

Development of Fort Architecture in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The study entitled “Development of Fort Architecture in Kerala” deals with the developmental stages of forts in Kerala and its architectural importance. The study of fort is a desideratum in order to understand the system of defence and military architecture of Kerala. This study one can clearly understand the stages in the evolution of forts in Kerala and also the architectural features of fort.

Kerala is one of the main attractive places in Indian sub- continent. It lies between Western Ghats and Arabian Sea, from ancient time to present the Cochin port is famous and also known as “Queen of Arabian Sea”. Due to these attractions the land was continuously attracted by several foreigners. Some foreigner came here for trade and others for invasion. As part of these invasions, the foreigners and local rulers built so many palaces, ports, forts, lighthouses. This is considered as the background behind the origin of forts in Kerala. Most of the forts are located along the extended seacoast of Kerala.

Forts in Kerala have been influenced by the different rulers in different time, with beautiful architecture and design. These forts are the fusion of traditional Kerala and various foreign style of architecture. Each fort in Kerala is a piece of art and each has a story to tell. Most of the forts in Kerala have an overwhelming European feel to its architecture. Many of them were initially built by native rulers like Hyder Ali and later modified over by the Europeans. Some of the famous forts in Kerala are Anjengo fort, Baekal fort, Chandragiri fort, Pallipuram fort, Palakkad fort.

The origin of forts in Kerala is very ancient and interesting. Before the Cheras established themselves as a major force in Kerala, it was ruled by the Ay dynasty sometime between 7th to 11th centuries AD with Vizhinjam as the capital. The Ay dynasty ruled the land between Nagarcoil and Thiruvalla. Ay kingdom lay around the Podiyahill, the southernmost section of the Western Ghats. The Greek geographer Ptolemy wrote about one ‘Aioi’ ruling the country at that time which included Cape Comorin and Mount Bettigo. When the kings of the Ay dynasty shifted their capital to Vizhinjam, they built a fort which is now considered to be the oldest fort in Kerala dating to the eighth or ninth century.

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Well planned forts came to Kerala only after the invasion of European powers. As a result of the trade contact Europeans built a number of fortresses in India in different periods. The first fort in

Kerala, built by the Europeans is Fort Manualin Kochi. It was built by the Portuguese and named after the Portuguese ruler Manual.

Vasco da Gama anchored near Calicut in 1498 to get major concession from the Zamorin in the sphere of trade. Again when Vasco da Gama came to Malabar Coast for the second time in 1502, he met the king of Cannanore with a letter he took from DomManuel, the king of Portugal addressed to the king of Cannanore with a request to establish peace and friendship to conduct commercial activities. Dom Francisco de Almeida was appointed as viceroy of Portuguese India with specific instruction to erect fortresses at strategic places.

Accordingly, on 24.10.1505, Almeida, and Goncalo Gil Barbosa, the Factor at Cannanore laid the foundation of the factory (fortress) in a place called Moppila bay ceded by the local ruler. Gradually, they fortified the factory to protect the factors and the goods stored. The construction was quick with active support of the Kolathiri Raja and the walls and towers reached sufficient height for being equipped with artillery.

In the beginning it was a wooden fort, which was named after St. Angelo. The fort had a long trench. Again in 1507 the Viceroy began construction of a stone fort inside its walls. It was in the beginning, a square fort with four round towers on the cardinal directions. By the side of the bay there was a two storied tower. The door of the fort was by the seaside. This was one of first mainland forts built on the western coast and it had a trench of 3 fathoms deep and two and a half fathoms broad. Its circuit was 255 fathoms. Linschoten described this fort as “the best fortress that the Portuguese have in Malabar”.

In course of time the fortified factory grew into a fort as the need for local show of force became more and more important and often necessary. Side by side with this change came also the acquisition of extra territorial jurisdiction. Dom Francisco de Almeida himself ordered the construction of a chapel dedicated to St. James between walls surrounding the habitation and the portals of the fortress. A Franciscan convent was also built as desired by the Portuguese king. This was known as the convent of Sao Antonio.

At present it is a massive triangular structure built with laterite stones. It had facilities to keep arms and ammunitions besides a warehouse. It is surrounded by sea on three sides. The deep moat protected it from the landside and strong flanking bastions.

Ancient Malabar and Travancore regions of Kerala have innumerable forts mainly built during the medieval period either by the local rulers or by the European traders. Most of these forts are strategically located on the sea coast of Kerala to safeguard particularly the maritime trade. Those who are controlled the important ports and were equipped with strong navy and had an edge over others in sphere of political prestige and economic stability. Beside military use the forts were also used as the centre for collecting coir, spices, and other trading articles. Some of the forts such as St. Angelo fort (Kannur), Tellicherry fort, Anjengo fort also served as the signalling stations for ships.

BEKAL FORT, KASARGOD

Bekal fort is situated on the seashore of Pallikare Village. The fort built of laterite blocks, roughly polygonal in plan. The fort built during the period of 1500C.E. In 1763 the fort fell in to the hands of Hyder Ali. After the reign of Tipu Sultan the fort came under the British power.

Architecture of Bekal Fort

The fort spreading over forty acres has massive walls about 12 meters in height built of local laterite stones. The headland on which it is situated runs into the sea with fine bay towards the south. The site was so well selected to give a complete view of the area and also the laterite bedrock was very well utilized to strengthen the fort. It is a large fort, the wall and ramparts on the sea side being strong and interspersed by the bastions with opening for guns. The main gate is towards the east and was protected by bastions. A ditch surrounds the fort on the land side. The important features of this fort are the tank with its flight of steps, the opening of the tunnel towards the south, the magazine for keeping ammunition, wide ramp leading to the observation tower.

This tower is a rarity giving fascinating view of the surrounding area. From there, one has ample view of all the important places in the vicinity and also has the strategic significance in ascertaining the safety of the fort. The voids in the massive laterite walls were used for placing guns.

The recent excavations conducted at the fort yielded different types of secular and religious structures built of laterite of the time of Nayakas of Ikkeri and Tipu Sultan. The other interesting discovery was the mint house (Huzur) and a palace complex of the medieval period. Remains of Darbar hall and temple complex were also brought to light during the excavation. The coins collected from the excavations belong to Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan and Mysore Wodeyars. Another interesting find was the copper coin mould of Tipu Sultan. The structures exposed were mostly secular in nature.

FORT ST.ANGELO, KANNUR

St. Angelo's Fort has witnessed the rule of many kings and mighty kingdoms. It has a rich historical background and seen many battles fought for the possession of the fort. The fort has constantly remained under attacks after its creation from a number of native rulers in the Siege of Kannur in 1507. However, all their efforts were in vain, as the inhabitants remained under security from different directions. Afonso de Albuquerque had also arrived to confirm himself as the new Governor but Almeida refused to surrender the fort to him. Almeida instead captured Afonso de Albuquerque and imprisoned him inside the fort.

Architecture of St. Angelo's Fort

St. Angelo's fort is an exquisite example of architectural design. The fort has been crafted out of laterite. With its massive triangular design and the adjoining bastions, the fort serves as a prominent tourist spot. The protected monument is replete with a big moat which runs around the fort. St. Angelo's fort is an example of Portuguese architecture. However, due to renovations and modernization process the fort appears like a fusion of various European architectural styles. An interesting feature of St. Angelo's Fort is a wall projecting from the Fort that separates the saline sea water of the Arabian Sea from the inland water .

TELLICHERRY FORT, TELLICHERRY

The fort was built in 1708, was the military centre of the British. The small redoubts on most of the outplaying hills long since disappeared. The Dalwai of the Kingdom of Mysore, Hyder Ali, attempted to capture the fortress during his military campaign to Malabar, but remained unsuccessful. After the end of the Third Anglo-Maratha War, Tipu Sultan, the son of Hyder Ali was compelled to surrender the Malabar District to the East India Company in 1792. But the Tellicherry fort is in fair state of preservation .

Architecture of Tellicherry Fort

Tellicherry Fort is a square shaped structure and has huge walls and ramparts. The strong fortifications and bastions are located towards the edges of the building. The doors and gateways of the fort are massive and have carvings on them. There is also a secret tunnel inside the premise which was used in case of emergency escape during attacks of the enemies.

FORT ANJENGO, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

In 1690, the East India Company was allowed by the Rani of Attingal to build a fort at Anjengo and it was raised in 1695. Square unalignment, it served as a first signalling station for ships arriving from England. It was an important depot for military stores during the Karnataka wars. Main purpose was to facilitate the collection of pepper, coir and other trading articles.

Architecture of Anjengo Fort

Compared to the other forts in Kerala, Anjengo Fort lacks some typical look and characteristics of a fort. It is more like an enclosed bastion with high laterite walls. The fort also has some lookout points and three entrances on east and west. The fort includes various buildings inside the premises. There is a cemetery in the fort precinct which served as the burial site for the former occupants of the building. A lake named 'Muthalapuzhi Lake' is also located in the nearby area.

PALLIPURAM FORT, PALLIPURAM

Pallipuram Fort was built by the Portuguese in 1503. It is the oldest existing European fort in Kerala. Pallipuram Fort is an island fort, which was built by the Portuguese in 1503. Pallipuram Fort is one of the famous and oldest remaining forts in Kerala. It is located in Ernakulam district and is popularly known as "Ayikkotta". It is the oldest existing European fort in India. In 1503 the Portuguese built the Pallipuram Fort.

Architecture of Pallipuram Fort

The Pallipuram Fort is an exquisite example of its architectural beauty. The fort is of a hexagonal structure. The hexagonal structure of the fort was very fruitful for the inhabitants, as it enabled them to keep an eye on enemies or invader from the 6 walls of the monument. The height of the lower floor is raised to 5 feet from ground. The fort houses a cellar that was used for storing gunpowder. The gunpowder was used during invasions. The fort also has a well which used to be a source of fresh water. Towards the northern direction of the Pallipuram Fort there is an opening which leads to the cellar. There is a circular slab stone, on which was installed a pillar on which the

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radiating wooden struts supporting the upper two floors must have rested. In ancient times the cellar was used to imprison the captured enemies. The local people believe that the cellar is a tunnel that leads to the Cheraman Masjid in Kodungallur.

The walls of this beautiful fort are almost 6 feet thick, and the face of the fort measures a gigantic 32 feet in length and 34 feet in height. The fort is constructed using laterite, limestone, and wood. The walls are thickly plastered using mortar. The door way in the central circular slab is made of granite. All the six sides of the fort are overgrown with vegetation.

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Forts are the living examples for the defence architecture and powerfulness of India and Indian rulers in the past. Most of the forts are stand as the mile stones in the history of India. Every fort has a story to tell, the story of conquering, battles, failures and victory. In Kerala also the development of forts is connected with superiority but the forts in Kerala were not witnessed so many battles and conquering as compared to the north Indian forts Kerala forts were act as the centre of trade and commerce. Most of the forts in Kerala reflect the architectural features of western powers like Portuguese, Dutch, and British.

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