

Tisser

hand to heart

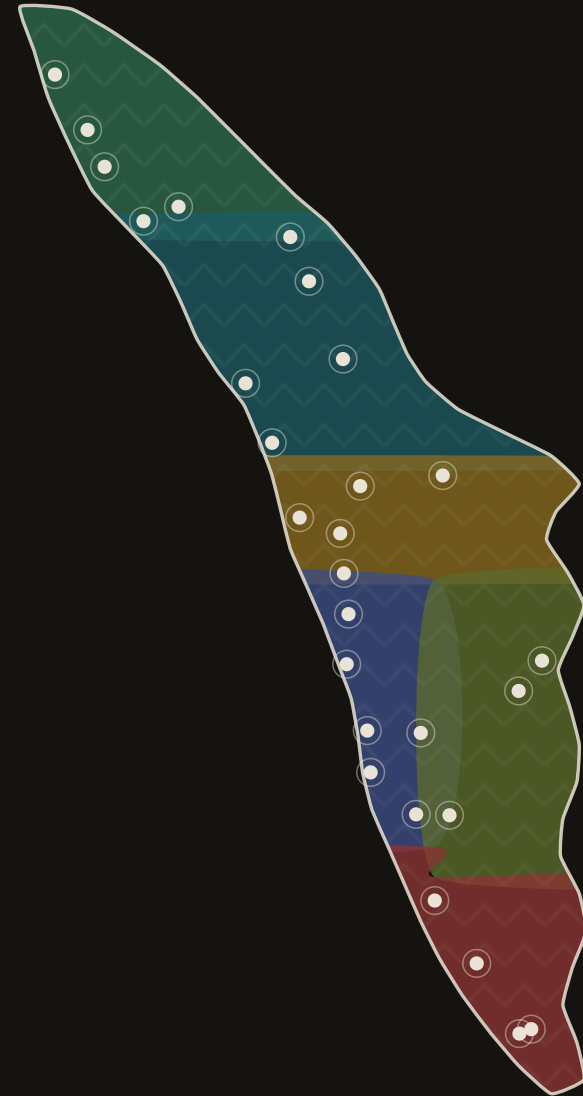
ARTISANS TRUST

CRAFT MAPPING INITIATIVE · KERALA

Kerala: A Journey Through Crafts

കരകൗശല വഴികളിലൂടെ

A district-by-district map of the state's living handloom and handicraft traditions — their makers, materials, geographies and legal protections. Forty-three entries across fourteen districts. A first edition, and an open one.



What is in this volume

This volume maps craft by geography. A second volume, planned, will map it by maker — named artisans, workshops and co-operatives, with contact routes for buyers, designers and researchers.

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Every craft is one card

Each entry carries the same eight pieces of information in the same place, so that entries can be compared across six hundred kilometres and a thousand years. Nothing here is ranked: a craft with one surviving family takes exactly as much space on the page as a craft with four thousand workers.



IN METAL

Payyannur Pavithra Ring

പവിത്ര മോതിരം

KANNUR (PAYYANNUR)

A small number of goldsmith families at Payyannur working under the Payyannur Pavithra Ring Artisans and Development Society

A ritual ring whose band is tied in a knot — the pavithram, the same knot of darbha grass a Brahmin wears at a rite, rendered in gold or silver and worn for ancestor offerings. It is cast by lost wax and finished by hand, and it is made nowhere else. Its geographical indication application carries number 6, which makes it one of the first half-dozen filed in India; it was granted in 2010-11, a decade behind applications numbered after it.

GI 6 FILED 2000S, GRANTED 2010

● AT RISK

▲ A finished entry, at printed size.

01 Band

The material family — loom, print, needle, metal, wood, clay, fibre, pigment, leather, paper, stone, glass.

03 Panel

Original illustration made for this edition, in the region's palette. Every one is a live photo slot.

05 Makers

The community, workshop or settlement that carries the skill.

07 Status

Legal protection, cluster recognition, and flags — including Field-check.

02 Name

In English, with the local name below it. Both are searchable terms.

04 Place

District, or the belt a craft crosses. Not a boundary claim.

06 Note

Technique, history and the one thing worth knowing about this craft.

08 Vitality

How close this craft is to ending, read from cluster size, age and market.

The 6 regions

Colour follows six craft systems — five stretches of coast and the high range behind them, which is a different country.



North Malabar

Kasaragod and Kannur



The Malabar Coast

Kozhikode to Wayanad



The Bronze Belt

Thrissur and Palakkad



The Backwaters

Ernakulam to Kottayam



The High Range

Idukki and Pathanamthitta



South Travancore

Kollam and the capital

The vitality reading

An editorial judgement, not a census. It is printed so that it can be argued with — and corrected.



Thriving

Growing cluster, young entrants, working market.



Holding

Stable numbers, ageing workforce, thin margins.



At risk

Falling numbers; skill still transmissible.



Critical

A handful of practitioners. One generation from silence.

Two flags to watch for

GI 000 — a registered geographical indication, with its application number at the Chennai registry. **Field-check** — an entry compiled from secondary sources, not yet confirmed on the ground; nineteen entries carry it. They are printed rather than dropped, because omission is how crafts vanish from the record.

What was counted, and what was left out

What counts as a craft here

A skill that shapes material by hand, transmitted within a community or a workshop rather than through a syllabus, and still practised by someone in Kerala today. That definition lets in quarry carving and gold-foil beating, and keeps out revived hobby practice with no inherited line.

Where the entries come from

Three layers. The GI Registry's state list, which is authoritative but narrow. State ODOP, handloom and handicraft cluster records, which are broader but commercial in framing. And published documentation — craft council surveys, museum and university records, and reporting on individual clusters.

What this document cannot yet claim

It has no artisan headcount. Loom censuses, cluster registers and co-operative rolls disagree with each other and with the ground, and publishing a wrong number is worse than publishing none. It has no verified list of living practitioners — that is Volume II.

The known gaps

Kerala is the best-documented state in this series and the hardest to count. It has a literate press, a strong research tradition and detailed government reviews — the coir report alone runs to hundreds of pages — but almost all of it measures industries rather than crafts. There is a precise figure for coir employment and none at all for how many people make a nettipattam. Where a number here comes from a cooperative roll rather than a count of working looms, it is said so.

An honest caution about maps

The outlines and region shapes in this volume are drawn for legibility, not for survey accuracy. Cluster pins mark craft towns, not administrative boundaries. No inference about any border should be drawn from this document.

On naming

Kerala's district boundaries have been stable since 1982, which makes this the first volume in the series where no craft has changed district under it. Older names still in use are kept where the craft carries them: Cannanore for Kannur in the registration, Alleppey for Alappuzha, Calicut for Kozhikode, Trichur for Thrissur. The register spells Kuthampully both ways, once per filing.

Sources for the legal status

GI application numbers and dates in this volume are taken from the Geographical Indications Registry, Chennai, and from the published state registration lists. Where an application number is not published for a registration, the entry shows a dash rather than a guess.

Forty-three entries, nine material families

43

craft entries mapped in this first edition, across 14 districts

13

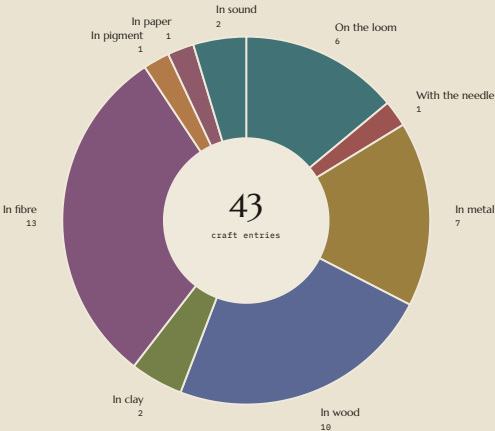
handicraft geographical indications — thirteen crafts out of roughly forty entries. Most of what Kerala has registered is food.

39

entries read as at risk or critical — more than half of everything on this map

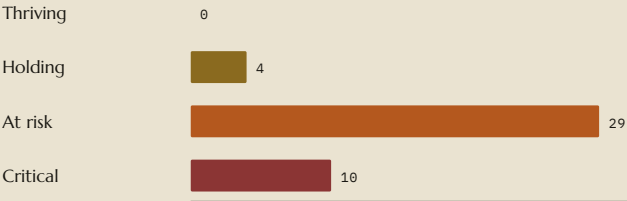
19

entries still awaiting a field visit before they can be called confirmed



What the shape of the wheel says
Kerala holds around forty geographical indications and only thirteen of them are handicrafts. The wheel below is therefore not a picture of the register; it is a picture of what is actually made, most of which the register does not see.

Vitality across all entries



Indicative vitality, assigned from cluster size, age profile and market access.
To be validated in the field survey round.

A register made of rice

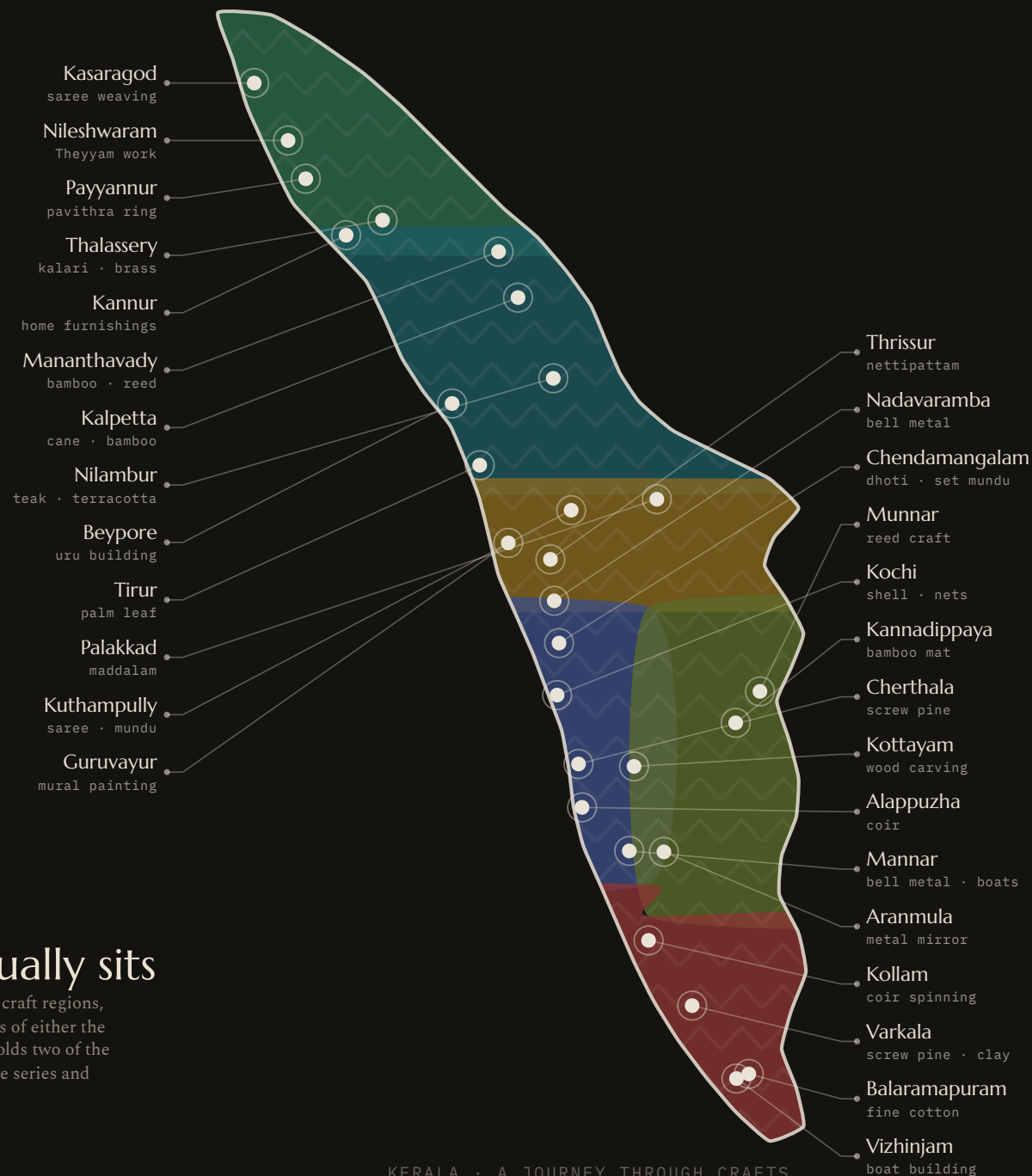
Kerala holds one of the largest GI registers in India and around **twenty-eight of its entries are agricultural or foodstuff** — four kinds of rice, pepper, cardamom, two coffees, two jaggeries, bananas, betel leaf, garlic, sesame, chilli, cloves. Thirteen are handicrafts.

And it started with a craft

Aranmula Kannadi is **application number 3** on the Indian register and the Payyannur pavithra ring is number 6 — two of the first half-dozen geographical indications ever filed in this country. Both are made by a handful of families, and the twenty years since have gone to the fields.

What is not on it

Beypore's uru, which has been built here for something like fifteen centuries and whose application has been pending since 2022. The chundan vallam. Theyyam's costume. The nettipattam. Kerala mural painting. The chenda. Five of the six are the most photographed objects in the state.



Where craft actually sits

Twenty-eight working clusters across six craft regions, almost all of them within a few kilometres of either the coast or the backwater. The high range holds two of the most technically remarkable objects in the series and some of its smallest workforces.

All fourteen districts, arranged as they sit

A schematic grid, not a survey map: each district is one tile, placed in roughly its geographical position, coloured by region, and carrying the number of entries that name it in this edition. A craft practised across a belt is counted once in every district it names, so the tiles total more than 43. Low numbers mark thin documentation at least as often as they mark thin craft. Every district on this grid carries at least one entry.

Kasaragod കാസർഗോഡ് entries 3	Kannur കണ്ണൂർ entries 5	Wayanad വയനാട് entries 2	Kozhikode കോഴിക്കോട് entries 3	Malappuram മലപ്പുറം entries 3
Palakkad പാലക്കാട് entries 3	Thrissur തൃശ്ശൂർ entries 6	Ernakulam എറണാകുളം entries 5	Idukki ഇടുക്കി entries 2	Alappuzha ആലപ്പുഴ entries 5
Kottayam കോട്ടയം entries 5	Pathanamthitta പത്തനംതിട്ട entries 4	Kollam കൊല്ലം entries 4	Thiruvananthapur. തിരുവനന്തപുരം entries 5	

Thirteen protected handicrafts

APP.	GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION	PLACE	REGISTERED	SCOPE
3	Aranmula Kannadi	Aranmula, Pathanamthitta	2005-06	Kerala
54	Alleppey Coir	Alappuzha	2007-08	Kerala
57	Brass Broidered Coconut Shell Crafts	Kerala — statewide	2008-09	Kerala
58	Screw Pine Craft of Kerala	Kerala — statewide	2008-09	Kerala
59	Maddalam of Palakkad	Palakkad	2008-09	Kerala
144	Cannanore Home Furnishings	Kannur	2009-10	Kerala
152	Balaramapuram Sarees and Fine Cotton Fabrics	Balaramapuram, Thiruvananthapuram	2009-10	Kerala
6	Payyannur Pavithra Ring	Payyannur, Kannur	2010-11	Kerala
170	Kasaragod Sarees	Kasaragod	2010-11	Kerala
179	Kuthampully Sarees	Kuthampully, Thrissur	2010-11	Kerala
225	Chendamangalam Dhoties and Set Mundu	Chendamangalam, Ernakulam	2011-12	Kerala
402	Kuthampally Dhoties and Set Mundu	Kuthampully, Thrissur	2015-16	Kerala
927	Kannadippaya (bamboo mat)	Idukki	2024-25	Kerala

What a GI does, and does not, do

A geographical indication is a collective right. It cannot be owned by one workshop; it is held by a registered body on behalf of everyone producing to the specification inside the named territory. It stops a mill elsewhere using the name. It does not set a price, it does not find a buyer, and it does not pay for yarn.

Kerala demonstrates both halves of that at once. Chendamangalam's five societies had not received their certificate twelve years after the grant, and weave for ₹900 a week. Beypore has no certificate at all and has gone from fewer than fifty working craftsmen to more than two hundred, because the Gulf kept ordering.

Thirteen handicrafts is a respectable register and the gaps beside it are not small ones. They are the ship, the boat, the costume, the ornament, the painting and the drum — in other words, most of what a visitor photographs and most of what the state puts on its own tourism material.

Ten of the twenty-eight, and six with nothing

Kerala's agricultural register is too long to print in full; ten representative entries are listed here. The columns beside them give the crafts with a defensible case and no filing — including one whose application has been sitting with the Registry since 2022, and one whose raw material is registered while the making of it is not.

17	Navara Rice	Palakkad belt · filed 2007	Agricultural
36	Palakkadan Matta Rice	Palakkad · filed 2007	Agricultural
49	Malabar Pepper	shared with Karnataka and Tamil Nadu · 2007	Agricultural
72	Alleppey Green Cardamom	shared with Tamil Nadu · filed 2007	Agricultural
81	Pokkali Rice	Ernakulam · Thrissur · filed 2008	Agricultural

163	Central Travancore Jaggery	Alappuzha · Kottayam · 2010	Agricultural
242	Kaipad Rice	Kannur · Kasaragod · filed 2013	Agricultural
543	Nilambur Teak	Nilambur, Malappuram · filed 2017	Agricultural
613	Marayoor Sharkara	Marayoor, Idukki · filed 2018	Agricultural
641	Tirur Vettila	Tirur, Malappuram · filed 2019	Agricultural

Significant crafts with no protection

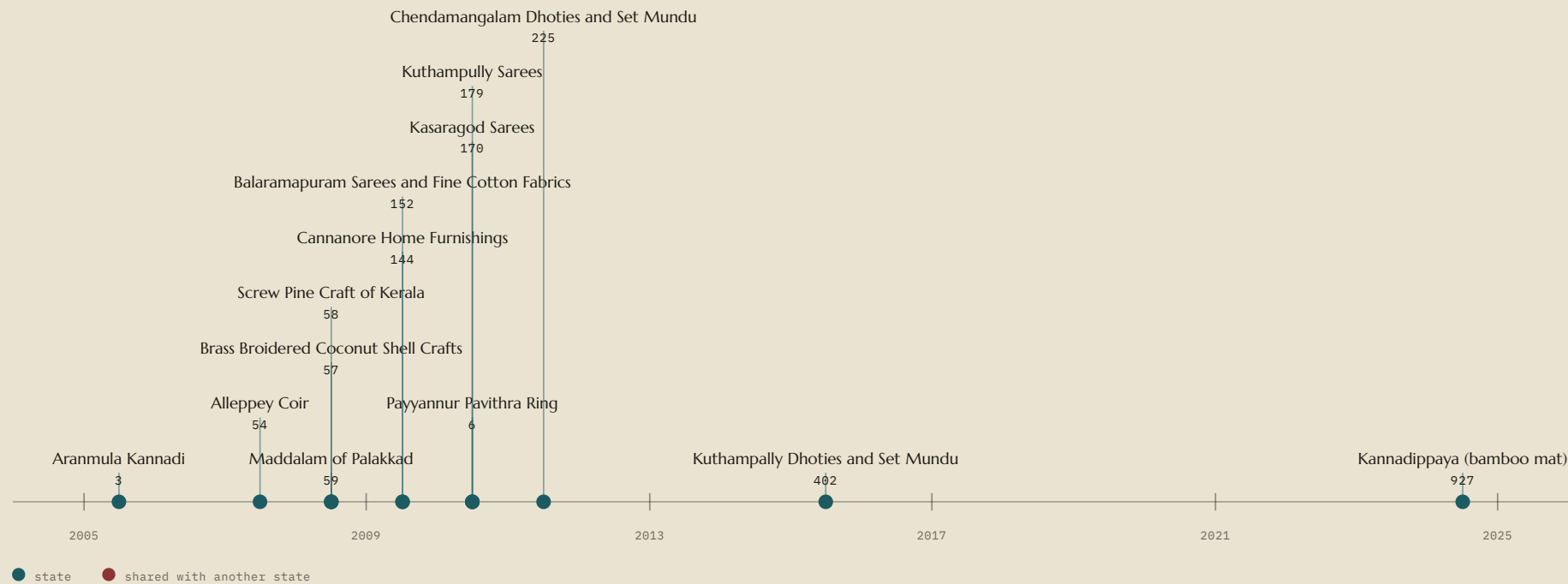
These are practised, documented and commercially significant, and hold no geographical indication of their own.

Beypore uru	Beypore, Kozhikode Ocean-going wooden dhows built without a drawing, by a team of about fifty over one to four years, and sold to the Gulf for fifteen centuries. A GI application was filed in 2022 and is still pending.
Chundan vallam	Alappuzha · Kottayam · Pathanamthitta Up to a hundred and forty feet of anjili and kadamb carrying a hundred paddlers, built to a fixed proportion. An annual world stage, and no registration.
Theyyam costume and headgear	Kannur · Kasaragod The headgear, ornament, pleating and face paint of several hundred Theyyam forms, made new each season. Probably the largest unregistered costume tradition in India.
Nettipattam	Thrissur · Palakkad Hundreds of gilded brass discs stitched in graded rows onto cloth — the most recognisable object at any Kerala festival, made by a handful of workshops.
Kerala mural painting	Thrissur · Ernakulam · Pathanamthitta Five centuries of temple wall painting to a fixed five-pigment recipe. No geographical indication, while the state has registered four kinds of rice.
Nadavaramba bell metal	Irinjalakuda, Thrissur Lamps, urulis and temple vessels in a tin-bronze close kin to the Aranmula alloy. The mirror is registered; the vessel tradition beside ⁰⁹ it is not.

Twenty years of filing, almost all of it agricultural

Read the periods, not the days

The Registry's state-wise list gives the financial year in which each registration took effect. The craft filings cluster hard in the first decade — Aranmula in 2005, coir in 2007, three crafts in 2008-09, the handlooms at the turn of the 2010s — and then almost stop. Between 2012 and 2024 Kerala registered two handicrafts and more than fifteen agricultural products.



What went in first

Aranmula Kannadi, application number 3 — behind only Darjeeling tea and one other. A mirror made by a handful of families in one village was among the very first things India chose to protect.

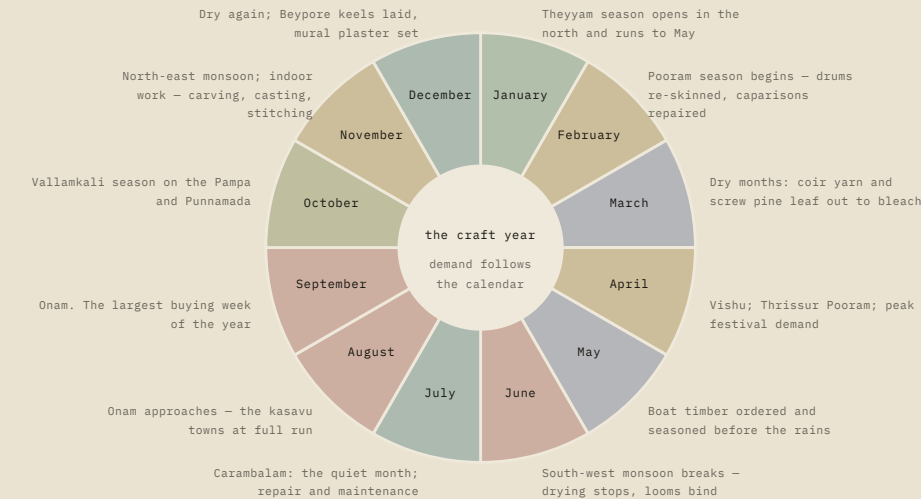
What went in last

Kannadippaya, the Idukki mirror-mat, in 2024-25 — filed when the number of people who can split bamboo that fine had already fallen into single figures. The pattern from Andhra repeats: the newest filings are made into decline, not out of strength.

What is still waiting

Beypore's uru application was filed in 2022 and is still under examination. Fifteen centuries of continuous building, a method that exists only in one man's memory at a time, and a live export trade to the Gulf — and the file is open.

Demand follows the calendar, not the market



Kerala works around rain rather than between harvests. The south-west monsoon lands in June and runs to September, the north-east returns in October and November, and between them the state gets close to three thousand millimetres. Everything that has to be dried — coir yarn, screw pine leaf, mural plaster, boat timber, drum hide — is scheduled against that. The festival calendar does the rest: Onam in late August or September is the single largest buying week of the year, and the temple pooram season from February to May is when every drum, caparison and lamp has to be ready.

Nothing dries in the monsoon

Screw pine leaf has to be sun-bleached, coir yarn has to be dried before it is twisted, and a wooden loom swells and binds in the wet. Four months of the year are not a slow season here; they are a stop.

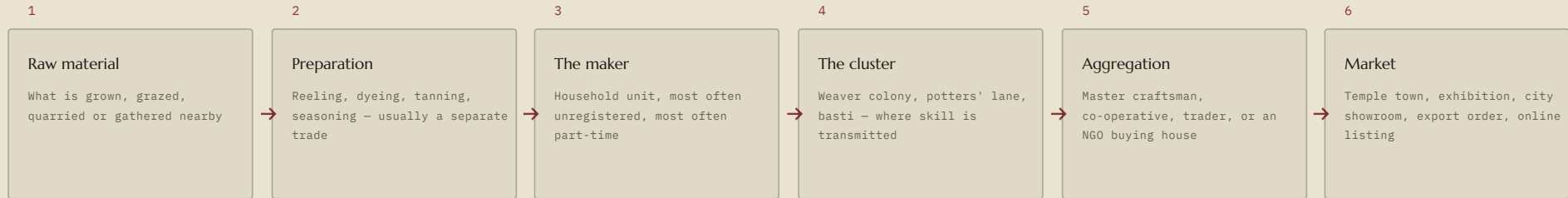
Onam is the order book

The kasavu towns — Balaramapuram, Chendamangalam, Kuthampully — make the bulk of their year in the six weeks before Onam. A bad Onam is a bad year, and powerloom kasavu arriving from outside the state lands in exactly that window.

Pooram sets the deadline

Chenda and maddalam heads are re-skinned, nettipattams repaired and lamps recast for the February-to-May festival season. The drum makers' year runs to Thrissur Pooram the way a weaver's runs to Onam.

Six links, and the two places value leaks out



Where value leaks: between 2 and 3 (raw material cost), and between 5 and 6 (the margin the maker never sees).

Every intervention in this document – GI, ODOP, cluster funding – is an attempt to shorten the distance between 3 and 6.

The raw material squeeze

Gold, silver, coloured stone, natural indigo and good quarry stone have all risen faster than the price a finished object commands. When a printer switches from madder to a synthetic, the craft has not been abandoned — it has been priced out of its own specification.

The margin the maker never sees

Between the cluster and the shelf sit anywhere from one to four intermediaries. In a tourist economy a fifth appears: the shop that pays a commission to whoever brought the customer through the door.

What actually shortens the chain

Direct selling at fairs. Producer companies that hold their own stock. Authorised-user registers under a GI. Workshop visits and craft tourism at the cluster itself. None of these is a subsidy; all of them are structure.

The state · before the six regions

Kerala

കേരളം

WHY CRAFT SITS WHERE IT SITS

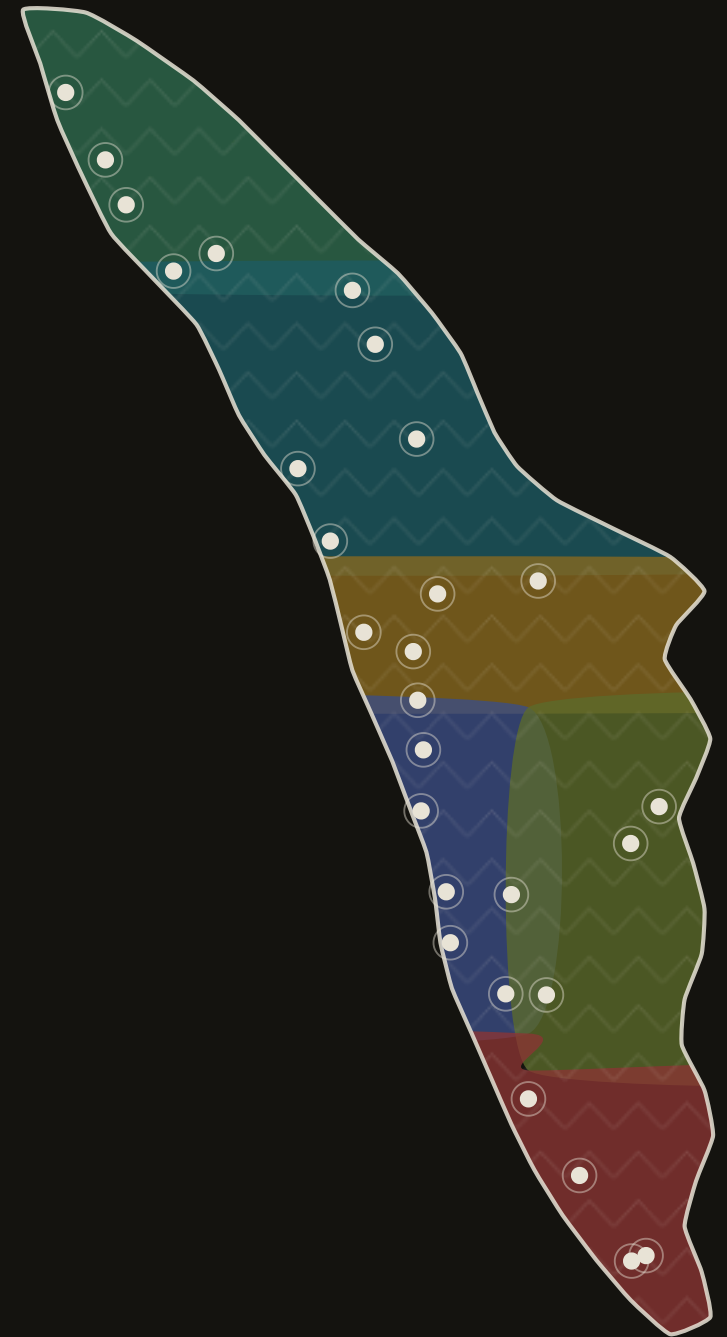
38,863 km² · 14 districts · 33 million people · 590 km of coast
and the Western Ghats the whole length of the other side —
and a craft map that is not evenly spread across any of them.
This chapter sets out the three forces that put each craft
where it is: the ground it is made from, the courts that paid
for it, and the communities that carry it.

TERRAIN

DYNASTIES

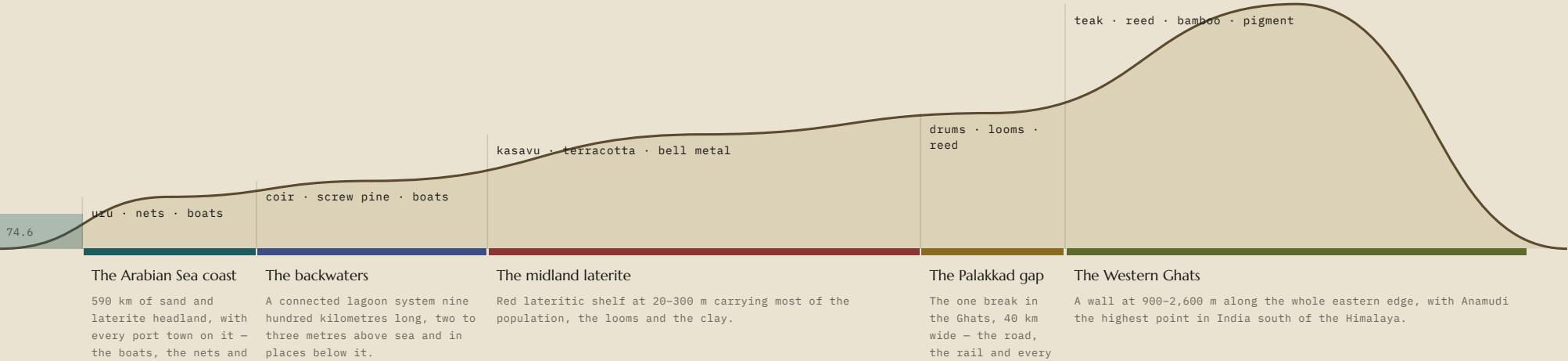
COMMUNITIES

MATERIALS



Five landscapes, west to east

Three things put craft where it is in Kerala: the backwater, which rets the husk and floats the timber; the Ghats, which supply every piece of wood, reed and stone pigment in the volume; and the temple festival, which is the single largest standing order any craft here has.



The Arabian Sea

The Western Ghats

The backwaters

Nine hundred kilometres of connected lagoon and canal between Kozhikode and Kollam. It rets the coconut husk, grows the screw pine on its edges, floats the timber for the boats and carries everything that is made. More than half the entries in this volume sit within five kilometres of it.

The Ghats

Teak, anjili, jackwood, rosewood, reed bamboo and the eraikkallu stone that grinds green for a mural all come off the Western Ghats. Forest access rules and plantation policy now decide more about six crafts in this volume than any market does.

The coconut

Kerala means, by one reading, the land of the coconut, and the tree supplies three separate crafts here: the husk becomes coir, the shell becomes brass-inlaid vessels, and the frond and leaf become roofing, mats and Theyyam costume.

What each period left behind

Almost every court craft in this volume can be dated to the founding or the ending of a patron. Courts commission, courts fall, and the workshops stay — which is why Kerala holds so many techniques whose original customer no longer exists.

Before 1498	 The pepper coast	Muziris, Kollam and Kozhikode trade with Rome, China and the Gulf. The uru is being built on this coast and the Chinese cantilever net arrives at Kochi. Kerala's oldest crafts are export	uru · nets
1498–1663	 Portuguese and Dutch	Trade shifts to European hands. Boat, rope and timber work expands around the new ports; the coconut economy formalises. Mural painting reaches its height in the temple and the palace.	murals · coir
1729–1900	 Travancore and Kochi build their trades	The Travancore court brings Shaliyar weavers south to Balaramapuram and the Kochi royal family brings Devanga weavers to Kuthampully. Both towns are founded as craft settlements, to clothe a	kasavu weaving
1840–1947	 Plantation, mission and factory	Nilambur's teak plantation is laid out in 1840, the first scientific teak planting anywhere. The Basel Mission sets up weaving and tile works at Kannur. Alappuzha becomes the centre of the	teak · coir · furnishings
1957–2000	 Cooperatives and their limits	Handloom and coir are organised into societies on a scale no other state attempted. It holds the sector together for a generation and then becomes the thing that cannot be reformed: by 2015,	the society model
2005–2012	 The craft filings	Aranmula goes in as application number 3. Coir, coconut shell, screw pine and the maddalam follow; the handlooms register between 2009 and 2012. Eleven of Kerala's thirteen craft	GI filings
2018–today	 Flood, and what came after	The 2018 flood destroys looms, stock and workshops at Chendamangalam and Aranmula; Chendamangalam's societies put their losses at ₹15 crore. The damaged cloth becomes the chekutty	loss and recovery

Craft here is carried by communities, not by individuals

Kerala's craft communities do not map onto the usual all-India caste pattern as neatly as the states to its north. The Vishwakarma lines — Asaari in wood, Moosari in bell metal, Thattan in gold — hold the metal and the carving, as they do everywhere. But the weaving communities were brought here: the Shaliyar to Balaramapuram and the Devanga to Kuthampully, both by royal invitation, both from outside. The coir and screw pine workforces are overwhelmingly women and overwhelmingly not a caste occupation at all. And the ritual crafts of the north are held by Malayan and Vannan households whose claim is to the performance, not to the object.

648 and 24

The Kuriappilly society at Chendamangalam has 648 weavers on its rolls and twenty-four actually weaving, all of them women. Across the Kerala kasavu towns more than ninety per cent of working weavers are women, most of them over forty.

Where the women are

Coir at its peak was about 85% women in the rural workforce, and screw pine is almost entirely women's work. Between them they are by a wide margin the largest craft workforce in this volume, and neither is organised in a way that lets a GI reach the worker.

The space problem

Street sizing — stretching and starching warp in the open — needs about 100 m by 3.5 m of clear ground. Urban growth around Kochi has taken the plots. A craft can be ended by land use as surely as by price, and nobody counts that as a cause.

A note on naming

Community names are recorded here as they are used by the communities themselves and in craft documentation. They are listed to show who holds a skill, and for no other purpose. Several groups appear under more than one craft; several crafts are worked by more than one group.

Brought here to weave

Shaliyar	settled at Balaramapuram by the Travancore court
Devanga	brought to Kuthampully by the Kochi royal family
Saliya	the Kasaragod weavers, come south from Karnataka

Ritual households

Malayan · Vannan · Velan	Theyyam — the performer's family makes the costume
Odayi and Khalasi	Beylore: the master builder and the crews who launch
Temple painters	the mural line, now also taught at Guruvayur

The Vishwakarma lines

Moosari	bell metal at Nadavaramba, Mannar and Payyannur
Asaari	temple woodwork, boats and the carved ceiling
Thattan	the goldsmiths, including the Payyannur ring
Forest and water	
Mannan · Muthuvan · Ulladan	Idukki reed and the kannadippaya
Paniya · Kattunayakan · Kuruma	Wayanad bamboo and cane
Irula · Muduga · Kurumba	Attappady reed, in the driest block in Kerala

Nothing here travels far before it is made

From the coconut

● Husk, retted in backwater
→ coir yarn, mat and matting

● Shell
→ brass-inlaid bowls, ladles and lamps

● Frond and leaf
→ roofing, mats, Theyyam costume

● Coir rope
→ lashing an uru's planks, with no metal

From the Ghats

● Teak
→ Nilambur's, until felling closed – now Malaysia

● Anjili and kadamb
→ the chundan vallam hull, sewn with coir

● Jackwood
→ the chenda and maddalam shells

● Reed bamboo
→ baskets, and the kannadippaya's paper-thin in

From the water's edge

● Screw pine leaf
→ de-thorned, boiled, sun-bleached, split

● Paddy-field clay
→ the Aranmula mirror mould, broken to release

● Lime plaster
→ the ground a mural is painted on

● Fish oil and resin
→ sealing a boat hull

From the melt

● Tin and copper
→ the Aranmula alloy – proportion held in a family

● Tin-bronze
→ Nadavaramba and Mannar urulis and lamps

● Sheet brass, gilded
→ several hundred discs to one nettipattam

● Gold and silver
→ the Payyannur ring, cast by lost wax

Every craft in this volume begins as something grown, grazed, quarried or gathered within a few hours of where it is made. That is the whole argument for mapping craft geographically.

From the elements

What has moved away

Coir fibre extraction has relocated almost entirely to Tamil Nadu: yarn that was about 10% Tamil Nadu fibre is now close to 100% for most grades. Kerala spins roughly ten kilos per person per day against about sixty across the border. Beypore's teak now comes from Malaysia, because Nilambur was closed to felling.

What has been substituted

Fibreglass for plank in the fishing boats. PVC-backed mat for handloom coir, at half the price. Powerloom kasavu for handloom. Each substitution kept a market and removed a maker.

What cannot be substituted

The Aranmula alloy, whose proportion is held in a family and whose tin is now imported. Anjili for a chundan vallam hull. The inner skin of reed bamboo for a kannadippaya. Three crafts, three materials, no alternative proposed.

Region 1 of 06

North Malabar

വടക്കൻ മലബാർ

KASARAGOD AND KANNUR

Three registered crafts, a ring whose application number is 6, and the largest unregistered costume tradition in India.

North Malabar is where Kerala's craft is most tied to ritual and least tied to a market. The Payyannur pavithra ring was among the first six geographical indications ever applied for in this country and took until 2010 to be granted. Kannur weaves furnishing cloth for export and Kasaragod a saree of its own. And behind all of it stands Theyyam — hundreds of nights a year of performance, every one of them requiring headgear, ornament, pleated skirt and face paint made by hand, and not one element of it registered anywhere.

KASARAGOD

KANNUR





IN METAL

Payyannur Pavithra Ring

പവിത്ര മോതിരം

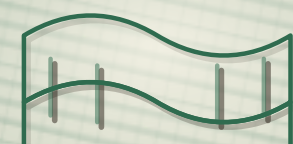
KANNUR (PAYYANNUR)

A small number of goldsmith families at Payyannur working under the Payyannur Pavithra Ring Artisans and Development Society

A ritual ring whose band is tied in a knot — the pavithram, the same knot of darbha grass a Brahmin wears at a rite, rendered in gold or silver and worn for ancestor offerings. It is cast by lost wax and finished by hand, and it is made nowhere else. Its geographical indication application carries number 6, which makes it one of the first half-dozen filed in India; it was granted in 2010-11, a decade behind applications numbered after it.

GI 6 FILED 2000S, GRANTED 2010

● AT RISK



ON THE LOOM

Cannanore Home Furnishings

കണ്ണൂർ തുണിത്തരങ്ങൾ

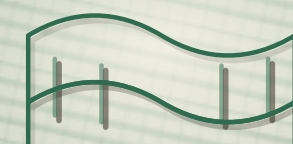
KANNUR (PAPPINISSERI • CHIRAKKAL BELT)

Weaver cooperatives across the Kannur belt, largely women at the loom

Furnishing cloth — curtain, upholstery, bedcover, table linen — in dyed cotton, woven on frame looms for a European export trade that the Basel Mission started in the nineteenth century and that Kannur has run ever since. It is the one Kerala handloom that was never about dress, which is why it survived the collapse of the mundu market better than the others and why it is more exposed to a buyer in Germany changing their mind.

GI 144 EXPORT TRADE

● AT RISK



ON THE LOOM

Kasaragod Sarees

കാസർഗോഡ് സാരി

KASARAGOD (KASARAGOD TOWN BELT)

Saliya weaver households, a community that came south from Karnataka; a few dozen looms remain

A cotton saree in strong checks and stripes, closer in colour to the Karnataka weaves across the border than to the cream-and-gold of the rest of Kerala — which is exactly what the district is. The cluster is the smallest of Kerala's registered handlooms and the furthest from a market.

GI 170 SALIYA WEAVERS

● CRITICAL



IN FIBRE

Theyyam Costume and Headgear

തെയ്യം കോലം

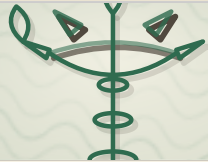
KANNUR • KASARAGOD (SHRINE VILLAGES)

Malayan, Vannan, Velan and Pulayan families attached to specific shrines; the performer and his household make the costume

Several hundred distinct Theyyam forms, each with its own prescribed headgear, breast ornament, waist pleating, face design and torch. The mudi — the headdress — can rise fifteen feet, built from split bamboo, areca spathe, cloth, tinsel and coconut frond, and is made new for the season rather than stored. The face is painted on the performer with rice paste, turmeric and manayola in patterns fixed per deity. Nothing in this complex is registered, catalogued or sold, which is why it is almost certainly the largest craft tradition in this volume by hours worked.

NO GI RITUAL CRAFT

● AT RISK



IN METAL

North Malabar Bell Metal

ഓട്ടുപണി

KANNUR (PAYYANNUR · KUTHUPARAMBA)

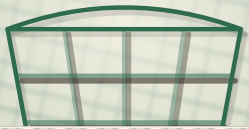
Moosari families casting for shrines and households

Lamps, urulis and ritual vessels cast in tin-bronze for the shrines that the Theyyam calendar keeps busy. The north's bell metal is less documented than Thrissur's and sits in the same unregistered position; a field visit has to establish how many furnaces still work.

FIELD-CHECK

TEMPLE SUPPLY

● AT RISK



IN FIBRE

Kasaragod Palm Leaf and Reed

ഓല പണി

KASARAGOD (BEKAL · KANHANGAD BELT)

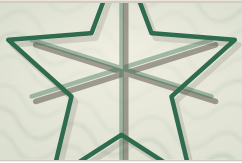
Coastal and lakeside households, largely women

Coconut and palmyra leaf plaited into mats, baskets, roofing and the containers a fishing household needs. It is the commonest craft on this coast and the least recorded, because almost none of it is sold through a shop.

FIELD-CHECK

HOUSEHOLD CRAFT

● AT RISK



IN METAL

Kalari Weapon Making

കളരി ആയുധം

KANNUR (THALASSERY) · KOZHIKODE

A handful of smiths who supply kalari schools

The urumi — a flexible sword of spring steel that coils round the waist — along with the otta, the churika and the wooden practice weapons of kalaripayattu. A tiny trade with no substitute: a kalari cannot buy its equipment anywhere else, and the number of smiths who can forge an urumi correctly is in single figures.

FIELD-CHECK

SPECIALIST TRADE

● AT RISK

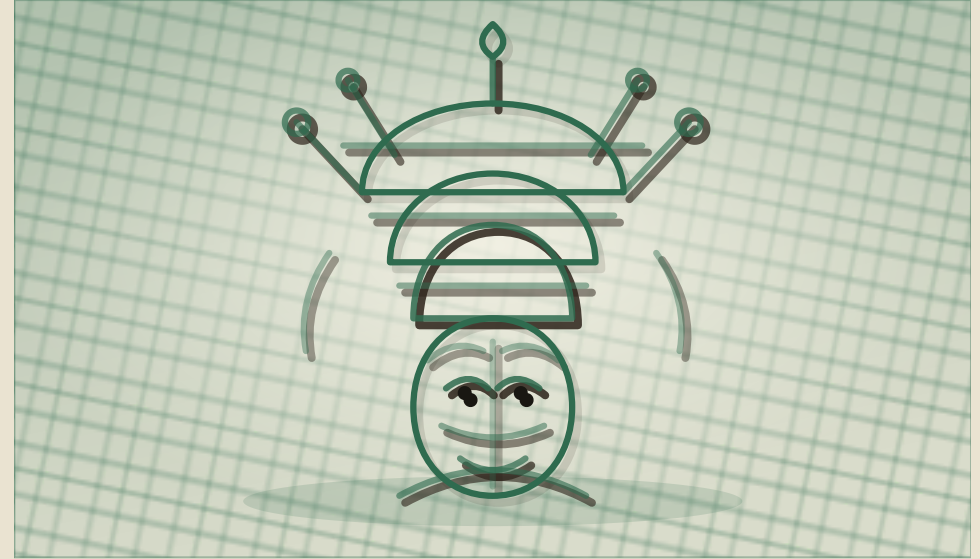
The largest craft nobody has counted

Between December and May, several thousand Theyyam performances take place across Kannur and Kasaragod. Every one of them requires a headdress, a breast ornament, a pleated waist, a painted face and a set of torches, made by hand, to a specification that differs for each of several hundred deities.

The **mudi** — the headdress — is the largest object in the costume and can rise fifteen feet above the performer. It is built on a split bamboo frame over areca spathe, dressed with cloth, tinsel, coconut frond and painted wood, and it is made **new for the season** rather than stored, because the old one is dismantled when the season ends.

The face is painted on the performer over several hours with rice paste, turmeric, manayola and lime, in a pattern fixed per deity — the vairadelam, the kattaram, the prakkezhuthu. The painter is usually a senior member of the same family. There is no catalogue of these patterns held anywhere outside the households that paint them.

None of it is registered, none of it is sold, and none of it appears in any artisan census — because the maker, the wearer and the performer are the same person, and what he is paid for is the performance. By hours of skilled work per year, **this is almost certainly the largest craft tradition in this volume.**



1

Frame split and bound

Bamboo split and lashed into the mudi frame, over areca spathe — the structure that carries fifteen feet of headdress.

2

Dressed and gilded

Cloth, tinsel, painted wood and coconut frond fixed to the frame, to the pattern that deity requires.

3

The face written on

Rice paste, turmeric, manayola and lime laid on the performer over several hours, in a design fixed per deity.

4

Dismantled at season's end

Nothing is kept. The next season's mudi is built again from the beginning, which is why the knowledge has to be renewed annually.

Why a GI would be awkward

A geographical indication protects a product in a territory. Theyyam's object is inseparable from a rite performed by a named family at a named shrine, and there is no producer body to hold a collective right.

What is actually at risk

Not the performance — attendance is rising — but the making. Ready-made ornament and synthetic tinsel are already standard, and the frame building is the step most likely to be bought in.

What documentation would do

A catalogue of the mudi types and face patterns, made with the households rather than about them, is worth more here than a certificate. Nothing like it exists.

Region 2 of 06

The Malabar Coast

മലബാർ തീരം

KOZHIKODE TO WAYANAD

The coast that built ocean-going ships for the Gulf for fifteen centuries, and still does — with a geographical indication application that has been pending since 2022.

Bey pore is the single most remarkable entry in this volume. A team of about fifty builds a wooden dhow of sixty to a hundred and thirty feet over one to four years, with no drawing, no model and no written calculation: the design and the waterline exist in the master builder's memory. Behind the coast, Nilambur's teak and Aruvacode's clay, and behind those, the bamboo and cane of the Wayanad hills.

KOZHIKODE

WAYANAD

MALAPPURAM





IN WOOD

Beypore Uru

ബേപ്പൂർ ഉരു

KOZHIKODE (BEYPORE, ON THE CHALIYAR)

Odayi master builders holding the design in memory; Mappila Khalasi crews who move and launch the hull; carpenters under the Odayi

An ocean-going wooden dhow of sixty to a hundred and thirty feet, built by a team of about fifty over one to four years with no drawing, no model and no written calculation. The master marks the waterline from memory and calculation and it matches the loaded vessel when she floats. Teak, seasoned in the river; wooden treenails and coir lashing rather than metal. Buyers are now Gulf royalty and collectors in Qatar, the UAE and Bahrain, who fit air conditioning and navigation gear into a hull built the old way. Active craftsmen have gone from fewer than fifty around 2010 to more than two hundred by 2024 — one of the few genuine recoveries in this series.

GI PENDING SINCE 2022

200+ CRAFTSMEN

HOLDING



IN FIBRE

Kozhikode Screw Pine Mats

കൊത പായ

KOZHIKODE (KOYILANDY · VATAKARA BELT)

Women's households along the coast; the leaf is cut, de-thorned, boiled, dried and split at home

Kaitha — screw pine — grows wild on every backwater edge in Kerala. The leaf is stripped of its thorns, boiled, sun-dried until it turns cream, split to width and plaited into sleeping mats, prayer mats and boxes. The statewide geographical indication covers it. What the registration does not cover is the price: a mat that takes four days sells for less than the plastic one beside it.

GI 58

WOMEN'S WORK

AT RISK



IN WOOD

Nilambur Teak Woodwork

നിലമ്പൂർ തേക്ക്

MALAPPURAM (NILAMBUR)

Carpenter and joinery households around the Nilambur teak plantations

Nilambur's teak is the finest in the world and was planted as the first scientific teak plantation anywhere, in 1840. The timber itself was registered as a geographical indication in 2017 — as an agricultural product. The furniture, joinery and temple woodwork made from it, by the people who live beside the plantations, holds no registration of any kind. It is the clearest example in this volume of the register protecting the material and not the making.

TEAK HOLDS A GI

CRAFT DOES NOT

HOLDING



IN CLAY

Aruvancode Terracotta

അരുവാക്കോട് മൺപാത്രം

MALAPPURAM (ARUVACODE, NILAMBUR)

Kumbhara potter households at Aruvancode

A Kumbhara potters' colony that became nationally known in the 1990s for an attempted revival and for the social boycott that followed it. The clay work — votive figures, water vessels, roof tile — is real and the cluster is small and precarious. It is listed here because a craft that has been the subject of a documented social dispute is exactly the kind a register will not touch.

FIELD-CHECK

KUMBHARA POTTERS

CRITICAL



IN FIBRE

Wayanad Bamboo and Cane

വയനാടൻ മുള

WAYANAD (MANANTHAVADY • KALPETTA • SULTHAN BATTERY)

Paniya, Kattunayakan, Kuruma and Adiya households

Baskets, grain bins, winnows, fish traps and the carrying gear of the Wayanad hills, split from reed bamboo collected under forest rules. The craft follows the collection permit as much as the season. Several of the communities working it are among the most economically marginal in the state and appear in no artisan register.

FIELD-CHECK FOREST CRAFT

● AT RISK



IN WOOD

Kurichiya Bow and Reed Craft

കുരിച്ചി വില്ല്

WAYANAD (MANANTHAVADY BELT)

Kurichiya households — a community historically known as archers

The bamboo bow and cane-bound arrow of the Kurichiya, who fought the Pazhassi rebellion with them and who still make a few for ritual and for the hunt that is now illegal. There is no market, no apprentice stream and no record. Listed as a named gap rather than a going trade.

FIELD-CHECK NEAR-EXTINCT

● CRITICAL



IN PAPER

Tirur Palm Leaf Writing

താളിഴയാല

MALAPPURAM (TIRUR • PONNANI)

A very small number of practitioners, mostly attached to manuscript collections

Palm leaf cut, boiled, dried, smoothed and incised with a stylus, then rubbed with soot so the line shows — the medium every Malayalam text before print was written on. What survives is conservation work and demonstration. The preparation of the leaf, which is the actual craft, is the part most likely to be lost first.

FIELD-CHECK CONSERVATION ONLY

● CRITICAL

No drawing, no model, no calculation

An uru is sixty to a hundred and thirty feet of ocean-going wooden ship. About fifty craftsmen build one over one to four years. There is no plan, no scale model and nothing written down: the whole design sits in the master builder's memory.

The **Odayi** is the master. He holds the lines, the structural proportions and — the part that is hardest to credit — the waterline, which he marks on the hull by calculation in his head. It matches where the loaded vessel actually floats. The knowledge passes by apprenticeship inside the family, never on paper.

The hull is Malabar teak, seasoned in the Chaliyar river. Planks are fastened with **wooden treenails and coir lashing** rather than metal, and fitted closely enough that no oakum caulking is needed. When she is finished the **Mappila Khalasi** move her — hundreds of tonnes of ship, shifted to the water on wooden poles, hawsers, ropes and pulleys, under a Mooppan, with no crane.

Demand for wooden cargo dhows collapsed in the 1980s and Nilambur was closed to felling, so the teak now comes from Malaysia. The buyers are Gulf royalty and collectors in Qatar, the UAE and Bahrain, who fit air conditioning into a hull built the old way. Active craftsmen have gone from **fewer than fifty around 2010 to more than two hundred by 2024**, with over a hundred and fifty young people formally trained.



1

The Odayi sets the lines

Proportions, frame spacing and waterline held in memory. No drawing is made at any stage.

2

Teak seasoned in the river

Timber sunk in the Chaliyar to season. Malabar teak historically; Malaysian teak now.

3

Planked with treenails and coir

Wooden kodams and coir lashing, fitted closely enough to need no caulking.

4

Launched by the Khalasi

Hundreds of tonnes moved to the water on poles, ropes and pulleys by a Mappila crew under a Mooppan.

The one craft here that grew

From under fifty working craftsmen to over two hundred in fourteen years. The mechanism was a buyer — Gulf commissions — plus formal training. Not a certificate.

And it has no certificate

A geographical indication application was filed in 2022 and is still under examination. Fifteen centuries of continuous building, and the file is open.

The real risk

Not demand. The design exists only in a living master's memory, so the craft is one failed succession away from losing something that was never written down.

Region 3 of 06

The Bronze Belt

ഓട്ടുപാത്ര നാട്

THRISSUR AND PALAKKAD

Two districts carrying four registrations and the whole apparatus of the Kerala temple festival: drum, lamp, caparison, mural and mundu.

Everything here is made for a festival. The maddalam and the chenda are built to a tuning the players specify; the nettipattam is a thousand gilt discs stitched to cloth and hung on an elephant; the Nadavaramba bell-metal lamp is cast by the Moosari; and the murals on the temple wall behind all of it are painted to a pigment recipe five centuries old. Kuthampully weaves the cloth everybody wears to watch.

THRISSUR

PALAKKAD



ON THE LOOM

Kuthampully Sarees

കുത്താമ്പുളി സാരി

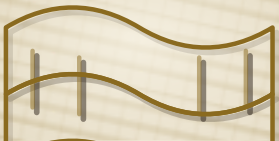
THRISSUR (KUTHAMPULLY)

Devanga weaver households brought from Karnataka by the Kochi royal family to weave for the palace

The cream cotton saree with a kasavu — gold zari — border that Kerala wears at Onam and at a wedding. Kuthampully is the largest of the kasavu clusters and the one whose name a buyer outside the state is most likely to know. Powerloom copies of the same look, made elsewhere and sold at a third of the price, are the specific thing the registration was meant to stop and has not.

GI 179 DEVANGA WEAVERS

● AT RISK



ON THE LOOM

Kuthampully Dhoties and Set Mundu

കുത്താമ്പുളി മുണ്ട്

THRISSUR (KUTHAMPULLY)

The same Devanga households; a separate registration for the two-piece cloth

The mundu worn by men and the set mundu — a two-piece drape, mundu and neriyathu — worn by women, both in the same cream and gold. The village filed it separately from the saree in 2015, four years after Chendamangalam registered the same two garments. Two villages, the same objects, two registrations: the register follows applications, not garments.

GI 402 SECOND FILING

● AT RISK



IN SOUND

Maddalam of Palakkad

പാലക്കാട് മദുളം

PALAKKAD (PALAKKAD TOWN BELT)

A small number of specialist makers working to each player's specification

A barrel drum hollowed from a single block of jackwood and headed at both ends with layered hide, the right head loaded with a rice paste applied fresh for each performance. It is built for the player, not for stock: shell weight, head tension and tuning are agreed before work starts. It accompanies Kathakali and the temple ensemble, which is the whole of its market.

GI 59 JACKWOOD SHELL

● AT RISK



IN SOUND

Chenda Making

ചെണ്ട

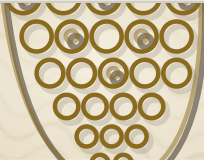
THRISSUR • PALAKKAD (TEMPLE BELT)

Drum-making households, often from the same communities that play

The cylindrical drum that carries the Kerala temple festival, hollowed from jackwood and headed with cured cow hide stretched on a hoop, tuned by hammering the lacing. The chenda melam at Thrissur Pooram runs hundreds of drums at once. The maddalam beside it holds a geographical indication; the chenda, which is louder, more numerous and more visible, holds none.

NO GI SUPPLY CRAFT

● AT RISK



IN METAL

Nettipattam

നെറ്റിപ്പട്ടം

THRISSUR (THRISSUR • IRINJALAKUDA)

A handful of workshops, with women doing most of the stitching

The elephant's forehead ornament: several hundred gilded brass discs, graded from large at the base to small at the crown, hammered, polished and stitched in rows onto a red cloth backing, finished with tassels and a fringe. A full caparison can weigh thirty kilograms and take a workshop weeks. It is the single most recognisable object in Kerala's visual repertoire and it is unprotected.

NO GI

FESTIVAL CRAFT

● AT RISK



IN PIGMENT

Kerala Mural Painting

ചുവർചിത്രം

THRISSUR (GURUVAYUR) • ERNAKULAM • PATHANAMTHITTA

Temple painters and graduates of the mural institute at Guruvayur

Five pigments and no more — red and yellow ochre, green from eraikkallu stone, white from lime, black from lamp soot — bound in tender coconut water and the gum of the neem, laid on a lime plaster ground. The drawing is fixed by the Shilparatna canon: the colour of a figure tells you its nature before you read the iconography. Formally taught since 1989, which has kept it alive. It holds no registration while Kerala has registered four separate kinds of rice.

NO GI

FIVE PIGMENTS

● HOLDING



IN METAL

Nadavaramba Bell Metal

നടവരമ്പ് ഓട്

THRISSUR (NADAVARAMBA, IRINJALAKUDA)

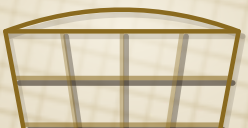
Moosari families; the number of working furnaces has fallen sharply

Urulis, lamps, cooking vessels and temple bells cast in a tin-bronze close kin to the Aranmula alloy, in sand and clay moulds, then turned and polished. A Nadavaramba uruli is the vessel Kerala cooks payasam in and gives at a wedding. The mirror at Aranmula is registered; the vessel tradition that shares its metallurgy is not.

NO GI

MOOSARI CASTERS

● AT RISK



IN FIBRE

Palakkad Reed and Bamboo

ഇറ്റുറ പണി

PALAKKAD (ATTAPPADY • CHITTUR BELT)

Irula, Muduga and Kurumba households of Attappady, and reed-working families on the plains

Etta reed split into baskets, winnows and granary liners. Attappady is the driest and poorest block in Kerala and its craft is instrumental: made for the house, traded in small quantities, counted nowhere.

FIELD-CHECK

IRULA AND MUDUGA

● AT RISK

THE BRONZE BELT

KERALA • A JOURNEY THROUGH CRAFTS

28

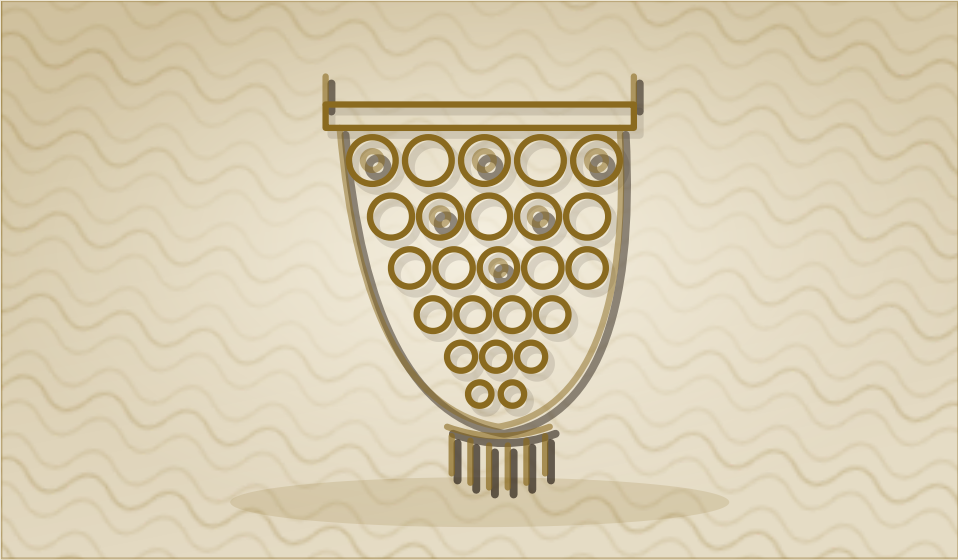
Thirty kilograms of gilded disc

The nettippattam is the most photographed object in Kerala and one of the least documented. Several hundred gilded brass discs, graded from large at the base to small at the crown, hammered and stitched in rows onto red cloth, hung on an elephant's forehead for a festival.

Each disc — the **netti** — is cut from brass sheet, raised into a shallow dome, embossed with a border and gilded. A full caparison carries them in graded rows, the sizes stepping down so the whole hangs as a single curved field rather than a grid. The rows are stitched by hand onto a cloth backing, which is the slowest part and is largely done by women.

Below the discs run the fringe, the tassels and the two **nettippattam kudas**; above them the crown. A large one weighs around **thirty kilograms** and takes a workshop weeks. Thrissur Pooram puts dozens of them in a line at once, which is the image most people outside Kerala have of the state.

It holds no geographical indication. Neither does the chenda beside it, nor the mural on the wall behind it. The maddalam does — one object out of the four that make a Kerala festival look the way it looks.



1

Discs cut and raised

Brass sheet cut to graded sizes and domed, each one embossed with its border.

2

Gilded

The gold finish that gives the object its name in the eye — and the step that decides what it costs.

3

Stitched in rows

Hundreds of discs sewn onto red cloth in graded rows, mostly by women. The slow part.

4

Fringed and crowned

Tassels, kudas and crown added. A large caparison runs to about thirty kilograms.

Protected: one of four

Of the four things that define a Kerala temple festival — drum, caparison, lamp and mural — only the Palakkad maddalam holds a geographical indication.

Why it is not registered

No producer body has applied. The workshops are few, privately held and busy; filing is somebody's unpaid full-time job for a year.

What would be gained

The specification itself. A written standard for disc grading, gilding and row count would outlast any one workshop, which is the real value a GI file produces.

Region 4 of 06

The Backwaters

കായൽ നാട്

ERNAKULAM TO KOTTAYAM

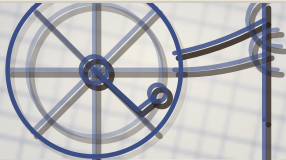
The largest craft workforce in the state by an order of magnitude — and the one that has lost the most people.

Coir is not a cottage craft here; it is an industry that employed about four lakh people and now employs roughly a third of that, with the fibre extraction itself relocated to Tamil Nadu. Beside it sit the Chendamangalam looms, where one society has 648 registered weavers and 24 still weaving, and the boatyards that build the hundred-and-forty-foot chundan vallam out of a wood that has to be ordered years ahead.

ERNAKULAM

ALAPPUZHA

KOTTAYAM



IN FIBRE

Alleppey Coir

ആലപ്പുഴ കയർ

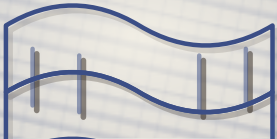
ALAPPUZHA (ALAPPUZHA · CHERTHALA BELT)

About 1.36 lakh workers across the industry; around 85% of the rural workforce is women

Husk retted in backwater, beaten to fibre, spun into yarn on a ratt and woven into mat and matting. Alappuzha was the centre of the world coir trade and the industry is a shadow of itself: a 2005 parliamentary figure put it at about four lakh workers, of whom two lakh were women; a 2015 state review counted about 1,35,750. Fibre extraction has moved almost entirely to Tamil Nadu — yarn that was 10% Tamil Nadu fibre is now close to 100% for most grades. Kerala spins about ten kilos per person per day against sixty in Tamil Nadu, and PVC-backed mats sell at half the price of handloom ones. Cooperatives averaged 123 working days a year.

GI 54 4 LAKH TO 1.36 LAKH

● CRITICAL



ON THE LOOM

Chendamangalam Dhoties and Set Mundu

ചേന്ദമംഗലം മുണ്ട്

ERNAKULAM (CHENDAMANGALAM · PARAVUR)

Eleven cooperative societies in Ernakulam, five of them in Chendamangalam; over 90% of the weavers are women, most over forty

A fine cotton mundu and set mundu with a distinctive puliyilakara border — a thin dark stripe — and a plain body. The Kuriappilly society has 648 weavers on its rolls and twenty-four actually weaving, all of them women. A weaver earns about ₹900 a week for roughly thirty-eight metres, against a Kerala daily wage of ₹900 to ₹1,500 for ordinary labour. The 2018 flood destroyed the society building and cost Chendamangalam's cooperatives an estimated ₹15 crore. Twelve years after the geographical indication was granted, the five societies had not received the certificate.

GI 225 648 ON THE ROLLS, 24 WEAVING

● CRITICAL



IN WOOD

Chundan Vallam Building

ചുണ്ടൻ വള്ളം

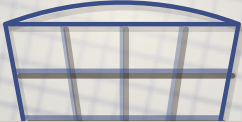
ALAPPUZHA · KOTTAYAM (PAMPA AND PAMBA BELT)

A small number of Asaari boatwright families who hold the proportions

The snake boat: up to a hundred and forty feet of anjili and kadamb planking sewn with coir and sealed with fish oil and resin, carrying about a hundred paddlers with the stern rising twenty feet out of the water. The proportions are fixed by rule and the hull is built by eye. It has an annual world stage in the Nehru Trophy race, a boat that costs tens of lakhs, and no registration whatsoever.

NO GI 140 FEET

● AT RISK



IN FIBRE

Screw Pine Craft

കൈത പായ

ALAPPUZHA (CHERTHALA · HARIPAD) · KOLLAM

Women's households across the coastal belt; several thousand across the state

The densest concentration of the statewide screw pine registration sits here, on the lake edge where the plant grows thickest. Mats, boxes, bags and the thick sleeping mat a Kerala household still buys. One of the very few crafts in this volume where the geographical indication covers an entire state rather than a town, which makes it easier to claim and harder to police.

GI 58

STATEWIDE REGISTRATION

● AT RISK



IN WOOD

Brass Brodered Coconut Shell

ചിരട്ട പണി

ERNAKULAM · ALAPPUZHA (STATEWIDE REGISTRATION)

Small workshops, several of them in and around Kochi

Coconut shell cut, cleaned, turned and polished, then inlaid with brass wire and sheet — bowls, spoons, hookah bases, lamps and ladles. It is Kerala's answer to the question of what to do with the hardest agricultural waste in the state. Registered twice, once in 2008 and again in 2015 for the logo, which is two more registrations than the chenda has.

GI 57

SHELL AND BRASS

● AT RISK



IN METAL

Mannar Bell Metal

മാന്നാർ ഓട്

ALAPPUZHA (MANNAR)

Moosari casting families at Mannar

The second bell-metal town, casting lamps, urulis and idols by lost wax and sand mould for the temples of central Travancore. Mannar's trade is larger than Nadavaramba's by output and equally unregistered. Scrap price and LPG cost now decide more about a workshop's year than demand does.

FIELD-CHECK

VESSEL CASTING

● AT RISK



IN WOOD

Ettumanoor Wood Carving

ഇടുമാനൂർ കൊത്തുപണി

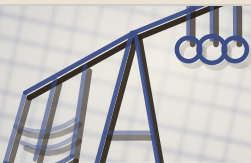
KOTTAYAM (ETTUMANOOR · VAIKOM)

Asaari carpenter families working on temple commission

The carved wooden ceiling, bracket, door and ratha of the central Travancore temples, in jackwood and teak. Ettumanoor's own temple holds some of the finest of it. The living craft is repair and replacement under the devaswom boards — real skill, no product, and a livelihood that is a budget line rather than a market.

FIELD-CHECK TEMPLE WORK

● AT RISK



IN FIBRE

Cheenavala Net Rigging

ചീനവല

ERNAKULAM (FORT KOCHI · VYPIN)

Net-owning families and the carpenters and riggers who maintain the frames

The Chinese fishing net: a cantilevered teak and bamboo frame thirty feet across, counterweighted with stones on ropes so that four men can dip and lift it. The rig is said to have come with Chinese traders in the fourteenth century. It is maintained rather than manufactured, and the knowledge sits with a handful of carpenters whose other work has gone.

FIELD-CHECK CANTILEVER RIG

● AT RISK



WITH THE NEEDLE

Chekutty Dolls

ചേകുട്ടി

ERNAKULAM (CHENDAMANGALAM)

Women's groups at Chendamangalam and volunteers across the state

After the 2018 flood ruined lakhs of metres of handloom cloth at Chendamangalam, the damaged mundu was cut up and tied into small dolls — chekutty, from chelum kutty, the child of mud and mire — and sold to fund the weavers. It is the youngest craft in this series by two centuries and the only one in it invented in response to a disaster. Listed because a register that only looks backwards will never see something like this.

BORN 2018 FLOOD CRAFT

● HOLDING

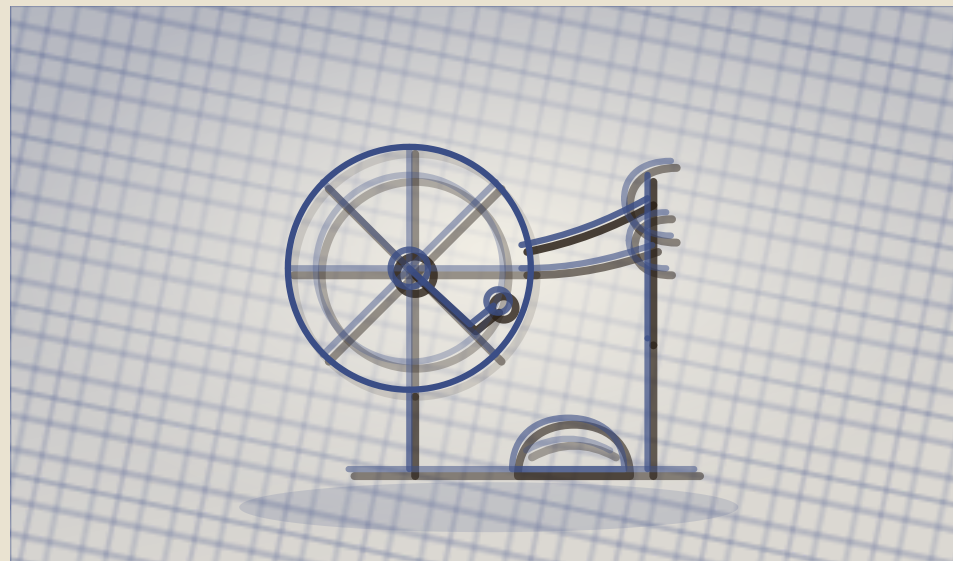
Registered, and down by two-thirds

Alleppey coir was registered as a geographical indication in 2007. A 2005 parliamentary figure put the industry at about four lakh workers, two lakh of them women. A 2015 state review counted about one lakh thirty-six thousand.

The process has not changed. Coconut husk is retted in the backwater for months until the fibre separates, beaten out, spun into yarn on a ratt, and woven into mat and matting on handlooms. It is a water craft, and Alappuzha has the water.

What has changed is where each step happens. **Fibre extraction has moved almost entirely to Tamil Nadu** — yarn that used to be about ten per cent Tamil Nadu fibre is now close to a hundred per cent for most grades. Kerala spins roughly **ten kilos per person per day against about sixty** across the border, where the mills are newer and the labour cheaper. PVC-backed mats sell at about half the price of handloom ones.

The cooperative structure that was meant to hold the sector together is itself in difficulty: of 420 working primary yarn societies in 2014-15, **311 were loss-making**, and societies in the Kollam circle averaged about **123 working days a year** — which a state minister described as five days of work a month.



1

Retted in the backwater

Husk sunk in brackish water for months until the fibre will separate cleanly. The step Alappuzha was built on.

2

Beaten and cleaned

Fibre extracted from the softened husk — the stage that has largely relocated to Tamil Nadu.

3

Spun on the ratt

Yarn twisted on the spinning wheel, overwhelmingly by women, at about ten kilos a day per person here.

4

Woven into mat and matting

Handloom coir, now competing with PVC-backed mat at half the price.

What the registration did

It protects the name against a mat made elsewhere being sold as Alleppey coir. It does not affect the price of fibre, the cost of labour or the number of days a society can run.

Where the work went

Across the state line. Tamil Nadu has the newer machinery and the lower wage; Kerala has the backwater, the history and the certificate.

The number to watch

Working days per society per year. At 123 it is not an industry in decline, it is an industry on standby.

Region 5 of 06

The High Range

മലനാട്

IDUKKI AND PATHANAMTHITTA

Two districts, two registrations, and the two most technically extraordinary objects in the volume: a mirror made of metal and a mat you can read through.

The Aranmula kannadi is a mirror with no glass and no silvering — a polished tin-and-copper alloy whose proportion is a family secret, cast in a clay mould that is broken to release it. The kannadippaya is a bamboo mat split so fine by the Mannan and Ulladan households of Idukki that it was said you could see your face in it; it was registered in 2024, the state's most recent craft filing and its oldest forest craft.

IDUKKI

PATHANAMTHITTA



IN METAL

Aranmula Kannadi

ആറന്മുള കണ്ണാടി

PATHANAMTHITTA (ARANMULA)

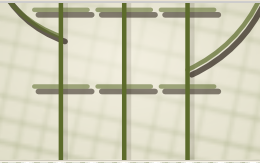
A handful of Vishwakarma families at Aranmula; the alloy proportion is a family secret

A mirror with no glass and no silvering. A tin-and-copper alloy in a proportion that is kept within the family is cast in a clay mould made from local paddy-field clay, and the surface is then ground and polished for days until it reflects from the metal's own face — which means there is no secondary image and no parallax, unlike every glass mirror. It is application number 3 on the Indian register. Tin is now imported, the 2018 and 2019 floods destroyed workshops, stock and moulds, and artisans are owed money by the state handicrafts corporation, with several having stopped selling to it.

GI 3

A HANDFUL OF FAMILIES

● CRITICAL



IN FIBRE

Kannadippaya Bamboo Mat

കണ്ണാടിപ്പായ

IDUKKI (MANNAN AND ULLADAN SETTLEMENTS)

Mannan and Ulladan households of the Idukki forests; very few makers remain

A reed-bamboo mat split so fine that the surface takes a sheen — kannadippaya means mirror mat, and the claim is that you could see your face in a good one. The inner skin of the bamboo is used, shaved to the thickness of paper, and a full mat takes weeks. It was registered in 2024-25, which makes it Kerala's most recent craft filing and almost certainly its most endangered: the registration arrived long after the number of makers had fallen into single figures.

GI 927

FILED INTO DECLINE

● CRITICAL



IN WOOD

Aranmula Palliyodam

ആറന്മുള പള്ളിയോടം

PATHANAMTHITTA (ARANMULA, ON THE PAMPA)

Boatwright families building for the fifty-odd karas of the Aranmula temple

The palliyodam is not a racing boat but a temple boat, built to carry an offering to the Aranmula Parthasarathy temple, and the villages that own them treat them as deities in their own right — a boat is kept under roof and entered barefoot. The proportions are fixed and the wood must be anjili. It shares a craft base with the chundan vallam and the same complete absence of protection.

FIELD-CHECK

RITUAL BOAT

● AT RISK



IN FIBRE

Idukki Tribal Reed Craft

ഇറ്റുറ്റ നെയ്ത്ത്

IDUKKI (ADIMALI · KATTAPPANA · MARAYOOR BELT)

Mannan, Muthuvan and Ulladan households

Baskets, honey containers, granary liners and the carrying frames the high range needs, worked from eetta reed cut under forest permit. The same households make the kannadippaya. The difference between the two is that one is now registered and the other is what actually feeds the family.

FIELD-CHECK

FOREST CRAFT

● AT RISK



IN WOOD

Pathanamthitta Temple Woodwork

കേരളം കൊത്തുപണി

PATHANAMTHITTA (ARANMULA · THIRUVALLA)

Asaari families working on devaswom commission

Carved ceilings, door frames, brackets and the wooden vahanas of the Pampa valley temples. Like Ettumanoor's, the work now is largely conservation, which keeps the skill but not the trade.

FIELD-CHECK

CONSERVATION

● AT RISK

A mirror with no glass in it

Every mirror you have used reflects off a silvered layer behind a sheet of glass, which means every one gives you a faint second image and a small offset. The Aranmula kannadi has no glass. It reflects off the front face of the metal itself.

The metal is a tin-and-copper alloy in a proportion held inside a few Vishwakarma families at Aranmula and not written down. Too little tin and it will not take the polish; too much and it shatters. The alloy is cast in a mould made from local **paddy-field clay**, and the mould is broken to release the casting, so each mirror needs its own.

What follows is days of grinding and polishing on the cast face until it goes from grey to a true reflecting surface. There is no second step, no coating and no backing — which is the whole point. A front-surface mirror has **no parallax and no ghost image**, and that is a measurable optical difference, not a sales claim.

It is application number 3 on the Indian geographical indications register, filed before almost anything else in the country. The families making it now import their tin, lost workshops, stock and moulds to the floods of 2018 and 2019, and are owed money by the state handicrafts corporation — several have stopped selling to it.



1

The proportion

Tin and copper in a ratio held within the family. The margin between polishable and brittle is narrow and unpublished.

2

Cast in paddy clay

A mould of local field clay, broken open to release the casting. One mould, one mirror.

3

Ground for days

The cast face worked down through successive abrasives until it reflects — no coating, no silvering, no backing.

4

Framed in bell metal

Set in a cast frame with a handle, in the valkannadi form the Kerala bride's trousseau requires.

Application number 3

Among the first handful of geographical indications filed in India, ahead of almost every craft in this series. The instrument was used early here and used well.

And it did not stop the floods

2018 and 2019 took workshops, stock and the clay moulds themselves. A certificate protects a name; it does not insure a shed.

The part at risk

The proportion. It is held in a small number of heads, is not written down, and the families have shrunk. Everything else about this craft could be reconstructed; that could not.

Region 6 of 06

South Travancore

തെക്കൻ തിരുവിതാംകൂർ

KOLLAM AND THE CAPITAL

The court weaving town that dresses the state for Onam, and the screw pine mats that are made by more women than any other craft here.

Balaramapuram was settled by weavers brought south by the Travancore court in the eighteenth century to make cloth for the palace, and it still weaves the plain cream cotton with the gold border that Kerala understands as its own dress. More than three hundred handloom societies once worked in the town. Around ten are active. Along the coast and the lakes below it, screw pine leaf is still split, boiled, dried and plaited in more households than any other craft in this volume.

KOLLAM

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM





ON THE LOOM

Balaramapuram Sarees

ബാലരാമപുരം സാരി

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (BALARAMAPURAM)

Shaliyar weaver households brought south by the Travancore court in the eighteenth century to weave for the palace

Unbleached cream cotton in 60s to 80s count with a kasavu border, woven on throw-shuttle pit looms — the dress Kerala wears at Onam, and the standard against which the other kasavu towns are judged. The town once held more than three hundred handloom societies; roughly ten are active. The weave that defines how an entire state dresses itself is down to a double-figure number of working societies.

GI 152 300 SOCIETIES TO ~10

● CRITICAL



IN FIBRE

Thiruvananthapuram Screw Pine

കൈത പായ

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (VARKALA · ATTINGAL BELT)

Women's households along the coastal lakes

The southern end of the statewide screw pine registration, worked along the Anchuthengu and Varkala backwaters. More women work screw pine in Kerala than any other craft in this volume, and the output is almost entirely sold through intermediaries at a rate set per piece.

GI 58 WOMEN'S WORK

● AT RISK



IN FIBRE

Kollam Coir Spinning

കൊല്ലം കയർ

KOLLAM (KARUNAGAPPALLY · OACHIRA BELT)

Spinning households and primary cooperative societies, overwhelmingly women

The second coir district. Of 614 primary yarn cooperatives in the state, 311 of the 420 that were working were running at a loss; societies in the Kollam circle averaged about 123 working days a year, which a minister described as five days of work a month. Wages in cooperatives and small units run ₹250 to ₹300 a day against a Kerala norm two to three times that.

FIELD-CHECK 123 WORKING DAYS

● CRITICAL



IN WOOD

Vizhinjam Boat Building

വിഴിഞ്ഞം വള്ളം

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (VIZHINJAM · POOVAR)

Fishing-village boatwrights, largely Latin Catholic households

The kattamaram and the plank-built fishing vallam of the south coast, made and repaired in the open on the beach. It is a working craft rather than a heritage one — the boats go out — and it is being displaced by fibreglass hulls, which last longer and cannot be repaired by the man who owns them.

FIELD-CHECK WORKING CRAFT

● AT RISK



IN CLAY

Chirayinkeezhu Terracotta

മൺപാത്രം

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (CHIRAYINKEEZHU • ATTINGAL)

Kumbhara potter households

Cooking vessels, water pots, votive figures and the roof tile that half of old Travancore is covered in. The cooking-pot market has come back a little with the clay-cooking revival; the tile market has not come back at all.

FIELD-CHECK KUMBHARA POTTERS

● AT RISK



IN WOOD

Padmanabhapuram Wood Carving

മരപ്പണി

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (NEYATTINKARA • PARASSALA BELT)

Asaari families in the far south, across the old Travancore line

The carved rosewood ceiling, the pillared mandapam and the jackwood panel work of the Travancore palace tradition, whose finest surviving example sits just across the modern state border at Padmanabhapuram. The craft continues in house joinery and temple repair on the Kerala side.

FIELD-CHECK PALACE LINE

● AT RISK



IN FIBRE

Kollam Reed and Bamboo

ഇരുറ്റ പണി

KOLLAM (PUNALUR • ANCHAL BELT)

Forest-edge households on the Punalur side

Eetta reed baskets, mats and the containers the rubber and cashew trades use. It is a craft held up by two agricultural industries rather than by its own market, which makes it stable in a way most entries here are not and vulnerable in a way they are not either.

FIELD-CHECK FOREST EDGE

● AT RISK

Thirteen crafts and twenty-eight foods

Kerala — agricultural and food



28 rice, pepper, cardamom, coffee, jaggery, banana, betel,

Kerala — handicraft



13 thirteen crafts, eleven of them filed 2005–2012

Kerala's register, split by what it protects. The state has one of the largest geographical indication portfolios in India and roughly two-thirds of it is food.

What the register got right

Aranmula went in as application number 3 and Payyannur as number 6 — two of the first half-dozen filed in India, both made by a handful of families. Kerala understood the instrument before almost anyone, and eleven of its thirteen craft registrations were in by 2012.

What it did not reach

The uru, pending since 2022. The chundan vallam. Theyyam's costume. The nettipattam. The chenda. Kerala mural painting. Nadavaramba's bell metal. Nilambur teak is registered as timber while the woodwork made from it is not.

What a tag cannot do

Alleppey coir has been registered since 2007 and the industry has gone from about four lakh workers to one lakh thirty-six thousand, with fibre extraction relocated to Tamil Nadu. Chendamangalam's five societies had not been handed their certificate twelve years after the grant, and weave for ₹900 a week.

Kerala completes the argument from the other end. Goa protected nothing. Andhra and Telangana protected almost everything. Kerala protected early and well, and then spent twenty years registering rice — and the one craft here whose numbers have gone *up*, from under fifty working builders to over two hundred, is Beypore, which has no certificate at all and a file still sitting with the Registry. What Beypore has is a buyer in the Gulf and a training programme. **Across eight volumes, every recovery has had a body or a buyer behind it, and not one has been produced by a certificate on its own.**

What still needs to be shot

This edition is illustrated with original drawn panels so that it can be read, circulated and costed before the photography budget is committed. Every drawing sits in a live photo slot: put a folder named `photos/` beside this file, name each image after its craft id — `kota-doria.jpg` — and it appears here and in the interactive explorer automatically, with the drawing as the fallback. The explorer exports the full filename list as a spreadsheet. This is the shot list.

Cover and openers

6 region openers need one horizontal hero each: a working hand, not a finished object. Shoot at the printing table, the lathe, the kiln, the pit loom, the quarry face.

Every craft card

One object frame, square, plain mid-grey ground, single soft key light from the left, no props. Consistency across forty-three objects matters more than beauty in any one.

Process sequences

Four to seven frames each for a hull plank being treenailed at Beypore, an Aranmula mirror coming out of its broken clay mould, coir yarn going onto the ratt at Cherthala, and a nettipattam disc row being stitched at Thrissur. These four are the volume's highest photographic priority.

Detail macros

The polished face of an Aranmula mirror held against a rule, with no second image; the puliyilakara border of a Chendamangalam mundu; split reed at kannadippaya thickness against the light; the kasavu selvedge where zari meets cotton.

The people

Portraits at the workplace, environmental, eye level. Name, age, years at the craft and consent recorded for every single frame — no exceptions, including for children in shot.

The places

The Beypore yard with a hull in frame, the Alappuzha retting channels, a Chendamangalam society shed at eight in the morning, Thrissur Pooram's caparison lines, and a Theyyam ground at dawn — the last only with the shrine's agreement.

Credit and consent

Every artisan photographed is credited by name in the caption, and holds a signed release. Three cases in Kerala need particular care. Theyyam is a ritual in progress, not a performance, and photography during possession is not automatically welcome — permission is sought from the shrine and the performer's family, not from an organiser. The Attappady, Wayanad and Idukki entries involve scheduled and particularly vulnerable groups, where consent goes through the oorukoottam. And the Aranmula and Chendamangalam households have had workshops destroyed twice by flood; stock and premises are a sensitive subject there.

Licensing

Commission with full print and digital rights for the trust, and a non-exclusive licence back to the artisan for their own promotion. Artisans should be able to use photographs of their own work.

Specification

Minimum 300 dpi at 200mm on the long edge. Raw retained. Colour-managed to a grey card shot on location — textile and enamel colour is the single most common failure in craft publishing.

This is a first edition, and it is wrong somewhere

Craft mapping is not a publication. It is a register that has to be kept. Forty-three entries is a beginning; Kerala almost certainly holds twice that number, and nineteen of the entries here are still marked for field confirmation.

Four things would change the next edition materially, and all four need people outside this office.

1 · Correct an entry

Wrong district, wrong community, wrong technique, wrong tense — a craft listed as living that has ended, or listed as ended that has not. Corrections are the most valuable contribution.

2 · Add a craft

If it is made by hand, transmitted rather than taught, and still practised, it belongs here — including crafts with no market and no name.

3 · Name a maker

Volume II is the artisan register. A name, a village, a craft and a way to reach them is enough to start a record.

4 · Adopt a district

Wayanad, Idukki, Kasaragod carry the fewest entries in this edition. Each needs about a week of field survey. Institutions and design schools can take one district each.

What a good entry looks like

Craft name, in English and the local language · district and nearest town · community or communities · materials and where they come from · one paragraph on technique · roughly how many households still practise it · whether it is sold, and to whom · your name and how you know.

Who made this, and why

Tisser Artisans Trust was founded in 2015 to work with rural artisans through a value-chain approach — design and product development, producer organisations, market access and fair pricing — with a particular focus on women artisans. It works with a network of artisans across India.

This map exists because that work kept running into the same problem: there was no single register of what a state actually makes, where, and by whom. This is the Kerala volume of that register.

Standing acknowledgement

Compiled from the public record of the Geographical Indications Registry, Chennai; state ODOP, handloom and handicraft cluster documentation; museum, university and craft survey material; and published reporting on individual clusters. Where sources disagreed, the entry is marked for field check rather than resolved on paper.

All illustration, cartography and diagrams in this volume are original work made for it. The maps are schematic and carry no cartographic authority.



Artisans Trust

Craft mapping initiative · First edition · Working draft
World Trade Center, Mumbai · tisser.in