



SWAMI SARANAM

TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD SABARIMALA

The Garden of Lord Ayyappa

The trees in Poonkavanam (the garden of Lord Ayyappa) have been lending ears and providing shade ever since to the innumerable chants of the pilgrims who trek from Pamba to Sabarimala. The devotees, who have been here for years, know by heart, the transformations of these centuries' old trees of different sizes, which are part of the tiger reserve forests of the Western Ghats.

In the garden, which shares the characteristic features of thick rain forests, Kattupunna, also known as Punnappa (*Calophyllum polyanthum*) is the biggest of the trees. It often grows to a length of thirty metres, has parched barks and has a width that cannot be measured by two people together holding their hands. The wild version of Aanjili (*Artocarpus hirsutus*), known as Karanjili and Kampakam, the most weighing tree, can also be found here on both sides of the path, along with Rain Trees (*Albizia Saman*), providing shades to the pilgrims.

These flowering trees are a visual treat to the devotees who look down at it from Sannidhanam. Aanjili along with wild jackfruit trees and wild mango trees are found in abundance here. In Swami Ayyappan Road, one may even find a place named "Maavin Chuvadu." Often, lime trees are found at places that serve lemon juice.

"Marakkoottam" ('group of trees', literally) is known so because of the abundance of trees here. Deputy Range Officer (Forest Department, Sabarimala) NV.Satheesan notes that soil erosion is much less in these areas thanks to the number of trees here. The State Forest Department has implemented an afforestation programme to counter the deforestation happening due to the increasing presence of plastic and other wastes.

Hornbills, various breeds of monkeys and giant squirrels are now calling on frequently to have the plums that are aplenty in the black plum trees that have been planted in the forest path at Neelimala, observes Satheesan. Cullenia Fruit is the favourite of the Lion tail Macaque, and is seen in abundance near Kazhuthakkudi, before Pulmedu. The centuries' old ilavuthat had been recently fell down is an unbearable sight to behold for the devotees who had been passing by this tree as pilgrims for years. No matter how expensive these trees are they often dissolve in the soil and remain a part of nature in the Sabarimala reserve forest.