

THE ENTRANCE TO THE MANDAKKAD TEMPLE

## MANDAKKAD

**T**HIRTY-EIGHT miles to the south of Trivandrum is the tiny fishing village of Mandakkad. Famous for its temple consecrated to Sri Bhagavathi, and the annual *Kodai* festival conducted in the shrine in the month of March, Mandakkad attracts many thousands of pilgrims from all over Travancore. Of all the Bhagavathi temples in the State, Mandakkad is regarded as the most important by devotees who undertake every year pilgrimage on foot to this Shrine.

### **Ant-heap Deity**

The most remarkable feature of this temple is that the deity worshipped here is in the form of a large ant-heap which is

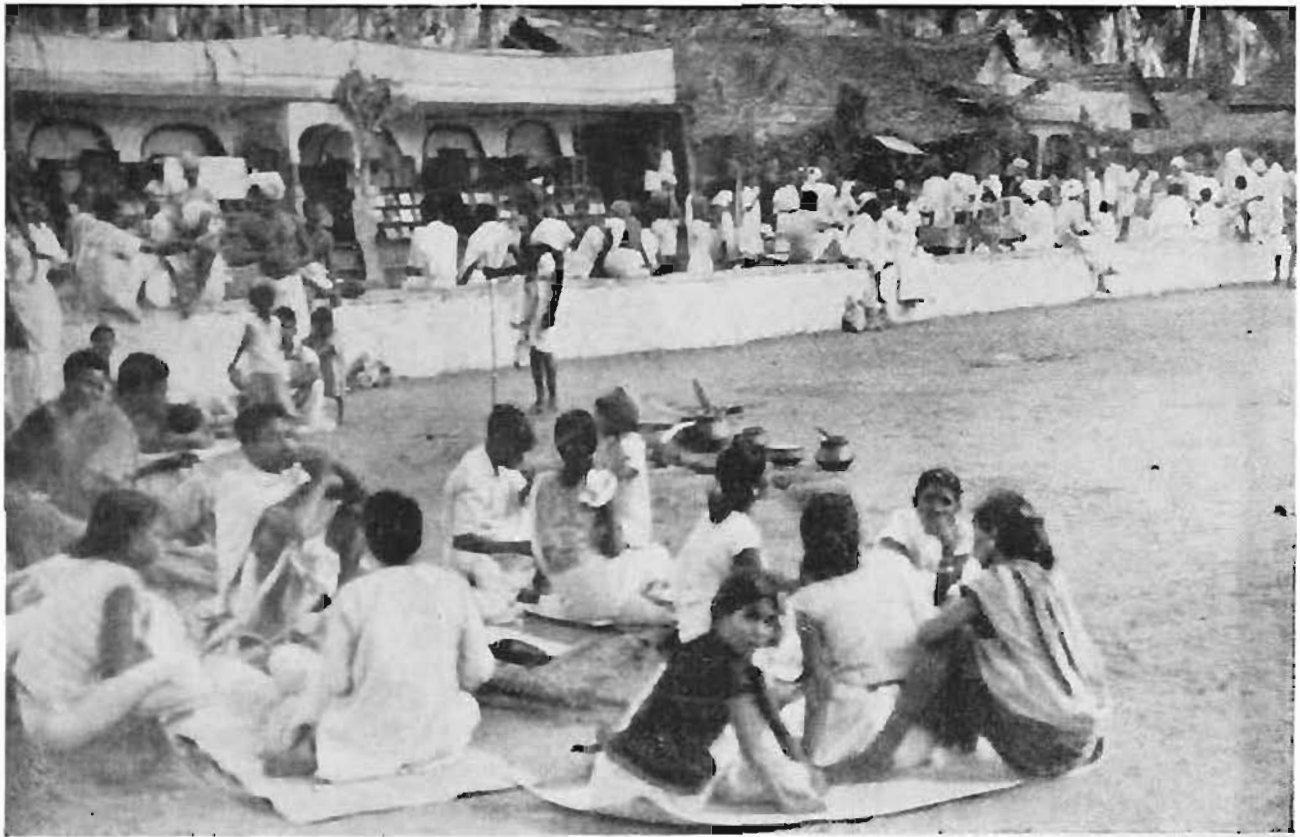
ever growing. Tradition and legend aver that centuries ago some plough-boys made a heap of clay from the paddy fields and worshipped it as *Bhadrakali*, an aspect of Sri Bhagavathi, and after some time when the mount was disturbed by some too curious folk a tiny stream of blood was found emanating from it. This strange and bewildering phenomenon was viewed with awe and reverence by the people who forthwith attributed it to divine intervention and the mount became sacred. The mount grew in size every year and the people invested it with the living presence of the Almighty and increasing sanctity. In course of time, a temple was

built at the hallowed spot. The original mount of earth continues to be worshipped as Sri Bhagavathi though there are sacred images in the shrine.

### **Kaleidoscope of colour and humanity**

The annual *Kodai*\* festival at Mandakkad in the month of Kumbham (March)

from various parts of Travancore arrive at Mandakkad two or three days prior to the actual *Kodai* and camp on the extensive sea shore adjoining the Temple. The State provides the large concourse of devotees who gather at Mandakkad with the necessary medical, public health and other amenities. During the festival season

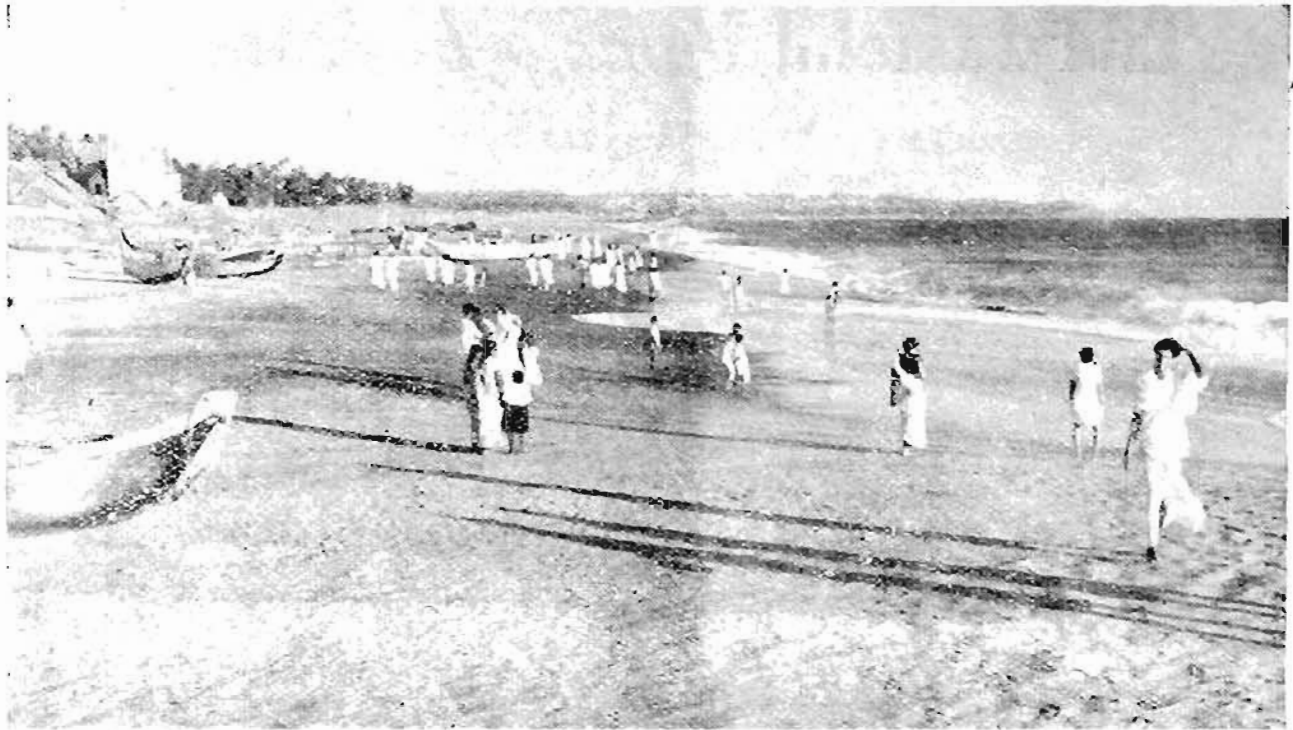


PILGRIMS CAMPING IN THE PRECINCTS OF THE SHRINE.

transforms the quiet, unpretentious, out of the way fishing village into a living kaleidoscope of colour and humanity. On the *Kodai* day and the day previous, Mandakkad is one vast seething mass of humanity the like of which could only be witnessed during the festivals in temples. In small bands of ten to twenty, pilgrims

religious conventions are held in the precincts of the Temple. On the tenth day of the annual festival, is the *Kodai*.

*\*The Kodai occurs on the last Tuesday in the month of Kumbham (March) every year. This year's Kodai was celebrated on the 29th Kumbham 1121 corresponding to the 12th March 1946.*



A VIEW OF THE SEA BEACH AT MANDAKKAD

### **An Imposing Religious Festival**

To witness the *Kodai* is to participate in one of the most imposing and sacred religious festivals in the State. The background for the *Kodai* is the glorious seascape. The pilgrims watch the *Kodai* with reverence amidst magnificent natural scenery. On all sides as far as the eye can reach are the huge concourse of pilgrims gathered to pay homage to the Goddess, the sparkling white sands, the sheltering palms lining the coast, and the shimmering sapphire sea. Artistic, aesthetical, and symbolic, the *Kodai* is a harmonious commingling of historical and traditional associations, form, design, colour, sound and pageantry. The exuberance and

devotional ecstasy of the devotees wax great and cool down only after the *Kodai* is over and they trek their way back home when they take with them various kinds of highly useful and artistic articles manufactured from the palmyrah leaves for which exquisite art-crafts Mandakkad and the neighbouring places in South Travancore are famous.

The Mandakkad temple is noted for its mural paintings, wood carvings and copper images. Until a few years ago, animal sacrifice used to be an important and indispensable part of the *Kodai* festival but it was abolished by a Royal Proclamation.

(K. P. P. T)