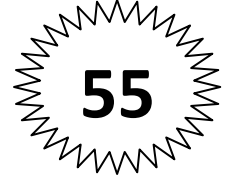


ARCHITECTURAL GLORY OF PADMANABHAPURAM PALACE

Rajalekshmi Sreedeeep
PhD Research Scholar
Bridge Academy for Media and Fine Arts
Tamil University, Thanjavur



ABSTRACT

Padmanabhapuram Palace is actually a palace complex. This complex has fourteen individual structures that are interconnected with each other. It spreads over an area of 6.5 acres and has unique features of ancient Kerala architectural skills based on "Tachushasthram" and Vasthushasthram". The model of this palace is based on Nalukettu (the traditional construction style of Kerala), with a central courtyard and clay roof tiles supported by the marvellous wooden planks and ceiling. It was once the residence of Travancore's ruling kings and is now the best wooden architectural example in Asia.

Key words: Nalukettu, Wooden architecture, Padmanabhapuram, Palace, Travancore

INTRODUCTION

Padmanabhapuram Palace is regarded as the largest wooden palace in Asia. Padmanabhapuram Palace, an exemplar of Kerala architecture, is listed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was the official residence of the former Travancore kings and queens under the Venad kingdom. The palace was built in 1601. This majestic structure in Kerala is currently situated in the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu in South India, but this property belongs to the Archaeological Department of Kerala. Iravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal, who ruled Venad from 1592 to 1609, constructed Padmanabhapuram Palace in the year 1601. The Thai Kottaram appears to have been built around 1550. Around 1750, the palace was restored by King Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma (1706–1758), the founder of modern-day Travancore. He ruled Travancore from 1729 to 1758. In 1750, King Marthanda Varma dedicated the kingdom to the family deity Sree Padmanabha, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, which is known as Trippadidhanam. With this, King Marthanda Varma and their successors owned the title Padmanabha dasa (servant of Lord Padmanabha) with their names. In 1756, he shifted his capital to Padmanabhapuram. Because of the dedication to the Lord, the new city got this name. Prior to that, it was known as Kalkulam Palace. The timber mansion's immaculate woodwork, magnificent floral carvings, and the beauty of its murals and black granite floors now leave an impression on everyone who visits. Beautiful lotus carvings and other exquisite carvings adorn the interiors. There are many 17th- and 18th-century paintings on the walls. The palace has painted ceilings and is adorned with a mahogany musical arch, mica windows of varying colours, carved royal chairs, and the majestic Thai Kottaram. Using a special mixture of egg white, coriander, lime, toasted coconut, charcoal, and river sand, the architects of the durbar hall achieved something really unique and stunning. In addition to its hidden tunnels and chambers, the King's famous bed, murals of Krishna, and a temple for the goddess Saraswati, the palace also features a pond (kulam), fish sculptures, brass pendant lamps, etc., showing its splendid beauty and craftsmanship.

The palace of Padmanabhapuram is located within the fort, which covers a total area of 186 acres. In this area, over 6.5 acres of land were used for the construction of the palace. The beautiful woodwork is on display in every corner of the palace. The Padmanabhapuram palace is surrounded by a massive defensive wall. The entrance to the palace complex is located to the west, and it is known as "mukhya vathil" (major gate). The foundation of the palace was laid with stones gathered locally. The floor is laid with mortar and lime. The majority of the work is done with teak, sandalwood, and wood from medicinal plants; hence, it is also known as thekku kottaram (because of teak wood usage in



அண்ணா பல்கலைக்கழகம், சென்னை
(பொறியியல் தொழில்நுட்ப தமிழ் வளர்ச்சி மையம்,
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abundance). Wooden beams and planks support the wooden roof and the traditional roof tiles laid on it. Coolness inside the palace can be achieved by using lots of wood with lots of space between the boards for proper ventilation, thus offering relief from the heat and humidity. Like many other examples of secular and religious architecture in India, the exterior of Padmanabhapuram Palace is simple and plain. The wood carvings and bold murals inside make for an aesthetically pleasing environment. The Thai Kottaram, the first structure to come up in this palace complex, is a double-storied traditional nalukettu structure (a house with a central courtyard open to the sky, with rooms on all four sides). As a palace, even though it is a multi-story Nalukettu, it is extensive and has additional structural components. Therefore, the structural element may differ from a typical residential nalukettu.

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF PADMANABHA PURAM PALACE

Palace structures include the Poomukham, Plamoottil Kottaram, Veppinmoodu Kottaram, Thaikottaram, Uttupura, Homappura, Uppirikka-Malika, Ayudhappura, Chandravilasam, Indravilasam, Navarathri Mandapam, Lekshmilvilasam, and Thekkekkottaram. A mint, stable barracks, and a small cow shed were also there in addition to these structures. But over time, as part of the renovation process, those structures were removed. The padipura, or main gate, is a signature element of traditional Kerala architecture; the palace's massive doors adhere to that even today. Following this path will lead to Poomukham, another significant section of the palace. The Poomukham is a reception hall that is distinguished by its traditionally decorated gabled entrance. Exquisite specimens of woodcarving can be seen on either side of the entrance in the form of figures of horse riders. Lotus medallions adorn the wooden ceiling and pillars in abundance. The ceiling is carved with ninety flowers, each one unique from the rest. At the centre of the ceiling in Poomukham, a kuthirakkal vilakku (lamp) is hanging on a chain. The seven-piece granite cot, the Chinese-style throne, and the portrait of Ona Villu are the room's most eye-catching features.

The Mantrasala, or council chamber, resides on the first floor of the Poomukham. In the hall, the king meets his ministers. A decorative throne was provided for the monarch beneath the ceiling's magnificent carvings of Gajalekshmi and lotuses. On all three sides, chairs were provided for the ministers and dewans. The upper portion of the chamber is curved outward, and the chamber's planks pass through the powerful studs that connect the roof's caverns to the railing wall below. The wall is supported by intricately carved and decorated pillars, which are in fact the only vertical elements in the structure. The height of the doors is small, made in such a way that one enters or leaves the room by bending. It was a way of showing respect to the king in those days. The shining floor, which is dark grey in colour, is purely made of natural resources such as kummayam, chirattakarri, vellakkarru, kadikkacharru, leelambaricharru, yellena, and lime.

The Uttupura is the dining hall, which is located next to the council chamber and has two floors, each measuring 72 by 9 metres, which can hold 2000 people at once during free feeding events. The Thaikottaram, or mother palace, is the oldest building in the palace complex, which is also known as Darpakulangara Koyikkal Palace. The open portico, named Ekandhamandapam, is constructed from a single piece of jackfruit tree and is adorned with intricately carved wooden columns. It has carvings of four flowers on each of its four sides. Each is distinctive from the others. In accordance with 'Vasthu Sasthram', a ring is carved inside a flower in the south-west corner. The palace's ceiling is adorned with sixty-three distinct kinds of flowers. There are sixty-two blossoms with two petals each and one flower with three petals in the centre. The three petals symbolise gods such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. The floor was made of a mixture of natural substances, including hibiscus leaf and lemon juice. The Thaikottaram is regarded as a significant component of the palace; it is also known as the Dharpakulangara Koyikkal Palace and is considered sacred as the pooja space. Red or yellow should be used for the flooring in pooja chambers. Yellow cannot be produced from natural juice, whereas red can



அண்ணா பல்கலைக்கழகம், சென்னை
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be readily manufactured, so they chose red for the floor. On a wall-mounted shelf, the Vedas are kept, which are required for performing pooja. Beginning in November, the ancient worship of the deity Bhadrakali spanned 91 days. When sandhya deepam lights, the goddess image is artistically drawn on the ground with rice flour, turmeric, and charcoal, with the accompaniment of Kalamezhuthum pattum.

Kulapura is the building on the eastern side of Thaikottaram, near the pond. The pond is called Darpakulam; hence, the thaikottaram, which is near the pond, is known as Darpakulangara thaikottaram. The kulapura leads to Darpakulam by steps made of stones. Homapura is a single-story building to the north of Thaikottaram that is mainly used to perform homam (religious offerings). On the eastern side of Homapuram, there is a small Saraswathi temple. The 'Uppirika Malika', a three-story edifice, is the most attractive structure in the entire palace. The name 'Uppirika' is derived from the word 'Upriaka', which implies a multi-story structure. 'Uppirika' is an abbreviation of 'Muppirika', which denotes the residence of the eldest family member. In the year 1750, Maharaja Marthanda Varma constructed this structure. He constructed this palace in order to dedicate it to Lord Sri Padmanabha. Therefore, it is considered a sacred place. Before entering the rooms, there is a location to wash one's feet on the first floor. The structure contains four floors with three windows. The royal treasury is located on the ground floor. The first floor used as a bed room consists of a medicinal cot displayed that is comprised of sixty-four pieces of medicinal wood. The second floor of it was used as a resting place for the Maharaja during religious fasting and meditations, especially during ekadashi virutham. The third floor is a mural pagoda with a pooja room that consists of beautiful mural paintings. From the first floor, a passage through a beautifully carved door made of a single piece of wood leads to the rest room called anthapuram, or ladies chamber. On the other end of the corridor is the Indravilasam Palace, which was built during the time of Marthanda Varma for receiving foreign guests as a guest room. It has a little European touch.

Maharaja Marthanda Varma erected the magnificent granite Navarathri mandapam and Saraswathy temple in the year 1744 A.D. This stone structure was constructed after the wooden structure was demolished. During Navarathri pooja days, the palace ladies observe the performances from the lady's chamber above. No one can see inside, protecting the women from prying eyes. The Saraswathy temple stands opposite the mandapam. The pillars support the ceiling with solitary granite cross beams that are closely spaced. The performance hall is defined by ornately carved monolith pillars carved in the popular Vijayanagara style with bands of floral and geometric patterns and adorned with human figures in various gestures associated with Natyasastra. Vyalis figures can be spotted in the upper section of the pillars, with inverted floral ends gracefully hanging down. Some of the main pillars in front of the Saraswathy shrine are adorned with salabhanjikas (figures of a woman holding a lamp with both hands) in the shaft. In the outer corridor surrounding the mandapam, simple hewn stone pillars support an overhanging roof laid with neatly dressed stone blocks. The 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 Trivandrum. The wood-screened chambers at the south-east corner of the hall were used to accommodate the king and other royal members in order to witness the performance in the mandapam. The Vijayanagara style of architecture of this mandapam is a contrast to the simple, wood-dominated structure of the palace complex. Thekkokottaram is the southern palace. It is not within the same compound but forms an intrinsic part of the palace. It is the most attractive building in the compound. The main building is the domestic apartment in the traditional style of a nalukketu with a nilavara. The small balcony facing the tank was probably a resting place in olden days. The other building in the South is the nalukketu, a common place of worship attached to that tharavad. The wooden pillars, doors, beams, and ceiling are elaborately carved.



அண்ணா பல்கலைக்கழகம், சென்னை
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CONCLUSION

The location lost its former splendor when Thiruvananthapuram became the capital of Travancore in the late 18th century, namely in 1795. However, the palace complex still stands as one of the finest examples of traditional wooden Kerala architecture, and some areas of the vast complex also bear the distinctive features of this type. The Palace is a product of the fusion of traditional building technology, exquisite craftsmanship, and Tachusastra, which has a clear prescription for every aspect of a structure's function and placement, direction, size, and design, including specifications for the layout of designated spaces within individual structures. It is not only the architectural pride of Kerala but also of the entire country.

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