

PADMANABHAPURAM PALACE MUSEUM -AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TREASURE

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ABSTRACT

Padmanabhapuram Palace, one of the most attractive wood palaces of the world which is a renowned monument under the protection of Archaeological Department of Kerala. This historically important and structurally beautiful palace, which was built some centuries back, attracts tourists in large number from all over the world which is presently included in the tentative list of UNESCO'S world Heritage list. The word Padmanabhapuram literally means the city of Lord Sree Padmanabha. Padmanabhapuram, now in the Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu is about 15 Kms to the south-east of Marthandam. Marthanda Varma was the maker of the modern Thiruvithamkur, who gave the Palace and its surroundings the present name of Padmanabhapuram, or the Abode of Padmanabha. The Department of Archaeology constructed a Museum at the south west corner of Padmanabhapuram palace. The construction of the building was originally started in 1962. Later in 1993, it was redesigned in according with the style of Vernacular Kerala architect.

The paper Padmanabhapuram palace Museum- An Archaeological Treasure is to highlight the significance of Padmanabhapuram Museum .

Objects preserved in the Museum

Wooden sculptures, stone images, stone inscriptions, copper plates, old coins, ancient arms and ammunition, swords, copies of mural paintings are the important objects preserved in the Museum. These commemorate the war strategies, social stratification and army setup of the Southern part of Kerala.

Wooden sculptures

The important wooden sculpture are preserved in the Archaeological Museum. The wooden and stone sculptures are discovered from the various places of Kanyakumari district. These sculpture added additional colour to the Museum. The important wooden sculptures are Dwarapalaka, Rathi Devi, Sraswathi Devi and Ladies with Veena¹.

Dwarapalaka is one of the important wooden sculpture and decorative one. This sculpture made in Teak wood. This sculpture discovered in 18th century A.D. from Padmanabhapuram. Rathi Devi is another wooden sculpture. It was discovered in 18th century A.D. from Padmanabhapuram. Saraswathi Devi is one of the attractive wooden sculpture. These sculptures are nice and polishing. The carving styles was very beautiful. It was discovered in 17th century A.D. from Padmanabhapuram. Ladies with Veena is another sculpture. It was discovered in 17th century A.D. at Padmanabhapuram².

The sculptural art on display here represent a fairly rich heritage of artistic traditions of this area. The early sculptures though may not reveal any distinctive traits from their counterparts from the neighbourhood viz; Chola, Pandya region, are characterized by simplicity and delicate modeling. The impart of Chola plastic art and that of the Pandyan classical modeling are the Virtues of the sculptural art of Venadu up to 14th century AD. The influence of Vijayanagara school of art can be seen in the sculptural medium from the 16th century AD onwards. However, the sculptures in wood are more dominant in artistic traditions in Venadu.

Copper plates

‘Chempu Pattayam’ or ‘Copperplates’ are the other objects preserved in the Archaeological Museum. This plates gives informations about the kings of Tamilnadu and Travancore. Parthivapuram copper plate document of the Ayruler Kokkarunaddakkam of 864 A.D. is the oldest copper plate discovered from Travancore. The important copper plate exhibited, is the paliyam copper plate issued by the famous by king Vikramaditya Varaguna regarding the donation of some land to the famous Budhavihars, Srimalavasam of Thrikunnapuzha near kollam. Mampalli plate of the famous king Sri. Vallabham kotha also deserves. It is the first source recorded in the Malayalam Era³.

Twelve ‘Parvas’ of a Palm leaf Grandha depicting ‘Mahabharatha’ in Sanskrit with a blend of Tamil and Malayalm regained from the palace recently. The wooden front cover of this antique treasure is decoratively carved. Measures have been taken to exhibit this ‘Grandha’ at the Museum⁴.

Mural Paintings

Kerala is rich in Murals. In almost every temple or old palace, they are rendered and their period ranges from 8th to 19th century A.D. Puranic lore and secular themes are the subjects of these paintings and they indirectly shed light on the political, social and religious conditions of the respective periods. The stories in the Murals at Padmanabhapuram are based on Vaishnavite and Shaivaite puranas. They have been painted with qualities of vividness and realism in order to recollect the Mythologies without much difficulty. The Travancore kings give important to Mural Paintings. The original Mural paintings are kept the room of kings. These paintings are more than 300 years old. But the copies of Mural paintings kept very carefully in archaeological Museum⁵.

Important Mural Paintings

The important Mural paintings are Pardosha Moorthi (Shiva with 16 hands), Yoga, Narasimha, Shiva Lingam, Mahavishnu, Sridevi, Bhoomidevi and Garuda, Venugopal and Gopika, Sastha on Horse Back, Kodanda Rama, Ardhanareeswara, Mahavishnu on Golden Lotus, Pael of Murals, Subramanya with Valli and Devayani, Gaja Lekshmi, Ekadasa rudras and Dwadasa Adityas and Sudharsana Murti⁶. Another important paintings preserved in the Museum are Kundara Proclamation, Battle of Colachel, Prince Marthandavarma Practicing Kalari etc. These paintings give detailed about the some incident happened in the time of Travancore rulers. Some paintings give information about the greatest rulers of Travancore⁷.

Indus Objects

A total of 330 objects of antiquities, collected by Sir.Mortimer Wheeler during his Indus Valley Excavation, have been contributed to the Padmanabhapuram Palace Museum. This brilliant and excellent collection holds a mirror upto the Harappan Civilisation, which is believed to have existed some thousands of years ago. The objects include potteries, pointed-based goblets, heads of Indus Goddess, corals, conch shells, beads, red pottery with red and black slip painting, human and animal torso in teracotta⁸.

These objects are now properly documented and steps are taken to exhibit in the present Archaeological Museum⁹. Travancore minted its coin from the earliest time in the Kali age and it is the principle currency of the kingdom and is called Kaliyuga Rajen Fanam, which coins though not current now, is the acknowledged currency in Travancore, like the star Pagida of the carnatic. The old Kaliyuga Rajen Fanam (the Pandyan coin) and both had a faint resemblance to the Rasi Fanam. The Travancore mint gold coins and issued a silver coin, under designated as chuckram, was issued from Travancore mint from the earliest period and it was current even in the Pandyan Kingdom¹⁰.

Travancore coins had special meanings, viz, Kaliyuga Rajen Fanam means the coin of the king who ruled Keralam in the beginning of the Kali age. Anantha Rajen Fanam means the Travancore King's coin, so also Anantha Varaham; and chuckram denotes the emblem or weapon of Vishnu, the house hold deity of the Travancore sovereign. Gold chuckrams were minted in Travancore at one time, but they are not current now¹¹.

Important Coins

Kaliyanpanam is one of the important old coin issued by Marthandavarma in 1729 - 1758 AD. It is a Gold coin. Another coin issued by Marthandavarma is Vellichukram in 1729 - 1758 AD. It is a silver coin. Bala Ramavarma issued Arachakram in 1798 - 1810 AD. It is a silver coin. He also issued Anantharayan Panam. It is a gold coin. Raniparvati Bai issued Laksmivarahan. It is a ½ Rupee and is a silver coin. She also issued Lakshmivarahan Rupee, Parvati Rupee, Parvati ½ Rupee are the silver

coin. Swatitirunal Ramavarma issued cash copper. The symbol of a coin is conch. In the circle the figure of Vishnu was inscribed. Utram tirunal Marthandavarma issued cash in copper in A.D. 1847 to 1860. Ayilyam Tirunal Ramavarman issued Vellichukrum. It is a silver coin, issued in the year A.D. 1860 - 1880. He also issued Vellipanam. It is a silver coin. Visakam Tirunal Ramavarma issued Vira Rayan panam in 1880-1885. It is a Silver coin. Moolam Tirunal Ramavarma issued cash in 1885 - 1924. He issued one cash in copper, four cash in copper, Eight cash in copper. Bala Ramavarma issued $\frac{1}{4}$ Rupee in silver and also issued $\frac{1}{2}$ Rupee coin in silver¹².

Epigraphical Gallery

The epigraphical gallery of Padmanambhapuram Palace is considered to be largest gallery in South India. It is informative, and educative to one and all who are interested in studying our past history and culture¹³. This Gallery contains copper plates and stone Inscriptions. They were written in Vattezhuthu. Tamil, Grantha and Malayalam Characters. They range from 8th century A.D. 18th century A.D., among which the following epigraphs are note worthy and interesting in different aspects. The earliest Vattezhuthu stone inscription belongs to the Pandya king Marcandayan. The inscription of the cholaking Raja Raja speaks about the gift to the temple at Kanyakumari. The earliest stone inscription of Venad king in this gallery is the Manalikkara inscription of Ravi Kerala Varma dated AD 1236¹⁴.

The most interesting inscription of the gallery are the inscriptions known as anjnanpukalidam, the asylum for the oppressed. There is a peculiar making on the stone which registers security to the oppressed people who live in colonies. From the above records one may understand the political, social, religious history of Venad from 8th to 18th century AD. The stone inscriptions were collected from different parts of erstwhile Travancore state¹⁵.

The 'anchinan pulculthiam' Inscription of 1478 AD. installed in Quilon by the Travancore king Chembaka Ramavarma is another item of interest. Social evils like 'Mannappedi' and 'Pulappedi' which were in existence in the Southern part of the state was banned by the venad king Veerakerala Varma in 1696 A.D. This inscribed slab document is also exhibited in the gallery¹⁶.

Conclusion

As a matter of fact this internationally famous palace is the treasure house of old traditional architecture of Kerala. The intrinsic wood craft and exquisite mural Painting are the best specimens of our yester year's cultural heritage. Though the palace which is more than four hundred year old, it attracts large number of foreign as well as local tourists every day. This is a protected monument entirely administered by the Government of Kerala¹⁷.

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