

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MANORA FORT - A STUDY

Dr. P. JEYABALAKRISHNAN,
Assistant Professor in History
Thiru. Kolanjiappar Govt. Arts College,
Vridhachalam - 606 001.

Sarabendrarakattinam, once known as **Caluvanaickan- pattinam** is a little shantey in the panchayat of **Sethubhavachattiram** of **Pattukottai** taluk in **Thanjavur** District, on the coast of Bay of Bengal. This *Pattinam* stands in the thick of coconut groves and frondage as a beautiful spot. In this sea-shantey of natural beauty exists the historic monument of **Manora** on the beach.¹ Its lofty structure is a single complex of a fort, a moat, halls to lounge and a nine-tier-tower of a light house. **Serfoji II** the then Maratha ruler of **Thanjavur** was under the British hegemony and had run an administration under the alien control.

It befell to the lot of Indian kings to take sides with the British when there was a rampant rivalry among the English, the French and other Europeans to colonize the countries all over the world. Under these circumstances French emperor **Napolean Bonaparte**, a sworn enemy of the British was forced to court defeat in **Leipzig** in the year A.D. 1813 and in A.D. 1815, he fell in **Waterloo**.² Napoleon's first defeat encouraged the English greatly. Kings and nationals holding allegiance to the British hailed the English victory to their delight. They celebrated this victory to show their solidarity and happiness with the British rulers. It was then, **Serfoji II** of Thanjavur, friendly to the English, ordered to build this **Manora** within a year span and dedicated it as a memorial speaking of Napoleon's defeat, and more than that of the victory of the English.³

On the one hand, **Manora** was a commemorative index of political wins and vanquishings; on the other, it was a splendid sea-trading port with a lighthouse and a secure fort for king's kinsmen to resort to. The nine-tier-tower navelled in the midst of Manora is a lighthouse column.⁴ In this structure, though many art traditions show their flourishes, the Kenspeckle tradition of Maratta, of keeping lamps aglow on standards known as '**Deepastambha**' was imitated and artfully reproduced.⁵ Until recently, the people of Tamil Nadu knew very little of

Manora and its historic significance. The steps taken by the Government of Tamil Nadu to upgrade Manora as a tourist spot presently maintained by the Archaeological wing functioning under the Department of Tamil Culture, Government of Tamil Nadu is appreciable.⁶

Manora fort is an exemplary one with all features proper to a fort finely built with a technical know-how of which any amount of description would hardly be an exaggeration. The fort wall that runs round the hexagonal moat is of twelve feet mean height. Upon this wall are vomitaries of defence built. They first appear to converge and then diverge. To the west of the fort wall, there are safety cellars. In these cellars all needed accessories required to build ship hulls and other weapons were kept.⁷ There are three gates to Manora all in a line. The first two have doors of a very small size. The second gate is just past the moat. This beautifully fortified threshold gate is in western style. The pillars in the two gates are built of rocky stone. At the top of the pillar column rests spheroidal shaped *abaci*.⁸ The threshold door is of a curved shape. The hull roof of this mantapa, the wall, the segments of the roof and pillars, all have the sheen of a conch - with a lime - wash decorative work. Construction materials of the kind to which brick, lime and timber belong, were taken to the spot on dhows via sea from **Point Calimere**.⁹ The Thanjavur palace engineers were specially commissioned to build Manora. Though Manora was raised as a memorial of Napoleon's downfall, it was rather famed as a light-house rather than a memorial. Manora is a beautifully planned structure. The architecture appears to be a confluence of **Indo - Islamic and Saracenic styles**.¹⁰ But the pillars inside the fort speak for the English Renaissance style. Tamil's technology and English art form run parallel in the design of this fort. King **Serfoji II** introduced the latest architecture of the west to the Thanjavur soil.

Mathur Hanging Bridge

The **Mathur Hanging Bridge** is the tallest as well as the longest bridge in Asia,¹¹ having a height of 115 feet and a length of one kilometre. Constructed in 1966, this bridge has become a place of tourist importance and hundreds of tourists visit this place. This is situated in **Mathur**, a hamlet of **Aruvikkarai** village in the **Thiruvattar Panchayat Union** of **Kanyakumari district**.¹² The bridge has been constructed across the river *Parazhiyar* and the bridge carries water for

irrigation from one side of the hill to the other side of the hill. The bridge has a height of seven feet with a width of seven feet six inches. The canal bridge is being shouldered by 28 huge pillars. Following are the details of the bridge.¹³

END NOTES

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3. M. Rajaram, Raju Poundurai, **Manora Maritime History & Architectures**, (Thanjavur: TMSSML Publications, 2002), p. 2.
4. S.C. Bhatt (ed.), **The Encyclopaedic District Gazetteers of India - South Zone**, (New Delhi : Gyan Publishing House, 1997), p. 1115.
5. K. Anbarasu, **Geomorphological Configuration of Tamil Nadu Coast from Coleroon to Pulicat**, (Thanjavur : Tamil University Publications, 1993), pp. 35-39.
6. **The Hindu**, 15th February, 2003.
7. Raju Poundurai, **The History of Secular Architecture of Tamil Nadu with Special Reference to Thanjavur District**, (Thanjavur : Tamil University Publications, 1990), pp. 25-29.
8. **Abaci** - a Dutch architectural style introduced by **Serfoji II** while constructing the Manora Memorial. **Marathi Modi Records** (23 - 15)
9. **Ibid.**
10. G.V. Rajamanickam, V.S. Arul Raj (ed.), **Maritime History of South India**, (Thanjavur : Tamil University Publications, 1994), pp. 101-107.
11. **In and Around Kanyakumari** (Folder), (Nagercoil : Published by the District Collector, 2004), p. 20.
12. M. Gopalakrishnan (ed.), **Kanyakumari District Gazetteer**, (Madras : Govt. of Tamil Nadu, 1995), p. 1181.
13. **Ibid.**