

# Arattupuzha Panicker

# Velayudha

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**In news**– A movie based on the life of Arattupuzha Velayudha Panicker, a social reformer from the Ezhava community in Kerala who lived in the 19th century was released recently.

## **About Arattupuzha Velayudha Panicker-**

- Born into a well-off family of merchants in Kerala's Alappuzha district, Panicker was one of the most **influential figures in the reformation movement in the state.**
- **He challenged the domination of upper castes or 'Savarnas'** and brought about changes in the lives of both men and women.
- **Panicker is credited with building two temples dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, in which members of all castes and religions were allowed entry.**
- One was built in his own village Arattupuzha in 1852, and one in Thanneermukkom in 1854, another village in the Alappuzha district.
- **Some of his most significant contributions were in protesting for the rights of women belonging to Kerala's backward communities.**
- **In 1858, he led the Achippudava Samaram strike at Kayamkulam in Alappuzha.** This strike aimed to earn women belonging to oppressed groups the right to wear a lower garment that extended beyond the knees.
- In 1859, this was extended into the Ethappu Samaram, the struggle for the **right to wear an upper body cloth by women belonging to backward castes.**
- In 1860, he led the **Mukkuthi Samaram at Pandalam** in the Pathanamthitta district, **for the rights of lower-caste women to wear 'mukkuthi' or nose-ring,** and other gold ornaments.

- These struggles played an important role in challenging the social order and in raising the dignity of women belonging to the lower strata of society in public life.
- Apart from issues related to women, Panicker also **led the first-ever strike by agricultural labourers in Kerala**, the Karshaka Thozhilali Samaram, which was successful.
- He also **established the first Kathakali Yogam (area-based schools for the classical dance form Kathakali) for the Ezhava community** in 1861, which led to a Kathakali performance by Ezhavas and other backward communities, another first for them.
- Panicker was murdered by a group of upper-caste men in 1874 at the age of 49. This makes him the **'first martyr' of the Kerala renaissance**.
- Apart from his work as a social reformer, Panicker was **a master of Kalaripayattu**, the traditional martial arts practised in Kerala, which is also considered the oldest of its kind in India.
- He excelled in other sports as well, including wrestling, swimming and horseback riding.
- **He was given the title of 'Panicker' by the then-king of Travancore in 1869.**

### Ezhava community-

- The Ezhavas are a community with origins in Kerala.
- They are approximately 25% of the state's population.
- They are also **known as Ilhava, Irava, Izhava and Erava in the south of the region; as Chovas, Chokons and Chogons in Central Travancore; and as Thiyyar, Tiyyas and Theeyas in the Malabar region.**
- Some are also known as *Thandan*, which has caused administrative difficulties due to the presence of a distinct caste of Thandan in the same region.
- The **Malabar Ezhava group have claimed a higher ranking in the Hindu caste system** than do the others, although

from the perspective of the colonial and subsequent administrations they were treated as being of similar rank.

- Ezhava dynasties such as the Mannanar existed in Kerala.
- The Chekavar, a warrior section within the Ezhava community, served the army of the Chera dynasty; there were also renowned Kalaripayattu experts among Chekavars.
- Britishers also formed the Thiyyar Regiment in Malabar during the colonial rule

### **Nangeli-**

- Contemporary of Panicker, Nangeli was an Ezhava woman who is said to have lived in the 19th century in Alappuzha.
- She supposedly cut off her breasts to protest the 'breast tax' imposed by the Kingdom of Travancore on women belonging to lower castes.