FactsDid you know

The Zamorin and the Chavers at Mamankam

Every twelve years on the sandy banks of the Bharathapuzha at Tirunavaya, the Zamorin of Calicut held the Mamankam (Maha-makham). At this grand festival, regional rulers gathered to acknowledge his rule as their overlord. Vassal kings sent flags in token of fealty. The Valluvanad Raja refused to submit because the Zamorin had violently wrested from him the ancestral right to preside over the assembly. Instead, he sent suicide squads of sworn warriors known as Chavers (men who devoted themselves to death) to assassinate the monarch.

The Chavers came mainly from four noble Nayar houses of Valluvanad, namely Chandrattil, Putumanna, Kokat and Verkat Panikkar. They prepared to die and shaved their heads and eyebrows as a sign of mourning. They ate their final meal on earth and wore garlands. They smeared themselves with ashes before taking a permanent farewell of their families. Loyal comrades joined them, and they stepped onto the festival grounds armed only with swords and shields.

The Zamorin mounted the ceremonial terrace and waved his sword. Each time, small bands of Chavers charged down the narrow palisaded lane into thousands of his bodyguards, the Ten Thousand of Polanad. An army outnumbered them, and spears and shields stopped wave after wave. Records note that in 1695, a teenage Chaver from the Chandrattil Panikkar house fought his way entirely through the imperial guard. He leapt onto the royal platform and struck at the Zamorin’s seat before the guards cut him down.