

ART AND ARCHITECTURE GRANDEUR OF PADMANABHAPURAM PALACE – A STUDY

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The Padmanabhapuram palace is known for the traditional lines of Malabar Architecture with pointed gables and corridors. It is so decorative and full of historical and architectural interest. It is built on the plan of the Naukettu with the courtyard in the middle. The padipura, the essential feature of Malabar style is present in the palace. In front of the palace there is a garden with an oval shape lawn at the centre. The pathway goes around the lawn. In this paper an attempt has been made to reveal the artistic works of padmanabhapuram palace.

The date of the construction of this palace is still a matter of controversy. N.G.Unnithan has the view that, as the fort was constructed in 1601 A.D, the palace would have come into existence earlier than the fort¹. The palace was built in 1335 A.D. in the reign of Aditya Varma. It is believed that the Travancore rulers gave attention to the improvement of this palace. With the accession of Marthanda Varma, it earned great care. The Kalkulam Palace was renamed as Padmanabhapuram Palace, when he dedicated the State to the God Padmanabha in the year 1750 A.D².

The Padmanabhapuram Palace covers an area of 25,000 square kms. Maharaja Marthanda Varma rebuilt and repaired the Padmanabhapuram palace. The construction works were directly supervised by Ramayyan Dalawah, the famous of all the Dalawahs. It is believed that for the construction, stones were brought from Maruthuvamalai. It is said that the heavy granite slab was lifted from one side by an elephant and from the other side by Valiya Yejamanan. The palace was once a place of brist and lively activity. Now it is a magnificent edifice to remind as the story of its hectic days.

The exterior of Padmanabhapuram palace is simple and unpretentious like other secular and religious architecture specimens. The interior is enriched by wood carvings and conspicuous murals. The names of the buildings are as follows³.

1. Poomukham
2. Plamoottil Kottaram.
3. Veppinmoodu Kottaram
4. Thaikkottaram
5. Uttupura
6. Homappura
7. Uppirikka Malika
8. Ayudhappura
9. Chandravilasam
10. Indravilasam
11. Navarathiri Mandapam
12. Lekshmi Vilasam(Puthan Kottaram)
13. Tekkekottaram

In addition to these buildings, there were a mint, a stable, a barrack and a bit cattle shed. But those buildings were demolished in course of time, as part of renovation work.

Poomukham

The Padipura or main gate is an essential feature of an old Kerala house, with its huge doors remains its imposing appearance to the palace even today. The entrance to the main edifice is controlled by another ornamental gateway with arrangements for the retainer and the watch and ward. This leads to Poomukham, the next important part of the palce complex.

The Poomukham has gabled entrance in traditional style and ornamentation. The images of horse rider on both sides of the entrance are examples of exquisite wood carvings, the wooden ceiling and pillars are profusely ornamented with lotus medallions. There are 90 flowers carved on the ceiling and each one is different from the other. The granite cot made up of seven pieces of granite, the Chinese model throne and the painting of “One Villa” are main attraction in the hall.

A lantern at the center of Poomukham called “Kuthirakkal Vilakku” is balanced at one end to the ceiling by a chain with center of gravity⁴. It can be fixed in any particular direction. The wooden cot made up of 7 pieces of granite is used to rest in summer. It is cool by nature, and the Chinese model throne, made of teak in the shape of “Horse Shoe” was presented by Dutch Government in 18th century, for “Asthadhik Palakan”.⁵

Onevillu, the wooden bows made of Mahogany tree had paintings on it. It is presented to the swearing on festival occasion by local dignitaries. After 1750 A.D. it had the painting of Sri Padmanabha Swamy. These are the main things which attraction in the hall.

Mantrasala

The first floor on the Poomukahm is the “Mantrasala” or the council of chamber. The king used to communicate with his ministers in the hall, An ornamental throne was provided for the king under the magnificent carvings of “Gajalakshmi” and lotuses on the ceiling. Chairs were also provided for ministers and divans on all the three sides. The council is considering as 8 and ½ yogam. Ministers and Diwans include 8 yogam and ½ yogam is the Maharaja. The provision of wooden louvers to admit air and light tempered and diffused has helped to keep the temperature inside the ball always constant. The upper part of the louvers is curved outward and the planks of the louvers pass throught sinuate and strong studs which link the caves of the roof to the railing wall below. The wall so formed is supported by pillars with a wealth of carving and florinated corbels which are as a matter of fact the only verticals in the structure⁶. The whle interior is shed and cool and admits plenty of light and air always, with pleasant smell of medicinal leaves. The doors are made in small size in such a way that one enters or leaves the room by bending. It is a size of respecting the king⁷.

The shining floor, which is dark grey in colour is purely made of natural resources such as Kummayam, Chirattakarri, Vellkkarru, Kadikkacharru, Leelambaricharru, Yellena and sand both from river and sea. Lime, charcoal produced from burnt coconut shell, white part of egg, juices from Kaddikka and Leelambari plant.

Manimalika

The Manimalika or Clock tower contains a clock which was designed purely by a village mechanic. It is believed to be about 200 years old. The motive force of the clock is derived from two heavy weight made up of blocks of rock, disc shaped and suspended from the escapement wheel by chains. The chains are about 9 meters in length. The movement of the clock is regulated by the weight raised up every week by a pendulum of 1.5 metres length. This is the unusual feature in the mechanism of the clock⁸. After two decades of inanimate silence it has climbed into active life again recently. The striking of the mallet against the huge bell produced a resonant sound which is heard by people within a radius of 3 kilometers.

Uttupura

The council of chamber leads to the dining hall or Uttupura. It is adjacent to the mantrasala, it has two floors, The ground floor and the first floor each measuring 72 by 9 meters and accommodate about 2000 people at a time⁹. The complicated nature of the roof is on the lines of the couple rafter roof adopted in China and such other countries which have heavy rainfall alternated by drought.

There were 14 types of Dhanam. Of these the first type is Annadhanam or free feeding. No one is satisfied with any Dhanam or Dharmam except food. 2000 Brahmins were fed daily, and they were satisfied with the food given by Maharaja.

Thaikottaram

The Thaikottaram or Mother palace is the oldest building in the palace complex. This is also known as Darpakulangara Koyikkal palace. It obtained the name since it is near the pond. It is believed to be built by "Iravi-Varma Kulasehara Perumal" the ruler of Venad. It is believed to be about 452 years old¹⁰. The Ekanthamandapam or open verandah in this palace is built of finely carved wooden pillar decorated with specimens of indigenous pillar is made of a single piece of jack fruit tree. It includes the four flower carvings on each of its four directions. Each one is different from the other. A ring is carved inside one flower at the South west Corner based on "Vasthu Sasthram"¹¹. The ceiling of the palace is decorated with 63 different types of flowers. 62 flowers with two petals each and one flower at the center with 3 petals. The three petals represent the Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The lucky number of the ruler is 9 and so every division and counting is based on the number 9. The floor is made of a mixture obtained from the natural elements like Hibiscus leaf, Dhristi life and lemon juice. The Thaikottaram is considered and respected as Pooja room. The floor of Pooja room should be either red or yellow in colour. Yellow cannot be made from natural juice but red can easily be made and so they preferred the colour of the floor to be red. The Vedas necessary for conducting Pooja are kept on the shelf in the wall.

In olden days, the worship of Goddess Bhadrakali was conducted for 41 days in November-December month. Sandhya Deepam was lighted and when the image of Goddess was artistically drawn on the ground using rice flour, turmeric, charcoal, etc. Ritual songs were also song on these occasions to the accompaniment of the instrumental music "Kalamezhuthum Pattum".¹²

The buildings are in the traditional style of "Nalukettu" which means four houses with an open courtyard in the center. This is also known as "Nadumittam" or "Brahmasthanam"

Kulappura

It is the building on the eastern side of Thaikottaram near the pond. It is used for oil massaging and dressing. The pond is called by the name “Darpakulam” and hence the Thaikottaram which is near the Darpakulam is called “Darpakulangara Koyikkal Kottaram”. The kulappura leads to the Darpakulam by steps made of stones.¹³

Homappura

Homappura is a single storeyed building to the north of Thaikottaram. This was mainly used to perform “Homam”. That is to perform religious offerings to Gods and Goddesses. There is a small Saraswathy temple on the eastern side of the Homappura, It is believed that the image of Goddess Saraswathy of this temple had been worshipped by the famous Tamil poet “Kamban”¹⁴. This image is ceremonially taken to Thiruvananthapuram in a procession annually for the Navarathiri Festival even today.

Uppirikka Malika

The name Uppirikka is derived from the word Uparika’ which means a multistoreyed building. This building was constructed in 1750 A.D. by Marthandavarma Maharaja’. The old name of this building was ‘muppirikka Malika’ because old people lived there. Later, it was shortly called ‘Uppirikka Malika’. Considering the height of the building¹⁵. The original name given to this building was ‘perumal Kottaram; which means Lord’s palace. Marthandavarma built this palace for dedicating it to Lord Sri Padmanaba. So it was considered a sacred place. In the first floor, there is a separate place for washing feet before entering in to the rooms.

The building consists of four storeys with three windows. The ground floor was used as the royal treasury. The first floor, used as bed rooms consist of a wooden medicinal cot made up of sixty four pieces of medical woods good for health. It was made during 16th century when Dutch East Indian company established its power and was presented by Holland people to Maharaja.¹⁶ Their emblem is carved on both the side of the cot, with the International Medical emblem and Ayurvedic emblem. The emblem consist of the picture of an eagle with two snakes on its both the sides, a cross, a parrot, a doctor at its lower end and the Dutch crown on its end. All these pictures are inside the symbol of the heart.

The snake is the symbol of the heart. The snake is the symbol of disease. The cross specifies a diseased man and the parrot symbolized an independent healthy man, free from diseases. Maharaja used this cot and was healthy. Through the windows on the first floor Maharaja selected soldiers for the army, by watching their performance on the Army Recruitment Ground. There is a stone weighing thirty eight kilos. Young men willing to join the army should lift the polished round stone 101 times above their head within the period given by Maharaja. Direct selection procedure was followed¹⁷. The second floor of Uppirikka Malika was used as the Maharaja’s resting place during religious fasting, and meditations called ‘Eakadesi Virudham’.

The third floor is the Murai Pagoda, with pooja rooms. Since Kerala is rich in murals and in almost every temple or old palaces they are rendered and their period ranges from 8th to 19th century A.D. Puranic lore and secular themes are the subject of these painting and they indirectly sheds light in to the subject of these painting and they indirectly sheds light in to the political, social and religious conditions of the respective periods. The coiffure styles of women,

their drapery, ornamentation, and the stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata and Holy Bible, etc. are some of the themes default within them¹⁸.

The form of the Uppirikka Malika from the ground floor to the third floor is Artha, Kama, Dhiyana and Motsha;. The presidency of money was the king and the presidency of the king was the God and such an arrangement was made with treasury on the ground floor and pooja room on the third floor¹⁹.

The treasury has two doors with two four-levered lock on the top for each door. The walls of the first floor are the width five feet, the walls of second and third floors are respectively three feet and two feet so that the entire weight of the building stands by.

The ceilings of the first, second and third floors are decorated by the model Chinese dragon. The Chinese dragon has the face of a dragon the body of a lion. But before 250 years, it was replaced by the body of the peacock which is the national bird and the face of dragon which is a symbol for China²⁰. The architectural ideas were given by Chinese and local workers had done the job successfully. The outside of the building totally looks like the model of a boat.

The murals on the four walls of the top most storey was popularly known as 'Uppirikka Malika' of this magnificent palace are well preserved and display the stylistic condition of the 17th and 18th centuries A.D.²¹ The stories expressed in the murals in this building are based on Vaishnavite and Saivite Puranas. They have been painted with qualities of vividness and realism in order to recollect the mythologies without many hardships. A gain the technique at this palace is the use of the light colour against a dark background or in a dark tint against some light tone in the distance.

The grace and beauty of the figures are mainly some light tone in the distance²³. The grace and beauty of the figures are mainly due to the art of line and the artist had given effective expression to his subject by simply modulating the line in various ways.

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