

A TRAVEL THROUGH THE PLETHORA OF HISTORICAL ELEMENTS OF TRAVANCORE PALACES

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Abstract

Kerala is the state of tropical Malabar Coast of south western India. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country. Along with its scenic hill stations, picturesque backwaters and serene beaches, Kerala also has a number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Monuments, and other structures. These are the important visual source of analyzing the history of Kerala. There are 170 protected monuments under the Kerala State Archaeological Department. Another important objective of the department is to find and preserve monuments of different eras. The state is famous for its Palaces, Forts, Stone caves, Tombs, Shrines and many other unique architectural features of Kerala. Thiruvananthapuram is the capital city of Kerala. It is famous for number of Historical Places, Palaces, and Pilgrim centres. Thiruvananthapuram was the main administrative centre of the Travancore Kingdom. For the administrative purpose they built number of Palaces in Thiruvananthapuram such as Kuthiramalika Palace, Koyikkal Palace, Kowdiyar Palace and Kanakakunnu Palace. These are the architectural wonders and monuments in Kerala that tales of a rich foregone era. This paper gives a brief description about the treasure trove palaces of Thiruvananthapuram.

Key Words: Historical Monuments, Puthenmalika, Pallikettu, Ettukettu

Thiruvananthapuram is the capital city of Kerala. It is the main centre for the richest historical monuments and Tourist centre's of Kerala. It is the land for beautiful traditional style architecture palaces such as Kuthiramalika Palace, Kowdiyar Palace, Koyikkal Palace, and Kanakakunnu Palace. These are the important visual source of analyzing the history of Kerala. These Palaces represents the style of Kerala art and architecture.

Kuthiramalika Palace

Kuthira malika is a great cultural heritage of Kerala. It was constructed between 1845 to 1846 during the reign of Swathi Thirunal RamaVarma.¹ This Period Travancore enjoyed the

golden period of artistic refinement and glory. It is situated on the left side of the Sree Padmanabha Swami temple complex. This is the most suitable example of the traditional Kerala architecture structured with wonderful wooden carving and ventilations. Kuthiramalika literally means ‘mansion of the horses an apt name because the facades are embellished with 122 figures of rampant horses². *Puthenmalika* is the authorized name of the palace.

Architecture of the Palace

Palace has the classic sloping roofs, overhanging eaves, pillared verandas and enclosed courtyards. Complicated carvings adorn the wooden ceilings, with each room having a unique pattern. The main 16 rooms are in the palace had constructed in 16 different patterns. It was built by 5000 Viswabrahmins in four years.³ It is made from teakwood, rosewood, marble and granite. The roof of the palace is completely made of wood and 42 beams support the carved patterns. The granite pillars supported the roof too are intricate designs. Totally the palace contains 80 rooms of which 20 were opened for visitors in 1995.⁵ A huge Belgium mirror is the main beauty of Kuthira Malika.⁶ One of the very interesting factors in the palace is the floor fully made of egg whites, charcoal and limestone. This makes it cold and smooth even in hot weather conditions. The performance venue built in the palace location uses traditional sounds reflectors comprising fifty clay pots hung upside down from the ceiling.

Museum

The palace has been transformed to a palace museum. It is one of the main properties owned by the Travancore Royal Family. Now the palace is opened for visitors. The Palace has wonderful collections of traditional furniture, music instruments, greek statues, Kathakali mannequins, Belgian and Italian mirrors, crystal chandeliers, paintings, a gaint belgain harpoon, armaments.⁷ A beautiful Musical tree which makes 8 sounds on tapping is the another attraction in the palace. On the right side of mannequins are the ivory cradles of different sizes. The palace has on show two royal thrones, one finished from 24 elephant tusks and other of Bohemian crystal with the Travancore emblem ‘conch’ embellishing the top of backrest.⁸ The palace has a massive collection of idols and sculptures finished from white marble.

The rooms on the first floor of the palace that maintained as the meeting chamber, the library and an alcove that Swathi Thirunal used for meditating and composing many of his famous musical compositions. There is a small wooden stair which contains carvings of peacock, parrot and elephant.⁹ The illusion portrait of Sree Chithira Thirunal Balaramavarma is the striking displaying item in the palace. It was painted by Svetoslav Roerich.¹⁰ The face and the shoes of the king become visible facing the onlooker from all corners of the room.

Swathi Thirunal Sangeetholsavam

It was one of the popular yearly festivals remembering the legacy of Swathi Thirunal. The courtyard of Kuthiramalika is the spot of Swathi Thirunal Sangeetholsavam. It is called as Kuthiramalika festival. This festival is conducted every year from January 6 to 12. It attracts most of the top performers of Carnatic and Hindustani classical music. Some of the eminent performers of the past include Bismillah Khan, Kisshori Amonkar, M.Balamuralikrishna, D. K pattammal, and Gangubai Hangal.¹¹

Kowdiyar Palace

Kowdiyar palace is the biggest palaces of the princely Travancore clans, who still stays in this magnificent building. It is a central landmark in Trivandrum. It was constructed in the year 1934 by Maharajah Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma, on *Pallikettu* (wedding) of his only sister, Karthika Thirunal Lakshmi Bai with Lt.Col. G.V Raja. After the constitutional amendment of 1971, the assets were partitioned equally among the branches of the two Travancore queens, Sethu Lakshmi Bai and Sethu Parvathy Bai.¹² This palace belongs to the heirs of Sethu Parvathi Bai as it was built her son Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal.

Architectural Importance of Kowdiyar Palace

It is the masterpiece of Kerala Architectural style. It is on 100 acres of land area, constructed on a small hilltop over 300 meters from the sea level. The palace was built according to on Vasthu Shashtra. The Palace has 150 rooms in three floors and made large rectangular shaped structure.¹³ There are 6 small towers placed on the top roof of which seems like a small watch tower. There are long running corridors besides the small pillars adjacent the main walls of the building. There are a lot of small pillars and large pillars throughout the building. The entrance of the palace was constructed with two major arched pillars. The palace roof was constructed with terracotta tiles and floors are made with white marbles. The well carved furniture's, paintings and sculptures, well designed in the floral forms are making this palace more beautiful. Some floors are made with pure white marbles and few floors are in the colour of chessboard. The palace has a very spacious kitchen and a huge dining hall to accommodate 500 people at a time.¹⁴ There are huge store rooms and the windows are framed on glasses and there are glass hung lightening in every rooms. All the furniture, doors and windows frames are made of teak wood.

Historical Importance of Kowdiar Palace

Kowdiar Palace was built in 1934 by the Sri Chithirai Tirunal for his loving daughter as a marriage gift. In the year 1971 this palace was partitioned among the Thamburati's named Laxmi Thirunal and Parvathi Thirunal.¹⁵ It is the only and last palace where the Travancore decedents agreed to settle here eternally after the independence of India and when the princely states were dissolved by the government of India. The Travancore kings are well known for their cultural and architectural achievements. They ruled South Kerala from 1729 with Padmanabhapuram as its capital and obsessed it until 1949.¹³ It is the present capital of Kerala state now called as

Thiruvananthapuram. This palace has a large attractive garden with colour lightening fountains. It is a unique palace has splendid features.

Attingal Palace (Koyikal Kottaram)

Attingal Palace is one of the oldest palaces in Kerala. It was constructed in the 17th century for Umayamma Rani, queen of the Venad Royal Family, who ruled this area in the year 1677 to 1684. It was a historic gravestone of social and cultural principles in the Kerala state from its best times with European imperialists' influences.¹⁴

Historical Importance of the Palace

Koyikal Palace at attingal was under the control of Umayamma Rani of Venad kingdom. These clans ruled from the year 1677 AD to 1684 AD. The word 'Koyikkal' literally means 'arithmetics' and another meaning is 'hen's leg'. Attingal was very famous for pepper and rubber trade in the European Union.¹⁵ The Agasthiyar Hills is located here for its medicinal values of herbs found here. The Palace is situated near to the Ponmudi lake area. After the decline of Venad Kingdom in 18th century, this Palace was under the rule of Travancore Royal Family. In the year 1922 this palace was transformed into a museum of art and culture by the Kerala archaeological department.¹⁶ There are two galleries found, namely the Folklore and the Numismatic. The folklore has a vast collection of olden musical instruments, olden household implements, and old manuscripts, reading of folk songs, stories, and traditional royal dresses. The Numismatics gallery is set up on the first floor of the Palace has the ancient collection around 2500 years.¹⁷ Different types of International and Indian coins are chronologically arranged here. The coins of Jerusalem are the most expensive one preserved here.

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Architectural importance of the Attingal Palace

The Attingal Palace is constructed at a 68 meter prominent land area bounded by coconut palm trees in Kollampuzha, Attingal. It is a huge square structure built in two stayers. The Palace fully made with mount clay brick, limestones, clay tiles and woods. This Palace was constructed on the traditional Kerala architectural style. Inside the palace there are four temples established together with the 700 years old sanctorum that houses the Palliyara Bhagavathy.²⁰ The family deity, Thiruvartukavu Devi, is also seated in the temple inside the palace compound. The palace constructed in an 'ettukettu' structure is known for its stylishness and graveness.²¹ The entrance of the palace has small watchtower like model with cylindrical pillars. It gives a look of royal entrance to the palace. There are large outdoor porch and corridors supported with small watchtower like model with cylindrical pillars which give a royal entrance on its gateway. All

the interior architects of the palace were made with wood. The courtroom is the one of the largest hall with splendid wooden works on its surroundings.

Koyikkal palace is one of the heritage monuments in Kerala. This palace has two museums Such as Numismatics museum and Folklore museum which are representing its rich and cultural values. It has one of the few colonial antiquities well conserved here. The Temple and the Palace is presently under the management of the Devaswam Board. The opening gate or ‘Chavadipura’ was reconstructed by the Devaswam Board.

Kanakakunnu Palace

History of the Palace

Kanakakunnu Palace is an artistic beauty of Thiruvananthapuram. It is located near the Napier Museum and Vellaya Ambalam road near Palayam Town. It is built by the great Travancore King Sree Moolam Thirunal(1885-1924) for the reason of outside guest. This Palace is one of the last architectural vestiges of the colonial era. It has hosted many colonialists as its guest. The Travancore royal classes were not eating Non Vegetarian food but it was served to the Guests. It is the major centre for all cultural events like the Onam and Vishu Festivals. At present it is under the management of Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC). They organise lots of social and cultural programmes here. This Palace auditorium is used as learning centre for art and music. Its open courtyard is used for studying sword fights, Kalari, Mohini Attam, Kathakali. The Tourism Department conducts the annual Music Festivals in the Onam Seasons.

Architecture of the Palace

The Kanakakunnu Palace was constructed in the new British Era Model. Inside the Palace there is a beautiful garden with unique landscaping work. The laterite stone and Granite stone are mainly used to the creation of the Palace. The upper portion of this Palace was constructed with laterite stone, and occupies the main portion of this structure. The roof tops are completely covered with fine terracotta tiles in the red colour. Inside the palace was carved by marbles and woods. Kanakakunnu Palace is a centre for social and cultural activities and heritage of Kerala

This Monuments remind us of our heritage. They are like a treasure for a nation and symbol of pride of their civilisation. They help us to appreciate our past and the level of development, knowledge and thoughts. In a way, they provide life to our past.

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