CHAPTER 4

PROFILE OF KUMBALANGI GRAMMA PANCHAYATH

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CHAPTER 4

PROFILE OF KUMBALANGI GRAMMA PANCHAYATH

4.1 Kumbalangi a Brief History
Kumbalangi Gramma Panchayath is an island-village. The Panchayath surrounded by backwaters on three sides in the outskirts of the city of Cochin of the state of Kerala in South India. ‘Kumbalangi was part of different kingdoms during different historic periods. Kumbalangi region was part of Edappally kingdom and later taken over by the Kochi Kingdom. Travencore kings fought war against Kochi Kingdom and conquered many parts of Kumbalangi and ruled over it. Kallenchery a region of the present Panchayath belonged to the Madras state of the British.1

At present the Panchayath has got a land area of around 14.77 sq. km. The Panchayath has the utmost length of 5.21 kms and the maximum a width of 1.5 km². There is no conclusive evidence regarding the origin of the name of the place and also regarding the formation of the island. The popular belief among the elders of the locality is that the island Kumbalangi was formed during the great flood of 1341 AD.

4.2 Geographical Boundaries
Kumbalangy shares its boundaries with Kannamaly and Perumpadapu Kayals (backwaters) in north, Ezhupunna Lake in the south, Edakkochi and Aroor Kayals in the east and Chellanam Pandikudy road, Kannamaly and Ezhupunna Kayals in the west.
Figure 4. 1 Map of Kumbalangi Gramma Panchayath with boundaries

Figure 4. 2 Map showing the location and route to Kumbalangi
4.3 Transportation

Access to Kumbalangi tourism village can be by two ways- road ways and water ways. At present Kumbalangi is connected by road to Kochi. Public transportation by buses are available to Kumbalangi from Ernakulum south and Kaloor bus stand. With the completion of Ezhupunna bridge, Kumbalangi will get connected to the mainland from Alapuzha region also.

Since Kumbalangi is place that is surrounded by water in three sides, ferries give greater connectivity to the Panchayath. Through water mode of transportation people can come to Kumbalangi through one of the eight following ferries:

- Kumbalangi Edakkochi ferry
- Kumbalangi Arroor Illickal ferry
- Kumbalangi Arroor Janatha ferry
- Kumbalangi Arroor Priyadarshini ferry
- Kumbalangi Arroor Keltron ferry
- Kumbalangi Arroor Veluthully ferry
- Kumbalangi Ezhupunna ferry
- Kumbalangi Perumpadappu ferry

By road the island is 45 Km away from the Kochi International Airport, 15 Km. from Ernakulum Railway Station, and 16 Km from Ernakulum KSRTC Bus Stand.

4.4 Altitude

The land near the backwaters is clay land. Majority of this land is situated below sea level. This land is primarily used for the cultivation of paddy and is alternately used for farming prawns and crabs. The altitude of other parts of the island is
slightly above sea level. Coconut and areca nut farming are the primary cultivations in these regions.

4.5 Climate and Rainfall

The temperature of Kumbalangi ranges from 32 degree Celsius to 21 degree Celsius round the year. There are two rainy seasons in a year. The first season starts with the monsoon in June and ends normally in September. The second rainy season is during the Malayalam month of Thulaam (October-November) (according to Kollavarsham) and therefore called thulavarsham. The average rainfall during the year is 300 cm of which 200 cms is from monsoon and rest from thulavarsham.

4.6 People in the Village

The density of population of the village is high. Total population in Kumbalangi Gramma Panchayath is 40331 people, out of this 19681 are male and 20650 are female. A total of 8479 families live here. Vast majority of the people own land below 5 cents.

People of the village belong to Hindu, Christian, and Muslim religions and they have separate prayer houses. The Hindus primarily belong to Nambuthiri, Sarasota Brahmans, Gauda, Devara, Kyudumby, Ezhava and Pulayari Veda backward communities. The Christian population include native Christians and Anglo-Indians.

4.7 Flora and Fauna

Kumbalangi is an agrarian village. The main fauna in Kumbalangi are river fishes like pearlsport (Karimeen), filophia, prawns, crabs, paral, and oysters. The major flora of the place is coconut and areca nut. The main cash crops are paddy and
cashew nut. The presence of large numbers of mangroves in the place protects land from soil erosion and the presence of these trees helps the growth of fishes too.

4.8 Medical Facilities in the Panchayath

There are only minimum medical facilities available in the Panchayath. Following are the important facilities available. There is a community health centre- an allopathic hospital owned by the Government. In the private sector there are NKN Hospital - a private allopathic hospital, four Homeopathic private clinics and three Ayurvedic private clinics.

4.9 Communication Facilities

The Panchayath at present has very good communication facilities. All the telephone companies operating in the country offer their services in the island. The internet connectivity is good and there are many internet cafés available for the public.

4.10 Tourism Avenues

In 2003 the Government of Kerala took a policy initiative to encourage village or rural tourism in the state. As a response of to the policy initiative, Kumbalangi Gramma Panchayath under the leadership of the then President of the Gramma Panchayath - Mr. Shiva Dathan -and the then minister of tourism of the state – Prof. K V Thomas, who hailed from the region- took up the challenge of developing the Panchayath as a model tourism village. The efforts and experiments were proved successful and at present the Panchayath is one among the 31 endogenous tourism projects identified and funded jointly by the Government of India and UNDP. This
model tourism village offers a veritable treat to its visitors with the famous Chinese fishing nets literally encircling. This small island has a panorama of exciting sights and experiences to the tourists to savour. Arrays of mangroves separate the land from water provide a breeding ground for prawns, crabs, oysters and small fishes. The Kumbalangy Panchyathu is a home to fishermen, farmers, labourers, toddy tapers and coir spinners all alike. People of the region belong to the three major religious denominations viz the Hindu, Islam and Christianity and enjoy a harmonious life. Kumbalangi has a tranquil and quiet landscape and receives tourists with spontaneous warmth of hospitality unspoiled by the artificial demeanour of modernity. It’s a virgin landscape well-preserved without excessive presence of tourists. It’s a unique place adjacent to the metro township Kochi in Kerala, to relax and rejuvenate with the beauty of nature and richness of exotic cuisines. The most important tourism avenues in the island Panchayath is listed below.

4.10.1 Park
As a part of developing the tourism infrastructure in Kumbalangi a park was constructed around Kumbalangi bridge at the entrance to the village. The bridge connects the village with Kochi. The park provides entertainment facilities for children and relaxation for tourists who visit here. Every day evening local foods are being served here by local kudumbasree Self Help Groups (SHG). Large number of public especially from Kochi, comes to the park in the evening to relish the local cuisines. Attached to the park there is a small ground which is also
utilised for minor exhibitions and art displays. Every year the Gramma Panchayath conducts a tourism fest for one week, showcasing Kumbalangi to the public.

4.10.2 St. George Church Kumbalangi
This is the oldest church in the island. The foundation stone of St. George church was laid in 1833. The inscription on the entrance door says that the foundation stone was laid on 18 Chingam 1012. This is as per kollavarsham or Malayalam year. The wood carvings seen in the church are beautiful and ancient. The church has a typical Indian style façade and holy of holies.

4.10.3 Illickal Arthanareeswary Temple Kumbalangi
The historic origin of the temple is very clear. It is believed that the temple came into existence at least 500 year ago. At present the temple management is with the Ezhava community. ‘But it is believed the temple belonged originally to the Brahmin families of the place. But when they left the island, they entrusted the temple to Ezhavas and Christians. Until the beginning of the last century the temple feasts were conducted jointly by the Hindus and Christians. It is one of the rare temples for Arthanareeswara deity.

4.10.4 St. Peter’s Church Kumbalangi
St. Peters church was built in 1861. The interiors are kept in its original style even today. But when the church was renovated, an extension was added to the façade. This addition has blocked the beautiful view of the church. The wood carvings and the style of construction of the ancient part of the church are typically traditional to churches in Kerala. The presbytery attached to the Church also is architecturally beautiful.
4.10.5 Pokkali Farm
Pokkali rice is a special variety of organic paddy produced in this land. Kumbalangi Panchayath comprises of 140 ha of paddy fields, which are mostly below sea level. Paddy is produced in this region through joint farming of large number of farmers. The paddy fields are divided into nine big paddy fields (Paadashekaram- in Malayalam). These paddy fields are concentrated in the southwestern region of the Panchayath. The number of farmers in each paddy field varies. The Manalkur paddy field has the largest number of farmers. There are 195 farmers jointly cultivating the land.

The tourists visit Pokkali paddy land as a part of their village visit. Some of them are interested in carrying away a pack of Pokkali rice produced in the field. The specialty of the rice is that they are prepared not using artificial chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

4.10.6 Nature Walks
Tourists can walk through the village and experience the culture and life of the village. The people in the village are quite hospitable in their behaviour and attitude. During the village walk tourist can watch fisher folk at work or they can join in fishing using Chinese nets, go canoeing and visit the farms etc. In the evenings, the travellers experience an exceptionally soothing atmosphere by walking along the mangroves in the tranquillity of the cool wind. The tourists can also observe large number of fishes that live around these mangroves. Tourists will be happily assisted by the local people by explaining the name of the fishes, growth pattern, specialities of breeding etc.
4.10.7 Bird Watching
Bird watching is a popular hobby. India is home to as many as 1200 (roughly 14%) varieties of birds out of which 141 are endemic to this region. The country has 20 Orders and 77 families\(^\text{12}\). The reason for this richness of species is the climate, the diversity of vegetation as well as its wide altitudinal range, which extends from sea level to the Himalaya. Kumbalangi village has the advantage of attracting different varieties of migrant birds and in addition there are different varieties of native birds. In the tranquillity of the village life the tourists can engage watching these birds and hear their lovely chirping noises.

4.10.8 Chinese Fishing Nets
Tourists have the opportunities to watch and experience the operations of Chinese fishing nets and if interested they can even join in the effort of fishing. Hundreds of Chinese fishing nets are placed in the lakes.

4.10.9 Prawn and Crab Farms
Kumbalangi has many crab and prawn farms. Tourists have possibilities to visit crab and prawn farms and learn about it. People are employed in shifts to protect the crabs and prawns from the birds and probable thefts. Small sheds attached to farm serves as the watch house for the workers. In many paddy fields, paddy cultivation and prawn and crab farming are done in alternate years. This helps the farmers to maintain the fertility of land and also enable them to use the field without using chemical fertilisers and pesticides.
4.10.10 Boating
Crusing through the backwaters gives the tourists a panoramic view of the island village and nearby places. The canoe used for cruising is locally made and the cruising is done with the assistance of the local public. No motorised boats are used for canoeing.

4.10.11 Kopra Making Units
Kumbalangi is a village with abundant coconut trees. The ripe coconuts are collected and processed for extracting oil from coconut. ‘Kopra’ is the vernacular name given to the processed coconut. Kopra is squeezed to extract oil. Tourists can visit the yards and know the oil extracting process.

4.10.12 Fish Pond
As already stated Kumbalangi is surrounded by water on all three sides. Earlier all the households in the island possessed drinking water wells and fish ponds. At present not all households are having ponds or even wells. The ponds owned by the individuals have different varieties of fishes. In some of the fish ponds there are Asian Carps also known as jumping fishes. They jump above the water level when there is the movement of water in the ponds. Tourists are invited to visit to these fish ponds.

4.10.13 Tourism Fest
Every year under the leadership of the Panchayath and Kumbalangi Village Tourism Society a week long tourism fest is conducted in the island. This is conducted in December every year. The programme attracts many tourists to this place. The important events in connection with the fest are food fest where only
local cuisines are served, cultural shows, where only local artists participate, boat races etc. As part of the celebrations, lot of arts and sports competitions are also conducted for the public to transform the mindset of the people favourably towards tourism. Exhibition and sales is also part of the celebration. The ground near the entrance bridge to Kumbalangi is the exhibition ground. Souvenirs and gift articles prepared by people of the locality are exhibited and sold.

4.11 Accommodation facilities
Hospitality is one of the most valued traditions of Indian and Kerala culture. The adage, "Atithi Devo Bahava"- that is considering guest as a representative of God, is a part of the life of Keralites. Kerala was the first state in India to successfully implement home stay accommodation for guests. Kumbalangi offers home stay accommodation for tourists. Home stay is the practice of welcoming guests in home and offering them hospitality and food. Hospitality becomes more warm and friendly when the guests stay at home. Home Stay offers peace, privacy and wholesome relaxation to the guests. Home stays provide an opportunity to the guests to enjoy natural beauty of Kerala and a homely atmosphere. The most appealing part of Home stays is that almost all Home Stays are situated quite away from crowded city life and heavy traffic. The hosts are family members and not trained staff with artificial etiquettes of modernity and industry. The family members welcome and serve the guests with warmth and love at heart. Therefore home stays give the tourists an atmosphere of home away from home.
The Home stays not only showcase the rural life but also the warmth and care of the rural folks. Another high point of home stay in Kerala is the traditional Kerala cuisine. The guests are invited to experience and share the unique hospitality of Kerala Home Stay.

Currently, there are 14 registered home stays in Kumbalangi that offer rooms to visitors. These rooms are part of the residence, where two or more rooms with attached baths are set aside for guests. Per day charges are around Rs. 1000/-, inclusive of breakfast. Lunch and dinner are provided at an extra charge. The tourists sit with the host family and eat the same food they eat.

4.12 Local Cuisines

Kumbalangi is known for its spicy and hot foods. Traditionally, in Kumbalangi food is served on a banana leaf. Almost every dish prepared in Kerala has coconut and spices to flavour. On occasions of festivity Sadya (Solemn banquet) is served in banana leaves. Traditionally people sit on the floor to eat. Sadya is served with large varieties of food. A traditional Kerala Sadya is purely vegetarian. A brief description about different essential food items served in Sadya is given below.\(^{13}\)

4.12.1 Rice

White Plain Steamed rice is usually taken with dishes in Sadya (Vegetarian), it is the basic ingredient. Biryani (in Non vegetarian meals of the Arabic tradition).

4.12.2 Aviyal

Aviyal is prepared by a combination of vegetables like pumpkin, drumstick, potato, chilly etc and coconut sauce. It is a popular side dish. Even mango, jackfruit and cashew nuts are sometimes included in Aviyal. To add taste, vegetables like
Cabbage, Coconut, and Green chilly and mustard seed are added to Avial in either fried or steamed form.

4. 12.3 Sambaar
It is made out of drumstick, tomato, potato, onion and other vegetables mixed with turmeric powder, chilly powder, coriander seeds and many more spices. This is used to mix with rice while eating. Sambaar is a liquid curry.

4.12.4 Olen
Beans and gourds mixed with several spices like chilli powder to prepare olen.

4.12.5 Kaalen
Kaalen can be made by cooking green banana and adding curd to it. It is then mixed with coconut paste, green chilly and turmeric powder.

4.12.6 Rasam
Rasam can be said as a form of vegetable soup mixed with spices. Rasam is very good for digestion. It is similar to a clear broth; Rasam may be flavoured with tamarind, lemon, tomato, lentils and/or pepper.

4.12.7 Pachadi
Main ingredients are Pumpkin, Coconut milk and curd with green chilly. Pachadi is a pleasing finish to the meal.

4.12.8 Erissery
A typical vegetable side-dish for rice prepared using Pumpkin.

4.12.9 Paayasam
Payassam is a desert item served after the solemn food. There are different varieties of payassam prepared with rice, peas, adda, and coconut. Payasam is a traditional
Indian dish, a rice pudding made by boiling rice with milk and sugar. It is often flavoured with cardamom and pistachios. The dish is also a must in all wedding feasts.

4.12.10 Snacks
Popular snacks include banana chips, yam crisps, and Tapioca chips deep-fried with chilly powder.

4.12.11 Sweets
There's no shortage of sweets in Kerala. Jaggery is often used as a sweetener. It can be boiled and made into paste form. It can be used as a sweet sauce with curd or fruit. Milk rice, coconut rice, or vermicelli sweetened with jaggery are common desserts. Avalose is a rice-based sweet rolled into a ball with jaggery. Unniappamada is pulped jackfruit, mixed with rice flour and jaggery, wrapped in a leaf and steamed. Prathaman is lentils boiled with coconut, cardamom and ginger. Jaggery and cashew nuts are also added. Kumbalangi has a special Halwa that is made from bananas.

4.13 Seasons to Visit
The best season to visit this place is from November to December. Usually from June to October there are heavy rains in the region. From January to May is generally climate is dry and is a good season for visitors. The island has a tropical climate and usually the weather will be warm and the temperature will vary from 25 to 32 degree Celsius. Humidity of the atmosphere also will be high during this season.
4.14 Summary
Kumbalangi enjoys a unique place in the tourism map of Kerala. It is awarded with ‘World Travel Award 2006’ in the category of the ‘World’s Leading Responsible Tourism Project\(^{14}\)’. In the same year Kumbalangi tourism village won the prestigious Golden award for Environment from PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association). The award committee judges commented “Kumbalangi is a sustainable tourism project that makes a difference; not only does it preserve nature and the environment, it also pays homage to a rich culture and heritage”\(^{15}\). At present Kumbalangi has all necessary infrastructures for tourism development. It also has number of unique cuisines to offer to the tourists. Now the important task before the stake holders of the project is to effectively market Kumbalangi as a village tourism destination.
Endnotes and References


2 As per the report kept with the Panchayath

3 Report prepared by Kumbalangi Panchayath in December 1996. p.26

4 Many places in South India, especially the Keralites follow a Hindu sidereal calendar called the Kollavarsham. The Malayalam Era (ME) as per the calendar commenced in 825 AD. The word Kollavarsham has been derived from the Malayalam words, 'kollam and 'varsham'. There are many conflicting views about the origin of Kollavarsham in 825 AD. It is a solar sidereal calendar and like the Roman calendar the Malayalam Calendar also has 12 months. The months are named after the star constellations rising on the orbit of the earth.

5 Thulavarsham is the combination of two words. Thualam and varsham. Thulam is the name of month as per Kollavarsham. Varsham means rain in Malayalam.


7 Report prepared by Kumbalangi Panchayath in December 1996. p.11

8 Report prepared by Kumbalangi Panchayath in December 1996. p.31


10 Arthanariswaran: This is the combined form of Lord Shiva and Shakti the right half male and the other female (Shakti). There are many legends in connection with this
representation. Most probably this was an attempt to co-ordinate the early worship of mother-Goddess with that of Lord Shiva. This is a popular form of Lord shiva and Parvathi (Shakti) in standing pose and is often seen in bronzes. This particular idol was installed in the temple with a view settle the conflicting interests of two prominent groups of worshipers. One group demanded the installation of Devi idol and the other group demanded the installation of Shiva Linga. As a compromise, Sri. Narayana Guru installed the Arthanareeswara idol in the temple.


