

The Cheramaan Juma Mosque (Malayalam: ചെറമ്മാണി ജുമാ മസ്ജിദ്) (Arabic: مسجد الرئيس جمعة) is a mosque in Methala, Kodungallur Taluk, Thrissur District in the Indian state of Kerala.[1][2][3] A legend claims that it was built in 629 CE,[4] which makes it the oldest mosque in the Indian subcontinent which is still in use.[5][6][7] It was built by Malik Deenar, Persian tābiʿūn of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, on the orders of the successor of Cheraman Perumal, the Chera King of modern-day Kerala.[7][8][9][10] The mosque was constructed in Kerala style with hanging lamps, making the historicity of its date claims more convincing.[1][2][7][8][9][10]

The mosque was completely destroyed by the Portuguese in 1504 when Lopo Soares de Albergaria attacked the port of Kodungallur. The old building was built some time after the 1504 de Alagabaria attack (i.e., from mid-16th to the early 17th century). Modern corridors and halls were built in 1984. The 1984 extensions, which surround the old building, conceal almost all of the exterior features of the old building.[11]

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History[edit]

According to some legends, Cheraman Perumal ("Cheraman Perumal" being the title held by Chera kings) witnessed the splitting of the moon, a supernatural event mentioned in the Quran[12] as a miracle performed by Muhammad when asked for one by Meccan unbelievers. The bewildered King confirmed with his astrologers that the incident had taken place, but didn't know what to make of it. Arab merchants who had arrived at a Malabar port, a bustling global marketplace, sought audience with the King to have his permission to visit Ceylon. In conversation with them, the King learnt about Muhammad, made his son the regent of his kingdom and travelled back with the Arab merchants to meet the man himself.[citation needed]

The story goes that Cheraman Perumal arrived in Arabia with a gift of ginger pickles for Muhammad and his companions[13] and converted to Islam "at the feet of Prophet Muhammad".[14]

The oral traditions of the legend differ greatly, another story goes that Cheraman Perumal was visiting the King of Maldives and they discussed the splitting of the moon, both men deciding to visit Mecca to find out the truth.[14] According to S. N. Sadasivan, a social historian, it wasn't the Cheraman Perumal of Malabar in the tale at all, but instead the King of Maldives, whose capital city "Malé" was confused for "Malabar".[15] In his book A Social History of India, Sadasivan argues that it was the king of Maldives, Kalimanja, who converted to Islam. Mali, which was known to seafarers then, might have been

misunderstood as Malabar (Kerala) and this might have given rise to the tale of Tajuddeen in the Cochin Gazetteer, which need not be expected to concoct such a tale which in no way enhances the prestige of the Brahmins or Hindu population.[16][17]

The history of the mosque has given it many architectural quirks including that since it was a repurpose Buddhist shrine, until its reconstruction in 1000 CE the mosque faced East instead of towards the Kaaba. Even today the mosque still includes some remnants of the shrine, including a traditional pond and a lamp that is said to have been burning for a thousand years,[18] with oil that is brought for it by visitors and pilgrims of all religions.

Location[edit]

Masjid is located in the Paravur–Kodungalloor Road, NH-66 at Kodungalloor taluk, Thrissur District in Kerala.

Ceremonies[edit]

Vidyarambham[edit]

The ceremony of Vidyarambham (Vidya means "knowledge", arambham means "beginning"), held typically on Vijayadashami, is a Hindu tradition to initiate their children into learning under the supervision of a learned person like a priest. At Cheraman Masjid, this ceremony is performed by the mosque's Muslim Imam, who traces the alphabet drawn in the sand on a child's tongue, indicating an invocation to Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

Appointment of the Aven (Priest)[edit]

The aven (priest) of Shobhaparamba Sreekurumba Bhagavati temple in Tanur, Malappuram district, is appointed a member of the Pazhayakath family, a local Muslim family. According to Chellikkattil Sundaran, president of the temple trust, the temple's aven had been traditionally appointed by a member of the local Thiyya family, a Brahmin family of Pazhayakhath Ilom. The family disintegrated over the years and its remaining members converted to Islam but both the temple authorities and the family upheld the tradition. The temple's Hindu priest is appointed in a special ritual once every 12 years, presided over by a Muslim member of the Pazhayakath family, who makes the formal announcement. Locals ascribe this camaraderie to Cheraman Perumal.[14][19]

Maharajahs of Travancore[edit]

The legend of the "Makkattupoya Perumal" or "the King who went to Makkah (Mecca)" has lived on in Kerala memory and apparently, the Maharajahs of the Principedom of Travancore in pre-Independence India would say at their swearing in, "I will keep this sword until the uncle who has gone to Makkah returns".[20]

Famous Visitors[edit]

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, 11th President of India.[21]

Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.[22]

See also[edit]

Islam in India

Tamil Muslim

Muslim chronicles for Indian history

Muziris Heritage Project

Baba Ratan Hindi