

Innolam

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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF INTACH IN KERALA

“Our Fort Kochi study influenced the setting up of the state Arts and Heritage Commission”

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-KJ Sohan



The zoologist whose name was given to a new species.

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Why old houses matter in a world that is warming.

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INTACH's new *trans-national* project.

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INTACH Kerala

‘Innolam’. Inspiration from across chapters

Welcome to the first issue of the digital newsletter ‘*Innolam*’, a new initiative for INTACH chapters and members across Kerala.

Across eight locations in the state, thoughtful work continues to take shape in different ways, often remaining within local circles. *Innolam* offers a shared space where such efforts and learnings can travel across chapters, be noticed, and quietly inspire similar work elsewhere.

Along with celebrating recent chapter work, *Innolam* will sometimes look further. This may include reflections on significant initiatives from the past, individual efforts with the potential to inspire, and developments in the wider heritage and conservation landscape of Kerala that are relevant to the work at hand.

As a first-time effort, this newsletter will find its feet over time. Kindly be indulgent of the many shortcomings that you are likely to find. Please write in your critiques, ideas and contributions to keralaintach@gmail.com and help make this publication effort over the coming issues. As the new year begins, may this shared space help strengthen connection within the INTACH family in Kerala and help it grow.



AT A GLANCE

Frequency

Quarterly

Content focus

Short spotlights on the projects, people and possibilities that connects the INTACH fraternity in Kerala, and opens new skies for our work.

About the title

Innolam just means ‘till now’.
(But can you read more into it?)

From study to statute

How an INTACH report influenced urban heritage protection in the state



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“For many corporators, it was the first time heritage was being examined with this level of rigour”

K J SOHAN
former Mayor, Kochi

In 1986, an INTACH study of the historic Fort Kochi and Mattancherry area marked an important shift in how urban heritage was understood in Kerala.

Led by Prof K T Raveendran of the School of Planning & Architecture, New Delhi, the report documented the area’s layered history and proposed conservation strategies for a living city. At a time when such work was rare in India, it stood out for its depth and wide focus.

K J Sohan, former Kerala State Convenor, recalls that the study quickly moved beyond professional circles. Following his election as Mayor of Kochi, he invited Prof Raveendran to present its findings to the city council.

“For many corporators, it was the first time heritage was being examined with this level of rigour,” he says. “The multidisciplinary approach made a strong impression at the meeting.”



“Places such as Fort Kochi would have, most likely, been transformed, if not for this provision”

AR. RAMASWAMY
Member, Arts & Heritage
Commission, Kerala

The council went on to pass a resolution adopting the study’s recommendations for buildings within the historic Fort Kochi–Mattancherry area. For a city council to act on a conservation study in this manner was unusual at the time, and it signalled a change in approach.

From local insight to wider attention

The work soon drew attention at the state level. The late Dr Babu Paul IAS was among those who took note of the quality of the work. He felt that the Fort Kochi study demonstrated an approach that could inform a broader framework for protecting historic buildings and heritage assets across the districts of Kerala.

According to Ar Ramaswamy of the Kollam Chapter, this view found support among several senior figures in government, including former Tourism Secretary T Balakrishnan IAS.

Building momentum

Around that period, a seminar organised by the Local Administration Department brought together representatives from local self-government bodies and experts such as the late Ar Laurie Baker. These discussions, helped build momentum for a statewide response.

Shri Sohan also recalls the involvement of conservation professionals such as the late Shyam Chainani. “Inputs drawn from experiences in other parts of the world were extremely valuable in shaping thinking at the time,” he notes.

Lasting institutional outcome

The result was the establishment of the Kerala Arts and Heritage Commission, a statutory body chaired by the Chief Town Planner and comprising senior officials and external experts. It became the nodal mechanism for identifying heritage assets, defining parameters for protection and evaluating conservation proposals.

BABU PAUL, IAS
Former Chief Secretary



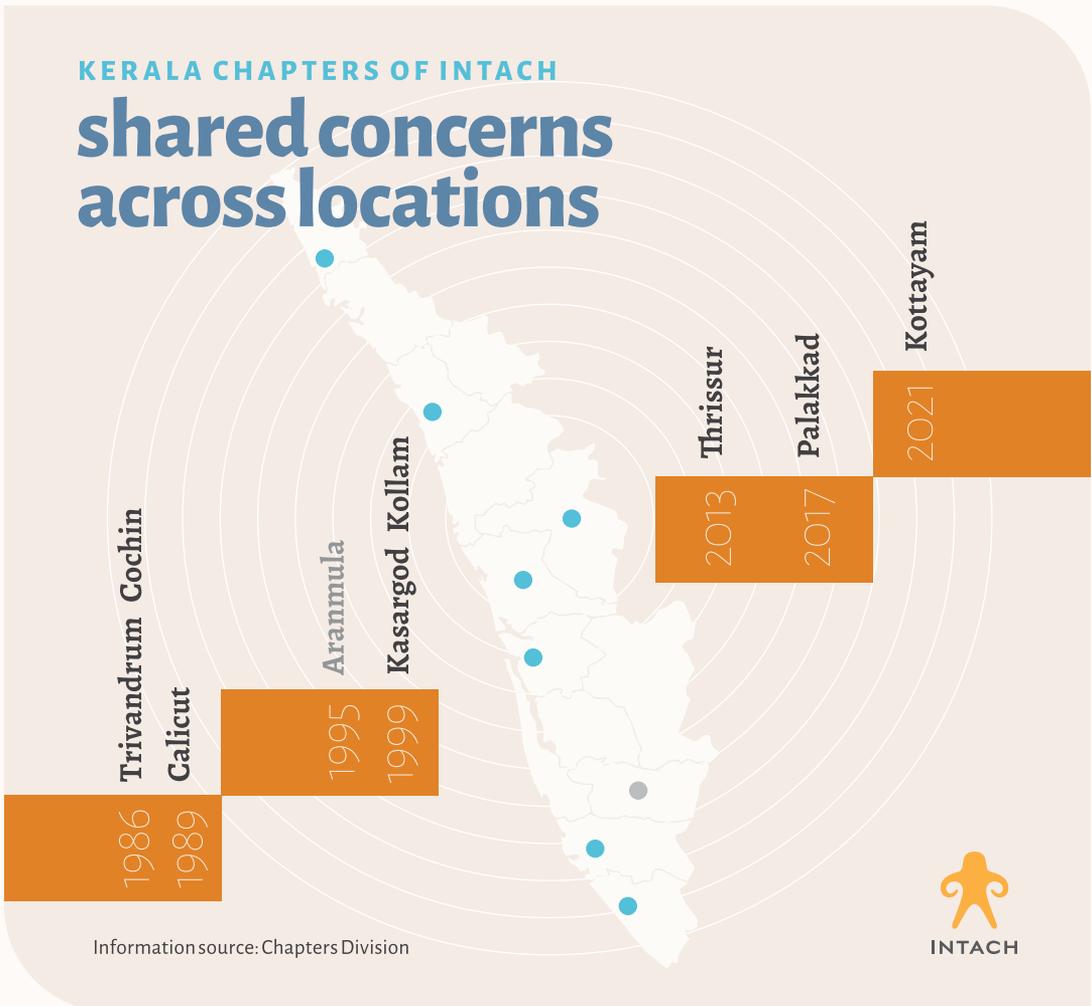


Fort area, Trivandrum

Ar Ramaswamy, the longest-serving member of the Commission, believes it has made a tangible difference. “Places such as Fort Kochi, the Fort area in Thiruvananthapuram and Kalpathi in Palakkad have not been entirely transformed, despite intense development pressure.” Over time, some early limitations have been addressed, with decentralisation allowing district-level mechanisms to resolve many issues locally.

Even as the pressures on Kerala’s built heritage have intensified, the presence of a legislative framework remains significant. Shri K J Sohan sees the Commission as one of the more enduring outcomes of INTACH's work in the state. Today, its ambit extends across all districts through town planning offices that maintain lists of heritage assets requiring protection; lists that continue to evolve, shaped by inputs from heritage groups and local communities across the state.

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The High Ranges

Interpretation as the first act of heritage conservation

In 1994, INTACH published *The High Ranges: Problems and Potential of a Hill Region in the Southern Western Ghats*, a book still remembered with admiration by those familiar with it. Written by Sathis Chandran Nair, an early member from Thiruvananthapuram and a respected environmental activist, it emerged during a period when ecological awareness in Kerala was shaped as much by explanation as by activism.



A book that explained before it warned

The book set out to define what the “High Ranges” are, tracing their natural, cultural and geological distinctiveness, and explaining why this hill region mattered. It also spoke, with notable clarity for its time, about the pressures this fragile landscape faced from development. Complex ecological ideas were made accessible without being over-simplified, and the writing trusted the reader’s curiosity and intelligence.





The Southern Western Ghats: A Biodiversity Conservation Plan. Another publication in the series by the same author that came out in 1991.

The publication grew out of wider efforts. Sathis Chandran Nair was closely associated with an INTACH natural heritage cell that functioned based out of Trivandrum for many years that focused largely on engaging young people. In the years following the Silent Valley movement, there was a strong push to take environmental knowledge beyond specialist circles.

The High Ranges was part of a broader publication series addressing different facets of ecological awareness, with communication seen as central to conservation.

Why it still matters

Today, the book is difficult to find, but its relevance has not faded. Shri Anilkumar of the environment-focused bookshop Altermedia has repeatedly urged that it be reprinted. “There is a real need for this book even now,” he says, noting that few publications explain the ecology of the Western Ghats with such balance and readability.

The High Ranges offers a glimpse into a moment when sharing knowledge clearly and widely was seen as essential to environmental work.



did you know?



That late **Dr M G K Menon**, pioneering physicist, thinker and Union Minister who chaired the landmark Silent Valley committee that recommended protecting the area as a nature reserve was one of the founder-members of INTACH IN 1984?

Dr P S Easa

The zoologist with a species named after him.



In 2022, when a newly identified gecko from the dry, rocky landscapes of Attappady in the Western Ghats was named *Hemidactylus easai*, it recognized the contributions made by a remarkable zoologist to wildlife research and conservation.

Dr P S Easa, part of the Thrissur chapter, and formerly Director of the Kerala Forest Research Institute, has close to five decades of experience in biodiversity research, conservation and management. Renowned for his work on elephant ecology, he continues to be engaged in natural heritage through research, advisory roles and education, long after retirement.

Extending Expertise into INTACH

His association with the Thrissur chapter began during work on the conservation of *Vadakkechira*, where his expertise proved particularly relevant. Since then, he has been an active member of the chapter's executive committee, contributing to discussions on planning and impact.





“We cannot expect the convenor to do everything... members have to take responsibility”

He speaks candidly about the realities of volunteer-led work. “Getting people to help needs patience. Everyone comes with different constraints.” About INTACH he adds, “We cannot expect the Convenor to do everything. If chapters are to have even one meaningful activity each month, members have to take responsibility.”

A need for calibrating areas of focus

Dr Easa also notes a broader challenge within the organisation. “There is sometimes an imbalance,” he says. “With many architects involved, cultural and built heritage tends to get more attention. Natural heritage needs equal care, and it takes a conscious effort to keep that focus alive.”

He also sees strong potential in working more closely with schools and young people, but feels this depends on members clearly understanding what participation implies. “Many assume it is someone else’s job. That mindset has to change, including for people like me,” he says.

Known for an affable and often witty manner that fits easily with Thrissur’s temperament, Dr Easa remains an engaged and grounded presence, bringing experience to the table without distance or deference.



Hemidactylus easai.

Know a similar person?

DO SHARE THEIR STORY

The membership in our chapters is full of people with remarkable interests, ideas and accomplishments. Knowing about them inspires the rest of us. If you have someone in your chapter who fits the description, propose the name with a short note to your Chapter Convenor to be considered for a future edition of *Innolam*.

Ar Vishnu P Prakash

Why old houses matter in a warming world



Vishnu P Prakash
M. Arch, PhD
Asst Professor,
Faculty of Architecture,
Christ University,
Bangalore

Many of us in Kerala believe that traditional courtyard houses (*Nalukettus*) are more climate-sensitive than what we build today. It is a belief shaped by experience, memory and anecdote, but rarely tested in systematic ways.

Ar Vishnu Prakash's doctoral research at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi: *Traditional Courtyard Houses of Palakkad, Kerala: Thermal Comfort Evaluation*, took this assumption head-on. It examined how these houses actually perform in terms of thermal comfort, using measured data rather than inherited wisdom.

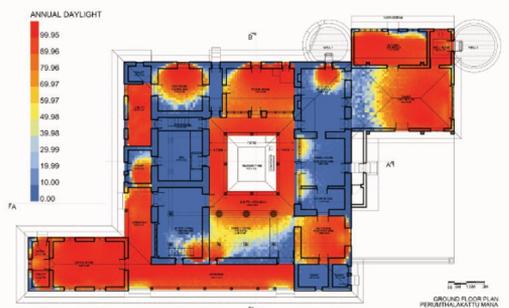
By studying a small set of courtyard houses in *Kadampazhipuram*, the research looks at how comfort is achieved through passive means such as ventilation, materials and spatial planning, rather than mechanical cooling.

Ar Vishnu's association with INTACH began through the student chapter at SCMS College, and continued during his fieldwork with support from the Palakkad Chapter, which helped identify case studies and enable access.

As climate-responsive design becomes more urgent, work like this helps turn belief into understanding. Keeping it connected to INTACH's work in Kerala, and to Ar Vishnu Prakash's continued involvement, clearly matters.

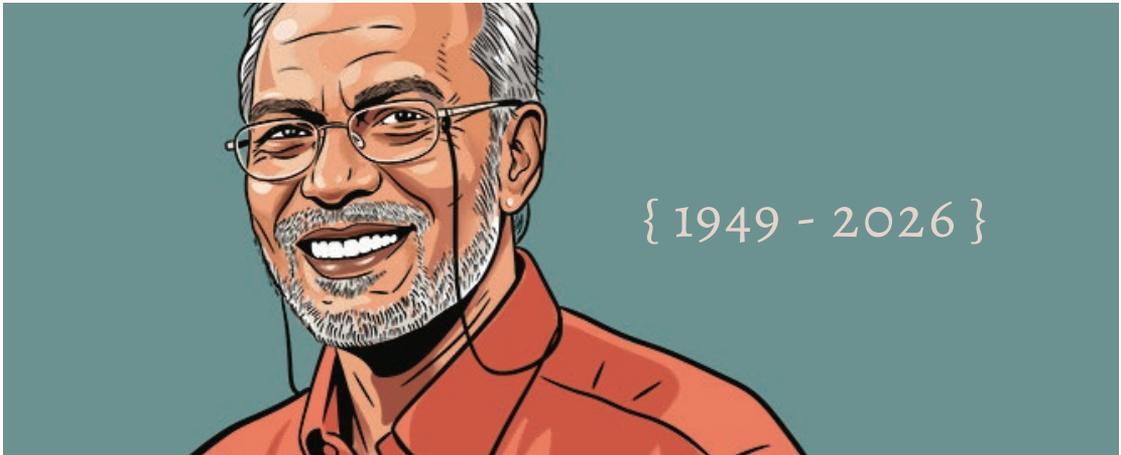


Incident Radiation



Remembering Capt Dinker Karunakar

An officer, a citizen and a friend



Captain Dinker Karunakar, fondly known as *Dinky*, brought dignity, easy warmth and good humour to everything he did. After a successful career in the merchant navy, he retired to Calicut and, with his wife Girija, became deeply involved in the city's volunteer and civic life. He believed strongly in active citizenship, often saying there was little point in joining an organisation without the intent to make a difference.

As Convenor of INTACH Calicut from 2015 to 2018, he put this belief into practice. He initiated a pioneering series of talks on Calicut's migrant communities, including the *Parsis* and the *Bohras*, held in locations closely tied to their histories. He broadened the chapter's appeal, drew in younger members, and played a mentoring role in the formation of the Palakkad Chapter. When he handed over leadership, the chapter was clearly more active and diverse.

After stepping down, he remained a generous guide and steady presence until ill health limited his involvement. He passed away on January 22, and is remembered with affection, respect and gratitude by friends across INTACH in Kerala.



CHAPTER UPDATES

Across Kerala, our volunteers organized activities ranged from history walks in *Calicut, Cochin and Kottayam* to tree walks and explorations of traditional water systems in *Kasargod, Palakkad and Thrissur*.

Thrissur and Cochin focussed on documentation and conservation work, while *Kasargod* engaged students with arts and elements of intangible heritage.

Together, these efforts reflect an energetic, imaginative community, where one chapter's work sparks ideas and action in another.

World Heritage Week at Payyannur



World Heritage Week 2025 opening took place at the Folkland Centre, Payyannur, on 19 November. The event brought together cultural practitioners, scholars and the wider public, setting the tone for a week of heritage-focused engagement.

Padmashri Prasad Gurukkal inaugurated the programme while chapter convenor Dr Jayarajan addressed the gathering. The occasion also saw film actor and dancer Rachana Narayanan Kutty being honoured for her diverse contributions to the cultural field.



Kalaripayattu master, Padmashri Prasad Gurukkal addressing the audience

World Heritage Week celebrations concluded on the 20th November at Monacha, Nileshwaram, with the valedictory function of a nine-month long mural painting training programme.

Besides the participants, the event recognised mural artist Priya Gopal for her role in mentoring them. Inaugurated by muralist K R Babu and presided over by Dr Jayarajan, the programme highlighted efforts to sustain Kerala's mural painting tradition.

A guided tour across the region's ancient water bodies and conservation systems was also held.



Participants at the mural painting course.

Heritage Club starts at St Joseph's College, Pilathara



A Heritage Club was initiated at the St Joseph's College, Pilathara. The opening featured a lively *Chakyar Koothu* performance by Kalamandalam Sajith Vijayan, who also inaugurated the club.

The programme was presided over by the Principal Dr Shajimon. The Manager Rev Fr Rajan Fausto offered a benediction, and the session included remarks from the convener of the club, Amritha Mathew, and a vote of thanks by student-member Priyesh Kumar.

Chakyarkoothu
by Kalamandalam
Sajith Vijayan



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did you know?



That the INTACH Heritage Academy brings out the **INTACH Journal of Heritage Studies (IJHS)**, a peer-reviewed publication? Edited by a panel of leading international scholars, it offers thoughtful, in-depth writing on Indian heritage for readers who value critical inquiry. It is especially relevant for members curious about the larger questions behind conservation.

Heritage trip to the historic town of Koyilandy



On January 17, an INTACH Calicut team, including archaeologist Padmashri K.K. Mohammed, conducted a heritage survey of Koyilandy to document its diverse historical layers.

The expedition mapped the town's role as a cultural crossroads, spanning Neolithic monuments (*Muniyara*) to revolutionary landmarks like the ancestral home of the *Kurumayil* family, key figures in the Quit India Movement's 'Bomb Conspiracy.'

The team also explored ancient maritime and religious sites, including the port of Panthalayani Kollam and the 250-year-old Valiyakath Darga Sharif. Environmental heritage was highlighted through a 10-acre sacred grove and a massive man-made pond, illustrating traditional conservation practices.

By connecting prehistoric relics with modern history, the visit underscored the importance of preserving Koyilandy's multifaceted identity amidst rapid urban expansion.



The team at the site of Vasco Da Gama's landing in Kappad

Tree walk in and around the Palakkad Fort



Tree walkers at the iconic mango tree at the Fort.

A tree walk held on 18th January in and around the Palakkad Fort drew attention to the area's remarkable green cover and botanical diversity. Spread across more than 25 acres in the heart of the city, the fort precinct holds over 350 trees and around 50 species, making it one of Palakkad's most significant urban green spaces.

Led by botanist Dr Rekha Vasudevan, the walk introduced participants to 20 selected trees, both indigenous and introduced, and explored their ecological and cultural value.

Beginning at the old *Peepal* within the fort and concluding near the *Mahua* tree by the Rappadi auditorium, the walk underlined the importance of safeguarding this "green heart" of the city.

Most visitors come to the fort for its historical significance, often unaware that its green heritage is just as rich and rewarding to explore. The chapter hopes to build on this initiative by working towards a publication that interprets the fort precinct's remarkable tree diversity.





Chapter GBM in a historic Thrissur home

A chapter General Body Meeting was held on 6th December at Ram Vilas, a 110-year-old heritage residence. Meeting in a conserved domestic setting offered a reminder of the value of living heritage and the role such structures play in everyday cultural life.

Alongside discussions on chapter activities, the meeting featured a technical talk by Ar Archana Vinod on climate-related risks to heritage buildings. Drawing on her ICCROM training in Nantucket and examples from Kerala, she outlined emerging challenges such as increased rainfall, humidity, flooding and material decay. The session highlighted the need for climate risk assessment, environmental monitoring and resilience-based conservation planning.

The discussion that followed reinforced the importance of proactive documentation, interdisciplinary approaches and greater awareness in responding to climate change impacts on heritage.



Presentation by Ar Archana Vinod on climate resilience.

A walk that reframed the old Thrissur zoo



A nature walk at the old Thrissur Zoo and Museum premises in *Chembukkavu* drew attention to the site's often-overlooked ecological value at a time when its future is under discussion. Led by Dr Sujanapalan of KFRRI, the walk highlighted the campus's mature tree cover, native and endemic plant species, and the layered micro-ecosystems that have evolved over decades.

The site was seen not merely as a former zoo, but as a vital green space that supports biodiversity and climate moderation within the city. The walk prompted conversations around reimagining the campus as a shared heritage and ecological landscape, where conservation, education and thoughtful public use can come together.



The team at the historic Sree Kerala Varma College



Site inspection at Sree Kerala Varma College

The visit enabled an initial assessment of the condition of the historic Main Block within the broader heritage context of the campus, including associated structures such as the Merry Lodge. The inspection revealed serious maintenance issues and potential safety risks, underscoring the urgency for informed intervention.

The inspection showed that the Main Block has suffered from years of neglect. Several areas are in poor condition, and some issues raise safety concerns. The visit underlined the need for early action. The INTACH team recommended detailed documentation of the building, followed by a careful of repair needs. These findings will guide a conservation-led DPR prepared by experts.

Heritage Walk and Talk at Muziris project sites



Heritage talk at the Kottapuram Fort



The Muziris Heritage Walk & Talk at Kottapuram on 12th November brought together over 70 participants for an immersive engagement with one of Kerala's most layered cultural landscapes.

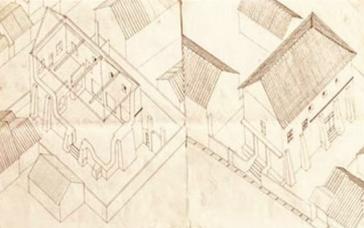
Conducted by the INTACH Cochin with the Muziris Heritage Project, KTIL and the IIA Kerala, the walk combined site-based exploration with panel discussion by six eminent experts.

The programme, coordinated by conservation architect and INTACH member Rakhi Mariam Johnson, deepened public understanding of Muziris as a living heritage continuum and encouraged informed dialogue on conservation, interpretation and future stewardship.

Kadavumbhagam synagogue: documenting for restoration

As part of its sustained commitment to the conservation of the 500-year-old Kadavumbhagam Synagogue at Mattancherry, INTACH Cochin has begun preparatory work on a comprehensive technical and research report.

Jointly developed by Ar. Jacob Cherian and Dr. Vishnu Prakash, the report will document the synagogue's architectural condition and historic significance. Once published, it will serve as a critical foundation for mobilising support from government agencies and international heritage funding bodies, strengthening the pathway towards long-term restoration.



Safeguarding the Cheppad murals



Heritage talk at the Kottapuram Fort

To support the protection of the 13th-century murals at St. George Orthodox Church, Cheppad, a technical report is being prepared by Ar. Ajay Abey in collaboration with parish member and research scholar Sneha Mary Mathew. The report builds on earlier documentation by Prof. Eugene Pandala and his team, and will inform conservation responses to emerging risks posed by the nearby NH66 alignment, strengthening the case for timely and sensitive interventions.



Documenting the Cheenavalas of Fort Kochi

In partnership with Saintgits Design School, documentation of the iconic Cheenavalas at Fort Kochi has been initiated, covering measured drawings, photography, sketches, video and historical research. The work will lead to an exhibition and publication. The initiative is guided by Ar. Jacob Cherian on technical documentation and K J Sohan on historical research, with academic inputs from Dr. Jayadevi, Assoc. Dean, Saintgits Design School.



Tracing lost basilica relics

A team comprising K J Sohan and history student Rinol Job visited sites where relics of a 16th-century basilica, recovered during the Fort Kochi Water Metro works, are currently housed.

The visits have led to the start of documentation and dialogue with archival and academic resources in Lisbon, aimed at reconstructing the site's history. An inception report will be submitted to the Dept of Archaeology to support conservation, and further exploration of remains beneath Fort Kochi's sea mouth.



Heritage talk at the Kottapuram Fort



Old Kottayam heritage walk

The chapter's first public event, a walk led by local historian and INTACH member Rajeev Pallikonam drew over 20 participants, including members and interested Kottayam residents.

It traced the layered history of the town through sites such as Kottayam Cheriyaapally, Valiyapalli, Thazhathangady Juma Masjid and the Thaliyil Mahadeva Temple. Along the way, participants encountered murals, inscriptions, woodwork and streetscapes that reflect the shared cultural life of old Kottayam. The walk demonstrated how different communities shaped the identity of this town on the Meenachil river over time.

The strong public response marked a confident beginning to the new chapter's outreach and engagement efforts.



Chapter revival at Kollam

After a long stretch of remaining a vibrant presence in the cultural landscape of Kollam under the leadership of Ar. Eugene Pandala, the Kollam chapter has been inactive in recent years.

A core team comprising senior members Ar. Manoj Kini and Ar. Santosh has come together to draw new membership and identify priorities.

A first meeting has been scheduled to be held at the 8Point Art Cafe on February



Online meet of convenors across Kerala

The State Convenors' Meet, held online on 17 December organised by the Chapter Division, focused on improving coordination, compliance, and momentum across chapters in Kerala. The session was led by Group Capt Arvind Shukla, Director of the division, who steered discussions on functioning and reporting practices.

Member Secretary, Shri Ravindra Singh IAS, presided over the meeting and provided strategic guidance. State Co-Convenor Arun Narayan outlined steps underway to address compliance requirements and plans to revitalise chapters that need renewed direction. The meeting reinforced a commitment to closer collaboration and more purposeful programming across Kerala chapters.



State Convenors meet at New Delhi

At the 27–28 January meeting at INTACH headquarters, Chairman Ashok Thakur reviewed progress on key initiatives and flagged areas for stronger coordination with state chapters.

Kerala State Co-Convenor Arun Narayan outlined chapter activities and member expectations around clearer communication and training. Member Secretary Ravindra Singh IAS noted that reforms to chapter guidelines, membership systems and electoral processes are underway.

SUPPORT CANDIDATES CLOSEST TO US

(in values, even if not location)



The 2026 elections to the Governing Council are here. Ballot papers will soon reach you.

Voting costs little more than your time and matters more than you may think.

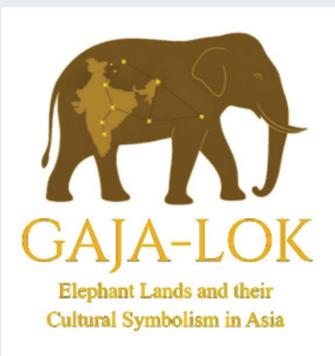
Those elected, even if they are not from Kerala, shape priorities that affect our chapters. Project funding, training and support.

Take a moment to review the candidates. Pick the people who seem knowledgeable, active, democratic and forward-looking.

Apply your judgment. Seal the ballot. Post it!*

*Post your vote not later than the first week of March.

A project that speaks to our love of elephants

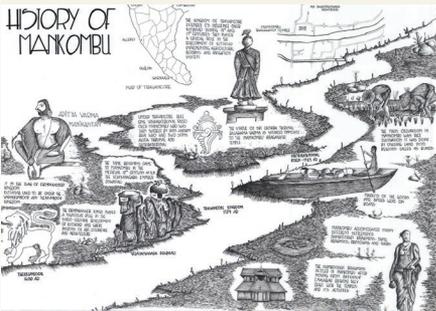


Project Gaja-Lok is a transnational culture–nature programme coordinated by the ICH Division of INTACH, exploring elephant landscapes and their cultural symbolism across Asia.

The project brings together diverse heritage perspectives to document traditional knowledge, archival material and lived histories of human–elephant relationships, with a long-term vision of a UNESCO nomination.

For Kerala, a state with a deep cultural affinity to elephants, Gaja-Lok presents an opportunity to contribute local narratives, practices and landscapes. Chapters are encouraged to ideate on ways to support the project and help amplify it through local initiatives and partnerships.

Heritage management plan for historic Mancombu village



A snapshot from one of the exhaustive documents prepared by the team from the SCMS School of Architecture in Ernakulam

A proposed Heritage Management Plan for Moncombu by the Kottayam chapter will document and map the region’s temple-centred settlement, traditional housing clusters, and cultural practices.

Guided by Co-Convenor Ar Binumol Tom, the project will attempt to conserve and strengthen local identity, and support environmentally sensitive planning in the Kuttanad wetlands.

A multi-disciplinary team led by Convenor James Zacharias started the project with a series of exploratory visits to the historic area.



did you know?



That Kerala once hosted an INTACH mural conservation facility in Thrissur, later shifted to Hill Palace?

INTACH runs one of the world’s largest conservation lab networks under its Art and Material Heritage division, with centres across five regions.

The labs document, conserve and restore objects ranging from manuscripts and textiles to murals and sculptures.

They also offer training in conservation and archives care, and undertake restoration projects for governments, institutions and private collections. The recent restoration of the friezes at the Kollengode Palace in Palakkad is a notable example from our state.

INNOLAM

Heritage Quiz

1. How many types of forts are mentioned in Kautilya's classic treatise on statecraft, politics, and military strategy, the *Artha Sastra*?
2. Which was the site in Kerala, later designated a national geo-heritage monument, that was first documented by Scottish surgeon and surveyor Dr. Francis Buchanan-Hamilton in 1807?
3. Who was the Malayalam poet whose work in the 1980s resulted in a great interest in the ritual art-form Padayani far beyond its traditional home?
4. What is the central subject of the Sanskrit treatise, the *Matanga-Lila*?
5. Who was the 20th century Maddalam maestro often considered the architect of modern *Panchavadyam*?

1. Six, 2. Angadippuram Laterite, 3. Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, 4. Elephants, 5. Tiruvilwamala Venkichen Swamy

ANSWERS

Note to Readers

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in this newsletter. However, if any errors have inadvertently slipped in, our regrets in advance. We would appreciate if you would point them out in a mail to keralaintach@gmail.com.

Your suggestions, updates and ideas for future editions are also welcome. Do write in.