

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MUSEUM: A CASE OF HILL PALACE MUSEUM

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Abstract

Museums are store houses created by men to preserve artifacts collected from different parts of the world. Museums are the great symbol of civilization and mirror of human heritage. Thus the museum is now a centre of culture and effective instrument of education. The Hill Palace Museum has played an important role in reconstructing the history of Kerala in a broad perspective. The artifacts which displayed in the Hill Palace Museum are mainly the contribution of Cochin and Travancore Royal families. This paper mainly intends to review the historical importance of Hill Palace Museum in the present scenario.

Key words: Museum, Hill palace, Cochin, Travancore.

Museum is an institution for learning meant for all. Museum all over the world played a vital role in preserving and interpreting the objects of material culture of human beings through artifacts helped to the better understanding of the progress of human societies.(R.D. Choudhary, 1998;7)Museums are important because they serve to remind us who we are and what our place in the world. Museums are the great symbol of civilization and mirror of human heritage. With the diversification of activities during the recent years, the concept of museum has undergone a radical change. Now museum is a centre of culture and effective instrument of education. There are different varieties of museum had developed all over the world. Museums are the great symbols of civilization and the storehouses of humanities heritage. (Sheila Watson, 2007;263)

This paper mainly analyses the historical importance of Hill Palce Museum. Hill Palace at Tripunithara, the royal seat of erstwhile Cochin rulers is located at a distance of 10 kilometers from Cochin, which was the official residence of Cochin royal family, built in 1865 by the Maharaja of Cochin. The capital of Cochin royal family was transferred to Tripunithara in the beginning of 18th century. This was done to avoid the penetration of foreigners into their territory and also the royal deity *poornathreyesha* which was installed in the temple at Tripunithara. (K.K.N.Kurup,2008;8-9)

The Hill palace was handed over to the Government of Kerala by the Cochin Royal family and it has been converted into an Archaeological Museum in 1984. Being an Archaeological Museum the collections are well preserved and protected. (K.K.N.Kurup,2008;7)The museum reflects the material culture of medieval Kerala. The Hill Palace Museum has its own historical, cultural and educational value. This museum not only highlights the history of Cochin dynasty but also provides a broad perspective on the social economic and cultural synthesis of Kerala. The artifacts displayed in the museum help us to reconstruct the social and cultural history of Kerala to a great extend. These objects bear the memory of a past which is close to us. They reflect our tradition in different fields.

The architecture of this Palace has its own aesthetic value. Kerala has evolved a distinct architectural style through centuries. The museum testifies this tradition of Kerala architecture. It also reflects Kerala's relation with outside world. The influence of foreign architectural elements, mainly the traditional European architecture is seen in the museum. It is a blending of Indo- European architectural styles. The Portuguese

style of big columns, glassy windows, porticos, floors with glassy tiles, high roof with tiles, wooden pillars etc. are seen. (K.K.N.Kurup,2008;9)

The gallery of wood carving symbolizes the features of temple architecture of Kerala. The wood carving gallery is a storage house of exquisite crafts and art pieces shaped with consummate skill with the hands of traditional artisans and craftsman of Kerala. South Indian wood carving tradition and the artistic talent of Kerala craftsmen found in temples and palace are projected here.*

The displays in the museum provide us a glorious status enjoyed by the royal family and it offers fruitful evidence to the polity of the ruler. The cabinet hall of the palace had its own political importance, which reflects the symbol of royal power. The ornamental throne and royal seat exhibited in the hall reveal the glory of grandeur of the Cochin rulers. It is here that the decision of the integration of Cochin to Indian Union was announced. This historic decision was announced in the presence of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, V.P. Menon and Rama Varma Pareekshit Thampuran, the last ruler of Cochin. The inauguration of the first session of the legislative council of Cochin was held in this hall on April 1925.*

The royal furniture gallery is very much important in political history of Kerala. "SANAD" which highlighted the glory of bygone ages is an important historical record which was issued by the viceroy and Governor General of Indian Lord Chelmsford in January 1921 conferring the title Maharaja of Cochin in lieu of Raja of Cochin.*

The portraits and paintings gallery provides genealogical charts of the Cochin rulers. The painting which displayed in this gallery gives the idea that the Cochin rulers patronized fine arts mainly paintings. They patronized Thanjavore, Portuguese and other European paintings. Some portraits and paintings in this gallery have a classical western touch.*

Mannadiar gallery projects important collections of Iravi Ramanunni Mannadiar. He was the staff officer of the Cochin Nair Brigade. He mainly collected the objects from various parts of the world. It reflects Cochin ruler's friendly relation with the European and far eastern countries.*

The jewel gallery or crown gallery gives a new insight on the Golden artifacts used by kings and ladies of the royal families of that time. These objects are exquisitely crafted with precious and semiprecious stones. The royal crown is a best example for this and has a very important place in the history of Cochin. It was presented to the Cochin Raja Unni Raman Coil II by the Portuguese Viceroy, Francis De Almeda. The crown represents the relation of Cochin royal family with the Portuguese.*

The Portuguese captain Vasco Da Gama was able to win the heart of Cochin rulers. This helped him to reinforce trade treaties with the Cochin state. The gallery of silver ware denoted the glory and grandeur of the rulers of Cochin. The gigantic English silver cup exhibited in the metal ware gallery, presented by the British reflects the relationship of British and Cochin rulers.*

During the period of His Highness Rama Varma an attempt was made by the Cochin rulers to recapture *Perumpadappu* rulers which have been annexed by the Zamorians of Calicut. But he was defeated and took an oath that Cochin Rajas would wear the crown only after recapturing of their lost territory. The intension of the Cochin Rajas could not be materialized. Later the king of Cochin used to keep this crown in their laps during special ceremonial procession of *Athachamayam Festival*.(K.K.N.Kurup,2008;7-8)

The palm leaf manuscript section is one of the richest sources of information throw a flood of light on the manifested culture of Kerala. Manuscript and documents relating to the history of Tantra, Ayurveda, Puranas and Jyothisha are also exhibited. The preparing or manufacturing technique of palm leaves is also seen in the epigraphic gallery.*

The visitors understand different stages of evolution of primitive man to a civilized community by going through the folklore gallery, which exhibits highlights artifacts model of settlement, method of agriculture models, models of primitive men etc. The exhibition in the folklore gallery signifies the cultural

manifestation of the past and present. A good deal of prehistoric people and their main activities are reflected here. The musical tradition of Kerala and the first man made musical instruments like *Villupattu*, used in temples of Kerala which displayed in the folklore gallery gives a picture of musical and religious tradition of Kerala. Models of men and women engaged in weaving throw light on the handicraft tradition of Kerala and also the step to civilization.*

The early transportation system of Kerala was reflected through the chariot gallery. The palanquins used for early transportation by the elite section of the community. In this palanquins gallery there is a painting which depicts the making of the handle of the palanquins. People engaged in the making of palanquin reflect the craftsmanship of artists. This is a good knowledge we got through the palanquins gallery.*

The early coin known as punch marked coins and, coin counting machine mainly called as *Rashipalaka* and also pictures of different stage of minting coins are identified through the Numismatics gallery. The coins that displayed in the numismatics gallery give an idea about economic condition of a particular kingdom, their trade activities, the reign of various rulers and the availability of metal in the particular period.*

The best picture of Military activity of medieval Kerala was reflected through the weapon gallery. The harshness of punishment which is existed in erstwhile Cochin State is indicated through iron cage exhibited in this gallery. During the pre modern period the system of this would have created fear in the minds of the people. Iron guilt has been used for giving punishment to the criminals during 18th C. In Travancore, criminals were captured and locked inside the cage and were exhibited in public place with a view to give a lesson to public. The culprits were kept there without providing any food or water and gradually they would strive to death.*

The paleolithic, neolithic and megalithic specimens are displayed in the Gallery of ancient history give an idea about prehistoric period. The burial system which prevailed in the megalithic period is reflected through the urn burials and model of *topikallu* (*Hat stone*) exhibited here. The religious practices which were prevailed during the Indus period can be understood through the models of objects of mother goddesses displayed here.*

The exhibits of the stone sculpture gallery reflect the sculpture of a particular period, the imagination talent of the craftsmen etc. A peculiar kind of religious aspects is seen through the stone sculptures of gods and goddesses exhibited here. From each sculpture we can understand the ornaments used in ancient ages. Hero stone exhibited in this gallery commemorates the martyrdom of heroes in ancient times. These stone were installed in places where they die as martyrs. They used weapons like bows, arrows and guns. The tradition of worshipping hero can be understood through the display of hero stones in the stone sculpture gallery.*

The heritage museum aims at presenting objects from the ancient time which highlight various aspects of human culture. One of the oldest traditional buildings at the palace premises has been renovated and developed as the museum complex which now rightly conveys the evolution of life style in Kerala over a long period of time. One of the finest woods carving tradition is displayed here. This imparts a good knowledge about Kerala culture in a broad manner*.

The important aspect of museum learning is conducted mainly through the objects which displayed in museums. Thus the Hill Palace Museum played an important role in reconstructing history of Kerala in a broad perspective. The artifacts which displayed in the museum reconstruct the history of Cochin rulers, their relation with foreign countries, and their material culture and so on. In this way Hill Palace Museum is an important centre of learning. It provides unique resources for education. As a learning centre, it gives an opportunity to work with a wide range of natural and cultural heritage. It gives idea to any alien about our vast and rich cultural heritage. This museum can bring the sense of integrity amongst people living in different parts of Kerala. This museum has also played as an important tourist centre for the redevelopment

and regeneration programmes for that area. Thus it is an historical museum in its real sense. It is considered to be an integral part of Kerala's history and culture.

References

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*Source collected from the officials and examining the objects in each galleries of Hill palace Museum.

