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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**MANUSCRIPTS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
PADMANABHAPURAM**

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Abstract

The existence of prehistoric culture in Kanniyakumari district is evident from the history of neolithic cult. There are number of forts and palaces in Kanniyakumari district. The famous forts and palaces are padmanabhapuram, Vattacottai, Upprika Malika and Udayagiri fort. The padmanabhapuram is an ancient, historic town. In earlier days the fort was built with mud and later it was dismantled and reconstructed with granite by Marthanda Varma. Vattacottai also constructed by Marthanda Varmans and it is in circle in shape and it was constructed by Marthanda Varma to serve as Defence for Nanjil Nadu. Uppitikea is three storied building and it was constructed for the eldest members of the family.

Keywords: Neolithic cult, kumara padmanabhapuram, Vattacottai, Uppirika Malika, Nanjil Nadu, Marthanda Varma, poomugam, Udayagiri, Ay dynasty, Naluketle style, Karthika Thirunal, gallantry, mantrasala, uttupura, swaroopam.

Introduction

The Date of human civilization in this district reaches 4000 years ago. The existence of prehistoric culture in Kanniyakumari District is evident from the discovery of Neolithic Celt which may roughly be dated to 1500 to 1000 BC.

A hand made coarse earthen jar and other relics were found near Thoothur Village in Kanniyakumari District. The shape. Fabric and the decorations indicate

that they are probably of the megalithic or early historic period.

From the legends and traditions existing in these regions, it has to be believed, beyond doubt, that a great city flourished in these regions during the megalithic or early historic period and that it might have been similar to the one which existed Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Since, the relics of this period remained in the sea bed; it has to be believed that this civilization was wiped out due to sea erosion.

The Phoenicians were the first among the foreigners to mention about the present Kanniyakuman District area. In the account of Eratosthenes who visited India in about 276 B.C. Kanniyakumari is mentioned. In this Komari is mentioned as a harbor and the land up to komari is said to be the part of Pandian Kingdom. A concise chronology of the district is presented. There are many a number of forts and palaces in 1st Century A.D. in Kanyakumari district. The famous ones are vattakottai, uppirika malika, Padmanabhapuram and Udayagiri fort.

Vattakottal (Circular Fort):

Vattakottal is situated at Agasteeswaram Taluk. Vattakottai is a fort made of granite. This is located at the distance of six kilometers northeast of Kanyakumari cape. This forms the terminal of a line of ramparts known as the South Travancore lines built by Marthanda Varma to serve as Defence for Nanjil Nadu. It is rectangular in shape and covers an area of about three and a half acres, Walls that are 25 to 26 feet high enclose the fort. This also includes the parapet. This is 29 feet thick at the front, 18 feet at the corners and 6 feet at the rear. The portion running into the area is the most strongly built under the orders of De Lannoy during the reign of Mathandavarma, St. Leger marched into Nanjilnadu through the Aramboly pass and demolished the Defence lines. The small river by the side of the fort, and the green vegetation all around add to the scenery of the fort and has now become a holiday resort and picnic center as well.

It is said that there is a subway or tunnel about four feet width, supposed to connect the padmanabhapuram palace. Now the tunnel has been closed. On the northern side of the fort there is slop to being the canon from the lower to the upper part of the parapet of the fort. There is well of about 6' diameter. The whole wall around the fort is repaired and fresh mortar is being applied. It may be presumed from the evidence left by the fort itself that it was the military base to protect the Kumari port, which was a rich pearl harbour. Since the emblem of the Pandya Kings was 'Fish' and it can be found in some of the places of the fort also. The Pandya Kings had control over this fort for some time.

Uppirika Malika

The most attractive building in the whole palace is the "Uppirika Malika'. This is a three-storied building. Uppirika" is the abbreviated term of 'Muppinka'. This means the residence of the eldest member of the family. A wooden cot is set up on the top most floors in the belief that "Lord Vishnu" is the chief deity. The first floor contains a wooden cot made of 64 medicinal plants, on which Maharaja used to sleep. The Dutch East India Company presented the medicinal cot to Maharaja "Marthanda Varma" in 1750, as a mark of friendship.

Padmanabhapuram Palace:

Padmanabhapuram is an ancient historical town. This is one of the four municipalities in the district. The place is located at the distance of 55 km south of Trivandrum, which is about two km east of Thuckalay and 35 km. from Kanyakumari on the Trivandrum-Cape Comerin road. A fort with an area of 187 acres surrounds this town. The ancient capital of Travancore might be constructed before AD 1601. At the center on the Padmanabhapuram Fort, there is a palace situated which has an area of seven acres. This is placed amidst hills, dales and rivers. This palace is situated in Kanyakumari District and is under the control of a Curator of the Archaeological Department of Kerala Government.

Entrance hall

The entrance to the main building is controlled by another ornamental gateway with retainers for watch and ward. There is a wooden ceiling profusely ornamented with lotus medallions present at the entrance. The most striking feature of the entrance is the clock tower. This is regarded as one of the oldest in India. This was set up in 1832 A.D. and still in working order, on the first floor there is Poomuham. This is a council chamber or Mantrasala that is meant for holding discussions with ministers and prominent citizens. The Boor off this hall, which is polished with the admixture of coconut shell ashes, eggs fermented in molasses and lime reflects the figure like a mirror. Nest to the Mantrasala, there is the Dancing Hall, which was used exclusively for the members of the royal family.

Adjacent to the Council Chamber and to the south of dancing hall there is a dining hall called "Uttupura". This has two floors ie. the ground and the first. Each floor measuring roughly 78 by 6 metres and it would accommodate about 2000 people at a time. About 2000 poor persons were fed every day at this temple.

Udayagiri fort

The fort was rebuilt in the reign of Marthandavarma. He was the Venad King during 1741-44. This happened under the supervision of De Lannoy the Belgian General, who served as the Chief of the Travancore army. Different factories for the manufacture of guns, mortars and cannon balls were also established within the fort under the supervision of the General. Recently a village has come up in front of the fort. The people living at this village are mostly agriculturists. A few of them are engaged in trade also. Pottery is also used to earn livelihood in some cases. Now, the District Administration, with the help of Forest Department has set up a Biodiversity Park over here. Tourists can see deer, decorative fountains, birds and over 100 varieties of trees inside the fort. As a whole the place has become a perfect tourist's spot.

Ay Dynasty and Padmanabhapuram

During the Sangam Age until around 5th Century AD, Padmanabhapuram and for that matter the entire area of present-day Kerala, was part of Tamilakam and under the rule of the Ay Dynasty. In those days there were three main power centers in the southern end of peninsular India. The central region belonged to the Chera Dynasty, the north was ruled by Ezhimala Nandans and the south was under the Ay Dynasty. The Ay Dynasty ruled over a vast area from Tiruvalla to Nagercoil. Ay Dynasty, which held sway over its vast boundaries till about AD 925 is credited with patronizing and encouraging religious, cultural and architectural excellence.

Decline of Ay Dynasty

Following the decline of the Ay Dynasty after AD 925, continuous strife between the Chera Dynasty and Chola Dynasty saw unprecedented transformation of the socio-political structure of various kingdoms of

South India. Eventually the Cheras merged the northern portions of the Ay Kingdom into Venad, while the Ay principalities continued for some more time in the south until the Ays themselves merged with a branch of the Venad royal family and rose to prominence as the Kulasekharas in the 10th Century. The void created by the decline of the Kulasekharas in the 11th Century witnessed the breaking up of various principalities into yet smaller autonomous units called Swaroopams. Padmanabhapuram came under one such Swaroopam called Trippapur Swaroopam, ruled by a branch of the Ay family which had settled at Trippapur, 16 km north of Thiruvananthapuram. The head of this family, Trippapur Moopan, who controlled the temples of Venad including the famous Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple at Thiruvananthapuram, was also called Koviladhikari, the officiating head of temples.

Naluketty style

One of those Trippapur Moopans built a palace with mud-fort at Kalkulam in the traditional Nair Nalukettu style around 14th Century and named the palace Darpakulangara. Successive rulers added additional structures to the palace and periodically renovated the existing ones. After re-building the palace and replacing the mud-fort with a 4 km long granite wall over a meter thick at the top and enclosing a total area of 186 acres, Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma (1712-1758) renamed the fort, the palace and surrounding areas as Padmanabhapuram.

Padmanabhapuram as capital

After presiding over the destiny of his kingdom nurtured with care and expanded by heroic conquests for some time, Marthanda Varma dedicated his kingdom to Lord Padmanabhaswamy in AD 1750. The story of the valorous King Marthanda Varma has been indelibly etched in the annals of history as one of the finest examples of gallantry, romance, heroism and adventure. He was succeeded in 1758 by his nephew Karthika Thirunal Maharaja; popularly known as Dharma Raja. The evil designs of the Dutch and English traders as well as the expansion of the Travancore State itself, necessitated the shifting of the capital from Padmanabhapuram to Thiruvananthapuram in 1790. (Historians also attribute

the presence of the refugee princess of Calicut at Thiruvananthapuram as the immediate reason for Dharma Raja to move to Thiruvananthapuram during the last years of his reign). Thus for about two and half centuries from 1500 to 1790 AD. Padmanabhapuram, as capital of Travancore symbolized the seat of royal power and center of trade, commerce, culture, art and literature.

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