



The first Sree Oommen Chandy Memorial Award, instituted for outstanding contributions to the agricultural sector, is presented to Padma Shri Cheruvayal Raman by Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan and Agriculture Minister Adv. T. Siddique.

Padmashree Cheruvayal Raman The Doyen of Agrobiodiversity Conservation

*VIPINDAS P, **THAMBAN C

*Social Scientist**Senior Fellow @Community Agrobiodiversity Center, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation

Cheruvayal Raman is globally renowned for his efforts to conserve traditional rice varieties of the Western Ghats region of Kerala. He belongs to the Kurichiya community, one of the settled agriculturist Adivasi communities of Wayanad. In

recognition of his significant contribution to agrobiodiversity conservation, the Government of India honoured him with the Padma Shri, one of the country's highest civilian awards. Cheruvayal Raman has a deep understanding of the close

relationship between culture and agriculture and its significance for agrobiodiversity conservation. Over time, modernization has contributed to the erosion of many traditional rice varieties that were once cultivated in the wetlands of Kurichiya joint



with paddy cultivation among the Kurichiya. For the Kurichiya, the conservation of traditional rice varieties is not merely about biodiversity conservation or agricultural resilience; it also has profound cultural and spiritual significance. Raman explains that the ancestral spirits worshipped by the Kurichiya are believed to be pleased when diverse traditional rice varieties are conserved, parallelly, these varieties that are well suited to the local ecological context, food culture, and geographical characteristics of the region, and that possess tolerance to climatic variations, pests, and diseases. At present, Raman cultivates 65 traditional rice varieties and provides seeds free of cost

Raman's field also serves as a rich reservoir of rare, endemic, threatened and native plant species of the Western Ghats. These plants have traditionally been used by the Kurichiya for various rituals, ethnobotanical purposes, maintenance of soil fertility, and other forms of ecological management and engineering. These lesser-known dimensions of his conservation efforts are particularly significant and are presented in Table 1.

Cheruvayal Raman is also well aware that a one-person initiative to conserve traditional varieties, however significant, is neither sustainable nor sufficient to address broader global challenges such as enhancing climate

Cheruvayal Raman is also well aware that a one-person initiative to conserve traditional varieties, however significant, is neither sustainable nor sufficient to address broader global challenges such as enhancing climate resilience in agriculture and tackling malnutrition through the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity.

families. According to Raman, almost all Kurichiya rituals and customary practices are closely associated with the rice-based agricultural ecosystem. Puthari (ceremonial feasting using the newly harvested rice), Makamkulipikkal ("birthday of rice," marked by worshipping the first blooming panicles), and Nattikootal (feast offered to labours during the final day of transplantation) are some of the cultural events and customary practices associated

to individuals interested in conserving and cultivating them.

The rice conservation efforts of Cheruvayal Raman are widely recognised. However, less attention has been given to his efforts to preserve the broader agricultural heritage of the Kurichiya community, including traditional agricultural tools and implements, straw-thatched Tharavadu (ancestral home), and equipment traditionally used for dehusking paddy and raghi.

resilience in agriculture and tackling malnutrition through the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity. Recognising the importance of creating awareness and transferring knowledge to younger generations, Raman actively engages with a wide range of people, from schoolchildren and community members to researchers and policymakers. Through these interactions, he seeks to encourage a broader understanding of the ecological, cultural, nutritional, and agricultural significance of agrobiodiversity. The lesser-known dimensions of Cheruvayal Raman's contribution are only now beginning to receive wider recognition. His work extends far beyond the conservation of traditional rice varieties; it represents an effort to preserve an entire bio cultural heritage system, in which agriculture,



biodiversity, culture, believe system, traditional knowledge, and ecological resilience are deeply interconnected.

A Treasure of Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Cheruvayal Raman is a strong believer in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). He believes that TEK offers valuable insights for addressing emerging challenges in agriculture, including extreme weather events and the declining health of soils and human populations. According to Raman, TEK has evolved over centuries through human experience and continuous interaction with the agricultural environment. Therefore, he considers TEK an important source of ideas and research questions for the scientific community to explore, validate, and experiment with before taking them to a larger scale.

Raman emphasises the importance of sharing this rich body of traditional knowledge with researchers and the wider scientific community. Much of the TEK associated with agrobiodiversity has been transmitted across generations through oral traditions and everyday agricultural practices. Knowledge related to seed selection, seed conservation and storage, multiplication, exchange, and cultivation is embedded within these traditional knowledge systems. For Raman, documenting and engaging with such knowledge is essential not only for preserving cultural heritage but also for

Table-1		
Local Name	Scientific Name	Status
Pana	Caryota urens	
Chooral	Calamus Travancoricus	Endemic SWG
Kodapana	Corypha umbraculifera	
Pala	Alstonia Scholaris	
Kurukkooti	Mallotus philippensis	
Valachedi	Glyricidia sepium	
Chembarathi	Hibiscus rosa-sinensis l.	
Elanji	Mimusops elengi l.	
Vendek	Lagerstroemia microcarpa wight	
Kulirmavu	Persea macrantha (nees) costerm.	
Chaliru	Flacourtia montana graham	Wild fruit
Thanni	Terminalia bellirica (gaertn.) roxb.	
Ambazham	Spondias Pinnata	
Kariveti (Edala)	Olea Dioica	
Karimurikku	Erythryna sp	
Nadan murikku	Erythryna Stricta	
Kunni	Albizia Odoratissima	
Vatta	Mecaranga Peltata	
Vetti	Aporosa Lindleyana	
Korandi (climbaer)	Salecia Fruiticosa	Endemic SWG
Aranji	Mymusops elengi	
Valanpuli	Tamarindus indicus l.	
Kodampuli	Garcinia gummi-gutta (l.) robs.	Wild edible
Thengu	Cocos nucifera.	
Kamuku	Areca catechu	
Njaval	Syzygium cumini (l.) skeels	Wild fruit
Mavu (30 variety)	Mangifera indica.	

exploring locally grounded solutions to contemporary agricultural and environmental challenges.

Development Visionary

During his speech at any occasion he reminds the audience

about the planetary limits for development. He also insists the relevance of local action. He always sees agriculture land as an extension of forest, therefore, the degradation of forest affect agriculture too and vice- versa. He is strong critic of



Plavu	Artocarpus heterophyllus (Lam.)	
Anjili	Artocarpus hirsutus lam.	Endemic WG
Medicinal Plants		
Murikooti	Murikooti miniature	
Edinjil	Pterospermum rubijinosum heyne.	Endemic WG, endangered
Arootha	Ruta graveolens l.	
Vayambu	Acorus Calamus	
Aripoo	Lantana Camera	
Aariveppu	Azeadarachta Indica	
Kayanchikuru	Caesalpinia Bonducella	
Sooryakanthi	Helianthus Annuus	
Thippali	Piper longum l.	
Gramboo	Syzygium aromaticum	
Jathika	Myristica fragrans	
Kurumulaku	Piper nigrum l.	
Eswaramulla	Aristoaristolochia Indica	
Aruvalli	Nervelia zeylanica	
Nenthravalli	Bridelia Scandus	
Njerinjil	Pterospermum Rubiginosum	
Keezharnelli	Phyllanthus Amarus	
Navarakizhangu	Dioscorea Oppositipholia	
Nannari	Midesmus indicus (L.) r. br.	
Koomullu	Caesalpinia mimosoides	
Katupukayila	Lobelia nicotianifolia roem. & schult.	
Kovakka	Coccinia Grandis	
Pavakka	Mamordica Charantia	
*SWG : Southern Western Ghats, WG : Western Ghats		

rapid and insensitive expansion of infrastructure in Wayanad by highlighting the uniqueness and vulnerability of the landscapes in Wayanad. He is a strong critic of assessing the profitability agriculture only on the basis of output. He states the relevance to account the ecosystem services offered by various farming systems. Unlike any other profession, farmers and conservators contributing larger social cause through ecosystem services. Therefore, state must ensure such farmers livelihood by ensuring pension.

As an Educator, Raman is very convinced about the potential of young generation to address the contemporary crisis like climate change if properly mentor them. Therefore, wherever possible he is trying to interact with young generation. During the last one year he had interacted with students from 162 education institution starting from local to international education institutes along with his own farm visit. In addition, he delivered lecture at 121 institutions which includes research institutions, collages, non- governmental institutions across the country.

Further, he also had the opportunity to interact and share his development visions with 101 bureaucrats and policy makers.

A Global Figure Acting Locally to Address Global Needs

In 2018, Raman was one of the invited participants at the International Symposium on Ethnobiology and Ethnoecology held in Belém, Brazil. In 2016, he received the Plant Genome Saviour Community Award, instituted by the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA), Government of India. In 2026, the Government of Kerala honoured him with the first Oommen Chandy Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture. Raman is a strong believer in grassroots-level action and continues to contribute actively to biodiversity conservation and community development. He serves as a member of the Biodiversity Management Committee of Wayanad and as the patron of the Wayanad District Tribal Development Action Council, a grassroots initiative promoted by M S Swaminathan Research Foundation engaged in the conservation of Wayanad's agrobiodiversity. Through these roles, he shares his decades of experience and learning from the field with communities, researchers, and other stakeholders. Raman considers himself an educator committed to creating awareness about the planetary limits and the importance of living in harmony with nature and its diverse forms of life. His work demonstrates how locally rooted knowledge and grassroots action can contribute to addressing global challenges related to biodiversity loss, climate change, food security, and sustainable agriculture. ■