

THE LOWLAND

The Landscape

In the monsoon season, the marsh floods and ponds combine; in summer, the floodwater evaporates. Our story begins with the marshy stretch of land, hence the title.

The Scenery

All low-lying areas do not automatically become lowlands. To be lowlands, they must be sufficiently rich in clay, lie at an elevation lower than their surroundings, and have access to a steady source of water like a pond, river or a lake.

The locals of *Azakiyanallur* call the lowland *Paduvappattu*.

Its persistently damp and petrified soil favors the growth of natural plants, like - *avaarai*, *manjanatti*, *pungu*, *vaakai*, *poovarasu*, *pandrivaakai*, *nocci*, *ucilai*, *erukkali*, *pinari*, *kozunchi*, *vempu*. Whatever the mix, they can be easily yanked out and replanted. The muck can subsist with any fertilizer of the farmer's choice.

The People

The *Azakiyanallur* lowland is surrounded by ponds: *Panikkan* and *Vaanian* in the west, *Velan* in the north-west, *Kammalam* in the south-west, *Samban* in the north, and *Sanaan* in the south. To the east lies a plot of land with a string of burial grounds put up on caste basis and, to its west, is the *Pazaiyaru Lake*, a perennial source of water to the region. On its shore sits a slum of the *Sambavar* community. The village displays temples dedicated to the *Vadivamman*, *Mutharamman*, and *Lord Ganessa*. The streets have shrines dedicated to four *Sudalaimadan* and *Isakkiyappan* deities. .

The members of the *Nadar*, *Sambavar* and *Saanar* communities are prohibited from walking on the streets frequented by *Brahmins* and *Vellalars* and they are also not allowed on streets where the chariot goes procession during the village festival. Sartorial restrictions are also strictly enforced. No low-caste member can put on headwear; rather, he must tie it around his waist. Folding of the *veshti* is a taboo, as is chewing betel leaves and spitting the juice on the street. The low-caste members must avoid entering the street on the day a flag has been hoisted on the temple premises.