

**HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF BADMANABHAPURAM PALACE IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT****Dr. T. Jayanthi**

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**Introduction:**

Padmanabhapuram, the ancient historical town is situated 55 kms south of Thiruvananthapuram and about 2 kms east of Thuckalay on the Thiruvananthapuram- Kanyakumari road. <sup>1</sup> It was the ancient capital of the erstwhile Travancore State from about 1555 A.D to the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>2</sup>

This town is surrounded by a fort with an area of 187 acres. <sup>3</sup> Originally a mud fort was later dismantled and reconstructed with granite by Maharaja Marthandavarma. The height of the wall varies from 15 to 24 according to the inclination of the ground. Besides the main gateways one on each side, the entire fortification was constructed with granite that exposes the engineering skills of the builders of the period. The original fort was built as a mud fort which was in existence during the reign of Veera Ravivarma Kulasekara perumal. Later it was made into a granite structure furnished with bastions and gun points by Maharaja Marthandavarma the architect of modern Travancore. The fort and the palace remained the centre of governance till the reign of Karthihai Thirunal Ramavarma. Later the headquarters of Travancore Kingdom was shifted to Kaudiyar in the present Thiruvananthapuram city.

The height of the walls varies from 15 to 24 according to the inclination of the ground. Thickness of the fort wall was 3 feet. Maharaja Marthandavarma was eager to adorn strong and efficient defensive measures for the safety of his kingdom. To ensure the safety of the royal palace at Padmanahapuram he constructed the strong fort with granite and the superstructure in red stone. The materials used for the construction were wood laurite, burnt bricks, granite and lime. Though the fort was one of the biggest in the region, the Government has not declared it a protected monument under the Tamil Nadu Archaeological Sites Act. Padmanabhapuram fort possesses one of the rare archaeological museums containing rare architectural pieces, beautiful sculptures, rare coins, mural paintings and weapons of war.

The ancient capital of Travancore was established before 1601 by the Venad Kings. Before 1744 the fort was known as Kalkulam Kottaram. After the dedication of palace in 1744 to Sree Padmanabha, by the king Marthanda Varma, the fort was named as Padmanabhapuram Palace.

**Padmanabhapuram Palace:**

The palace has many important parts that speak about the ancient glory and architectural genius of the time. The place is set amidst picturesque surrounding and is noted for its old palace and temple in which relics of antiquity having great historical and archaeological importance have been recently discovered. <sup>4</sup> Padmanabhapuram is referred to as the ‘Ujjain of the South’ famous for its learning and culture. <sup>5</sup> Padmanabhapuram was the capital of Venad i.e. the erstwhile Travancore state till the closing years of the region of Karthihai Thirunal Ramavarma. <sup>6</sup>

In earlier times, Navaratri Puja was a State Ceremony at Padmanabhapuram Palace premises. The worship of the Panchaloha idol of Goddess Saraswati in the temple at the Palace was a grand ceremony. However, with the shifting of the capital from Padmanabhapuram to Thiruvananthapuram in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Karthika Tirunal Rama Varma, the venue of the Navarathri festivities got relocated to Navarathri Mandapam, in Valiakottaram. <sup>7</sup>

**Structure in the Palace:**

Padmanabhapuram Palace is one of the oldest in India. The first floor has a Council Chamber or Mantrasala, is the most beautiful parts of the entire palace complex. It has windows, with coloured mica, which keep the heat and the dust away and the inside of the council chamber remains cool and dark. Delicate and beautiful lattice work can be seen all around the council chamber.

The floor is also beautiful done, with a fine and perfect finish. The floor is dark coloured and made of mixture of varied substances, including burnt coconut shells, egg white and so on. Thai Kottaram’s also another important structure of the palace. It is designed in traditional Kerala style, there is an inner courtyard, called nalukettu. In the inner courtyard, sloping roofs from all four sided taper down. On the south-west corner of the thai Kottaram palace is a small room, which is called as ekantha mandapam.

In the first floor there is a cot made of 64 medicinal plants on which Maharaja used to sleep. It was presented to Maharaja Marthanda Varma by the Dutch East India Company in 1750 as a gesture of good will. The top most floor has mural of high artistic excellence. Navarathri mandapam is a spacious hall. The four storied building is located at the centre of the palace. The top floor served as the worship chamber of the royal household. Its walls are covered with exquisite 18<sup>th</sup> century murals, depicting scenes from the puranas and also few scenes from the social life of the Travancore of that time. There are several rooms just below the worship chambers, which included the kings’s bedroom. The ornamental bedstead is made of 64 types of herbal and medicinal woods and was a gift from the Dutch merchants.

The Palace is considered as one of the store houses of the richest specimens of Indian art and architecture, in stone and wood extolling our glorious past exhibited to the public. Even though it is situated in the Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu, the palace is owned and maintained by the Archaeological Department of the Government of Kerala. <sup>8</sup>

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Padmanabhapuram was the capital of Travancore till 1750 A.D and then the seat of Government was transferred to Trivandrum during the time of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, the maker of modern Travancore who dedicated the whole state to God Padmanabha and ruled as his servant.<sup>9</sup> Padmanabhapuram Palace plays a vital role in promoting tourism in Kanyakumari District. The Archaeological Department of Kerala is taking care of the palace. Every year before the Navarathri Pooja the entire palace will be varnished. The Kerala people consider the Venad capital as their own capital and visit the palace in large number. The palace once the scene of brisk and lively activity has today its magnificent edifices explains through about the hoary past. The palace is fulfilling its task, which, it is hoped, it would be able to continue for many years to come. It is today an ancient monument jointly maintained by the Governments of Kerala and Tamil Nadu under administrative control of the Kerala Government. Padmanabhapuram palace, the abode of the erstwhile Travancore royal dynasty, is a world reputed monument stands protected under the provisions of the Kerala Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1968, under the Department of Archaeology.

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