

PALACE AS CENTRE OF CULTURAL TOURISM INTEREST IN TAMILNADU

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Kanadukathan Palace, is one of the chief centres of Nattukottai Chettiyar's cultural heritage¹ It is a most impressive village with massive and lengthy buildings elaborately constructed with well polished walls and stones. These houses are not limited to living alone. The size and nature of the building tells about the prosperity of the owners.² The buildings are spacious and they provide for ceremonial occasions when hundreds of guests have to be accommodated. The grandly and wonderfully embellished **Kanadukathan palace** reflects the prosperity of the *Nagarathar* community. The basic design comprises of a "*thennai*", enclosed courtyard surrounded by family rooms. The walls are smooth and are made of special plasters. The plasters involve the application of the finely ground mixture of powdered shells, lime, jaggery and spices, including walnut (*Fuglans regia*) to walls.³ This technique keeps the interior of the house cool in the hot and humid Indian summers and lasts for a lifetime. The architectural structure of the palace is a study about how human dwellings can be in harmony with nature.⁴ High ceiling and airy, the palace has several courtyards within the one near the entrance leads to the imposing main door, usually made of extraordinarily intricate wood carvings of mythological figures.

Nawab's Palace, Chepauk, Madras

The Nawab's palace at Chepauk, Madras now housing the administrative offices of the Government of Tamil Nadu was built for the Nawabs of Carnatic. The original designer is not known and this serene master piece was created with Seracen and Hindu settlements, Gothic arches and Corinthian columns.⁵ After the victory of the British in the Carnatic wars, they agreed Mohammed Ali to build a palace in the protective shadow of Fort St. George.⁶ The result was the emergence of Chepauk palace, perhaps the first Indo - Seracenic building built in India, completed in 1768. It was set in 117 acres and the construction was done by **Mr. Paul Benfield**.

Totally two hundred buildings constituted the Nawab's palace. The two staired smaller domed **Kalasmahal** to the South and a single storied northern block that house the **Humayun Mahal** and the **Diwani Khana - Darbar Hall**. When the British took over the palace in 1855, it was converted into government offices and as a imperial symbol, a tall mirror that would

tower over both the blocks yet integrate them, was built in 1860 by **R.F. Chisholm** who is better remembered for his contribution in Indo - Seracenic architecture.⁷

The Pudukottai Palace

The **Palace at Pudukottai** (at present the Collector's Office) built in granite from basement to final, is a typical example of **Indo - Seracenic** architecture, though there are some Dravidian elements.⁸ It is a magnificent building with a big dome. The granite blocks are neatly dressed with beautifully carved floral designs. The arches in the building are attractive. The granite pillars found in the buildings are well designed. The interior walls of the building is polished with stucco mixed with egg yolk.⁹ The arches in the palace were not intended for aesthetic appearance of the building. The arch across the east main road at Pudukottai was erected by the **Tondaimans**¹⁰ in commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, the then Empress of India. Even now, it gives a grand appearance to the town.¹¹

Padmanabhapuram Palace

The ancient historical town Padmanabhapuram is situated some 35 km. from Kanyakumari in the Trivandrum - Cape Comorin road. The town is surrounded by a fort with an area of 187 acres. The palace with an area of seven acres, is situated in the very centre of the Padmanabhapuram Fort amidst hills, dales and rivers.¹² Upto A.D. 1744 the fort and the palace were called *Kalkulam Kottai* and *Kalkulam Kottaram* respectively. Since the dedication of the palace to Sree Padmanabha the family deity of Travancore rulers, in A.D. 1744 the fort and the palace were known as Padmanabhapuram fort and palace respectively. On the eastern side of the fort lies Vellimalai. It is one of the rare archaeological museums containing five architectural pieces, beautiful sculptures, rare coins, mural paintings and weapons of war.¹³ The palace which is situated in Kanyakumari District is under the control of a curator of the Archaeological Department Government of Kerala. The art and architecture of the palace is of Travancore origin and atmosphere. The fort which was built with mud originally was dismantled and reconstructed with granite by Maharaja Marthanda Varma.¹⁴ The height of the walls varies from 15' to 24' according to the inclination of the ground. Besides the four main gateways, one on each side, there are also certain small entrances for emergency use. At the four corners of the fort, there are four main bastions.

The essential feature of an old Travancore house the *Padipura*, retains its imposing appearance in the palace which leads to the garden in front, with an oval lawn at the centre and pathway around. The first floor of the *Poomuham* has a council chamber or *Mantrasala*¹⁵ which is meant for holding discussions with ministers and prominent citizens. Wooden louvres have been provided for good air which facilitate keeping of constant temperature inside the hall. Next to the *Mantrasala* is the dancing hall which was used exclusively for the members of the

royal family. South of the dancing hall is the dinning hall called *Uttupura*¹⁶ with two floors (the ground and the first floor) and it would accommodate about 2000 people at a time. Feeding for about 2000 persons was done here everyday and so the king was called 'Dharmaraja'.

'*Thaikottaram*' ('Mother Palace'), said to be the oldest of all edifices in the palace contains 'Ekanta mantapa' which is built of finely carved wooden pillars and decorated with specimens of indigenous wood carving.¹⁷ The most attractive building in the whole palace is the '**Uppirika Malikai**' which consists of three storeys. '*Uppirika*' is the abbreviated term of '*Muppirika*' which means the residence of the eldest member of the family. A wooden cot is erected on the top most floor in the hope that 'Lord Vishnu', the chief deity, would recline on it every day. The first floor contains a wooden cot made of 64 medicinal plants, on which the king used to sleep.¹⁸ In the second storey, could be seen another ordinary cot which was used by the Maharaja occasionally. The medicinal cot was presented to Maharaja Marthanda Varma by the Dutch East India Company in 1750, as a mark of friendship.¹⁹

Another fascinating feature in this top most floor is the availability of murals datable to 17th and 18th centuries. This is hailed as the '**Ajantha of Travancore**'²⁰ which had served as the Pooja room of the Maharaja. The atmosphere and background of these paintings are permeated with religious concepts, human emotions and passions. The ingredients used for these painting works were leaves of certain plants. **Indra Vilas Palace**, another beautiful edifice in the palace was built by **Dalavoy Ramayyan**, the Dewan of Maharaja Marthanda Varma. The Maharaja interviewed the distinguished persons there and was used as a guest house for foreign visitors. The hall of historical paintings called '*Chitralaya*' is the longest edifice in the palace.²¹ Several oil paintings duly framed, are hung in the hall. The most significant among them are the paintings in which **Captain De Lannoy** of the Dutch army surrenders to Maharaja Marthanda Varma who came out with flying colours in the famous **Colachel War**.²²

Navarathri mandapa, situated to the west of the **Uppirika mandapa** is a spacious hall of exquisitely beautiful granite pillars with dropping pendants, reminiscent of the Nayak style of architecture. This mandapa is in front of the **Saraswathi temple** which is connected by a pillared verandah called **Namaskara mandapa**.²³ The whole structure is decorated with figures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and temple servants which display the remarkable skill of indigenous craftsmanship. The Secretariat and the record rooms used in olden days and the special arrangements for them in the **Chandra Vilasam palace** and adjacent rooms are specially noteworthy. There is an underground passage of three km. from this palace to another palace at **Charode** which the family of the king could use as a means of escape in times of danger.²⁴ The indigenous weapons utilised for war, the modern weapons captured from the Dutch invaders in

the famous battle of Colachel in A.D. 1741 and the instruments used for torturing the criminals are preserved very carefully in the **Armoury hall** in the glassed wooden bureau.²⁵

The **Padmanabhapuram Palace**, once the scene of brisk and lively activity, brings the tourists to the period of Venad kingdom and also brings to light information about their social, religious and political history.²⁶ It may be considered as one of the storehouses of the richest specimens of Indian art and architecture in stone and wood.

Ramalinga Vilasam Palace, Ramanathapuram

The **Ramalinga Vilasam Palace** at Ramanathapuram was built during the reign of **Kizhavan Setupathi** (1674 - 1710 A.D.), the most popular among the Setupathi rulers of Ramnad.²⁷ The palace building consists of a **Durbar Hall** and an ostentatious dwelling area. It is believed that this palace was built with the money gifted by **Sheik Abdul Khadar** alias "**Vallal Seethakkadi**".²⁸ The murals found in this building represents the life pattern of the Setupathi kings. Scenes depicting the Setupathis' battles with the Maratha kings of Thanjavur and their European contacts are quite exquisite. This palace has been declared as a historically important monument by the Government of Tamil Nadu.²⁹

Thanjavur Royal Palace

During the reign of the Maratha kings, in the Thanjavur delta, arts like music, dance, drama, sculpture and architecture grew. The Thanjavur royal palace is a vast building of architectural grandeur built partly by the Nayaks and partly by the Marathas.³⁰ It is a grand pile of building with huge corridors and spacious halls. During the period of king **Serfoji II**, with the advent of the Europeans and the connections of the English East India Company, town planning, village complexes, building structure - all these underwent a drastic transformation.³¹ During the administration of **Venkoji II** and **Serfoji II**, newer structures sprouted. The period of these two kings saw the renaissance of architecture of a new kind. The town layout was beautified that Thanjavur was famed as the **Paris of South India**.³² Though racially of a Marathi stock, these kings involved themselves in Tamil culture and language growth and showed a zeal sustained by diligence and fostered the arts. **Thanjavur Palace** clearly depicts Maratha's opulence and artistic talents. Twelve Mahals and eighteen *Kanas* were there in the palace of the Marathas.³³

Arms Factory (Jirat Kana), **Elephant Stable** (Uratti Kana), **Explosives Store** (Taru Kana), **Spirit - Celler** (Sharab Kana), **Soft drink trough** (Sherbet Kana) were catering to the needs of the palace people. Very much like these, several were the blocks inside the palace providing venues for athletics, bouts, canon practice, hospital medicine, paddy store and archives. Almost all these were ruined and some vestiges still remain.³⁴ Treasury, horse-stable, cattle farm, palanquin stall, public works department, mint, granary and such buildings were

called **Mahals**. In the royal palace at Thanjavur, a zoo park was reared in the 18th century. This is certainly a laudable feat. Special guests who thronged the palace, used to visit this zoo park and pleased themselves. In this park, several animals and birds brought from various parts of Tamil Nadu were looked after.³⁵ This was perhaps the first ever zoo park in Tamil Nadu.³⁶ Maratha kings were great experts in hunting. They had built holes in the forests, which they called **Vettai Mahals**.

King Serfoji II, after returning from his pilgrimage to **Kasi**, built a five corridorred storey, a sort of vomitory. This tower with bay windows was well decorated. Through these windows, the king and the queen observed processions. This building was designed in a combinatory style of Mughal, Hindu and English architecture.³⁷ Near to the palace harem, they had maintained a swimming pool. A '**dark mahal**' as it was called, was down underground. This has come to be known as '**Krishna Vilasam**'. Within this, there were facilities for water sports and frolics. The wall paintings serialize the **Krishna Leela** tickling the artistic urge of the onlooker. In this building the straight path is flanked by two walks diverging. Unfamiliar walkers would often lose their way. By such means the kings made it possible for them to isolate their foes and kill them by ambush. **Serfoji II's** wives stayed in a mansion called **Kalyana Mahal** built in A.D. 1824.³⁸ A part of this Mahal had a printing-press and a mint too. This building, stands majestically with lofty tiers and three projections, is a sheer delight to viewers. **Mangala Vasagam** is another complex in the royal palace where forty two women of the royal family resided. Of them, quite a few were danseuses. Morphologically, this building is in Indo-Mughal-European architectural combine.

On the four royal highways that run round the palace of Thanjavur, many new buildings were risen with the help of the English. **Serfoji II** had a strong penchant for Thanjavur town layout to resemble that of **Paris**.³⁹ Water taps for drinking, aqueducts for flowing were all designed in the palace. By the price worthy talents of the Maratha rulers, the history of Thanjavur attained more fame. It is no exaggeration to call Maratha lineage as the backbone of Thanjavur ethos.

Thirumalai Nayak Palace, Madurai

This palace was built in A.D. 1636 by **Thirumalai Nayak** (1627 - 1659), the greatest of the Nayak rulers of Madurai. It is considered as the most marvellous secular building in South India.⁴⁰ According to tradition, Thirumalai Nayak is said to have had the help of an Italian architect in designing the building. The grand palace was built by Thirumalai Nayak consisted mainly of two parts, namely - **Swarga Vilasa** and **Ranga Vilasa**.⁴¹ Besides these two royal residences, there were a theatre, a palace shrine, queens apartment, an armoury, a building for housing palanquins, royal bandstand, quarters for relatives and servants, a pond, garden etc.

The whole was enclosed by walls on all the four sides. The enclosure walls are said to have survived till a hundred years ago, when they were pulled down as they were badly dilapidated. The enclosure called *Pari Madil*⁴² was 300 m. in length east-west and 220m. in width north-south, and 12m. height. To the west of this enclosure, there was a flower garden with a pavilion in the centre.

The surviving building with a rectangular court yard in the centre, flanked by huge and tall colonades was the main palace portion. The courtyard measures 50m. east and west, by 32m. north and south, surrounded on all sides by arcades, of very great beauty. The pillars which support the arches are of stone, 12m. in height and are joined by foliated brick arcad of great elegance and design, carrying a cornice and entablature rising to upwards of 20m. in height.⁴³ The whole of the ornamentation is worked out in the exquisitely five stucco *Chunnam* or shell lime which is a characteristic feature of Tamil architecture.⁴⁴

On the western side of the court stands the **Swargavilasa** (celestial pavilion). It measures 75m. from north to south, by 52m. across. The large central dome is supported by twelve columns, enclosing a square 21m. across. These columns are first linked together by massive saracenic arches.⁴⁵ The celestial pavilion is approached by a flight of steps guarded by sculptures of horse riders now damaged. To the west, in the midst of a great dome-shaped hall, is a square building of black stone inside which is a chamber made of ivory. In the middle of this a jewelled throne, on which the king is accustomed to take his seat at the great **Navarathri festival** surrounded by all his banners, or ensigns of royalty, and which all kings are accustomed to do homage.

To the west of the *Swargavilasa*, the queens apartments were located. They have disappeared. But in the south-west may be seen a room, with black polished columns supporting the roof.⁴⁶ The queens used to hear music and literary discourses in this portion, during the mornings. At the north-west corner of the building is placed a splendid hall where the dramas were staged. This hall was used as a *Natakasala* (theatre) where the king accompanied by his queens and guests used to witness dances in the evenings, performed by beautiful damsels well-versed in their arts.⁴⁷

Further north, in a lane may now be seen ten tall pillars of stones. Originally this portion was a part of the big palace. To the west of these stood a palace similar to the celestial pavilion but some what smaller.

This was called **Rangavilasa**.⁴⁸ The ten pillars that survive, formed part of the courtyard of that palace. To the east of ten pillars were the main entrance and a pavilion where royal palanquins and other paraphernalia were placed. There was another pavilion housing 18

different kinds of musical instruments that used to form part of the royal entourage. These pavilions existed in somewhat dilapidated form, till a hundred years ago and were called '*Naubatkhana*'.⁴⁹ It was so dilapidated in the 1950's that the American mission declined to take it as a gift. It was then restored by **Mr. George Fischer** for the use of a school and was taken by the Government in 1853 for the use of the new Zilla School. In 1858 **Lord Napier**, the then Governor of Madras, wrote an emphatic minute on the necessity of restoring ancient ruins in general and this palace in particular. **Mr. Chisholm**, the Government architect was sent down to report on the possibility of saving what remained of the building.⁵⁰ His account led the Government to decide to repair the palace to render it suitable for government offices.⁵¹ **Lord Napier** took the greatest personal interest in the matter and in 1871, after visiting the palace, recorded an elaborate minute regarding the offices which were to be located in it. Since 1971, the palace is preserved as a monument by the **Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology**.

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