MATTANCHERY

By: AFRA, GEEVAR & GOURILAKSHMI

The Citywalk through Mattancherry became a memorable event for the three of us. We still spoke about it fondly. It was a hazy early morning as we finished packing for Mattancherry. Even from the limited vantage point of the bus window, nature proved an important travel companion as we made our way to Ernakulum by private bus. It was 9:30 when we landed at the Vytila terminal. Then we bought a 7-rupee ticket at the Cochin boat port and got on the boat. Ernakulum is the metropolitan side of Cochin, with its malls, massive metro walls, and trains that may take up to an hour to go anywhere. Mattancherry is a more rustic part of the city. The transition from the bus to the boat symbolized the cultural and linguistic shift when people from Cochin settled in Mattancherry. With the opening of the boat's window, we could see the Mattancherry river and hear the soft patter of rain. Different communities have been established on the many islands and streams that make up the Kochi estuary, and the boat has always been an important means of transportation between them and the mainland. However, for most people, it was only a mode of transportation. There were a lot of tourists and people from other countries there.

While disembarking from the boat, our line of sight is indisputably presented with a vivid view of Mattancherry. The iconic narrow streets, alleys, and lanes of Mattancherry bustle with vehicular traffic consisting of cars, motorcycles, and even enormous trucks jammed together as we explored the streets. Mattancherry is home to numerous ethnic groups; some are into the spice trade business, and their shops stand out among other shops with their impeccable ensemble of spice varieties and the aroma it entails. Our nostrils filled with the mesmerizing scent of these spices as we passed by these shops.

Something that caught our attention was the presence of the pastoral animals, such as goats, freely roaming in these urban neighborhoods. The animals are now used to their new home, which is quite different from their former hamlet. These urban creatures are goats, cows, stray cats, dogs, chickens, pigeons, and even butterflies. So many butterflies were flitting around the streets; it was incredible to see them all.

(Fig 1. Architecture of the houses)

Koonankurish

The sky was overcast, but the temperature stayed in the comfortable range. While wandering, we came across a Christian cross where a group of people was zealously praying with flowers, candles, and other items we first misunderstood as worship. A self-employed local tea seller who had been there for decades helped us understand our error and set us on the correct route. The tea seller shared with us that he, too, was a wanderer who had been throughout Kerala. Furthermore, he said customers from all walks of life frequented his tea business. He introduced his Konkani friend and talked about how Mattancherry accepts people of all religions. His pride in his little tea shop and his hometown of Mattancherry shines brightly in his eyes as he describes the area.

(Fig. 2 local tea stall)

We followed the instructions he provided and found the Jain temple. When we arrived at lunchtime, the temperature was high, and there was a little mist in the air. We were briefed on temple etiquette before our entrance. In one of them, it is stated that menstruating women are not permitted to participate. Our tour woman suggested that we (the women) all cover our heads with scarves. The effort put into these details demonstrates how seriously they take the task of preserving their culture in a new environment. The guide was a great example because she can speak five languages and knows a lot about the people of Gujarat. The tour guide made everyone feel welcome, whether they were believers or tourists. The temple's design transports us to another planet. Gujarati letters, an elephant with a lotus on its head, and the images of the nine gurus are all included. Images of Hindu deities, such as Dhanalakshmi, the goddess of riches, attest to the Jains' cosmopolitan outlook. In contrast to the bustle outside, the peace within the temple was a sight to see.

Fig 3. Jain temple

Fig.4 image of saraswathi devi

The salience of the temple was enhanced by the large number of pigeons that flew around it. At 12:15, an older man (possibly the bird trainer) arrived with grains to feed the birds and began to give a sermon on the Jain Siddhanta, the need for non-violence, etc. He then talked about what made the area around the temple special, like Gujarati Street, the local schools, and the Gujarati sweet shops. The wise old man brimmed with anticipation as he prepared to share

the Jainist philosophy with us. He also used examples from his own life to show how his philosophical arguments could be used in real life.

Fig.5 pigeons around the temple

We proceeded with our journey with the assistance of Google Maps until we reached the Dutch palace, which was closed when we got there. However, there were a few things that caught our attention. The first was that the palace's architecture blended elements from Kerala and the Dutch. Because it was closed, we could not continue our exploration of the area.

Fig. 6 street view

Fig 7 The dutch palace

We stopped for a moment at a Dutch palace with a stuffy ambiance for a little break, and then we continued on foot toward Jew Street. It was an even more fantastic experience since we saw cafés, antique stores, and fabric stores on both sides of the roadways. Additionally, we had the chance to meet many people, including locals, people who cherish Jewish traditions, visitors,

and so on. You can walk down the street to get to the "Paradesi synagogue," which was built in 1568 and is the "oldest synagogue still in use." In the territory now known as the state of Cochin, it is one of the seven synagogues that serve the Malabar Yehuden people, also known as the Jewish community of Cochin. The people who take care of the synagogue told us that the word "Paradesi" is used in more than one language. "Foreigners" is what the term means when taken literally. It was donated to the synagogue since it had been used by Jews.

Fig.8 jew street

When we left the synagogue, it served as a reminder that we needed to get some rest, and the weather seemed to agree with us, as shown by the fact that it started to rain shortly after we left. We walked through the streets until we got to the peaceful Konnan Kurish Church. Our destination was "Pandari Biriyani." We looked at the huge cross that was meant to show defiance against Portuguese colonial rule. The Christians of St. Thomas fastened a lengthy rope to a "standing cross" on the northern side of the Mattancherry Church on Friday, January 3, 1653, and made an oath that said, "As long as this trial remains, we will not succumb to the priests of Samballoor." The Koonan Cross Oath, also known as the Koonan Kurish Sathyam, was a protest that altered the lives of Christians in Kerala and contributed to the development of history. The atmosphere within the church was one of quiet. We were unaware of how tranquil the area surrounding the church was until the road was widened and the distance between it and the church increased.

After leaving the church, we took a stroll around the neighborhood, and it was rather amusing to watch many youngsters hurriedly making their way home. Perhaps they were worn out after attending lengthy courses. Because of how quickly they are moving, the streets are becoming increasingly crowded. Because they were such a varied mix of people that we came across on our trip, our time spent with them was unlike any other experience.

We got to the beach around five in the evening, and the sun was already making plans for his day off alongside the gloomy sky, which seemed like it would start crying at any moment. A soft breeze was relaxing the environment and ourselves, which may have been because we were fatigued after the long trip. In the evening, the port appeared like a night fairy thanks to the modest café lights, and the enormous ships that floated in the water added to her beauty.

It was the busiest place we visited during the whole trip. A place where all the cultural differences one encounters may converge. They have people of all ages and backgrounds represented there. Groups of people of many ethnicities relax on the bricks, share cups of hot tea, and pose for photographs. As more and more people arrived, they brought increasingly loud voices, and we saw that many of them seemed entranced while gazing at the water. This includes car horns, people talking, children screaming, and blaring music from car stereos. The sound of waves crashing on the beach calms and refreshes our minds and souls. Everyone around us seemed to be doing something different. Numerous merchants set up shops, along with a few modest tea shops.

After a very interesting day, individuals began to leave one by one as the sun's rays began to set and the day ended. Even though we wanted to extend our time on the beach and make the most of this once-in-a-lifetime chance, it was our turn to go, and unfortunately, it was time for us to leave. We embarked upon our journey with gratitude and composure in our hearts.