



HISTORICISING THE ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF PADMANABHAPURAM PALACE: A STUDY

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Abstract

*Palaces are one of the archaeological evidences. The study of palaces are given direct contact with that particular royal family. Padmanabhapuram Palace is one of the most important monument in Kerala. It was the royal household of Travancore royal family. It contains the treasure of archaeological evidences. The present study **Historicising the Architectural Features of Padmanabhapuram Palace: A Study** is tries to find out its importance of historical as well as its present situation.*

Key words :

Palace, ,Monument, Architecture, Poomukham, Manthrasala, Manimalika, Oottupura, Thaikottaram, Homappura, Kulappura, Natakasala, Anthapuram, Upparikka Malika, Vadakke Kottaram, Navarathri Mandapam, Thekke Kottaram, Veppumoottu Kottaram.

INTRODUCTION

Padmanabhapuram Palace is one of the most important monuments in Kerala. It is located at Padmanabhapuram Fort, close to the town of Thuckalay in Kanyakumari District.it is 20 km from Nagercoil and about 50kms from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.the present study **Historicising the Architectural Features of Padmanabhapuram Palace: A Study**is an attempt to presenting relevance of the history of Padmanabhapuram Palace. This palace is fully a co-ordination of Kerala art and architecture. It is the best living monument of Kerala traditional style. This



study includes the major aspects of Padmanabhapuram Palace, past and exact situation. It had a great relation with Travancore royal family. Tourism also attracted this palace, and so many foreigners visited here to know more about the social and cultural conditions of early Travancore. It is asset of ideal surroundings which also have contributed largely to the architectural magnificence of the monument. The study also tries to study about the exact situation also.

Historical review

The palace was constructed around 1601 AD by Iravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal, who ruled *Venad* between 1592 and 1609. It is believed that the *Thaikottaram* was built in 1550 the maker of modern Travancore Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma (1706-1758). He rebuilt the palace in around 1750. King Marthanda Varma dedicated the kingdom to his family deity Sree Padmanabha, form of lord Vishnu and ruled the kingdom as padmanabhadasa or servant of Lord Padmanabha. Hence the name Padmanabhapuram or city of Lord Padmanabha. In the late 18th century, precisely in 1795 the capital of Travancore was shifted from here to Thiruvananthapuram and the palace lost its former glory. But the successors of Anizham Thirunal Marthandavarma also continued to renovate the palace. The followers like Avittam Thirunal Balaramavarma, Swathy Thirunal, and Dharma Raja Also continued the renovative work.

Location

Padmanabhapuram Palace is situated at the ancient historical town Padmanabhapuram (City of Lord Vishnu) in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu and administered by Kerala Government. It is 55 kms south of Thiruvananthapuram and 2 kms east of Thuckalay on Thiruvananthapuram Nagercoil road. It was ancient capital of erstwhile princely state of Travancore (*Venad*) from about 1555 AD to the latter half of the 18th century. The palace is located at the foot of the Veli Hills which form a part of the Western Ghats the river valley flows nearby. Though the palace is situated in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu state, but it is administered by the Archaeology Department, Government of Kerala.



Art and Architecture

Padmanabhapuram palace is remarkable assemblage of traditions examples of the arts of architecture, stone sculpture wood carving and wall painting. There are freely accessible to the student of the inherent artistic craft genius of Travancore as it was two centuries and more ago. They are also potent inspirations and instructions to artists and artificers of today in the characteristics, qualities and details of art creation that are fundamental to the true art expression of Travancore. With high considerations, notwithstanding the former use of certain parts of buildings at Padmanabhapuram palace for religious purposes, the whole congeries of buildings and their contents have been made available for public inspection without any distinction, even to the point of refined thoughtfulness of restoring the old shine of Saraswathy Devi to its original state, with an image of the goddess but without conservation so that followers of all faiths may have the opportunity of seeing interior of a Hindu shrine to the deitic patroness of culture. The interiors enriched by wood carvings and conspicuous murals. The names of the buildings are as follows.

- *Poomukham*(Entrance Hall)

Poomukham is the front room of the palace where the king used to welcome and certain visiting dignitaries from far off lands. The *Poomukham* has gabled entrance in traditional style and ornamentation.

- *Manthrasala*(Council Chamber)

The first floor of the *Poomukham* is the *Manthrasala*. This was the palace where the king held his cabinet meetings grave matters of the state, chalked out strategies of war and held with important visitors.

- *Manimalika*(Clock Tower)

Manimalika contains a clock purely of the make and design of village mechanic. It is believed to be about 200 years old and after two decades of inanimate silence it has climbed in to the active life again recently.



- *Oottupura*(Dining Hall)

Oottupura is at the southern side, adjacent to the council chamber.⁹it has two floors, the ground floor and first floor. It is 78 meter long and 6 meter wide running through the whole length of the building on each floor. It is used to accommodate 2000 people at a time. In these two halls free meals were provided to two thousand Brahmins every day. The righteousness and charity of rulers of Travancore were so famous that the land itself was referred to as ‘*dharma bhoomi*’. The huge *oottupura* stands testimony for it.

- *Thaikottaram*(Mother Palace).

Decending from *oottupura* one can see *thaikottaram*.It is the oldest building in the palace complex.it is believed to be built by Iravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal the ruler of *venad*.It have been constructed around 16th century. Mother palace meant where the mother of king resides.

- *Homappura*

Homappura is a single storied building to the north of *Thaikottaram*. This was namely used to perform ‘*homam*’ (religious offerings to god and goddess).There is a small Saraswathy Temple on the canteen side of the *Homappura*.

- *Kulappura*(Bathing Ghat)

On the *verantha* on either side of the steps leading to the cool water of the tank are displayed stone idols collected from different parts of the state. The steps leading to the tank has for a roof.A room above with horizontal states over cooking the tank and large wall to wall seat where the royal family but to rest have oil massage before bath.

- *Natakasala*(Hall Of Performance)

This is relatively new building constructed at the behest of maharaja Swathy Thirunal,who reigned in Travancore from 1829-1846.He was a great connoisseur of arts, especially music and dance. He himself composed music and has left a rich to classical Karnatic Music. The



Natakasala has solid granite pillar and gleaming black floor. There is a wooden enclosure, with peep holes where the women of the royal household used to set and watch the performance.

- *Anthapuram*(Ladies Chamber)

From the first floor of the *Upparikka Malika* a passage through a beautiful carved door leads to the rest rooms (*Anthapuram*).

- The Long Corridor

The chief attractions to the long corridor are the ambary mukhappu(bay window) and historical paintings. The paintings were installed at the interest of maharani sethu parvathi bai between 1937 and 1940.

- *Upparikka Malika*

Upparikka malika is a four storied building is located at the centre of the palace complex. the name '*upparikka*' is derived from the word '*uparikka*' which means multi storied building. the building was constructed by Marthanda Varma in 1744 AD. The original name given to this building was *Perumal Kottaram*(Lords Palace). Marthanda Varma built this palace for dedicating it to lord Padmanabha. So it is considered as a sacred place.

- *Vadakke Kottaram*(Northern Wing)

The northern wing of the palace, *Vadakke Kottarm* built under the supervision of the loyal Dewan Ramayyan Dalawa during ad 1737 to 1756 was among the last structures to be added to the palace complex. There are three parts to this lengthy wing viz., *Chandravilasam*, *Indravilasam* and *Thekketheruvu Malika*

- *Navarathri Mandapam*

The marvellously sculptured granite structures of *Navarathri Mandapam* and Saraswathy Temple were constructed by Marthanda Varma in 1744 AD. Navarathri Mandapam was used for cultural performances .music, dance and other entertainments were conducted every year



during the Navarathri Festival. It was during the middle of the 19th century that the venue was shifted to thiruvananthapuram.

- *Thekke Kottaram*(Southern Palace)

Thekke kottaram, is not within the same compound form an intrinsic part of the palace. It is the most attractive building in the palace complex. There are three small buildings in one compound.

- *Veppumoottu Kottaram*(Ladies Quarters)

In *Veppumoottu Kottaram*, the queen reagent and the princesses along with their numerous female attendants lived.

Mural Paintings

The Padmanabhapuram Palace is a store house of artistic treasures. The famed murals in the Upparikka *Malika*. Palace records show the employment of a Persian painter called Saris Katchadourian in the 1980's to paint Krishna and the demon Puthana., Kaliya Mardana, etc. Each painting has written below, the words all joined together-the text is *vattezhuthu*(roundwriting). The Paintings like *Ananthasayanam, Annapoorna, Gajalekshmi, Venugopal And Gopis, Subrahmanya With Valli And Devayani, Arthanareeswara, Bhadrakali, Siva And Parvathi, Hari-Hara*, etc. available in Padmanabhapuram Palace, these are of mural paintings.

The Archaeological Museum

A museum block in the south west corner of Padmanabhapuram Palace was constructed by the department of archaeology. The construction of the building was originally started in 1962. Later it was re-designed in accordance with the style and structure of the old palace complex and completed towards the close of 1993. the museum was inaugurated by Sri. T.M. Jacob, Minister for cultural affairs, Kerala government on 12th January 1994. the invaluable exhibits within the new museum are examples of the rich and varied collection of the department of archaeology from the southernmost part of the state. This precious collection



of the department includes wooden sculptures, stone images, stone inscriptions, copper plates, old coins, ancient arms and ammunitions, swords, copies of mural paintings of the mural pagoda of the aforesaid *Upparikka Malika*.

Present Condition

World Heritage Status Likely For Padmanabhapuram Palace

The long wait to get the 400 year old Padmanabhapuram palace is included in the UNESCO world heritage sites list seems set to end. An advisory committee on world heritage matters constituted by the union ministry of culture has design and beautiful mural paintings are included in the tentative list. This is but the pen ultimate step before declaring it as a world heritage site.

After the state reorganisation process in the 1950's, the palace became part of madras state. However, Kerala retained its administrative control. The maintenance expenses for and income from the palace are equally shared by Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Though the government of Travancore realized the value of this heritage structure and declared it a protected monument in 1938 under the ancient monument act then in force, experts had pointed out that it deserved a high level of recognition celebrated Indian architect such as Charles Correa had often described the palace as key building typology to understand the Indian design to environmental issues. In 1999, realising the importance and outstanding value of the palace, the government sought international financial assistance to research palace, the government sought international financial assistance to research and prepare the nomination file the UNESCO sanctioned about \$6, 300, but not much progress was made last year, the ministry constituted the advisory committee and sought to maintain the geographical balance in the matter of nominations. The committee after reviewing the list, recommended that Padmanabhapuram palace be included in the tentative list Shikhajain, member secretary of the committee, in an e-mail replay, told the Hindu decision in July 2013. Each year member countries of UNESCO add monuments. The Padmanabhapuram Palce is now a potential candidate for nomination next year and when chosen would be the first Kerala architectural edifice to get into the world heritage list



CONCLUSION

The present study tries to provide a clear picture about the architectural importance of Padmanabhapuram palace under royal Family. The study concentrates on the origin and development of Padmanabhapuram Palace in Kerala. The study includes an outline of the palace tradition of Travancore in Kerala. It covers various aspects of traditional art and architecture. It also exposes the present condition of the palace. After start reorganisation process is in 1950's the palace became part of Tamil Nadu. However Kerala state realised the traditional importance of palace and retained its administrative control .Padmanabhapuram palace is now a candidate for World Heritage List.

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24th - 25th January, 2020

ISBN : 978-81-943584-9-7

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