over time with your words and deeds.”*

Chapter 4

The Light Within- Ammini Thomas

Bloom where you are planted





Mathai Panicker

STORIES OF BELONGING

Ammi Panicker, the youngest of the six children, was born on December 10, 1933 in Mavelikara, present day Alappuzha district. Her father's name was Mathai Panicker and mother, Achamma Mathai Panicker. Her family was very well known in the area. They owned huge tracts of land where numerous workers lived and worked. Pushpam recalls her visits to the Panicker Veetil house in Mavelikara in great detail, *"My maternal grandfather looked royal in stature. Their household customs too, resembled a royal household. The house was made in laterite stones and had a grand appearance. The stones must have been of a special quality as even after all these years, the house still bears its grandeur. They had horse carriages for travel. There was a boat made of medicinal wood in the outhouse. This tub-like boat (enna thonni) was used for a royal massage and was filled with therapeutic oils. The person lay in this boat soaking in the oil."*



Thankamma (second from left, sitting), Mathai Panicker (middle, sitting), Chellamma (fourth from left, sitting), Ammini (third from left, sitting on the floor).



*Ammini Thomas with her siblings.
Left to Right: Saramma (Amalamamma), George Panicker, Aleykutty, Thankamma (Vennikulam Ammachy),
Thomas Panicker, Chellamma (Konni Ammachi), Ammini Thomas.*



The ancestral home of Ammini Thomas at Mavelikara.



*His Grace Archbishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios OIC,
Servant Of God, Amminikutty's uncle.*

Amminikutty's uncle, Aboon Geevarghese Ivanios, was the first Archbishop of Trivandrum. He was the chosen one by Christ to establish and be the first head of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. With a degree in History and Economics, he was a scholar, exemplary educationalist, orator, able administrator, leader, as well as an advocate of the Orthodox and the Catholic Church. He founded the Order of the Imitation of Christ, also known as Bethany, on August 15, 1919 at Mundamala in Ranni-Perunad. He was made Remban on January 28, 1925 at Thirumoolapuram Church and on May 1, he was ordained Bishop at Niranam with the title Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Order of Imitation of Christ. In May of 1932 he visited Rome and was warmly received by Pope Pius XI, who conferred on him the sacred pallium and on his return appointed him as the Archbishop of Trivandrum. In 1933, he was enthroned Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum. His presence in the household imparted deep spiritual and religious values in *Amminikutty*.

Aboon Geevarghese Ivanios was enthroned Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum. His presence in the household imparted deep spiritual and religious values in Amminikutty.

GROWING UP

Ammini or *Amminikutty* as she was lovingly called, lost her mother when she was one year old. After her mother’s demise, her aunt, along with her elder siblings, raised her. She was brought up with elegance and grace. A governess was appointed to teach her a range of accomplishments ranging from reading to drawing. As a child, *Amminikutty* never had to do any physical work and she had no exposure to cleaning, cooking and other work related to running a house like the girls of the time. *Amminikutty* grew up into a tall and beautiful young lady. She was soft spoken and exuded grace and poise. Her upbringing empowered her with a sense of dedication, responsibility and selfless humility.

TILL DEATH DO US PART

As *Amminikutty* came of age, her family started looking for a match for her and soon came across *Kunjomachen*. Since his family’s reputation was at par with them, the match was fixed. Rani recalls having heard that Bishop Mar Ivanios was also a part of the marriage discussions. “*The Bishop came to our house to see the boy with whom his niece was going to get married. He was a man of big stature,*” she says.



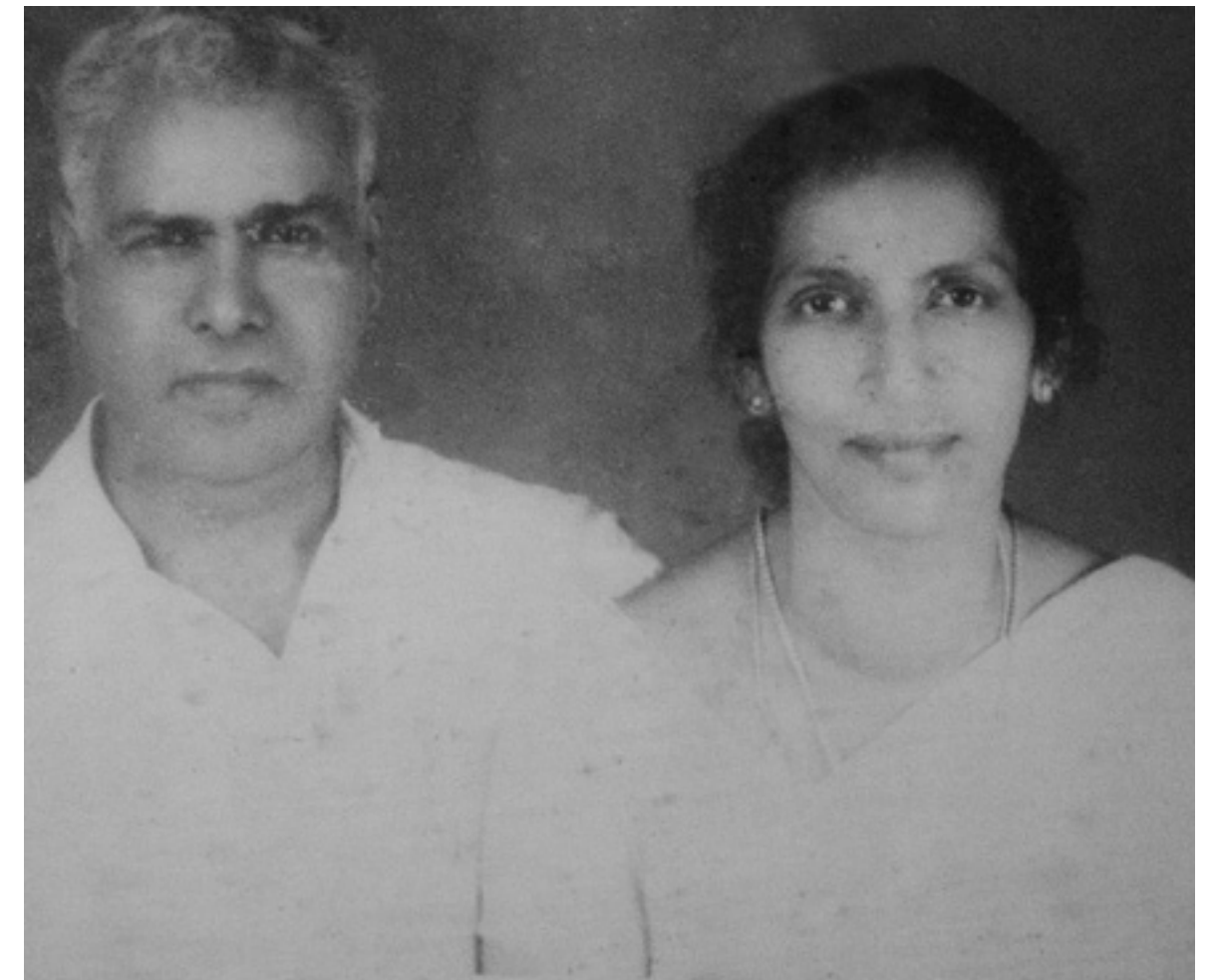
Thomas V. Chirayil and Ammini Thomas.



Thomas V. Chirayil and Ammini Thomas after their wedding.

On September 14, 1950, Ammini married Thomas V. Chirayil and moved to Edathua. Since the road network was very poor in the area, Paul shares having heard, *“She came by a vallam from Mavelikara to Edathua after her wedding.”* As the roads leading to the house were very narrow, car sheds were constructed for the cars near the house. *“The property,”* says Jacob, *“is locally referred to as ‘Car Shed’ even now.”*

Although having grown up in a highly protected and pampered environment, *Ammunikutty* assumed her new role as a wife and a daughter-in-law with conviction. Paul recollects, *“She had a very special work ethic. She was the first one to get up in the morning and the last one to bed at night. There were no days off or holidays. Winding up the day’s activities in a large farm house was a lengthy process; it included checking that all the chickens, animals, etc. were safe in their sheds and all the doors in all parts of the house were closed. I have never heard her complain about work. Such a concept was not in her vocabulary, and she was busy every minute of the day. On the contrary, she often counted her blessings and on top of the list was that all her children were alive and healthy.”*



Thomas V. Chirayil and Ammini Thomas.

The household was a joint family with relatives often staying in the house for long periods of time. Though there was help in the farm and in the kitchen, cooking for the people and taking care of domestic animals fell on *Ammunikutty*. There was nothing she couldn't do. *“Lost in her role, she soon became master of all trades even in milking the cows, when needed,”* remarks Pushpam. Mathew also recalls her ability to whip up a meal for many, *“She was used to getting surprise calls from Achen at about lunch time saying that there will be four or sometimes ten people for lunch that day, invariably government officials and the like; Ammachy would swing into action and lay out a huge spread on the table for the guests.”*

Ammunikutty and *Kunjomachen* shared a bond of mutual love and respect. The children have fond memories of seeing them around each other. Rani remembers how lovingly he would call out to her. She shares, *“There was love in the way he called her. The woman knows she is loved when her husband shows so much interest in all the children born to her. He always took her around with him.”* He set a high example for respect and dignity towards women in the household.

Left to Right: Paul, Mathew, Rani, Pushpam, George, Rosamma, Kusumam, Ivan, Jacob, Anto
(Front Row) Thomas V. Chirayil, Rojan, C.T. Varkey, Ammini Thomas, Jojo (in lap).



Ammachy's "multitasking" - Breastfeeding while cooking.

Kunjomachen and *Ammunikutty* raised twelve children - four girls and eight boys. Never did anyone feel less important than the other. Of his mother, George recalls, *“It was not a very unusual scene those days in our house - Ammachy in the kitchen cooking, one child on the floor on a mat drinking milk from a bottle, Ammachy breastfeeding another standing on a stool by her side, and just then comes in one with a complaint.”* Like her husband, she believed that *‘even if you have many children, deal with each child as if they are the only child’*. She dealt with every child, in-laws, grandchildren and great-grandchildren in such a manner that each one felt that they were special to her. She gave everyone abundant love. Her generosity and affection extended to the neighbours and those who came home. Having lost her mother early, she felt deeply for orphans. The pain of the loss of her mother stayed with her through her life and sometimes she even expressed it to her family.

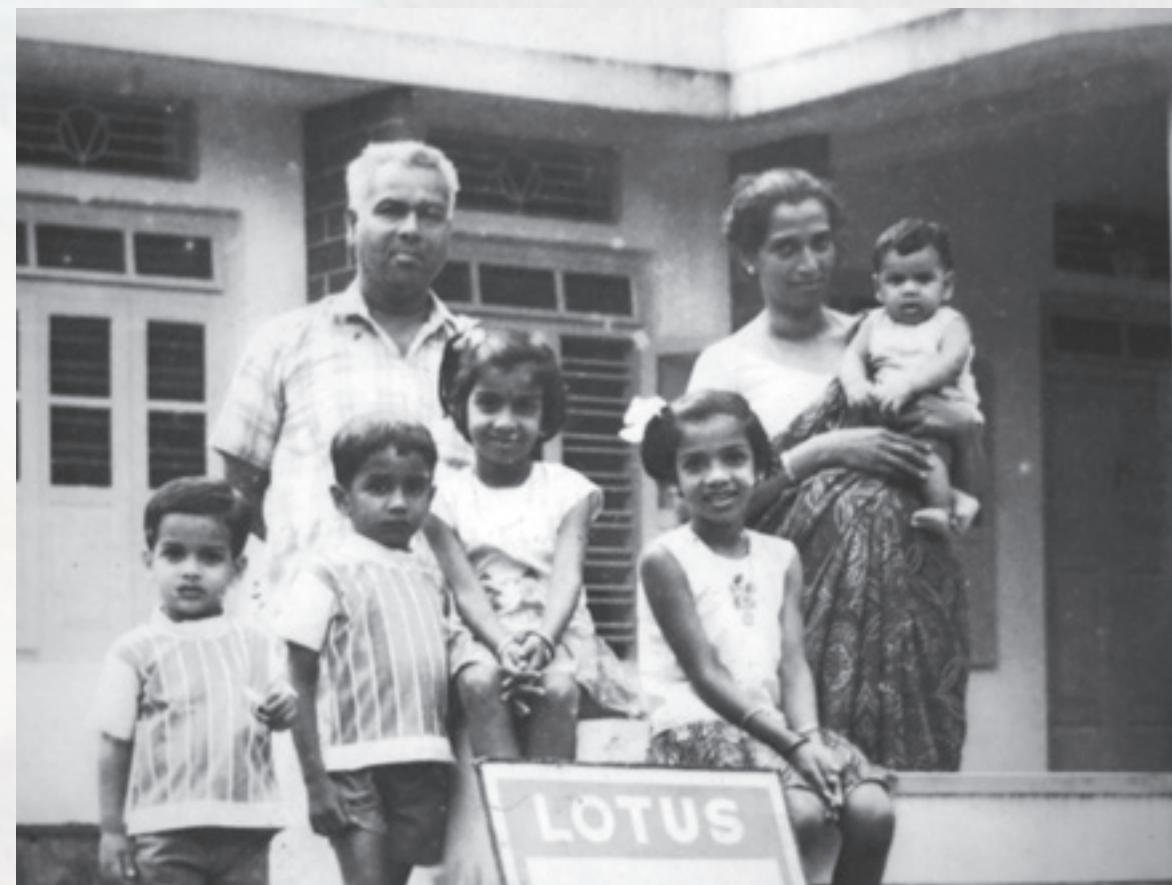
Amminikutty believed in simple living. Ivan recalls, “My mother had in her collection some under skirts made from cotton bags in which paddy seed came from Punjab. When I asked her why she wore such rough material she said that everyone’s needs must be met. That is quite a challenge. People of sacrifice and simple living have no wants, only needs.” Mathew further adds, “She never wore expensive jewellery either. Her only ambition was to see to her children’s health, see them study well and be well placed in life.”



Thomas V. Chirayil and Ammini Thomas.

Amminikutty was an ideal daughter-in-law. As soon as she took charge of the household, she became a caregiver for her parents-in-law and took care of them till the very end. Pushpam remembers, “When my grandfather was old and had even lost his memory, her care, patience and love for him was unforgettable and inspiring.”

Amminikutty had a deep faith in God. In every problematic situation, she had confidence that God was with her. Every day she went walking to Church along with her friends in the neighbourhood. When age-related ailments restricted her independent movement, she would go in the car and sometimes even in an autorickshaw. Daughter-in-law Sheeba remembers, “She attended Mass sitting in the vehicle. This act touched the hearts of many people and made many realise the importance of attending Holy Mass.” Amminikutty was a testament of faith before the people. She believed and practiced the twin virtues of forgiveness and humility.



Left to Right: Anto, Paul, Thomas V. Chirayil, Pushpam, Kusumam, Ammini Thomas with Rojan.

Amminikutty had a certain cheer and a ready laugh. She always showed compassion to the people working under her and readily got involved in their problems and tried to sort them out as much as she could. She could call upon considerable resources just with a phone call. People around her held her in very high regard. Paul recalls, “I remember a young man who had a certain deformity of the jaw that required an operation to correct it in a hospital in Bangalore. She raised the money for him and since then his career has blossomed.”

“She was not the type to slacken and complain when she was sick and you had to prise out her symptoms and problems. The Greeks had a word for it, ‘stoic’,” remarks Paul. “Ammachy was the candle that burnt out lighting the way for her children and the people she associated with,” adds Rojan.

A Family of Hope

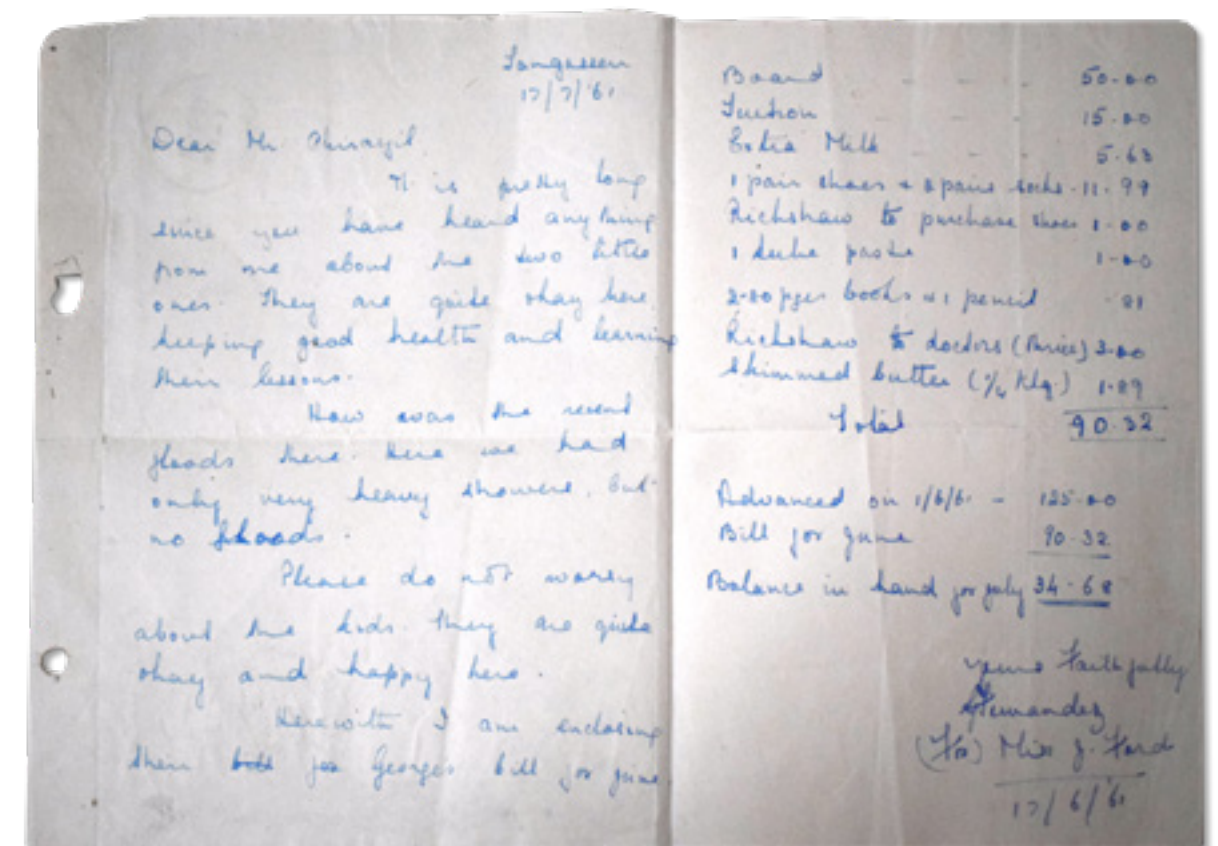
*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity- Psalm 133*





LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Kunjomachen or Achen to his children was a very loving father. All his children remember that he strove to provide them a comfortable life. From food to education, he paid close attention to their development. He made sure that all his children received the best education in the best schools and colleges in India. Money was never a constraint when it came to the education of his children. He was of the opinion that if the children studied in local schools, they will not match the education and exposure of the best schools. Whenever the children returned from their hostels for holidays, *Achen* made sure that all their needs were met. Very rarely did *Amminikutty* have to give him a list of requirements that needed to be bought for the children. He was always aware of the needs of his family.



A letter addressed to Kunjomachen from Rosamma and Rani's school.



Clockwise from left: Ivan, George, Kusumam (in arms), Jacob, Mathew, Pushpam (in lap), Paul (baby on the mat).



At Mathew's Communion.
Clockwise from left: Mathew, Rosamma, Rani, George, Ivan

When *Kunjomachen* had to travel out of town for work he made it a point to buy items in bulk for the requirement of the household. Even items like evening snacks were purchased in bulk. One such item fondly remembered by all the children is Britannia biscuits, which came in big tins. The tins almost reached the children's waist at that age (about 50 cm tall). One had to dive deep into the tins to get the biscuits towards the end. Most other items that had a long shelf life were purchased in bulk. Even cloth was purchased in bulk. A long piece of cloth would be converted by a tailor into shirts for all the children. The shirts would then be handed down to younger ones when the older siblings outgrew them.

Kunjomachen was a subscriber and regular reader of the popular English daily, *The Indian Express*. He insisted that all the children read the newspaper regularly and keep themselves updated with the latest news. He would ask all his children to write down the editorial of *The Indian Express*. It served twin purposes - it improved their handwriting, and gave them additional knowledge. He would also make them write some parts from the Holy Bible. “*He wanted us to learn Bible verses by heart. And even now we are practising this because we were introduced to it very early in life,*” reminisces Pushpam.



Left to Right (Back Row): Kunjomachen, Mathew, Ivan, George, Dr George John, Jacob
Left to Right (Front Row): Kusumam, Pushpam, Rosamma

Kunjomachen always found unique ways to inculcate the love for the Bible into his children. Kusumam reminisces, “*In the 4th standard, I was to begin the use of a pen. I told my father and he asked me to learn Psalms 23 and return. I promptly did it and he took me personally to buy the pen. This incident taught me many lessons. Firstly, for any achievement one must work hard. This also opened up my love for the Bible and God.*” “*I remember the prayer Achen used to recite while on a journey,*” says Ivan, “*Oh sacrament most holy, Oh sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment thine.*” “*He made us all recite it and now I feel like the sacrament has become a significant part of our lives,*” he adds.

Kunjomachen led by example. In the way he lived his life, he imparted numerous lessons to his children, some of his own and some imparted by his father. George remembers the importance *Achen* placed on the unity amongst the siblings and that is why Psalm 133 was a constant reference made by him.

He says that, “*Achen always asked us to be vigilant and to be there for the family in order to keep the enemies at bay. Enemies who aspire to break up good family bonds.*” Recalling an anecdote from his childhood he says that, “*Once, while some work was going on outside the house and we children were playing in the front yard, Achen instructed Ouseph (who was working on the boundary fence), to cut a bunch of 12 sticks, a foot each in length. After Ouseph did as instructed, Achen tied all the sticks together and asked all of us to have a go at trying to break them while they were tied together. Of course, all of us failed to do it. Then, he untied the bunch and asked the youngest one to break one of the sticks, which was done with minimal effort. Then he said, ‘The 12 sticks represent the 12 of you. If you all stand in unison, you’ll possess immense strength. No harm will come to you. However, if one of you takes a separate way, he/she will become weak and be easily broken.’*”

Kunjomachen taught his children how staying true to oneself is the most important virtue in life because if one knows himself/herself to be on the right side, they will always stand their ground and not become hypocrites. But at the same time, as Rani recalls, he would say, “*There is no point in crying about situations in life if you still have fresh air to breathe. Take a deep breath, gather yourself and live your life. There might come challenging situations that refuse to die down, and we can always think of ways to overcome them, if only we remember to take life one day at a time.*”

Kunjomachen also cautioned them to not fall for sob stories. George recalls, “*While travelling with Achen on a train journey, I met a boy my age at a station. He told me a sad story about his life. I believed it. I told Achen to take him home along with us. Achen smiled and said, ‘OK, but don’t believe such stories just like that.’ As a test, Achen gave him a small amount and asked him to get something to eat for himself. He ate and came back with the change, thus passing the first test. On reaching home, he stayed only till midnight or so. Early in the morning, we found him missing along with some money and valuables. I learnt my lesson that morning- not to believe sob stories without checking*”

Even though his children were students at some of the most reputed schools, *Kunjomachen* believed in inculcating a sense of responsibility and respect towards everyone. “*These people have no qualms or pompousness. They can even sleep on the floor if the situation demands so. Although you might be doctors and engineers, but the sense of dignity in them makes them no less than you,*” are the words that Rani fondly remembers him saying often. “*Achen loved us dearly but was strict wherever necessary. He used to take us everywhere not by public transport but by car,*” recalls Rojan.



This is a safe made of heavy steel, which Kunjomachen bought during his banking business days for safe keeping of money and documents (1960s and 70s). It is about 7 feet tall with thick steel doors.



Rojan and Jojo

When Mathew recalls his father, he remembers his professional attitude and his mantra of doing business and living life, *“Expect the most unexpected in every moment of your life. Even a friend can become a foe given the chance.”* Mathew says that, *“There was a sense of professionalism in whatever Achen did. There was an elegance to the way he wrote business letters, the filing system he maintained, and the way reminders were sent whenever needed.”*



Left to Right: George, Ivan, Paul (in front), Mathew.

One more interesting quality about his father that still remains fresh in Mathew's mind is the way he travelled. *"Achen would form connections with fellow travellers whenever he travelled. It did not matter whether he was travelling by bus or train, he would interact with as many people as he could. If he was in a train, his interaction would spread throughout the bogey he was travelling in and this interaction would be to form some sort of connection with people, some of whom he would advise and from some he would seek precious wisdom,"* recalls Mathew. Interestingly, it was on one of his train journeys that *Kunjomachen* met the Principal of Montfort School, Yercaud, which later became the school attended by five of his sons. This decision was made on the basis of his interaction with the man who told him that the institution's focus was to impart a Catholic based education.

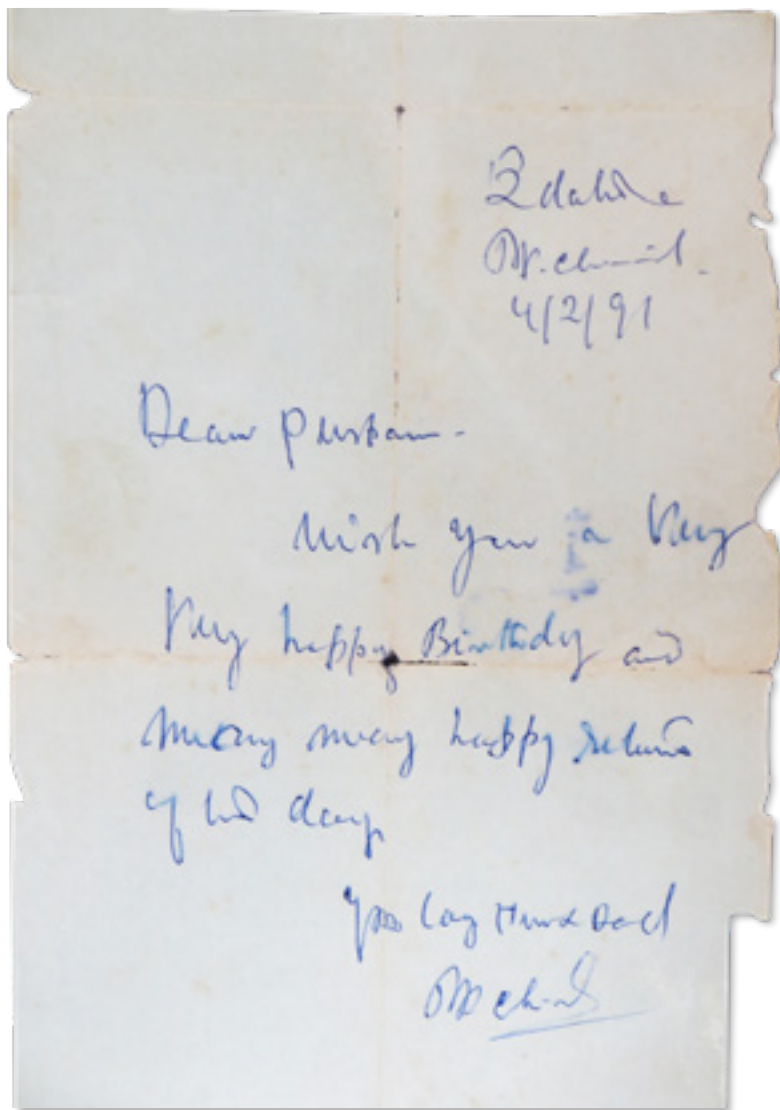
Recalling the importance that her father-in-law laid on the importance of time, Jolly says that, *"He always encouraged us to make fruitful use of time, irrespective of how short in duration it might be. When we shifted to Chirayil 140, to inculcate a sense of responsibility in me and to teach me the importance of time, he taught me to take care of everything we had. He tasked me with supervision of the yard and keeping a track of which crop has sprouted, what needs to be harvested and what needs further nurturing"* Laying emphasis on the importance of spending wisely, he also advised that they maintain accounts of all incomes and expenditures.

Following the phrase *'Prevention is better than cure'*, when the twelve siblings were growing up, herbal medication was a constant feature. This was not done owing to some illness but to help develop immunity against illnesses and to maintain good health. George recalls that, *"One particular herbal medicine, Ashta Choornam, had a very bitter taste and was very difficult to swallow, for the children at least. In particular, Rosamma Chechy used to make a huge fuss about it as she found it almost impossible to even place it in her mouth. But as it was inescapable for everyone, this used to be a fun time for us, the youngsters. Under Achen's guidance, we used to pin her down and force the medicine down her throat."*



Chunnambu Chellam and Paaku Vetti (betel nut cutter): The container is used for storing the lime used in paan chewing. The metal rod on the top goes through a hole in the lid, and when pulled out provides adequate lime stuck on the rod. The knife beside it is used to split open the areca nut seeds and to make into smaller shavings before preparing to chew it.

During *Achen's* younger days he took special care to train the children with many skills, one of them was professional typing. George adds, *"Thanks to Achen, soon after high school we were sent to typing tutorials. Some of the locals did not think it was good idea because it was meant for the dropouts. But Achen said children must learn whatever they can."* He was of the belief that no one can predict when a skill will prove useful. Even just before going to engineering college, George had to go for typing classes, where some people in the typing class refused to believe that he had secured an admission for engineering. They would often quip that since he was learning typing, there was no way he had secured a place to pursue engineering. The typing skills indeed turned out to be a great help, especially now in this age of computers. George declares, *"I am now proud of it like nothing else."*



Kunjomachen's letter to Pusham.

Kunjomachen's reputation made him a known figure in the entire area. Recalling an interesting incident, George shares, “*This one time, I was sitting with Achen and his friend in his kada (shop/office) at Edathua. Suddenly, we were approached by a well-dressed elderly gentleman who said, ‘I have firstly come for a first-hand verification, then for a confession and then to express my sincere admiration for my old mate.’*” As it turned out, the man was *Kunjomachen's* old classmate who had settled in a big city. The person was very proud of his own achievements in life and as a matter of habit, made it known to everyone he met. During one of his achievement-declaring sessions, someone told him about the things that *Kunjomachen* had been able to achieve in life while living in a small place like Edathua. He was so amazed that he came to Edathua to see for himself and express his admiration for *Kunjomachen*.

In another anecdote from the chronicles of the *kada*, George remembers that once, an elderly looking gentleman shopped for things that weighed about 10 kg. As it happened, none of the assistant staff were available at the shop to help the man to take this heavy load to his

boat. George shares, “*Seeing this, Achen asked me to take it for him and as I was walking with the man carrying the load, he asked me a few questions and eventually understood that I was the shop owner's son and the surprise on his face was quite evident. He thanked me and appreciated the fact that Achen told his own son to carry the heavy load for the elderly customer.*”

On the decision of his marriage, George shares, “*My first job, coupled with the subsidized food for three times, shared accommodation and the company transportation, paid me just enough to get me by in life during those days. It was at that point of time in my life when Achen suddenly came to me one day and said, ‘You should get married’. I was startled and my response was just like anyone's response would have been to such a question in such a financial situation. ‘It is possible only after I settle down,’ I said. But Achen was so sure of this that he replied, ‘Son, don't you worry about that. All of us finally settle down only when we are lowered into a pit for our burial. Everything in life has its time and this is the time for you to get married.’ I got married and honestly, now when I look back at the decision and the timing of it, I think that I could not have taken a better decision.*”

Ivan's memories of his father remind him of how composed the man was in his life and life decisions. Ivan remembers that while growing up, there was a teak tree in their compound, the best teak tree he had ever seen. “*I must've been 12 years old when the tree was cut down and taken to the mill by our carpenter the next day, to be cut into even planks. These planks were then stored in the attic of our house, allowing the wood much needed time to dry out,*” remembers Ivan. He further adds that, “*Whenever, during our childhood adventures, I would manage to sneak up into the attic, I always wondered what the purpose of those planks were. However, it wasn't until many years later, when Valliappachen passed into the next world, that we actually came to know their purpose. The same carpenter came along with two others and started working with those planks, only to carve out of them, the most beautiful coffin that Edathua had ever seen. Valliappachen's journey to the burial ground and his last resting place was in this magnificent coffin. This was the level of planning that Achen had for this father. A lesson worth a lifetime to all his children.*”

Chaddu: Often carpenters were hired to construct furniture from trees cut down from the home compound. These carpenters worked at home often for several weeks until their project was complete. This was a toy made from leftover wood on one such occasion. It can carry a small child in it.



Recalling a very interesting anecdote, Ivan says that, “Once, Achen had to go to Trivandrum for some work. Before setting off, he got four kulas of banana cut and asked us, the children, to count the kulas. He then instructed us to go to the local market in Edathua and inquire about the price they will fetch there. When we were back, he got them loaded in the trunk of the car and set off. After selling the produce in the Trivandrum market, when Achen counted the profit, he showed us that the difference between their price in Edathua and Trivandrum covered the cost of the fuel of the car from Edathua to Trivandrum. That was the kind of business acumen he wanted to develop in his children right from the earliest of their days.”

Of his father, son Jojo recollects, “He had many good qualities: wisdom, insight and foresight about which I could go on and on. Many here (Edathua), especially the younger generation have told me that just taking into consideration some of the buildings he constructed in and around the place speaks volumes of his foresight. Though he has lived only for sixty-five years, he has achieved much more than most people could dream of. In comparison to my forty-eight or so years to date and my siblings or the community at large he is way ahead. Many in my neighbourhood and the people I interact with, often comment as to why none of his children who should have inherited his qualities are showing the promise in entrepreneurship. There is no doubt that some of Achen and Ammachy’s children have many shades of his qualities but have yet to prove the same.”

The lessons that *Kunjomachen* taught his children through words and conduct are timeless. Every member of the family has tried to emulate his qualities and pass on his lessons.



Kunjomachen celebrating his 60th birthday.



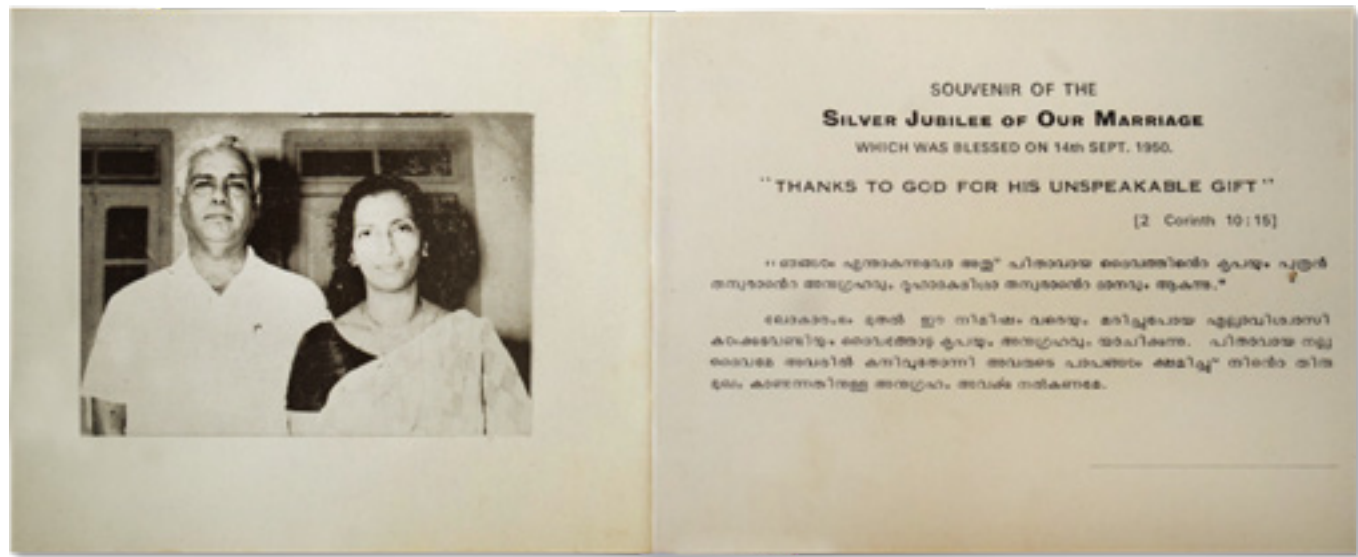
Left To Right (Back Row): Kunjomachen with Jacob, Amminikutty with Kusumam.
(Front Row): Mathew, Ivan, George

THE FRAGRANCE OF JASMINE

Amminikutty matched her husband in letter and spirit. Affirming, radiating and strong-willed are some of the words her children use to describe her. She was selfless and never complained about anything. She worked tirelessly through the day to ensure that all her children were well taken care of. She often recounted her blessings and the fact that all her children were well and healthy was something she was immensely thankful for.

Giving birth to twelve children, looking after them and a big household, *Amminikutty* or *Ammachy* for her children, did everything with finesse. She remained levelheaded, keeping up with everything gracefully. She was very humble and dedicated to the upbringing of all her children. Her devotion to her family did not go unnoticed and was praised by family and community alike. *“We are probably the youngest dozen in the region at this time in history. Ammachy was given a special honour and recognition at a Church function to commemorate her courage and dedication to such a large family. No one else has received such an honour in the history of the Church,”* George remembers fondly.

She motivated each one in her own style, fully understanding the requirements of each child. She paid special attention to the food that was prepared in the house. It was prepared acknowledging the tastes and preferences of each one.



Card commemorating Kunjomachen and Amminikutty's 25th wedding anniversary.



This is a copy of a painting by the Italian painter Giovanni. It was a big copy (4 feet by 1.5 feet). It has been in the central hall of the house in the same position for more than 60 years. It shows Jesus in a boat with his apostles approaching the shore of a lake.

Months before the children came home for their long holidays, she would have in the backyard riverlet, hundreds of ducks, fattened and ready to be cooked for her children. She made sure to have a stock of eggs in the house. At any given time, there were at least three or four cows in the large cow shed. She would milk the cows early in the morning, before the children got up. It was only later that she hired ‘*Annachy*’, a helper to milk the cows. She always planned out to have milk-giving cows in the cow shed, when children were at home for the long holidays (three months). Like her husband, *Amminikutty* was very keen on educating all their children. As was customary at the time girls were expected to do housework and help around the house but *Amminikutty* preferred her daughters spend their time focusing on their education.

Thadimathu: This is used to churn milk to produce butter and buttermilk. It is positioned vertically in a pot with milk (the wooden lid of the pot has a hole in the middle to position this device centrally and vertically). The lady doing the churning is seated on a low stool with her legs outstretched and the heels on the lid of the pot. There is a small piece of rope between her toes to stabilise this rod. It is then twirled to and fro with a coir rope wound around it using to and fro movements of the hands - like alternate pulling and pushing.





Thadi Ural: This is used to powder rice grains or other seeds. The pounding was done standing up using a long stick (which was tipped with an iron cap). The rod was literally thrown into the conical chamber using rhythmic movements and sometimes when the volume was large two people alternatively handled this rod with a fine rhythm.

Food was an important part of the household. *Ammunikutty* prepared everything with a lot of care and love. Delicious mouth-watering aroma wafted through the air when she cooked. “Coconut based gravy with jackfruit seeds and raw mango. The mustard seeds crackled with curry leaves and red chilli in coconut oil. The sumptuous fish curry in red gravy, Kokum and the variety with grated coconut, the duck roasts were all relished,” recalls Rani delightfully. “We all remember the delicious curries she made for us- duck curry, fish curry, yellow curry, chutneys, pickles and pavakka kondattam. I remember Ammachy preparing the idli batter in the traditional grinder late in the evenings. When all members of the family visited, she ensured that there was enough food for all, even snacks and sweets for children. Even when she was bed-ridden, she ensured that there was enough groceries, fruits, vegetables and milk in the kitchen. Whenever we got ready to fly back to our places of work after our annual vacation, she used to prepare parcels and packets of food for us to take,” Rojan adds.

Jolly remembers having learnt most of her cooking from *Ammunikutty* after marriage. *Kunjomachen* really enjoyed his food. Seeing him eat was a treat to the eyes. So much so that it made the onlookers hungry. He liked to have a sumptuous spread during meals and *Ammunikutty* happily obliged. Many a time even after he had had a delicious meal, he would call out *‘Ammini what about Kari Nalikka’* (a black dish made with gooseberry). It was his favourite dish.



Varpu: This is used for boiling paddy (rice with husk). The process is called parboiling. It is then milled and it increases its nutritional value.

There was very little that *Ammunikutty* could not do, from preparing delectable dishes to brewing special medicinal oils, she did it all. *Ammunikutty* was a master craftswoman in making the oils that her husband and father-in-law used on their hair and body. She had acquired a couple of handwritten recipes from Kesavan Vidayan, the local Ayurvedic doctor. Ever so often she would painstakingly get herbs and barks of trees and start the lengthy process of preparing these oils. Simmered for long hours in virgin coconut oil that she specially made, she always ensured that those little *bharenis* that held these oils were replenished. Sometimes she even allowed the children to use these oils but preferred to make a special oil for the children. “I remember as a child being smeared in oil and waiting the mandatory one hour before bath,” Ivan recalls fondly. “Now when I have time, I apply some of these oils, branded of course and missing the one ingredient that made it very special - Ammachy’s enduring love for Achen and respect for his father,” he adds woefully.



Clockwise from left: Mathew, Rojan, Paul, Anto with a friend’s son.



Despite having her hands full with the children and a bustling household, *Ammunikutty* was always attentive towards all her children. An incident from childhood that George remembers aptly depicts how aware *Ammunikutty* was. He recalls, “*Similar to the habit with children now, whenever, we, as children wanted to go to relieve ourselves, we first would tell Ammachy who was usually in the kitchen and then proceed to remove our shorts while informing her and walking to the toilet. This practice proved to be a blessing for Ranichechy (or shall we say act of providence in this instance to be readily available for the rescue of Ranichechy). On this occasion I was just getting ready for the venture with my shorts removed, I heard Ammachy shout out ‘Rani don’t play with fire’ (mothers know what their obedient children are up to even when not in sight) when Ranichechy was sitting near the rear door to the outside of the now ironing room. She was playing with fire from a lamp. At that time her hair caught fire. It was her luck or more appropriately a timely action by her guardian angel that I was close by with my shorts in my hand. I used it to put out the fire. The first naked firefighter saved the day.*”



Left to Right: Anto, Paul, Pushpam, Kusumam

Children being her topmost priority, *Ammunikutty* was always concerned about their health and wellbeing. If anyone was seriously sick, all other matters were put aside to focus on that. If you were even slightly sick you could expect some serious pampering. Paul recollects, “*As a child even to see a dentist you had to travel 30 kilometres. This usually involved a visit to her ancestral home in Mavelikara. She accompanied you there and it was a place where you got very special care.*” Sometimes the children also got to see a film at the MKV theatre adjacent to her ancestral house. The tickets were free for her family as the land for the theatre was donated by her father.



Left to Right: Jacob, Mathew, Rojan, Amminikutty, Ivan, Jojo, Anto, George, Paul

Amminikutty made sure she fed her children food that improved their health. Sheeba recalls, “She used to give a juice of tulsi (basil) and panikoorka (coleus) for cold and fever. She prepared a health drink-juice of gooseberry, turmeric, ginger and curry leaf. She insisted on the use of garlic and ginger in every day diet. She made ‘thavidu kizhi’ with thavidu (rice bran), moringa leaf and crystal salt, which were filled in a small cloth bag and then steamed in a steamer. It was used for children during cough and chest infections. She used ‘chena’ (elephant yam), rich in iron and kumbalanga (ash gourd), a good antioxidant in the weekly diet of the family.”

Along with the body, Amminikutty also made sure to nurture her children’s souls. She had a unique ability to make everyone feel special, comfortable and above all loved. “She was a very gentle soul; even though with big families situations could get overwhelming very quickly, I have never seen her getting angry with anyone. Her parenting style was warm and nurturing. She would always encourage us to be a lot more patient with our children,” recalls Lizzy.

Ivan remembers his mother as an eternally grateful and content woman, “Out of the twelve children, no one has a handicap or is unhealthy; that is the biggest blessing life has bestowed upon us.” While Ivan believes that all of this was because of the prayers of their parents, he recalls *Kunjomachen* as a person who did not usually demonstrate his faith. He says, “My father’s faith was of a very different kind altogether. While indulging in charity, as he often did, his left hand did not know what his right hand gave in charity. He ensured a good Christian education for his children and inculcated in them the importance of prayer and generosity.”



Amminikutty's signature.

Between 1979-80 after finishing school Kusumam studied in the Edathua college. Unlike the rest of her siblings who were away in hostels, Kusumam stayed at home. During this time, she experienced the depth of her mother’s love. She recalls, “Her motherhood bloomed and I was the one who experienced the bloom of the fragrance of a mother. She must have been excited to have one of her children going to school and returning home everyday.” Every day when Kusumam got ready for college, Amminikutty put a white chain of fresh jasmine flowers on her long hair. “In college I was known as the girl with white flowers and this fragrance of that bunch of flowers still fills with happiness each day of my life. During these two years she made lots of long skirts and blouses for me; she enjoyed watching me go and come. She taught me stitching and hand embroidery and handed over her embroidery threads kit to me. I have seen her doing beautiful cross stitches and that has inspired me too,” she remembers.



Clockwise from top left:
Mathew, Rosamma, Pushpam,
Paul, Amminikutty, Anto

Amminikutty always strived for the betterment of her children even if it meant staying far away from them. Rojan recalls, “Even when her children went abroad to work, Ammachy was only happy that her children became employed and self-sufficient. Even though she liked everyone to be with her, she always discouraged me from coming back, leaving my job in Kuwait to take care of her. She sacrificed her wishes for our own future.”

Amminikutty’s personality was such that she left an impact on everyone she met. Paul remembers, “All those who came in touch with her can attest that they felt a deep bond with her and that she made them feel special. I remember Vishwambaran (an old family driver and multitasker) once brought his daughter to Ammachy. His daughter had some bald patches on her scalp. His only request was that Ammachy place her hand on the girl’s head. He was sure that it would solve the issue.”



Achen and Ammachy with Rojan and Jojo - the youngest and favourites - Jojo by virtue of being the youngest should naturally have had less time with Achen and Ammachy than the elder siblings, but, has had more intimate and continued contact in the spirit, simply by virtue of the blessing of living with family in the very house Valliappachen lived in and subsequently expanded during Achen and Ammachy’s time to accommodate their dozen children.



Ammachy with all the children.

Amminikutty’s personality was such that she left an impact on everyone she met. All those who came in touch with her can attest that they felt a deep bond with her and that she made them feel special.

In her sunset years she always liked to have some money in hand to give out to any one whom she thought was in need. In her later years she had limited mobility and her children had mostly left home. One was amazed at what she could accomplish with a phone call from her Nokia phone. She was respected so much that nobody could refuse anything that she asked for.





Chapter 6

A Life of Service

*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect
in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my
infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Corinthians 12:9





A LIFE OF SERVICE

The community played an important role in the life of *Kunjomachen*, who always considered it to be his prime duty to be of service to others. His stature in the community commanded a lot of respect. From early on, *Kunjomachen* was actively involved in community service—a trait he inherited from his father. Rani remarks, “*The village was like his own child.*” “*No one would leave empty-handed from our house; he would help however he could,*” adds Kusumam. People would come to him for settling disputes or asking for advice. “*There were many who wanted him to inaugurate or even in a small way be a part of their venture because they believed in his golden touch. Many even say that Achen and Ammachy handled even the most downtrodden ones with mercy and care,*” recalls Jojo.



At the inauguration of the Sub Treasury, Edathua by K.M. Mani, former Minister of Finance.



At the inauguration of the Sub Treasury, Edathua by K.M. Mani, former Minister of Finance.

From stocking all the necessary supplies that the village could possibly need in his store to bringing new avenues of development in the village, he did it all. Mathew remembers, “*He was very much involved in all possible community activities, like the YMCA, Thiruvalla Lions Club, and Trustee Trading Community (now Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samithi). He was also the founding member and long time President of St. Aloysius College and a Managing Board member.*” He made great efforts to bring SBI Agricultural Development Bank to Edathua since most of the people were involved in agriculture. This is also the main reason for stopping all his business activities in St Paul’s building. “*He gave up his flourishing grocery business with distributorship of many items to enable and bring the State Bank of India to Edathua with provision for agricultural loans. Soon people could take up to a sum of a lakh rupees as loan from the bank,*” shares Jacob. “*His selflessness was such that he gave up his flourishing business and office space in St. Paul’s in order to set up this bank, since there were no private buildings in Edathua back then,*” he adds.

Being a visionary, *Kunjomachen* realised that bringing institutions was important for attaining sustainable development in Edathua. One such institution was the Industrial Training Institute (ITI), which he not only initiated but also supported its building construction, spreading awareness among locals about job opportunities and even in the purchase of *lathes* from Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT).

After the bank was set up, *Kunjomachen* realised that a telephone exchange and police station would bring in easier access to productivity and ensure the maintenance of law and order in Edathua. Therefore, he went ahead and donated land and initiated a police station in Edathua. For setting up the exchange, it was mandatory to have at least ten telephone connection orders. And so, he went around and successfully gathered ten connection orders. “*The ITI was one of those ten who accepted a phone to make up the minimum 10 phones required in order to get the first telephone exchange set up in Edathua,*” shares Jacob. “*There are two reasons for this,*” shares Mathew, “*He needed a telephone facility to communicate to the outside world for his business purposes and he wanted Edathua to develop like other areas.*” His telephone number was 21. He was also amongst the first to have a postal bag in Edathua. The number of the bag was Post Bag No. 2, which is still maintained. He was also instrumental in bringing the Sub Treasury to Edathua. This still benefits thousands of pensioners, government employees and teachers to date. Apart from that he also brought the Sales Tax Office, the Public Works Department (PWD) office and a godown of the Kerala State Warehousing Corporation to Edathua.

Edathua Telephone Exchange.





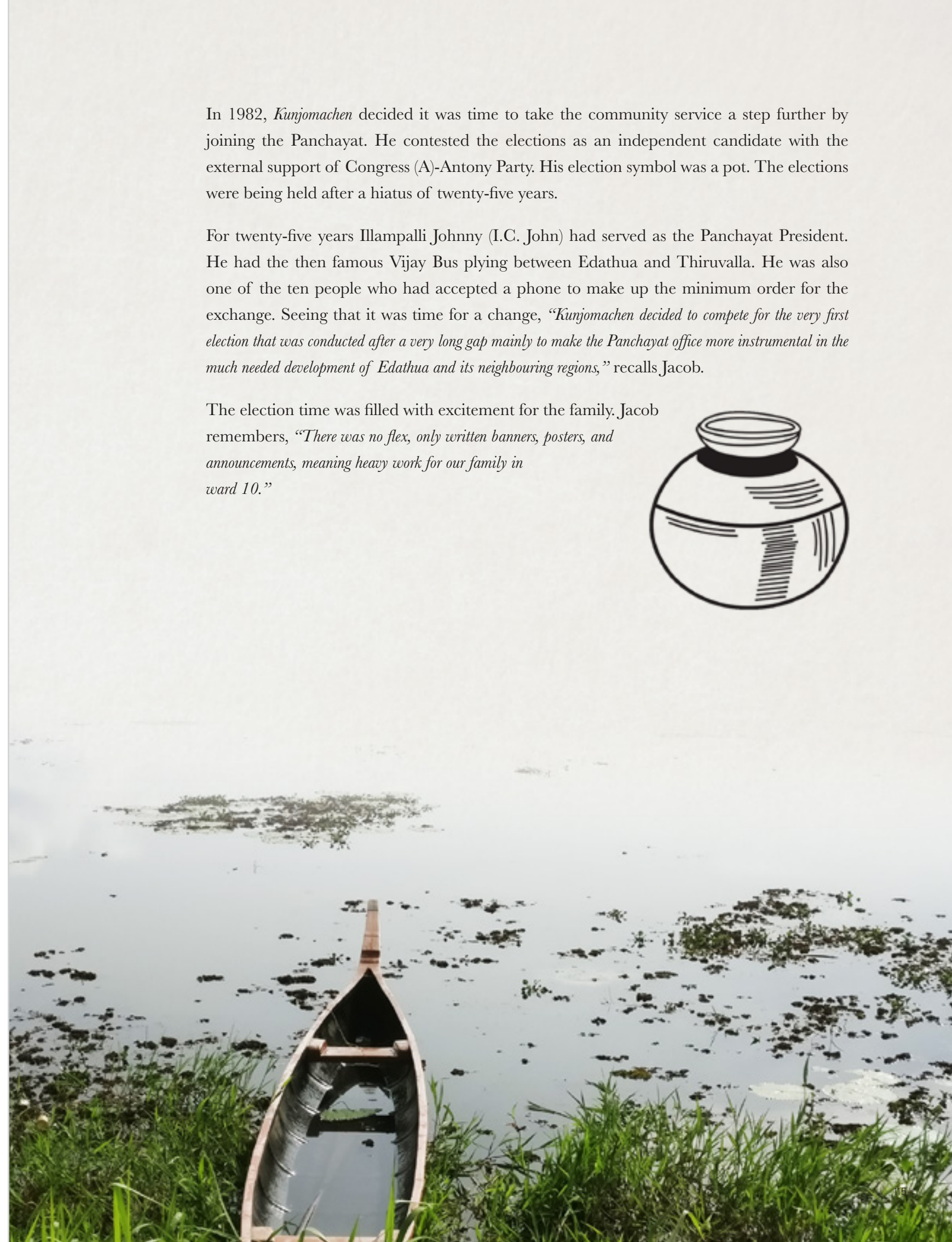
Kunjomachen

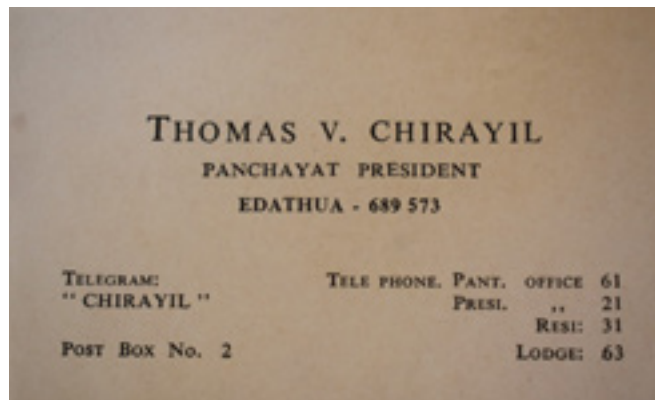
In 1974, *Kunjomachen* was admitted to a hospital in Kottiyam with a myocardial infarction. Coincidentally, the Bishop of Kottar was also admitted in the same hospital and their beds were side by side. In the process of their recovery, the two gentlemen struck a friendship. Finding a common ground in their unshakeable belief in the Almighty, they would together participate in the daily Mass even when restricted to the hospital bed. Jacob recalls the Bishop asking *Kunjomachen* if some charity could be expected. Looking at his fragile health, *Kunjomachen* promised the Bishop that if he recovers, he would consider it and in the same breath also requested the Bishop to pray the oppees for him if he passes away. To this the Bishop replied that God has many more plans for him and that he would still live to see many more years. The Bishop's words proved to be true and *Kunjomachen* recovered. He decided to get twenty-five underprivileged girls married in a single day. The event took place with the blessings of *Kunjomachen*.

In 1982, *Kunjomachen* decided it was time to take the community service a step further by joining the Panchayat. He contested the elections as an independent candidate with the external support of Congress (A)-Antony Party. His election symbol was a pot. The elections were being held after a hiatus of twenty-five years.

For twenty-five years Illampalli Johnny (I.C. John) had served as the Panchayat President. He had the then famous Vijay Bus plying between Edathua and Thiruvalla. He was also one of the ten people who had accepted a phone to make up the minimum order for the exchange. Seeing that it was time for a change, "*Kunjomachen decided to compete for the very first election that was conducted after a very long gap mainly to make the Panchayat office more instrumental in the much needed development of Edathua and its neighbouring regions,*" recalls Jacob.

The election time was filled with excitement for the family. Jacob remembers, "*There was no flex, only written banners, posters, and announcements, meaning heavy work for our family in ward 10.*"





Kunjomachen's visiting card as the Panchayat President.

In September 1982, the results were announced and *Kunjomachen* was unanimously voted as the Panchayat President for the next five years. His victory marked the beginning of some of the major developments in Edathua – construction of bridges, roads, particularly in the inner rural parts of the district, boat jetty, ferry etc. “*Many times the work was even funded by our bank,*” recalls Jacob. At this time, Thankachayan got involved in the construction. Due to his people friendly nature, he made friends with the Panchayat director and secured funds for the development of the region. He was instrumental in bringing the Sub Treasury to Edathua and also gave space in his own building at low rent for them to set up an office. This was a blessing for many who required its services by avoiding many hours of travel. The government hospital which was last upgraded by the British was also refurbished during his tenure.



Left to Right: Thomas V. Chirayil, K.G.R. Kartha, former MLA, Dr K.C. Joseph, former MLA at the inauguration of a new block at Government Hospital Edathua.

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Kunjomachen was a very good friend of the then Food Minister, E. John Jacob. His other high profile friends and associates included ministers, politicians, and businessmen such as M.P. Mathai, K.M. George, K.M. Mani, E.S. John and others. Under the initiative of E. John Jacob a Farmers Association was formed, which later took a political shade and gradually grew into the Kerala Congress. During that period a major conflict developed within Kerala Congress and in an attempt to resolve the issue, a marathon meeting was held in Edathua Tharavadu, which included a number of ministers. The meetings that lasted three days and two nights finally reached a positive conclusion with written agreements signed by the concerned. This initiative by E. John Jacob sadly did not last very long.

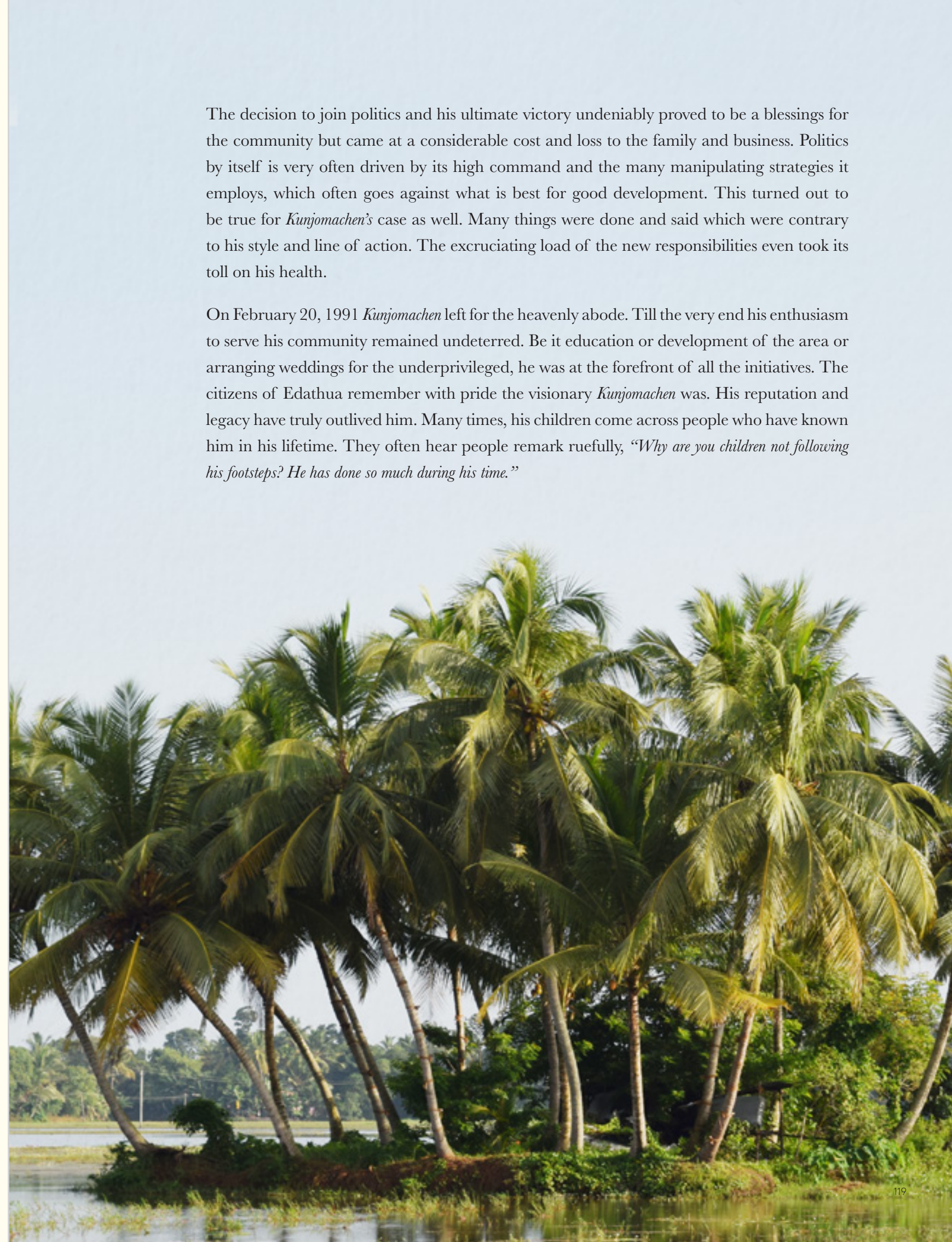
Kunjomachen held several meetings with the then union ministers A.K. Antony and K.M. Mani with the hope of benefiting the people and region. He even initiated the rice mills in Alappuzha and other areas in and around the region after visiting a couple of rice mills in the neighbouring states and being convinced of their efficacy and success.



Kunjomachen

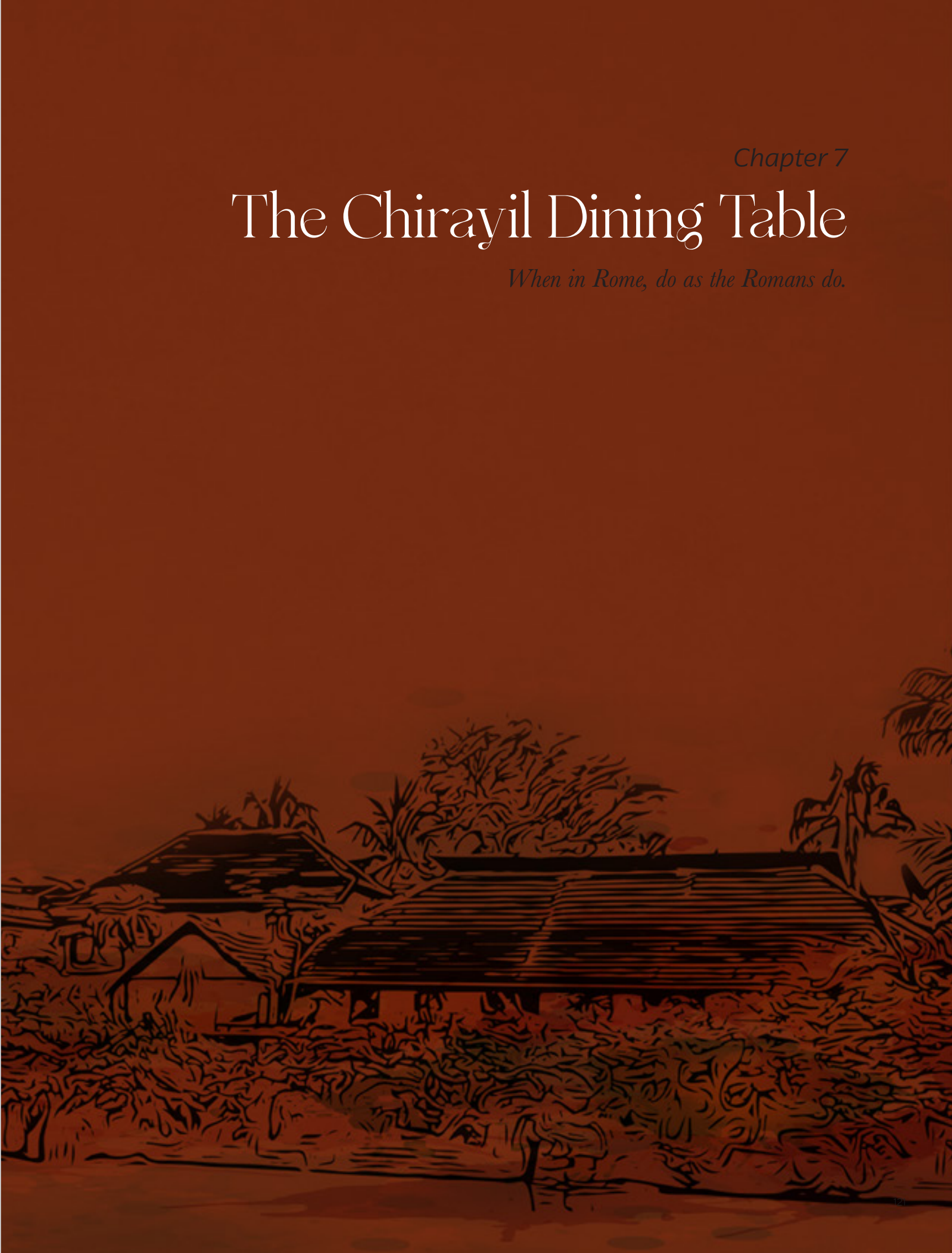
The decision to join politics and his ultimate victory undeniably proved to be a blessing for the community but came at a considerable cost and loss to the family and business. Politics by itself is very often driven by its high command and the many manipulating strategies it employs, which often goes against what is best for good development. This turned out to be true for *Kunjomachen's* case as well. Many things were done and said which were contrary to his style and line of action. The excruciating load of the new responsibilities even took its toll on his health.

On February 20, 1991 *Kunjomachen* left for the heavenly abode. Till the very end his enthusiasm to serve his community remained undeterred. Be it education or development of the area or arranging weddings for the underprivileged, he was at the forefront of all the initiatives. The citizens of Edathua remember with pride the visionary *Kunjomachen* was. His reputation and legacy have truly outlived him. Many times, his children come across people who have known him in his lifetime. They often hear people remark ruefully, “*Why are you children not following his footsteps? He has done so much during his time.*”



The Chirayil Dining Table

When in Rome, do as the Romans do.





EDATHUA FOOD SAGA

A book could be written on the Edathua food saga; to contain it within a few pages would be an injustice. The table at home was either soul-filling comfort food or sumptuous depending on the occasion. During holidays all the children and grandchildren were eagerly awaited with a variety of food made to their liking. During *Achen's* heyday, business guests would turn up and suitable lunch would be served at very short notice. There were always fattened chicken and ducks in the backyard ready for the pot or frying pan. A lot of the produce that was used in the house was procured from the family farms. The older children would remember having steaming coffee: homegrown, hand-picked, organic, pesticide-free and home-roasted much before these terms became market lingo.





Clockwise from left: Tom Jacob, Swarupa, Anjana, Pushpam, Shruthi, Teena, Anupa, Lizzy, Amminikutty, Ashwin, Rani, Thomachen, Roshan, Rohan.

Ammachy's recipes were a very small part of the good food story. Her eagerness and passion to serve everybody's liking was the secret of the food. When the children were young she spent the entire day juggling pots and pans and other duties to get the table ready. I remember each would ask for their liking for breakfast and all would feature on the table. Tea time was also very special.

Trying to make this food from recipes would be futile. One would require a grinding stone, firewood stoves, earthen pots and wooden ladles that *Ammachy* used to wield her magic. One would also require a lot of time and infinite love. Please don't let that deter you from trying.

— Ivan

DUCK ROAST



Serves: 5-6 people			
Duration: 90 minutes			
Ingredients			
Duck	Cut to 12 pieces	Shallots	30 nos
Ginger	1 inch piece	Garlic	8-10 cloves
Red Chilli Powder	1 tablespoon	Turmeric	½ teaspoon
Coconut Oil	2 tablespoons	Garam Masala	½ teaspoon
Pepper	½ teaspoon	Coconut Vinegar	3 tablespoons
Curry Leaves	5 sprigs	Salt	1 tablespoon

Method:

1. Heat oil and add shallots, ginger, and crushed garlic to it. When soft add powdered spices except pepper and garam masala.
2. Saute for a while.
3. Add one cup of water, vinegar, duck pieces and salt.
4. Cover and cook on slow fire for one hour.
5. Remove the lid, add crushed pepper, garam masala and curry leaves.
6. Cook till dry.
7. Serve with a choice of bread or rice.

Note: Best cooked on a very slow fire for an hour and half.

MEEN PEERA



Serves: 5-6 people			
Duration: 90 minutes			
Ingredients			
Sardines	500 grams	Shallots	30 nos
Green Chillies	2 nos	Chopped Ginger	1 tablespoon
Garlic	6 pods, chopped	Grated Coconut	¾ cup
Puli (Kokum)	3 pieces <i>(previously soaked in water)</i>	Coconut Oil	3 tablespoons
Curry Leaves	2 sprigs	Salt	¾ tablespoon

Method:

- Crush together shallots, green chillies, ginger and garlic in a mortar and pestle.
- Add grated coconut.
- In an earthen pot add this mixture, fish, water, puli and salt.
- Heat oil, add chillies and curry leaves.
- When golden, add to the fish.
- Cover and cook for 10 minutes until very little water remains.
- Set aside for half an hour before serving.

MEEN VEVICHATHU



Serves: 5-6 people			
Duration: 45 minutes			
Ingredients			
Salt	as per taste		
River Fish (Attu Vala)	1 kg	Red Chillies	15 nos
Coriander	1 tablespoon	Ginger	1 inch piece
Garlic	8 cloves	Shallots	25 nos
Curry Leaves	2 sprigs	Puli (Kokum)	4 dried pieces <i>(soak for an hour before use)</i>
Coconut Oil	30 ml	Fenugreek Powder	½ teaspoon
For Marination	Turmeric 1 tablespoon		

Method:

- Grind together red chillies, ginger, garlic, shallots and coriander to a fine paste.
- Apply turmeric on the fish.
- Heat oil in a pan, add fenugreek powder and ground paste.
- Fry for a while and then add curry leaves, one cup of water, soaked puli, and salt.
- Allow it to boil for 5 minutes.
- Add fish and simmer till the fish is tender.
- Serve with a choice of bread or rice.

Note: Best made in a clay pot and served one day later.

PAZHAM PORI (*Fried Banana*)



Serves: 5-6 people	
Duration: 25 minutes	
Ingredients	
Ripe Bananas	4 nos.
Rice Flour	½ cup (150 grams)
Sugar	2 tablespoons
Salt	½ teaspoon

Method:

1. In a bowl mix rice flour, sugar and enough water to make a thick batter and rest for ½ hour.
2. Slit the bananas and cut in half.
3. Heat oil in a deep pan.
4. Dip each piece of banana in the batter and fry in oil till crisp.

VELLARI MORU CURRY



Serves: 5-6 people			
Duration: 25 minutes			
Ingredients			
Vellari (Cucumber)	1 cup diced	Green Chilli	3 nos
Turmeric Powder	¼ teaspoon	Curd	1 cup
Fenugreek Powder	¼ teaspoon	Garlic	2 cloves
Mustard Seeds	½ teaspoon	Dried Chilli	2 nos
Curry Leaves	2 sprigs	Small Onion	4 nos
Oil	1 tablespoon	Water	½ cup

Method:

1. Cook the vellari cubes in a little water with turmeric and green chillies.
2. In an earthen pot, heat a little oil and add mustard seed, dried chilli and curry leaves.
3. Add chopped onion and garlic. When brown, add beaten curd and stir.
4. Add the cooked vellari.
5. Add fenugreek powder and simmer. Do not allow it to boil.
6. Take off the fire and add salt.

ELA ADA



Serves: 5-6 people			
Duration: 35 minutes			
Ingredients			
Roasted Rice Flour	1 cup	Grated Coconut	2 cups
Jaggery	1 cup	Cardamom Powder	½ teaspoon
Coconut Oil	1 tablespoon	Salt	½ tablespoon
Water	2 cups	Banana Leaf	1

Method:

1. Boil water in a pan, add oil and salt.
2. Add the rice flour and mix well. Allow to cook for 2 minutes.
3. Remove from heat and knead to a fine dough and keep aside.
4. To make the filling mix coconut, jaggery and cardamom powder in a bowl.
5. Take an 8 inch piece of banana leaf and apply a little oil on the surface.
6. Apply 1/8th of the dough on the leaf in a circle like an orotti.
7. Place the filling in the centre and fold in the half.
8. Press down the edges.
9. Carefully arrange in a steamer and steam for 20 minutes.
10. Serve hot.

OROTTI (*Rice Flat Bread*)



Serves: 5-6 people			
Duration: 20 minutes			
Ingredients			
Roasted Rice Flour	200 grams	Grated Coconut	½ cup
Green Chilli (chopped)	2 nos	Onion (chopped)	½ nos
Cumin	¼ tablespoon	Salt	½ tablespoon
Water	2 and ¼ cup	Oil	for pan frying

Method:

1. In a vessel add water and salt and bring to boil.
2. Add the rice flour and stir well till dough is formed.
3. Add coconut, onion, green chilli and cumin to the dough and mix gently.
4. Make balls of the size of the palm.
5. Flatten the dough balls on a hot griddle to about ½ inch thick.
6. Cook on slow fire till crisp on both sides.

KARI NELLIKA



Serves: 10-12 people	
Duration: 35 minutes	
Ingredients:	
Country Gooseberry	1 kg
Coarse Salt	200 grams
Curry Leaf	20 sprigs
Kandhari (Birds Eye Chilli)	100 grams
Water	200 ml

Method:

1. Place the gooseberry in an earthen pot.
2. Add salt, kandhari and curry leaf.
3. Add enough water to cover the berries.
4. Bring it to boil and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring gently and leave for a day covering the pot loosely.
5. To give the pickle a smoke flavour, immerse a piece of burning coal in a vessel and put it into the pot and cover.
6. Repeat the heating and cooling process for 15 days till the moisture is dried.
7. Bottle and keep aside for 2 months or retain in the pot. Cover well.

FISH PICKLE



Duration: 30 minutes			
Ingredients:			
Attu Vala (River fish)	300 grams cut to cubes	Turmeric	½ tablespoon
Chilli Powder	2 tablespoons	Black Pepper	½ tablespoon
Ginger	1 tablespoon (chopped)	Til Oil (Sesame Oil)	3 tablespoons
Coconut Oil	4 tablespoons (60ml)	Coconut Vinegar	2 tablespoons (30ml)
Fenugreek Seeds	½ teaspoon	Green Chillies	1 nos
Garlic	1 tablespoon		

Method:

1. Apply salt and turmeric to the fish and sun dry for a day.
2. Heat coconut oil and fry the fish pieces and remove from heat.
3. Heat the remaining coconut oil, add til oil, ginger, garlic, fenugreek, green chillies and red chilli powder and fry well.
4. Add vinegar, fish and remaining salt.
5. Simmer for 5 minutes.
6. Cool and transfer in a dry bottle.



The Lasting Legacy: Memories of Grandchildren and Great-grandchildren

The whole world is a stage, and all the men and women are merely actors. They have their exits and their entrances, and in his lifetime a man will play many parts, his life separated into seven acts.





MEMORIES

As *Kunjomachen* and *Ammunikutty*'s children grew older and married, the arrival of twenty-six grandchildren and growing number of great-grandchildren marked a new chapter of joy in their lives. With twelve children and more than twice as many grandchildren, they had their hands and hearts full. After the children moved away due to work and marriage, it was during the holiday season when the house came alive with grandchildren visiting their grandparents. All the grandchildren have the fondest memories of their visits to Edathua. The care, love and warmth *Kunjomachen* and *Ammunikutty* gave to their grandchildren was unparalleled. No one felt less loved than the other. *Ammunikutty* outlived *Kunjomachen* and till the very end, her grandchildren would visit her every chance they got.



Onam, 2010.

Back row: Samuel, Liya, Shruthi, Anjana, Rohan | Front row: Georgy, Thomas, Amminikutty, Sera, Nirmal, Hannah



With twelve children and more than twice as many grandchildren, they had their hands and hearts full. After the children moved away due to work and marriage, it was during the holiday season when the house came alive with grandchildren visiting their grandparents.





Amminikutty with Anu.

“For my brother Arun and me, the most exciting and anticipated ‘event of the year’ during our childhood was our summer vacation in Edathua. Delhi would be scorching with shades of dry and brown by May, and all our friends envied our month-long holiday with our grandparents in God’s own country. The changing view from the train over the 2-night journey added to our excitement as the landscape changed every few hours into more vibrant and shining shades of green and blue. *Ammachy* and *Valiachen* always came to pick us up at the railway station making us feel like the cynosure of their universe, as if this holiday was also the highlight of their entire year! Much later I realised that they did this for each of their children, and their tens of grandchildren, across the year with families dropping in from different parts of the world, following different timetables, and, without doubt, all feeling equally special, welcomed and loved!

Our youngest aunts and uncles who were home at that time were next in line to come rushing to our car as we drove into the grand driveway. They literally pulled us out of the car and into their laps as if we were toys! The feast that awaited us at home had to wait just a few minutes more as we ran across the mind-boggling space that would be home for the entire month.

My most precious memories from those holidays are following *Ammachy* around the house as she carried out her daily chores with her regular helping hands. Feeding the wide range of domestic animals we only otherwise saw pictures of, starting with the goats, cows, hens, duck, dogs and sometimes even rabbits and exotic birds like turkey; gathering cocoa and cracking them open to pick out white slippery seeds into big buckets; picking *pulli* (tamarind) from the ground and sifting through them before they were smoked on a cane mat placed over the traditional earthen stove; sweeping the *mittom* (front yard) with coconut stick brooms and getting distracted midway to chase dragonflies; assisting the household help in washing clothes at the river, primarily to get drenched; and lastly collecting fragrant *mulla pooh* (jasmine flowers) right before dusk to keep next to the Bible for family night prayers.

Those days we neither had television nor phones to distract us, and the days stretched on unhurriedly in ways one can now only imagine, where getting hands and legs and clothes dirty in the great outdoors seemed like our right and duty, offering us the ultimate escape from our restrictive apartment life in Delhi. This was all thanks to my generous, loving and larger than life *Ammachy* and *Valiachen*, who live on in my memories, till I meet them again.”

Anu
Granddaughter



Kunjomachen and Amminikutty with Anupa (in arms).



Kunjomachen with Anupa on her first birthday.

“From the time *Ammachy* was married, to the day she breathed her last, she dedicated her life to the family. She selflessly devoted every second of her day to her twelve children and their families, especially her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The huge treasure collections the grand and great-grandkids got while visiting *Ammachy* were an absolute gastronomic delight! Michael’s fondest memory is of getting sweets in varied shapes and sizes from the many bags hanging from *Ammachy*’s walker.

Nobody who came home ever left empty-handed. During my college days, every visit home ended with being handed over a mouth-watering tuck to take back to the hostel - mostly pickles. After I got married, my tuck parcel changed to *velichenna*, *aripodi*, *jaathika*, *kudampuli*, *Tusker Balm*, *Ashta Chooranam*, *rasnadhi podi* etc.

Ammachy arranged for a Malayalam teacher to come home to teach Anu *chechy*, Arun *chettan*, Swaru and me. But poor Sir; he did not stick around long. Anu *chechy* was the only dedicated student. Arun *chettan*, Swaru and I usually faked nature’s calls as soon as we saw his tall silhouette walk up the road leading home.

The two bathrooms which are right at the centre of the house, once upon a time, was one HUGE bathroom. What a delight the space was, to share with cousins for the fun group-bathing sessions. My hands and feet resemble that of *Ammachy*’s. Long fingers, fingernails, feet and toes. Michael’s limbs are now growing likewise.

In the days when the *pashukoodu* housed cows, the *kachipera*, in all its glory, was filled to the brim and to the door, with hay. Hay that kindled excitement in the grandkids. Hay that, oh so itchy as it may be, lured us to jump and play in the many levels it was stacked in. We have had itching-ly bombastic times, frolicking and jumping in it, all to be ended with colossal dermatological issues that only Nycil and Shower to Shower prickly heat powders could calm.

Ammachy had a strategic seating arrangement after her weak legs restricted her movement. Her seat was right outside her room (which meant easy access). That seat was also the end of the passage which led up from the entrance of the house (which meant she could see anyone who came home). That seat gave her a full view of the backyard (all animals, staff, movements and happenings were monitored).

Ammachy had a few trusted aids along the years. *Vishwambharan*, *Vareedettan*, *Aachi*, *Kunjunjamma* and a few more able helpers. Even when she was restricted to her strategic seat, one word to the assistant concerned, and the required work was done. Despite her physical frailties, God was gracious to her, giving her 84+ fulfilling years.”

Anupa
Granddaughter

“Growing up, *Appa* and *Amma* always made it a point to travel to Kerala for our summer holidays. I remember as soon as we were out of the airport, Vishwambaran *chettan* would be there on *Ammachy*’s orders to pick us up and drive us straight to Edathua, whether it was five in the morning or one at night.

The moment we saw *Ammachy*, it was like the whole house lit up. With the smile of a thousand watts and a hug that had the ability to melt away all negativity – *Ammachy* was magic. She always had something for everybody in the many pockets of her walking stand. Every time I was with *Ammachy* in Edathua, I used to see strangers at the door, asking her for money, clothes, books for them or their kids because they were facing hardships. She never sent them away empty-handed— her magic pockets and walking stand always had something for everyone.

My fondest memories with *Ammachy* have changed as I grew up. When I was around 10 years old, I remember *Ammachy* used to make sure there was always a free pair of scissors whenever I was home, so I could walk around the *mitam* cutting flowers. I used to promptly decorate her table with them and as soon as I was done, oh her smile! Precious. She was always so excited, and I think part of the reason why I did it every single time I was with her was just to see her smile.



Sera

Ammachy always had such a nurturing spirit, she always made sure our hearts and stomachs were full, every time we left. Just thinking about all the food we would have every time makes me nostalgic – the *Kuttanadan* duck curry, *natoli* fry, and oh that coconut *chamandi*! Not just the food on our plates, but the food she sneakily gave us every time we watched Shalom TV together, or had lunch together, or when she used to just call me to her side for a random conversation. Food that fills your soul too is rare to come by, but that always was the case when we were with *Ammachy*. I see the same spirit in my *Amma*, how her face lights up every time one compliments her food, how she has her own corner of the house that she has made her haven, how her hugs spread warmth and love like no other; *Ammachy* sure rubs off well on her children.

Even as she grew older, *Ammachy* still made it a point to stay connected. I was never someone who was good at that, and yet, she used to make such an effort to call and check in on me during my undergrad. Simple conversations where we both struggled to hear one another, but deep within, it was a seemingly moot exercise that gave the both of us so much joy. I remember, I randomly popped in to see her during one of my trips down to Kerala during my undergrad. It was the first time I ever travelled in Kerala without *Appa* and *Amma*, so one of my friends came along with me. *Ammachy* made sure to talk to her and get to know her. She still reminisces over how warm and welcoming *Ammachy* made her feel, and even when I was not around, she used to go and hangout with *Ammachy* occasionally.

A year before I got married, Joseph visited Edathua with his family to meet *Ammachy*. She held his hands and touched his cheek, as if to already welcome him into her heart and family. *Ammachy* passed away a few months later. When writing this, he fondly recalled that specific moment with her with tears in his eyes. That is the impact *Ammachy* has always had on people.

She lived a full life, with so many people who loved her endlessly and treasure moments with her. *Ammachy* was the epitome of love. I will always hold all my memories with her fondly in my heart.”

Sera
Granddaughter



Left to Right: Anupa, Kusumam, Swarupa, Amminikutty, Liya.

“The smell, feel and memories of one’s ancestral home, remain with them all their lives. Vaniapurackal Chirayil House stands, missing the wonderful couple who nurtured it. 84 years of loving and living. Loving everything and everyone around them. And living every bit of every day.

When we hear stories from Uncles and Aunts, we wonder in AMAZEMENT, how 12 children were raised under one roof! Each one’s upbringing, education, food, clothing and shelter! And in today’s world, raising even one is considered a mighty task!

I want to start on this note. I am extremely lucky to belong to large families on both paternal and maternal sides.

It is, I guess, the blood that runs in me, the strong roots that I come from, that motivates my family life, my strong desire to have children, children who can carry on legacies in their own ways, in their own time, creating a larger picture for generations to bask in.

I have three of my own and this itself has raised eyebrows among today’s people!

My eldest son, Daniel, is a nature enthusiast, an absolute animal lover. And seeing *Jojobabby*’s fascinating animal kingdom grow in diversity around the house, I’m positive that Daniel’s love for any creature that belongs to the animal kingdom is definitely from the blood that runs in him.

Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you are right.

Fun during our childhood days was unparalleled. I remember running around in the backyard with cousins - feeding ducks, cows, pigs and turkeys, playing hide and seek, scraping moss to fill coconut shells while pretending to cook etc. A coconut tree trunk was the bridge across the riverlet, connecting the backyard to the *parambu* on the other side. Walking on that trunk felt like an act of gymnastics on a tightrope!! And the sense of achievement of getting across and coming back home dry and unscratched.

My wedding eve, in 2013, gathered the largest crowd of immediate family members at Edathua house in my lifetime. We were about 55 humans housed under that one roof. The joy of togetherness, the fun and laughter, the cooking involved feeding the assembled multitude, the memories we relived, the playing that raised decibel levels to an all-time high, are all now memories we are thankful for.

There’s a room known as the *chavadi* which was the guest room. Just like in our childhood days, we laid out multiple bedsheets together on the *chavadi* floor, played cards, sang songs, danced, laughed till our sides hurt, did all the crazy cousin things and finally slept off together like a pack of sardines.

Orders for ice creams and Kerala *porottas* were not in 10s, but in 100s! One must bear in mind, this was JUST for immediate family! That’s the thrill of it!”

Swarupa
Granddaughter



Nirmal and Georgy with Amminikutty.

*Look at a day when you are supremely satisfied at the end.
It's not a day when you lounge around doing nothing;
it's a day you've had everything to do and you've done it.*

“We have fond memories of *Ammachy*. She used to give us ‘*kontha*’ (Rosary). She was vigilant that it was there on our neck. When priests came home she insisted they bless us and pray for us. Every year we would have a joyful birthday celebration with *Ammachy*, when she announced to all ‘*randum pillerude*’ (two children) birthdays as both of our birthdays were on the same day. She made us practice giving offerings in Church, giving alms to poor neighbours, Mandiram, our supporting staff, Snehabhavan and Shalom SPF. When we went to Malayattoor pilgrimage and Bharananganam to Alphonsamma’s tomb she gave us money for the Holy Qurbana.

When we went to school in the morning she used to give us pocket money and sweets. In the evening when we came back she would be waiting for us in the veranda with snacks. On her walker, *Ammachy* had different bags with all the items (*kontha*, areca nut, nutmeg, money, knife, pencil, pen, rubber, scale, keys, eatables, safety pins, prayer books etc). We always reached out to *Ammachy* for all things we needed and she always provided us with them. The chair on which she sat in the veranda was positioned aptly to watch everything from the front gate to the backyard. In the backyard there was a vessel which *Ammachy* always asked us to keep filled with water for ducks to drink and bathe. She was eager to feed the hens and collect eggs. She always insisted *Valyachi* and *Kunjachi* to clean goat’s shed and feed them. There were two goats which *Ammachy* named ‘Xavier’ (male) and ‘Annie’ (female). She named them so as she said they were born when *Ammachy* was watching Rev. Father Xavier Khan Vattayil’s Retreat. That day was the feast of St. Ann.”

Nirmal and Georgy
Grandchildren



Amminikutty with Hannah.



Amminikutty with Thomas.

“*Ammachy* very delighted to have her children and grandchildren around her. She loved to see us happy. She used to treat us to our favourite food and snacks. She would fondly watch us feed the pets at home. She was in touch with us with information regarding the arrival of a goat. At that time there were no goats in Edathua. Varghese Chettan was on the job of identifying and buying the goat. She knew how both of us loved goats. There was much excitement for us, through the day, feeding it and giving it a quota of drinks. She used to look at us lovingly when we used to eat our meals. She had a special seat from where she could look at the entrance of the house and the activities at the backside of the house and we remember her looking at the front door expectantly for visitors. She used to tell our helpers to give us a parcel meal when we used to travel somewhere. She taught us how to save money and started a bank account for us. Prayer time was very important for her. She had given us beautiful rosaries and inspired us to pray every day. We still remember her giving us our first umbrella to enjoy the rain. She had done charity in our name by contributing to Shalom T.V. and Mandiram Orphanage. I even dreamt of these experiences while in Edathua and even when I was back in Kuwait. Fondly I recall with a smile and much joy my *Ammachy* and her efforts to give us all these learning experiences. We got our love for plants and animals from her. Once I had brought two quails from Munnar and we had to leave them in Edathua because we had to return to Kuwait after our summer vacation. *Ammachy* had taken care of the quails until we came for the next year’s vacation.”

Hannah and Thomas
Grandchildren

It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows.

The time is always right to do what is right.



Amminikutty, Anupa, Swarupa with Josh (in lap) Kavitha, Noel.

“Walking into the Edathua house with anticipation, I truly loved the way *Ammachy* held my face close and gave me a kiss. It was almost like a break in time whereby I could wholeheartedly feel the warmth, love, and kindness in the room. As if that wasn’t enough, *Ammachy* would, subtly as possible, sneak candy into my pockets right before supper, something she knew my mom wouldn’t allow. She yearned to see me smile, she made it her mission to make me feel special, and she put my happiness above all. That being said, this was only one of the countless memories that *Ammachy* and I created. In fact, as a routine part of our trips to Edathua, we would spend some with the animals. And despite the initial excitement that the animals brought, the true memories came thinking about the way *Ammachy* admired, through the diamond shaped grates at the back of the house, her kids/grandkids and the birth of a new generation. Moreover, thinking back to that time, I can almost feel the wave of love and the burst of passion that she brought into my life. Without *Ammachy*, I wouldn’t be writing this letter today and without the kindness she instilled into my heart, I wouldn’t be who I am today. *Ammachy* undoubtedly, will be remembered for all the memories, lessons, and values she passed on, and the true and lasting impact she made on my life.”

Joshua
Grandson

*We don't have to be smarter than the rest.
We have to be more disciplined than the rest.*



Amminikutty with Nirmal and Noel.

“Incessant honking and sizable crowds giving way to expansive paddy fields and delicately swaying coconut trees invariably signaled our arrival to Edathua. When we were younger, Josh and I constantly looked forward to our summer travels to India. Getting away from our repetitive daily routines and travelling halfway across the globe to see cousins and family, whom we had both been missing so dearly, was always a much-anticipated prospect. During our time in India, our short excursions to Edathua were consistently filled with great joy and gratification. In Edathua, the serenity and peacefulness of our surroundings could only be paralleled by *Ammachy* and her perpetually comforting personality. *Ammachy*’s warm smile and tender embrace, upon our arrival to the house, is something that I shall carry with me for the rest of my life. Additionally, her benevolence is something that can only be rivalled by the divine. During my time in Edathua, I have never once seen *Ammachy* angry or upset, in fact, her calming presence always brought peace to those around her. In my childhood, I had a great propensity for mischief, and frankly, it was no surprise that my constant pranks and naughtiness yielded harsh scolding from my parents. However, I could always count on *Ammachy* to come to my defence. In those moments, *Ammachy* surely seemed less like my grandmother and more like my guardian angel. And though *Ammachy* has left this world, I am confident that, even today, she is watching over me as my guardian angel, looking down on me with the same warm smile, guiding me through many of my daily adversities.”

Noel
Grandson



Amminikutty with Shruthi

“Just before the church bells rang for the evening prayer, *Ammachy* had a routine walk to her oh so dearly loved, Jasmine flower garden from where she plucked buds which would bloom next day. She used to always tell me to accompany her and told me that our *Appachen* loved Jasmines and that we had to keep these flowers at his grave the next morning when we went to church.

She would keep them at the table in front of the family altar at home all night, and early next morning, even before anyone else arose for the day, after the milk and tea are ready for her family who will be up in some time, *Ammachy* would wrap those Jasmine flowers in her neatly pressed handkerchief with some Yardley powder in it, just to give it that extra fragrance! After a good jolly walk with *Ammachy* to church, we first went to the cemetery, where she’ll place the flowers she lovingly carried in her handkerchief and pray for the departed souls of *Valliappachen*, *Valliammachy* and our *Appachen*. There is not one day until the day she was not able to, that she has missed this beautiful token of her love to her dearest husband.

She instilled in us the importance of always praying for the departed souls in our family. *Ammachy* loved her grandchildren, more than her own I would say. She used to always tuck us into bed at night right beside her, and the one who slept right next to *Ammachy* got all her extra hugs and kisses while asleep.

She knew what each of her grandchildren liked, and would make sure hook or crook she gets it ready when they come home. I vividly remember, when Teena used to come home from boarding school, *Ammachy* knew Teena loved fish fry and could not eat a meal without it. And as always it was freshly fried on the table when we sat down for our meal.

I often miss her. There is so much I would love to talk to her about, now especially. There is so much wisdom I feel I’ve missed out on. But I know she has my back now and forever, as always. She was the purest form of love anyone could ever experience. So much that nothing is enough to express that bond and only after she’s gone, did I realize she was really an angel sent by God. She only taught us to love and share, and that has indeed taken me somewhere.”

Shruthi
Granddaughter

“Among all women in the world, Mother Mary was ‘The chosen one’ to hold Jesus Christ in her womb. There might be so many qualities that God saw in her to choose her for this great purpose. Likewise, I feel that my *Ammachy* was a chosen one by God- the way she lived in this world as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother is beyond words. She was humble, submissive, tolerant, patient, resilient, wise and extremely loving.

My dear *Ammachy* (Ammini) was a synonym of love. She took good care of all her children and grand-children in all ways possible. I always wondered how she was so mentally stable when she had so many people (her children and grand-children spread around the globe) and their million reasons to worry about. The answer to that was her stubborn faith in God. When she has put God in charge of everyone to be taken care of, what more to worry about. The answer was simple. That trust in God kept her calm and peaceful throughout her life.



Amminikutty with Teena

I will always be grateful to *Ammachy* and everyone in the family for making our childhood a colourful and memorable one. Our vacations were turned into a festive mood when all her children and grand-children gathered for vacations. I fondly remember Anu *chechi* and Arun *chettan* taking us around (the senior-most ones – partners and planners in crime), all of us playing merrily in water (aided with tyre tubes to float in water), boating and fishing organised by *Ipappi*, the times we children were made to stand in a line and bathed-pumping water from the hose near portico, making *Athapookalam* for Onam, the big audience in front of the TV- the huge arguments to decide which channels to watch (because of the diverse crowd of different age groups) that ultimately settled with Anjana *chechi*’s decision. The large noise made in despair when *Ipappi* puts off the TV switch fed up of repeatedly calling us for lunch, distribution of chocolates

in bulk brought by our dear uncles and aunties, waiting for our turn to get on the mighty swing *Ammachy* made for us on the Jackfruit tree at the centre of the house, we even named a tree-‘Chirayil travels’ in *akkaraparambu* since it could accommodate so many of us at the same time to swing up and down (We stopped going there after Roshan *chachen* slipped on a snake beneath the fallen cocoa leaves and shouted “*odikko*” and we all ran for our lives), the long bonding and story-telling sessions with Anupa *chechi* and Swarupa *chechi*, our small-big purchases made with the *Perunnapodi* (money given to younger ones by elders for Church feast) given by *Ammachy* and others during Edathua *palli perunnal* of St.George, the evening prayer with every one sitting together in the big prayer hall, the *sthuthi* giving process first to *Ammachy* and then in the order of eldest to the youngest, the card-playing sessions lead by Liya *chechi* and others after dinner – we would laugh our heart out! At the end of the day- the huge flock sleeping in a big line (either at *Chavadi* or in the prayer hall) cuddling with each other sharing blankets and pillows. The sense of togetherness, sharing and joy, holding onto each other, fights and solving fights, taking care of the younger ones, were all developed in all of us since we were a one big family, made possible only because of the foresight and sacrifices of *Achen* and *Ammachy*!

I vividly remember the life lessons *Ammachy* taught me. She used to make us collect ‘*Grampu*’ (clove-a bit difficult to be found when fallen in the ground), from a tree at the backyard (near the Badminton court now) in a small plate. I believe that the ounce of patience I have in me today might be born from such small gestures that she made us do as children. There were other things that were fetched by all of us- *Kodampuli*, *Jathikka*, *Cocoa*, *Chambakka*, Guava, and Jasmine flowers to be kept on the prayer table in the evenings. All these, now mean a lot to me- the pride and joy of collecting our own harvest from our own backyard!

During my teenage, she appreciated and encouraged me to do minor responsibilities- wash my own plate after meal using minimal amount of water, fold my blanket after bed, to keep an eye on my younger ones, to press and fold clothes. I was given a royal welcome when I came back from boarding school and ensured that my favourite food was kept aside- Fish fry/curry/ *Chakkakuru-manga curry*. The moment she saw you entering the hallway, she would say “*Ahaaah*” (in the tone of excitement) with a bright smile on her face. She would ask us to sit beside her and make *Navyakutty* and myself read the Holy Bible aloud, usually the Old Testament or Psalms. Her Bible had plenty of greeting cards sent by her children and grandchildren from different parts of the world. Those were precious to her. She had a very good hand-writing too. *Ammachy* would pamper the ones sleeping right beside her a lot, apply axe-oil or eucalyptus oil on your forehead and behind the ear. She made us apply warm-oil on our hair before bath. She would ask *Pennammachedathy* to grind *Mehendi* leaves for us to put on our hands just to see the excitement in our face when it turns orange-red.

She once taught *Sruthi* and myself to make “*muringa ila thoran*” (a dish made of Drumstick leaves), owing to its health benefits. She always knew and had medicines and *ottamoolis* in stock for any sort of ailments you tell her. She would give us *Jathikka* or *Ashtachoornam* for stomach ailments. *Ammachy* used to make *Unnichachen* drink *Tulasi* water as a child as he frequently suffered from common-cold. Since I hated the taste of *Ashtachoornam* in curd, she used her special tactic of luring me with some sweet to give me after having that. Such is her dedication and love! How can someone remember and cater to all so amazingly?

After I turned 18, she called me over the phone one day and gave me money to join the driving school. She is the one who insisted that I learn driving and I will be ever-grateful to her for that initiative since it helped me a lot ever since and even today. In fact she could meet everyones’ needs in all possible ways.

During my college days, if she got to know that I am at Edathua, she would call me over the phone sounding in a sense of emergency and I would rush to her, only to learn that it was only for her to just see me or give me something special that was kept aside for me to eat, or for buying her medicines, recharging her phone, stocking up something to give to the ones who come to see her and sometimes would insist me to stay back with her even though our house was in a walkable distance. She would make me wear her nighty too. I have heard her call *Cha* in a similar way on an urgent basis and he would rush to her. That would only be to make him drink *Nellika* juice (A health drink made of gooseberry, ginger and turmeric), that she would keep aside for him from her share.

Ammachy’s walker was a self-sufficient one. The colourful hanging pouches (stitched by *Kochammai*), could accommodate all sorts of essentials that *Ammachy* needed. One would be surprised to learn what all it had- one set of her medicines, mobile phone, comb, a pair of scissors, rosary, sweets, biscuits, a set of thread and needle, spectacles, torch, axe-oil and other ointments and anything and everything!

She used to watch Shalom TV and was familiar with all programmes aired in that channel. She would occasionally narrate to us a few inspirational thoughts and stories and Bible quotes that struck her. *Ammachy* did a lot of charity work in whichever way possible.

She had always made it a point to send any of her children, whoever could make it, to attend the family functions when invited from *Achen*’s side or from *Ammachy*’s side. She had great value for relations. She showed great respect even to her own children.

The most memorable family gathering was for Swarupa *chechi*’s wedding. We all had immense fun and almost everyone in the family had come down. When everyone bid adieu after the

wedding, *Ammachy* felt extremely sad. I had never seen *Ammachy* in such melancholy. The house had turned so silent and she missed everyone so deeply. Yet she was an understanding mother.

During her final days, *Ammachy* was fortunate to be taken care of by all her children whom she brought up. Everyone took turns to come and stay with her, adjusting their work schedules from different parts of the world. I can proudly say how her children set the best example to the younger generation of how to take care of their parents at old age. You could feel the rise in her confidence level, whenever her dear children were around.

When *Ammachy* breathed her last on March 5, 2018 (God did not want her to see the biggest ever 2018 monsoon floods and the COVID-19 pandemic), all her children could come for her funeral, which was conducted in a glorious way. I earnestly remember how all her children and grandchildren took turns to sit around her coffin throughout the night and offered prayers and rosaries, sang devotional songs for her departed soul. She deserved such honour. After her demise, her children were eager to own at least one small thing of her belongings—the Nokia phone she used, the *kashiroopam* (a Christian locket) stuck on top of her bed, her bible, the cross she had under her pillow, and so on.

I missed *Ammachy* to the core at the time of my wedding. I am only sad that she did not live long enough to see my husband and children too, but I am sure that she would abundantly shower her blessings and intercession from heaven.

What more does a mother want, who else can live life to the fullest and die so gracefully leaving behind such a huge imprint in our hearts. There is a piece of *Achen* and *Ammachy* in each one of us; their potential to do good and spread love is instilled in our blood and I am sure we all will try our best to live up to their legacy!

Having been born in this huge, blessed, God-fearing family as such is a true asset to me and I pledge that I would proudly teach my children too, what I inherited from all in the Chirayil family!”

Teena
Granddaughter



Amminikutty with Liya.

“*Ammachy* had 12 kids and close to 26 grandchildren. Yet, she made each and every one feel equally loved and so special. Thinking back, I see how truly amazing that is - *Ammachy* truly had a gift - she knew how to love, how to make us feel loved. She was always the first one to wish me for my birthday - every single year - without fail. She would always call me 2 full days before my birthday and wished me before anyone else. *Ammachy* had a very special way of kissing her grandchildren. As soon as she saw me, she would hold my face in her hands, and give my cheek a long and loving sniff. I cannot even describe in words how sincere it felt, and how loved it made me feel.

During my boarding school days in Kerala, before every long holiday, *Ammachy* would call and propose to send her favourite and trusted auto rickshaw to pick me up - from Edathua to Changanacherry - that’s about 30km. She was extremely thoughtful like that. I remember walking with *Ammachy* to Church everyday. After Mass, *Ammachy* would always visit the cemetery and place fresh flowers on *Appachan’s* grave. Now that I think back, it is the absolute form of everlasting love.

Ammachy was the light and soul of the Edathua house. Even during her last years when *Ammachy’s* mobility was restricted to a room, her presence still wandered across the house. Her presence was felt everywhere in the house, as is her absence now. She made sure everyone always got their favourite meals. Whenever I visited, I always had her delicious duck roast for meals and *neyappams* in the evening with tea.

I remember once when I paid *Ammachy* a surprise visit for a day - giving her no chance to prepare in advance. That day, when I was about to leave, *Ammachy* handed me something carefully wrapped in her handkerchief and asked me to open it back at my hostel for dinner. When I opened it later - it was a piece of fried fish from *Ammachy’s* lunch plate that she kept aside and packed for me. I remember *Ammachy* being generous as well. No one who came by the Edathua house - ever left empty-handed - always offered clothes, candy, money, or a warm meal.

Ammachy kept used clothes neatly washed and pressed in a specific room in the house - anyone who visits would always find something to their taste and size in her collection - the perfect example of sustainable clothing.

Ammachy was rich in values - she was kind, loving, patient, generous, humble, and virtuous - her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will carry her values and legacy forward. She lives today through us all.”

Liya
Granddaughter

It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it.



Aminikutty, Rani, Anu and Michele.

The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity.

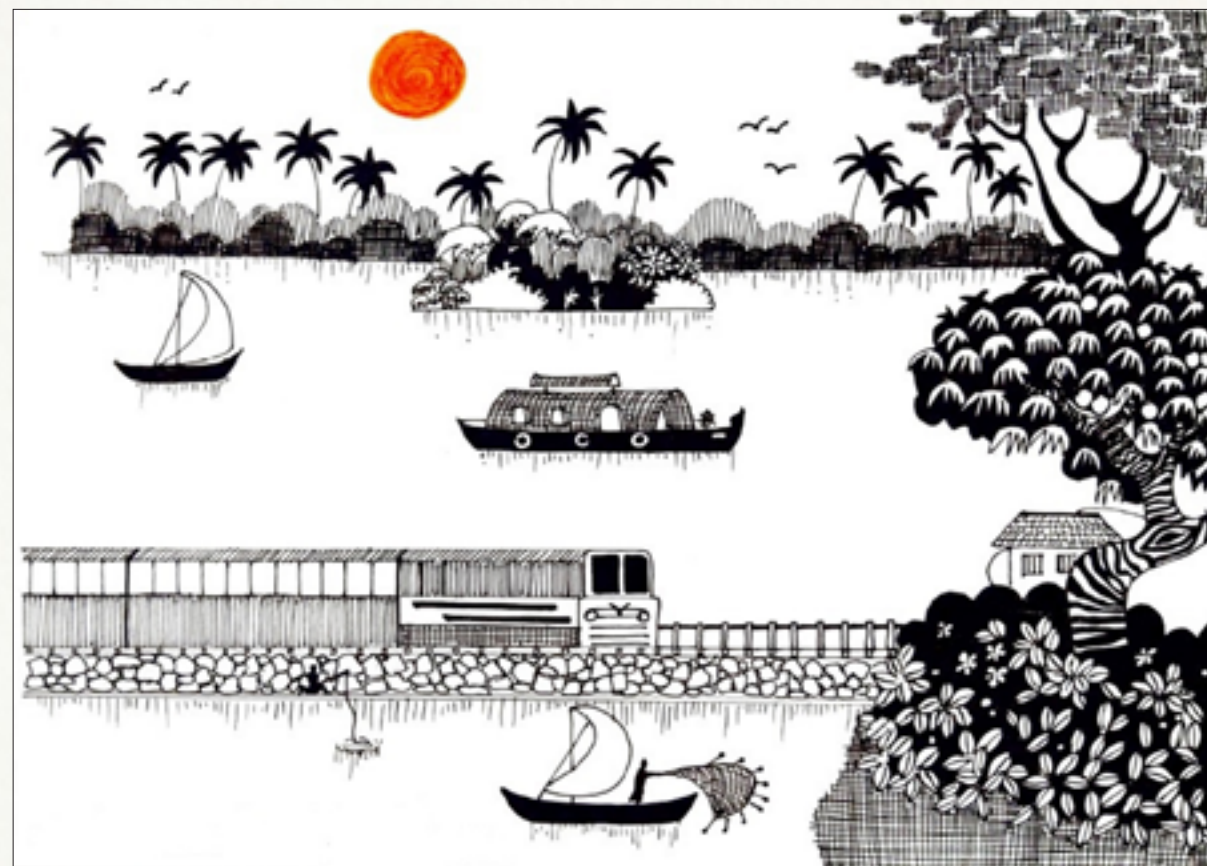
“A holiday that I will never forget was when we all stayed over for a few days for a wedding in the family. The ancestral house with its old and expansive architecture was the perfect backdrop to the festivities. The cheerful and lively ambience was no less than my school fete! I remember the hustle and bustle to prepare the house for the wedding, with the children running around trying their best to pitch in.

Being the first great-grandchild to *Valiyaammachy* is special to me. The large family tree is intimidating at times, and it still feels novel to me that some of my uncles and aunts are nearly the same age as me, one even younger!

Mealtimes were always larger than life. I was in awe at the enormous spread at the large table meant to seat all. To my surprise, it seemed that *Valiyaammachy* somehow ensured that everyone's favourite dishes were catered to.

Valiyaammachy spoiled me with goodies and candies, making sure that there was always something for me to take back to Delhi, which I shared with my friends along with all the stories featuring this large family.”

Michele
Great-granddaughter



Sketch by Ashwin's wife Greeshma

1 John 1:5

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

ALL MOTIVATING AND INSPIRING

<i>In a world of many dreams</i>	<i>A reminiscence so vivid</i>
<i>A light shines far beyond the skies</i>	<i>The light shineth then & now</i>
<i>A light that strikes the heart</i>	<i>In the hearts of those it touched</i>
<i>All motivating & inspiring</i>	<i>All motivating & inspiring</i>
<i>Striking on like a guiding spark</i>	<i>Games were played & wars were won</i>
<i>Through thick and thin</i>	<i>Honours galore on boats, land & love</i>
<i>Through and through</i>	<i>Memories of a lucent past</i>
<i>All motivating & inspiring</i>	<i>All motivating & inspiring</i>
<i>In the midst of violent storms</i>	<i>Leaping into the wide deep sea</i>
<i>Light did bring a bright new bow</i>	<i>Oblivious to shadows that stare</i>
<i>Colours of the promised land</i>	<i>Blithely conquering each new day</i>
<i>All motivating & inspiring</i>	<i>The light - still motivating & inspiring</i>

This was written while I was contemplating making the tough decision to quit my job at Wipro Tech in 2012. Edathua *Appachan* has played an important role and an inspiration for taking the dive into self employment.

Although there is so much I have heard about him, my real life experiences are few and memories are faint. Sometimes, I feel I may have created a fictional character of him. At work, when a decision was difficult to make, do or not do, move forward or not move forward, I have asked *Appachan* to pray and soon I get the courage to make a move. Similarly, when I need help in my personal moments and day to day life, a short prayer to *Ammachy* “please pray for me” has helped.

Ashwin
Grandson









മാതാ പിതാ ഗുരു ദൈവം

Matha Pitha Guru Deivam

Chirayil



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***‘Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,
and the glory of children is their fathers.’***

-Proverbs 17:6

This memoir in honor of our parents and grandparents follows the covenant of God. God told Moses that the law must be retold to the next generations to make them relate with the blueprint and the insights on the what and the how to face the challenges in the theatre of life. Memories of the life situations of our parents and grandparents and the oft-quoted sayings that move our consciousness will help unlock the creative spirit within us and within the generations to come.

- Rosamma & Rani

