ECHOES & EMBERS

CULTURE, COMMUNITY, AND CHANGE

GROUP 43







INTRODUCTION

History & Origins

The festival was established in 1798 by Raja Rama Varma, popularly known as Shakthan Thampuran, the Maharaja of Cochin. Before its inception, the prominent festival in the region was the Arattupuzha Pooram. However, one year, several local temples were denied entry to Arattupuzha due to arriving late because of heavy rains.

Insulted by this exclusion, the temple authorities approached Shakthan Thampuran. In response, he unified ten temples situated around the Vadakkunnathan Temple in Thrissur to create a new, grander festival. His vision was to make it a "Pooram of all Poorams",a democratic celebration that invited participation from all sections of society, regardless of caste or religion. There is a lot of speculation among people as to what the story actually is.



KNOWN AS THE "MOTHER OF ALL POORAMS," THRISSUR POORAM ATTRACTS MILLIONS OF VISITORS ANNUALLY TO WITNESS THIS SPECTACULAR CELEBRATION OF KERALA'S HERITAGE.



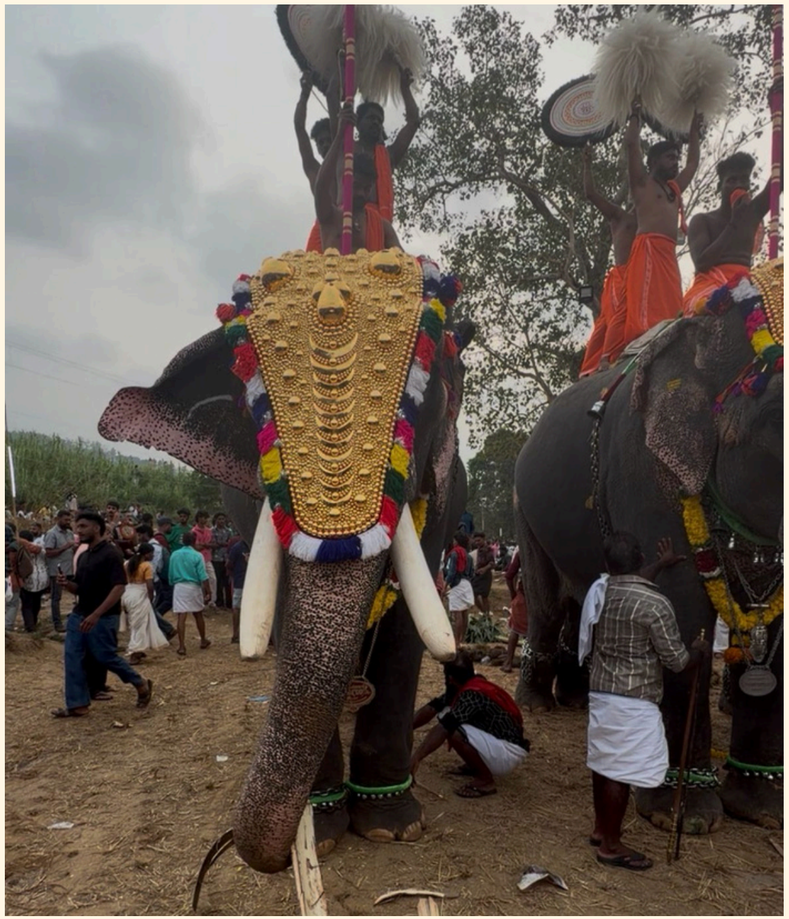
Literature Summary

- Too much focus on "The Show": Most studies only look at the flashy parts, like fireworks and decorated elephants, instead of the deeper meaning.
- Researchers often just list what happens (like a play-by-play) instead of explaining why it happens or what it means for the community.
- Missing the point of the music: The drumming (Melam) is usually treated as just "background noise" or atmosphere, rather than a skilled and complex art form.
- Surface-level views: Because they focus on the "pretty" parts of the festival, experts often miss the hidden stories about power, history, and social rules.
- Treating it as a museum piece: Studies often act like the festival is a static, unchanging event rather than a living tradition that changes with the times.

Gaps Addressed

- The "Camera" Effect: Experts haven't really looked at how social media, YouTube, and filming are changing the festival. Technology is turning old traditions into new types of digital shows.
- Hidden Hard Work: Most studies ignore the "regular people" behind the scenes the laborers, organizers, and helpers who do the actual work to make the festival happen.
- Treating it Like a Photo: Instead of seeing the festival as a living thing that changes every year, researchers often describe it as if it’s a frozen-in-time museum display.
- Surface Level Only: Because books focus so much on the "pretty" parts (like elephants and lights), they miss the real-life struggles and social changes happening underneath.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS & OBJECTIVES



Primary Research Questions

What roles do temple committees and local volunteers play in sustaining the Pooram’s traditional character?

How have modernisation, tourism, and media exposure influenced the Pooram’s practices, and what social or environmental challenges have emerged as a result?

In what ways do the rituals, music, and visual performances of Thrissur Pooram embody and preserve Kerala’s traditional cultural identity?

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS & OBJECTIVES



Core Research Objectives

- To analyze the unique organizational structure and management systems that sustain a festival of this magnitude.
- To investigate the role of community involvement and the specific contributions of stakeholders like temple committees, volunteers, and artisans.
- To explore how the festival balances ritual authenticity with modern demands and ethical challenges.
- To document the impact of global digital visibility on the lived experience and cultural meaning of the festival.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Focus on the Human Side: This study uses a Qualitative and Exploratory framework to look beyond just numbers and statistics. Instead of focusing on data like crowd sizes or costs, the design focuses on people's stories and personal experiences.

Capturing Meaning: It explores the shared traditions and deeper social meanings of Thrissur Pooram that cannot be captured by charts or graphs alone.

Investigating New Areas: By using an exploratory approach, the research digs into topics that haven't been studied much, such as private decisions made by temple committees and how social media changes old rituals.

Discovering Hidden Details: This flexible research style makes it possible to uncover hidden social dynamics and new cultural shifts, providing a clearer picture of how the festival operates in the modern world.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted both scheduled interviews with high-level officials (e.g., Presidents of Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devasoms) and unscheduled interviews with locals and vendors to capture diverse viewpoints.

Direct Observation: Systematic study of rituals, percussion performances (Melam), processions, and crowd behavior to provide real-time operational context.

Audio-Visual Documentation: Comprehensive recording of interviews (with consent) and photography of festival sites to ensure accurate evaluation and primary evidence.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Techniques

- **Purposive Sampling**: Specifically targeted experts, temple committee members, and organizers.

- **Convenience Sampling**: Spontaneous engagement with available visitors and street vendors during fieldwork.



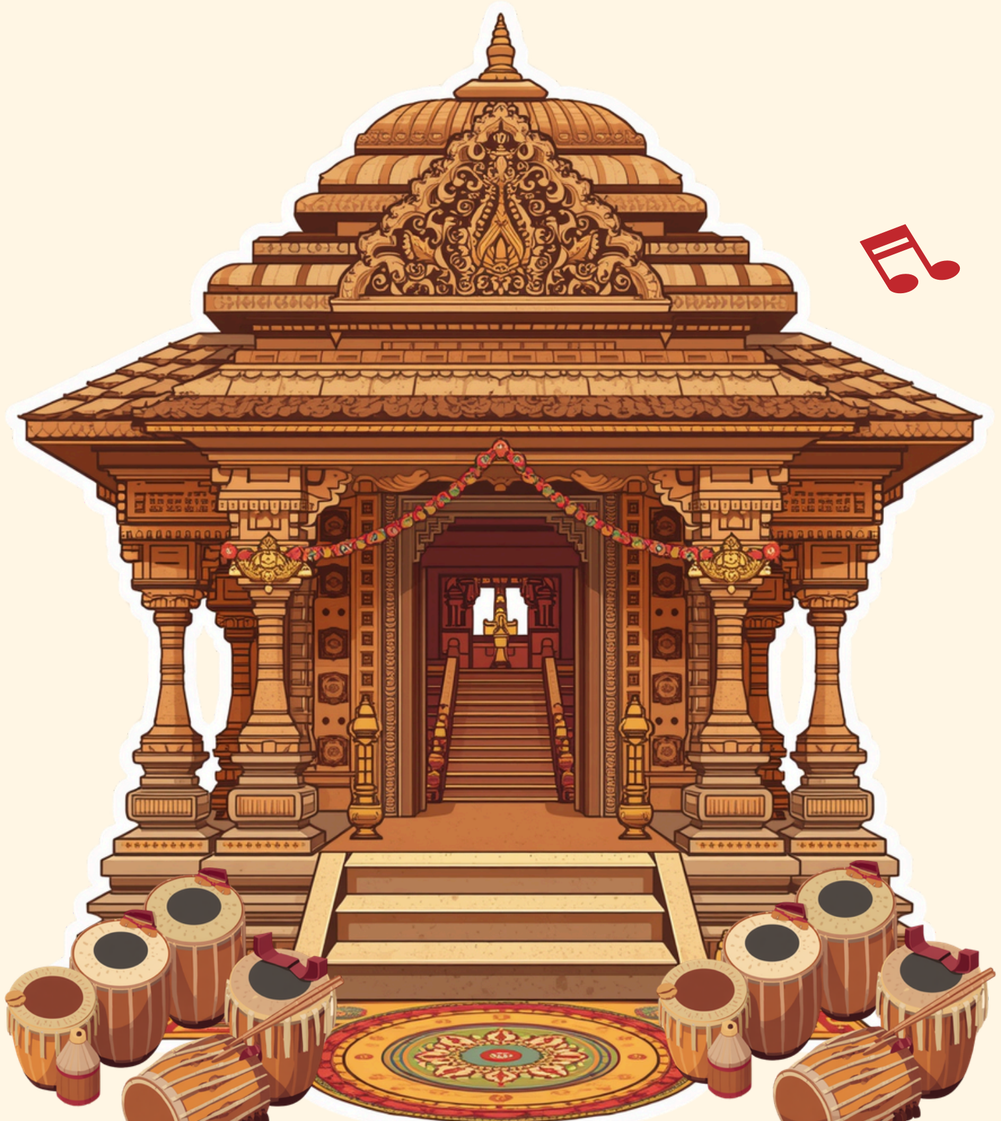
ANALYSIS & ETHICS



Participants & Stakeholders

- Local Business Insights: Included the voices of small business owners and hotel managers to understand the economic impact and logistical challenges of the festival.
- Community Involvement: Captured the experiences of residents and local volunteers who live through and support the event every year.
- Traditional Craftsmanship: Consulted festival item sellers to learn about the production and trade of traditional goods used in the celebrations.
- Complete Social Picture: By involving all these different stakeholders, the research covers the social, financial, and personal sides of the festival that are usually hidden.

ANALYSIS & ETHICS



Ethical Considerations

- Informed Consent: Obtained both written and spoken consent from all participants before data collection.
- Transparency: Participants were briefed on study objectives and informed of their Right to Withdraw or skip any uncomfortable questions.
- Privacy: Guaranteed strict confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring data was used solely for academic purposes.

ANALYSIS & ETHICS



Data Analysis

- Pattern Recognition: Researchers combined observation notes with interviews to identify recurring themes, moving past simple descriptions to find the real issues shared by different groups.
- Modernization & Technology: A key focus was how new tools, like social media and digital filming, are changing traditional rituals and turning them into a global digital experience.
- Stakeholder Roles: The study analyzed the specific jobs of everyone involved, from powerful leaders to manual laborers, showing how the festival depends on a complex web of social connections.
- Socio-Economic Impact: The research tracked how the festival affects the local economy, documenting the financial benefits for small businesses and the daily challenges faced by Thrissur residents.

ON FIELD LEARNING

Organizational Governance

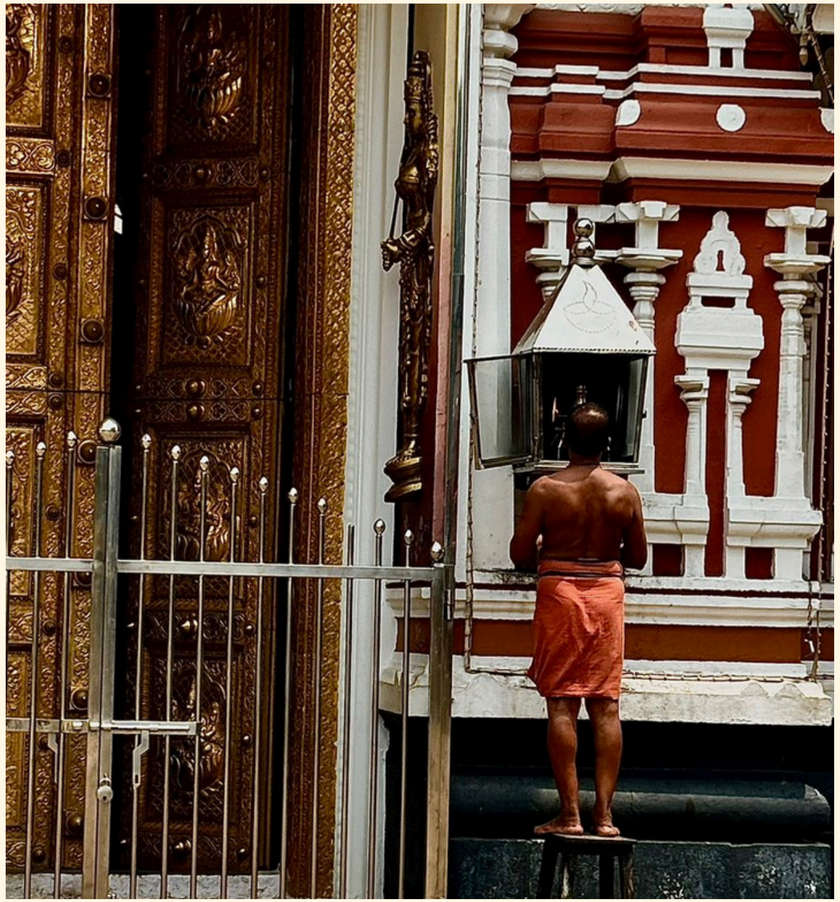
Ritual Rigidity: Despite the modern world around it, the core religious framework established two centuries ago remains strictly unchanged.

Precision Timing: The 36-hour schedule follows a fixed sequence (from flag-hoisting to fireworks), ensuring predictability for organizers.

Dual Governance: Authority is split between the Paramekkavu and Thiruvambady temple committees.

Structured Rivalry: The "rivalry" between the two sides is actually a self-directed competition to improve their own performance each year, rather than a conflict.

The Media Cycle & Massive Scale

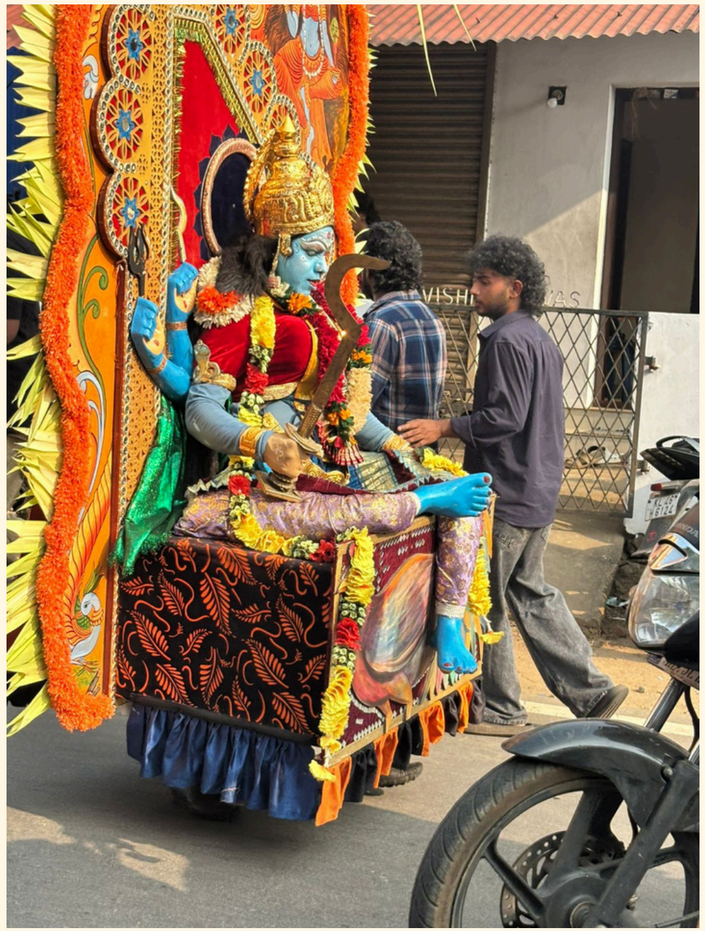


Spectacle vs. Devotion: There is an ongoing tension regarding whether the festival is becoming a show designed for cameras rather than a traditional religious act.

Crowd Pressure: In 2025, crowds reached an estimated 1.8 to 2 million people, putting massive strain on city infrastructure.

Visibility Loop: Global media coverage (180+ channels) attracts tourists, who generate social media content, which then increases the festival's scale further.

Findings: Community & Ethical Tensions

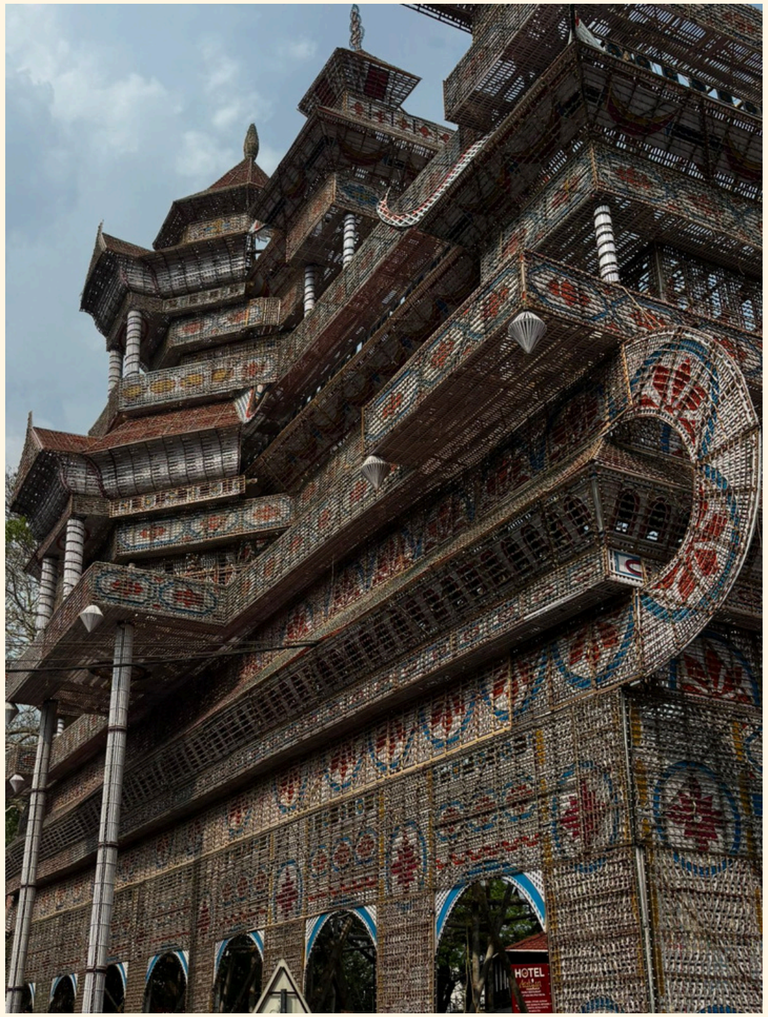


Elephant Welfare: A significant conflict exists between cultural identity and animal welfare. While organizers demonstrate protocols (watering/feeding every 30 minutes), groups like PETA highlight the stress caused by noise and heat.

Invisible Backbone: Local volunteers provide the essential unpaid labor for crowd control and food distribution, driven by a sense of civic duty.

Generational Shift: Younger residents are gradually moving from being active organizers/volunteers to being passive observers.

Findings: Community & Ethical Tensions



Unifying Force: The festival acts as a "cultural heartbeat" that transcends religious and social differences in the region.

Value of Labor: There is a deep appreciation for the "hidden" labor, artisans who work for months on umbrellas and ornaments used for only a few hours.

Selective Evolution: A major takeaway is that tradition can survive in a modern world if it evolves selectively, keeping its core while adapting its management.

Limitations & Future Directions



- **Lack of Financial Data:** The study could not access internal bank records or budget figures from the temple committees.
- **Restricted Meeting Access:** Researchers were not allowed into private committee meetings where major decisions are made.
- **Limited Fieldwork Time:** Being on the ground for only one week made it difficult to see the full year of planning.
- **Seasonal Focus:** The short visit meant the study did not see the festival's peak, only a brief prelude

Limitations & Future Directions



- **Sustainable Logistics**: The festival needs to explore eco-friendly options, like low-smoke fireworks, to protect the environment.
- **Community Re-engagement:** New strategies are needed to encourage local residents to return to active volunteer roles.
- **Managing Digital Growth:** Future work should look at how to use social media without turning sacred rituals into mere entertainment.
- **Long-term Economic Tracking:** More research is required to see how the festival supports local craftsmen throughout the entire year.

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THANK YOU

