

Padmanabhapuram Palace-An Aesthetic Architecture Of Venadu

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ABSTRACT

Padmanabhapuram Palace is a remarkable 16th Century wood palace of the erstwhile Venadu Kingdom now in the State of Tamil Nadu. Replete with intricate wood carvings and ornate murals, the Palace is an exceptional example of indigenous building techniques based on the science of carpentry and craftsmanship in wood. Padmanabhapuram Palace, has a style unparalleled in historic building systems which is unique to this region. Padmanabhapuram Palace is the oldest, largest and well-preserved surviving example representative of the traditional wooden architecture in India. The Palace is a product of the fusion of traditional building technology, exquisite craftsmanship and superior knowledge of material science. The Palace bears living testimony of traditional timber architecture with strict adherence to the traditional building code of the Tamil culture which has clear prescription for every aspect of the function and placement of a structure, direction, size and design, including specifications for the layout of designated spaces within individual structures.

Keywords: Venadu, Architecture, Royal patronage, inscriptions, art, architecture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article has been prepared through the study, analysis, and interpretation of both primary and secondary sources related to Padmanabhapuram Palace. A descriptive method is used to write this article. Of the published primary sources, the Travancore Archaeological Series is particularly noteworthy. Personal Interview is conducted with the descendants of the Venadu King Cheraman Perumal Kulasekhara Aalwar and Uthaya Marthanda Kulasekhara Perumal (A.D. 1798-1810). Additionally, various secondary sources have been consulted in this research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the original history of the Padmanabhapuram Palace.
2. To examine the evolution of the Padmanabhapuram Palace.
3. To understand the significance of art and architecture.
4. To uncover the various facets of the intrinsic artistic values contained within it.
5. To explore the Padmanabhapuram Palace as a museum.

1. INTRODUCTION

Perumal Kuzham, presently known as Kalkuzham and Padmanabhapuram, served as the ancient capital of the former Venadu Kingdom from around A. D. 1555 until the latter half of the 18th century. The land of ancient Venadu Kingdom was rich in timber, and traditionally, all constructions were made primarily of wood, with laterite stone used sparingly for plinths and selected walls. The Eraniyal Palace, constructed before the Padmanabhapuram Palace, is another example for the same. The roof structures were initially constructed using timber and covered with thatch; later, clay tiles became prevalent. The region is known for its exceptional building skills and craftsmanship in timber, characteristic of the southern architectural style. These wood-based buildings were constructed with the traditional style of architecture connected with Tamil culture. These principles crystallized into several guidelines governing proportions, dimensions, orientation, location, and construction procedures, creating a foundational framework for timber architecture.

ORIGINS

The origin of Padmanabhapuram Palace had a humble beginning on the bank of Perumal Kuzham. The present South Palace known as *Therkku Aranmanai* or *Thekkey Kottaram* is the first palace constructed in the Tamil style of architecture with *Murtam* or open hall or courtyard inside the palace. There are no available sources regarding the construction of this South Palace known as *Therkku Aranmanai* by any Venadu ruler but at the same time the most accepted fact that it was constructed in A. D. 1335 during the time of then Venadu King Shree Veera Uthaiyamarthandavarma Thiruvadiyar Pandiyadevar. One of his Tamil inscriptions engraved on the Central shrine of Siva Temple at Veera Keralapuram near Thuckalai in Kanyakumari District dated KE 491 (A.D. 1317) confirmed the same name.ⁱ Amalagiri P. Anthonymuthu Nadar, one of the descendants of Venadu and Chera Royal Family, in his book *Yesu Tharmathil Chera Arasar Kulam*, stated that Umai Ammai alias 'Ammmai Pandaram' lived at South Palace known as *Therkku Aranmanai* on the bank of Perumal Kuzham, presently known as Kalkuzham and Padmanabhapuram. The Keralapuram Tamil Inscription dated KE. 782 (A.D. 1607) stated that the ruling family of Keezhapperoor Illam Thiruppappoor Swaroopam who lived in the family of 'Ammmai Pandaram' alias 'Uma Ammai'ⁱⁱⁱ was the mother of Shri Veerali Ravivanmaraana Kulasekharapperumal.

Subsequently, the present structure of *Arasa Maligai* or Royal Residence was constructed by then Venadu ruler and son of Umai Ammai alias 'Ammmai Pandaram' named Shri Veera Ravi Ravivanmaraana Kulasekharapperumal. The Department of Archaeology of Govt. of Kerala stated through its publication named 'Padmanabhapuram Palace' informed that the Kalkulam Palace was constructed in A.D. 1601ⁱⁱⁱ during the time of the Venadu King Shri Veera Ravi Ravivanmaraana Kulasekharapperumal. The Inscriptional evidences confirm that Shri Veera Ravi Ravivanmaraana Kulasekharapperumal was then Venadu ruler.^{iv} The Mudaliyar manuscript from Azhagia Pandiapuram also indicates that Padmanabhapuram dates back to A.D. 1601.

The Venadu King 'Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperoor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maartaandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar' (A.D. 1729-1758), dismantled the old Kalkulam Fort made of mud walls in April 1740 and reconstructed it into a granite fort along with walls and ramparts in January A.D.1745, and also constructed the Saraswathy Temple and *Navarathri Mandapam* in A.D.1744, *Ambari Muhappu* and the *Indravilasam* Palace, and subsequently the *Perumal Maaligai* or Lord's Palace popularly called as *Upparigai Maligai* in A.D. 1750 with the assistance of his close relative Brahmakula Kshatriyan Thiru Anantha Padmanabha Perumal Nadar (A.D. 1698-1750), the Colachel war Hero and the Commander of Venadu Kalari Army. Kalkuzham was officially renamed as Padmanabhapuram by then Venadu King 'Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperoor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maartaandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar' (A.D. 1729-1758) in A.D.1750.

The Venadu King 'Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperoor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maartaandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar' stated through his Tamil Copper Plate Inscription dated 24th *Pankuni* month of Kollam 923 (A.D. 1748) that Brahmakula Kshatriyan Thiru Anantha Padmanabha Perumal Nadar (A.D. 1698-1750) was his close relative who saved the life of the King in several occasions and assisted the King in all matters including the defeat of the King's enemies and the preparation of a well defensive force.^v Thiru Krishnan Nair, Officer of Government Archives, Chief Secretariate of the Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, confirmed through his statement in Honourable Kuzhithurai Munchif Court on 04-04-1962 on the case O. S. No. 408 O-F 1961 that this Copper Plate is original and was issued by the aforesaid Venadu King. The famous Historian of Kerala State Shri Ibrahim Kunju, published the aforesaid Copper Plate through his unpublished Ph.D. Thesis to the University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram in 1971 named *Marthanda Varma and His Times*. His Excellency the Governor of Kerala Shri Aarif Muhammad Khan inaugurated the statue of Thiru Anantha Padmanabha Perumal Nadar at Pangode Military Station on 10th August, 2023 to commemorate the achievement of the defeat of the Dutch at Colachel and the arrest of the Dutch Commander De Lannoy, Vice-Commander Donadi and Dutch forces. The portraits of the Venadu King 'Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperoor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maartaandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar' and Brahmakula Kshatriyan Thiru Anantha Padmanabha Perumal Nadar was placed in the *Ambari Muhappu* building as Colachel War photo. Unfortunately, a copy of this Copper Plate is not placed in the Museum of Padmanabhapuram Palace.

The Kanyakumari Tamil Copper Plate Inscription No. 23 dated KE. 935 (A.D. 1760) mentioned the name of subsequent Venadu King of the aforesaid period as 'Parpanaabhathaasaraana Vaala Ramavarma Kulasekarapperumal',^{vi} who reigned from 1758 to 1798, moved the capital from Padmanabhapuram to Thiruvananthapuram. As a result, Padmanabhapuram gradually lost its significance in the historical context of Venadu and Thruvithamkoor.

LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

The Padmanabhapuram Palace complex spans 6.5 acres and is situated within a 185-acre fort at the foothills of the Vezhi Hills in the Western Ghats. It is located 37 kms north-west of Kanyakumari, 17 kms from Nagercoil, 55 kms to the south of Thiruvananthapuram and 2 kms east of Thuckalay from the Thiruvananthapuram-Kanyakumari National Highway.^{vii} Following the State Reorganization settlement of 1956, the 6.5 acres of the Padmanabhapuram Palace complex was placed under the custodianship of the Government of Kerala. This palace is recognized as a Protected Monument by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala.

CONSTRUCTION PATTERN OF THE PALACE

The Palace structure is made primarily of wood, with laterite used for the plinths and select walls. The roof is constructed from timber and covered with clay tiles. This Palace served as the oldest seat of power for Venadu. The palace complex spans an area of 6.5 acres and consists of numerous sub-structures that were built between A. D. 1590's and the early 1800's. The different features, including palaces and other ancillary structures, were gradual additions to the original *Arasa Maligai* or Royal Residence. The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Thai Kottaram* or Mother Palace. These later additions reflect changing architectural styles influenced by the Portuguese and the Dutch. While a uniform style is maintained throughout the complex, variety is introduced through the distinctive details of the decorative motifs. The murals on the four walls of the topmost third floor of the multi-storeyed building, known as the *Upparikaimaligai*, display the stylistic elements of 17th and 18th century architecture. The murals at Padmanabhapuram Palace are considered the best preserved in the state. They are executed in a traditional style that showcases rich realism and imparts grace and beauty to the figures. The fourteen designated structures include *Aranmanai* or palaces, *Puram* or houses or structures, *Maligai* or *Vilasams* or mansions and *Mandapams* or large halls. These are *Thalaivachal* or *Nulaivayil* or Grant Gateway, *Thirumukham Maligai* or *Poomukha Maligai* or King's Office, *Arasa Maligai* or Royal Residence, *Kadikaara Kopuram* or Clock Tower *Periya Unavarai* or Great Dining Hall, *Saraswathi Temple*, *Navarathri Mandapam*, Prayer Room or *Homappurai*, *Perumal Maligai* or *Upparikaimaligai* or Lord's Palace, *Anthapuram* or Lady's Chamber, *Ambari Muhappu* or Royal Howda, *Indravilasam* Palace or Royal Guest House, *Therkku Aranmanai* or *Thekkekottaram* or Southern Palace and Archaeological Museum.

THALAI VAASAL or GRANT GATEWAY

Padmanabhapuram Palace, facing eastern direction, has two gabled entrances in traditional Tamil style along with ornamentation known as *Thalai Vaasal* or *Nulaivayil* in Tamil and Gateway in English. The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Nadamalika*.^{viii} This serves as the main entrance to the palace and shows a glimpse of the grandeur that waits inside. The massive doors, reinforced with metal spikes, and the impressively tall walls expose the defensive system of the Palace.

THIRUMUKHAM or KING'S OFFICE

The grant Gateway or *Thalai Vaasal* or *Nulaivayil* is followed by *Thirumukham* or the King's Office of the palace where the King sat on throne and issued Royal Order and so this structure is called as *Thirumukham*. The Tamil word *Thirumukham* means Royal Order. For instance, the Venadu Tamil King Shri Veera Ravi Keralavarma Thiruvadi (Kollam Year 411-A.D. 1236) in his Tamil Vattezhuthu Inscription dated Kollam Year 411 (21st April A.D. 1236) engraved on the Aalwar Temple at Manalikkarai of Kalkulam Taluk of Venadu (now in Kanyakumari District) informed that the Royal Order of Venadu Government as *Thirumukham*.^{ix} The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Poomukham*.^x This *Thirumukham* is in the model of English letter 'T'. The ground floor of this 'T' model building was used by the king or his deputy to welcome the important visitors and dignitaries to the palace. Moreover, this place was officially used by the higher officials to meet the King. The exquisite wood carvings with the images of horse riders on both sides of the entrance provides an architectural beauty to this structure. The ground floor of this 'T' model building facing eastern direction has three platforms such as Lower platform, Middle platform and Upper platform.

The Lower platform, popularly called as *Varandah*, has an architectural beauty due to its three-elevation structure of one in front side and other two parallel structure in the subordinate sides. The elevation in the front side has a length of thirty feet's and ten inches and width of six feet. On the other hand, the elevation in the two subordinate sides has a parallel length of fifteen feet and one inches and a width of five feet and eleven inches. This Lower platform totally has twenty-one pillars made of stone with a height of five feet and eleven inches each. The roof is made of wooden beam of beautiful architecture and covered with tiled roof. The floor of the building has three steps with the total height of two feet and seven inches from the ground.

The Middle platform has a front elevation with a length of nineteen feet and two inches and a width of fifteen feet and two inches noted for beautiful wooden carvings. This Middle platform totally has sixteen pillars made of stone with a height of eight feet two inches each. The ceiling is made of wooden beam with beautiful architecture of ninety wooden flower designs different to each other. Another special feature of this Middle platform is the 'Horseman oil-lamp' made of brass with fine decoration. This situated in the central part of the Middle platform in hanging position for lighting purpose in the night.

The Upper platform have a total length of twenty-three feet six inches and width of twelve feet two inches and divided into two separate platform by a pathway leading to back door of *Thirumukham* towards the *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence, presently called as *Thai Kottaram*. Each platform of Upper platform area of *Thirumukham* totally has five pillars made of stone with a height of six feet and seven inches in the front side and backside is covered with a wall. There is a cot made of stone, placed in one platform situated to the north-west corner of *Thirumukham*, famous for its nature of cooling. A throne of the King is placed in another platform situated to the south-west side of *Thirumukham*. The south-west corner side of *Thirumukham* has a stair-way leading to the *Arasavai* or Kings Court situated in the upper-story of *Thirumukham*.

ARASAVAI or KINGS COURT

The structure of *Arasavai* or Kings Court is in the model of English letter 'T' due to its position in the upper-story of *Thirumukham*. The Thiruvananthapuram Tamil Inscription No. 37 dated KE 957 (A.D. 1782) preserved at Museum mentioned the Tamil word 'Arasan' for king in English during the time of eighteenth-century A.D. So, the King of Venadu was called in the Tamil name of Arasan.^{xi} The Krishnankovil Tamil Inscription No. 31 dated KE 887 (A.D. 1711) mentioned the Tamil words 'Arasiyar Kaal'^{xii} of which the first one 'Arasiyar' is a feminine gender of the Tamil word 'Arasan'. Kaal means canal system for irrigation. So, during the time of 18th century A.D. also the Queen of Venadu was called in Tamil designation. The Tamil Inscription No. 39 (No. 5 of 1086) dated KE 1064 (A.D. 1889) tells the Tamil words 'Arasaalwaar Tharman'.^{xiii} From this it is clear that Venadu remained as a Tamil Kingdom during the eighteenth-century A.D. also. The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Mantrasala*.^{xiv}

We can divide the area of king's court into greater part and the front elevation of king's court as lesser part to understand the plinth area. The greater part has a length of fifty-four feet and eight inches from north to south direction and nineteen feet and ten inches width from east to west direction. The lesser part has a length of twenty-two feet and four inches and width of fourteen feet and ten inches. The walls of the king's court are supported by wooden pillars with beautiful carving and floriated corbels. The walls of the three sides contain wooden shelves with efficient locking system to keep the confidential files of the Government. The walls of the king's court contain wooden louvers to admit needful air and light which made the temperature always shady and cool. This court has dormer type windows and pieces of coloured mica are used on it to resist the heat into the chamber. The ceiling of the king's court is made of wood with models of lotus flower. The top of the roof is covered with tiles. The strong and polished floor of the king's court is made of a special combination of coal, lime, egg, coconut water and medicinal herbs. This beautiful king's court is adorned with ornamental throne of the King and ornamental chairs of the Ministers and Military Chiefs. The king used this court to discuss administrative functions with his Ministers and Military Chiefs and to prepare official orders. The north-western corner of the king's court contains a pathway which connected with the double storey Dining Hall in its north side to take food during official hours. The south-western corner of the king's court contains a pathway which connected with the Clock Tower in its southern side.

ARASA MAALIGAI or ROYAL RESIDENCE

The *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence also known as *Muthal Aranmanai* or Mother Palace, is the two storied building used as the Royal House. The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Thaikkottaram*.^{xv} It situated to the western side of *Thirumukham*. The western door of *Thirumukham* leads towards the *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence, presently called as *Thai Kottaram*.

The present structure of *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal House was constructed by then Venadu ruler and son of Umai Ammai alias 'Ammal Pandaram' named Shri Veera Ravi Ravivanmaraana Kulasekharapperumal. The Department of Archaeology of Govt. of Kerala stated through its publication named 'Padmanabhapuram Palace' informed that the Kalkuzham Palace was constructed in A.D. 1601^{xvi} during the time of the Venadu King Shri Veera Ravi Ravivanmaraana Kulasekharapperumal.

This *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence is a two storied oldest building with a mortar-less chiselled granite base, a timber superstructure, and a steeply sloping timber roof covered along with terracotta tiles which has a length of seventy feet and width of sixty-four feet. This *Arasa Maaligai* has an open *Varandah* built of finely carved wooden pillars decorated with specimens of indigenous style of wood carving.^{xvii} This building has a structure of traditional Venadu Tamil style of architecture known as 'Naalukettu' or Four Champer House i. e. an open courtyard at the centre of the house without roof known as *Nadumurram* surrounded by the rooms on all four sides. This *Nadumurram* or an open courtyard of *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence has a length of sixteen feet and eight inches and width of eleven feet and eight inches. This *Nadumurram* is surrounded by a *Varandah* with a length of twenty-six feet in two parallel sides and twenty-one feet in other two parallel sides along with four feet eight inches width in all four sides. The *Varandah* of *Nadumurram* has eight wall lamps for lighting mechanism in the night. The eastern *Varandah* of *Nadumurram* has a Secret Tunnel with the size of three feet seven inches and of two feet nine inches which historically served as an escape route connecting this Royal Residence with Eraniel Palace, Uthagiri Fort and former Charode Palace of Thiru Anantha Padmanabha Perumal Nadar. The rooms of this *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence which surrounded the *Nadumurram* have doors facing towards the *Nadumurram*.

The ground floor of *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence has a grant entrance in its north-eastern portion where an open courtyard with roof of eighteen feet one inch length and fourteen feet three inches width excluding the *Varandah*. The peculiarity of this open courtyard is an ornamental pillar made of Jack Tree wood. This courtyard has a self to keep the crown of the king. The roof of this courtyard made of wood also have an architectural beauty. Its floor is polished with red colour and still in good condition. The ground floor of *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence also has another entrance in its western side. This ground floor of *Arasa Maaligai* also has other rooms including one kitchen and a small dining hall. In addition to this, there is a well for water source and a pond for bathing. This ground floor of *Arasa Maaligai* has totally twelve doors and twenty windows.

The first floor of *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence also has an open courtyard with roof in the north-eastern side.

Moreover, the first floor has four bed rooms which are separated by wooden partitions. There is a stairway in the northern side of *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence to enter into the first floor from the ground floor. This first floor of *Arasa Maaligai* has totally three doors in outer side and nineteen windows.

KADIKAARA KOPURAM or THE CLOCK TOWER

One of the striking features of the Padmanabhapuram Palace is its *Kadikaara Kopuram* also known as Clock Tower covered with tiled roof situated to the southern side of Kings Court. The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Manimalika*.^{xviii} Moreover, there is a pathway which connected the Clock Tower with the south-western corner of the King's Court. The Clock Tower is a three storied structure and each floor has a length of fourteen feet and six inches and width of nine feet ten inches. The three floors of the Clock Tower contain the machines for the function of the clock. The second floor, the third story of the Clock Tower, contains a 'Spanish Clock' and a balcony with intricate filigree woodwork surrounds the clock, which has about 300 years old. This 'Spanish Clock' has a white colour dial or face with black colour Hour Markers in Roman Letters from I to XII along with Hour Hand and Minute Hand. The Hour Hand of this 'Spanish Clock' makes two revolutions in a day and the Minute Hand makes one revolution every hour. The motive force for the movement of Hour Hand, Minute Hand and 1.5-meter pendulum is derived from two heavy weights made up of disc shaped blocks of stone raised up every week and suspended from the escapement wheel by chains of about nine meters in length. The huge bell inside the Clock Tower produces a clear and loud sound which is heard by people within a radius of three kilometres.

PERIA UNAVARAI or GREAT DINING HALL

The *Peria Unavarai* or Great Dining Hall is a great building of Padmanabhapuram Palace situated to the adjacent north side of *Thirumukham* or King's Office, *Arasavai* or King's Court and *Arasa Maaligai* or Royal Residence. The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Uttupura*.^{xix} The special feature of the *Unavarai* or Dining Hall is for free feeding to palace servants, Government officials and army personals that were in government duty. This *Unavarai* or Grant Dining Hall is a two storied building of the ground and the first floor which has the capacity to accommodate thousand persons in each floor i. e. totally two thousand persons.

The Ground floor of this building has the inner length of two hundred and thirty-eight feet and eight inches, inner width of twenty-nine feet and two inches and inner height of seven feet and ten inches. The roof of the Ground floor has twenty wooden beams with a length of twenty-nine feet and two inches inside the hall. The Ground floor has three doors of which one in east side and the other two in south side. This Ground floor has thirteen windows but none in its northern wall. The northern wall of the Ground floor has ten wall lamps and its southern wall has eight wall lamps for lighting purpose. Presently, there are thirteen big Chinese Jars used for preserving pickles are exhibited in the Ground floor.^{xx}

The First floor of this building also has the inner length of two hundred and thirty-eight feet and eight inches and inner width of twenty-nine feet and two inches. The roof of the First floor also has twenty wooden beams with a length of twenty-nine feet and two inches inside the hall and covered with tiles. The First floor has five doors among this one connected the Watch Tower of front Entrance Fort, another connected King's Court and other three doors connected with open ground. This First floor has fifteen windows. This First floor totally has nineteen wall lamps for lighting purpose.

SARASWATHI TEMPLE

The Padmanabhapuram Palace has a temple in its inner campus adjoining to the Royal Residence known as Saraswathy Temple constructed by then Venadu King Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maarthandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar (A.D. 1729-1758) in A. D. 1744. This stone structure was built after demolishing a wooden structure which existed there before A. D. 1744. This Saraswathy Temple is constructed in Tamil style of architecture of sanctum and sanctorum followed by a grant hall before the sanctum and sanctorum. It is said that the famous Tamil Poet Kambar worshipped the image of Goddess Saraswathy of this Temple which shows the connection of this palace with Tamil culture. Every year this image is taken to Thiruvananthapuram for the Navarathri Festival and also return from the same through a ceremonial procession.^{xxi}

STONE MANDAPAM or NAVARATHRI MANDAPAM

The front side of the sanctum and sanctorum of Saraswathy Temple has a Stone Hall or *Mandapam* for regular cultural programmes including music, dance and other entertainments of the Temple which later popularly called as *Navarathri Mandapam*, a marvellously sculptured granite structures, was constructed by then Venadu King Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maarthandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar (A.D. 1729-1758) in A. D. 1744.^{xxii} The monolithic pillars of the Navarathri Mandapam create an illusion of space in a confined area. These monolithic pillars along with the cross beams supported the ceiling made with single piece granite. The figure of a woman holding a lamp with both is carved out from the same block of granite. The inverted floral ends of the capitals of all the pillars form a uniform pattern in the mandapam. The Tamil style of architecture of the Cholas like the Prakatheeswara Temple of Tanjore and

Cholapuram Temple in Kanyakumari were used to construct this mandapam.

The cultural programmes including music, dance and other entertainments were regularly conducted every year during the Navarathri Festival and so this Stone Hall is called as *Navarathri Mandapam*. The King and other Royal Members used wood screened chambers situated at the South East corner of the hall to see the performance in the mandapa.

PRAYER ROOM or HOMAPPURAI

Prayer Room, presently called as *Homappurai*, is another important one in Padmanabhapuram Palace. The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala named it as *Homappura*.^{xxiii} This is a single-storied building with a length of seventy-three feet and ten inches and width of twenty feet and nine inches. This Prayer Room has doors in all four directions and its eastern door is connected with western side of *Thirumukham*. This is used to perform religious offerings to Gods and Goddesses.

PERUMAL MALIGAI or UPPARIGAI MALIGAI or LORD'S PALACE

The *Perumal Maaligai* or Lord's Palace popularly called as *Upparigai Maligai* is famous for its beauty and architecture. The Tamil word *Upparigai* means 'upper storey' or 'balcony' in English with its root word *uppari* meaning 'heightening' or 'elevating'. The *Perumal Maaligai* or Lord's Palace is the highest building in Padmanabhapuram Palace and so it is called as *Upparigai Maligai*. Then Venadu King Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maartaandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar (A.D. 1729-1758) constructed this four-storey building in A.D. 1750.

All the four storeys of this *Perumal Maaligai* or Lord's Palace has a length of twenty-seven feet four inches and width of sixteen feet eight inches. As this building was constructed and used by Venadu King Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maartaandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar, the Ground floor was made as the Royal Treasury. The aforesaid king used the First floor as his bed room. He used to sleep on a special Royal wooden cot measuring a length of eight feet, width of four feet nine inches and height of seven feet made of wooden pieces of sixty-four medicinal plants. This Royal wooden cot is presently exhibited in the First floor. The Second floor has the structure of *Varandahs* on four sides of the room. The King used the Second floor for his personal use. The Third floor is the top-most room of the *Perumal Maaligai* with the structure of *Varandahs* in the model of balcony on all four sides of the room and so the whole building is popularly called as *Upparigai Maligai*.^{xxiv} This Third floor is also called as the *Mural Pagoda* due to the availability of forty-one Mural paintings belongs to the 15th and the 16th centuries A.D. such as the traditional mural artwork characteristic of Cheras, the Puranic lore of the stories from Ramayana and Mahabharatha and various scenes from Hindu mythology^{xxv} and secular themes including the coiffure styles of woman, ornamentation, dress and habits, etc. and all these directly or indirectly shed light on the political, social and religious conditions of the respective periods. This Third floor has a pair of oil lamps burning continuously from more than 250 years.^{xxvi}

ANTHAPURAM or LADY'S CHAMBER

The Tamil word *Anthapuram* means in English as 'living quarters reserved for women of the royal household.' The Padmanabhapuram Palace also has royal ladies Chamber or quarters in the name of *Anthapuram* with the model of English letter 'L'. There is a passage from the first floor of the *Upparigai Maligai* to the *Anthapuram*. This *Anthapuram* of Padmanabhapuram Palace has three rooms or chambers with beautifully carved doors.

Among the three rooms, the first room is a big one which has a length of fifty-six feet three inches and a width of fifteen feet. Polished Black colour is the nature of the floor of this chamber. The walls of the room are decorated with polished photos using the essence of various flowers, fruits and leaves. Two Belgium Mirrors are fitted on either end of the parallel wall of the room. These big mirrors have the height of seven feet six inches and width of four feet three inches. In addition to this, this main *Anthapuram* has two swinging cots made of wood which has a length of seven feet two inches and a width of three feet seven inches. These two swinging cots are suspended on iron ropes.

Among the three rooms, the next room or chamber has a length of fifteen feet five inches and width of ten feet five inches. The speciality of this room is its cot made of Rose wood with ivory designs and Bamboo thread and a length of seven feet, width of four feet two inches and a height of six feet four inches. This cot may be used by the Chief Queen. This room contains considerable number of windows worn out and restored with coloured mica and filled with semi-transparent shell.

AMBARI MUHAPPU or ROYAL HOWDAH

The word *Ambari* means in English as 'a chariot like structure on Elephants back for the purposes of war, ride, travel, etc.' The Tamil works *Vikrama Cholan Ula*^{xxvii} and *Kamba Ramayanam*^{xxviii} stated that the *Ambari* is a seated canopy with a height of at least ten feet on Royal Elephants back of the respective rulers. The southern side of Padmanabhapuram Palace has a structure like *Ambari* on the first floor of the building which has a length of nine feet and five inches with five windows along with two wood carved elephants at the bottom of the steps. The *Varandah* of the *Ambari Muhappu* has the length of fifteen feet five inches and width of ten feet ten inches. This look like an *Ambari* on the elephant back and the Venadu King used this place to view the training and movements of his army. So, it is called as *Ambari Muhappu*.

INDRAVILASAM MALIGAI or ROYAL GUEST HOUSE

The *Indravilasam Maligai* also known as Royal Guest House is in the end of a long corridor built by then Venadu King Thiruppaappoor Keezhpperoor Shri Veera Ravipaala Maarthandavarmaraaya Chiravaayi Mooththavar (A.D. 1729-1758) in 18th century A. D. for the purpose of the reception of foreign delegates.

The *Indravilasam Maligai* has two floors such as Ground floor and First floor. The Ground floor has six windows and one door. The northern side of Ground floor has twelve single pillars and six double pillars. The first floor has eight rooms. The big doors and windows of the *Indravilasam Maligai* admits plenty of air and light which helps the whole interior of the same shady and cool.^{xxix}

The author of the book ‘*A Voyage to the East Indies*’ named Fr. P. Paulino Bartolomeo, is reported to have stayed at Padmanabapuram Palace for a period of sixteen days from 23rd September 1783 as the guest of the then King Dharma Raja.^{xxx}

AYUTHASALAI or WEAPON ROOM

Ayuthasalai or *Ayuthapurai* or the palace of armoury is a building sans windows and all ornamentations where the weapons such as sword, a gold-hilted sword with a fine blade decorated with ornamental inlays, pistols, guns, spears, etc. are placed.

THERKKU ARANMANAI or THEKKEY KOTTARAM or SOUTHERN PALACE

The *Therkku Aranmanai* or *Tekke Kottaram*, also known as the Southern Palace, is the most visually striking old building is not within same compound but forms and intrinsic part of the Palace Complex, featuring intricately carved wooden pillars, doors, beams, and ceilings. There are three small buildings in one compound with the Tamil style of architecture known as *Naalukettu*.^{xxxi} This was followed by a *Thekkathu*, a place of common worship attached to the palace.

A noticeable feature of the ceilings is the genius displayed in lines of lotus flowers. In all of them, uniformity of style is maintained all through while variety is achieved in differences of ‘details from lotus to lotuses. A very special attraction is on the doors to the inner rooms. The lintels are the masterpieces of scroll work and skill full deep cutting. On the lower part of the lintels lizards are carved with an eye to both artistic design and natural realism. On one lintel, at each corner a lizard watches for what eve may turn up. On another in another house, the story may probably have been carried forward a stage in the artificer’s imagination in the same two lizards stalking a fly in the centre of the lower edge of the lintel, one from each side. The twelve-inch wooden bands around the walls, three feet from the ground and the carved supports of the ceiling timbers are masterpieces of craftsmanship. This unique structure also was built during the period of Marthanda Varma.

Wooden Carvings

The Padmanabhapuram Palace complex is a remarkable example of traditional timber architecture in South India, known for its unparalleled design, craftsmanship, and intricate motifs. While the site has experienced continuous construction in various styles from the A. D.1590’s to the early 1800’s, the architectural forms consistently reflect indigenous building techniques and showcase exceptional craftsmanship in wood. The architectural detailing, simple ambiance, intricate carvings, and remarkable murals at Padmanabhapuram showcase a cultural tradition that is at risk of fading due to modern advancements in building technology. Notable features of this regional style include intricately carved doors and pillars, arched wooden grills along the veranda, and exquisitely crafted brackets that support it. Prominent elements such as the large bay window, known as *Ambari Mukhappu*, are adorned with elaborately carved wooden figures highlighting the uniqueness of the palace. Other distinctive aspects include remnants of semi-transparent shell decorations on the windows, which have been restored with coloured mica, and the clock tower, which is mechanically regulated by weights. These features greatly contribute to the extraordinary character of the palace.

Traditional timber buildings hold a history of their construction and should not be viewed merely as isolated objects to be preserved. Instead, they serve as sources of inspiration and provide living evidence of sustainable building practices and material science developed by earlier generations. The Padmanabhapuram Palace Complex stands out as an exceptional example of the traditional architectural knowledge of Venadu, and it represents a remarkable manifestation of wood architecture worldwide.

Mural Paintings

Padmanabhapuram Palace showcases unique features and construction methods that utilize locally available materials, following the principles outlined in carpentry. This unique school of traditional timber architecture evolved from Hindu religious and astrological principles, establishing a series of canons specifically for the Venadu region. One notable structure within the palace is an outstanding example of mural art. While murals can be found in many temples and palaces throughout the state, dating from the 8th to the 18th century A. D., the murals at Padmanabhapuram are exceptional. The themes depicted in these murals are inspired by the Vaishnavite and Shaivite Puranas. Most of the mural paintings are located in the *Upparikai Malikai* of the palace. The main paintings include Anantha Padmanabha, Harihara, Ardhanareeshwara, Ganesha, Satha, Parvati Parinaya, Krishna and the Gopis, the Nataraja dance, Ananthasayana, and Subrahmanya. Influences from the

Vijayanagara Empire can also be seen in many of the murals. The legend of Krishna is depicted in Sri Krishna Karnamrutham and Krishnaleela. In addition to illustrating scenes and characters from Hindu mythology, there are also murals depicting secular themes that reflect the socio-political conditions, fashions, and customs of the times.

MUSEUM

The Department of Archaeology of the Government of Kerala constructed a Museum Block at the South-west corner of Padmanabhapuram Palace in A. D. 1962. Later, the old buildings such as the royal stable, guard room and old Division butchery were demolished and the foundations for a new structure was laid by Sri. R. Sankar, the then Chief Minister of Kerala on 17th July, 1964. It was redesigned in accordance with the style and structure of the old Palace Complex and was completed towards the close of 1993.

In 1993, the palace complex was redesigned in a more modern style and now contains numerous invaluable stone inscriptions, copper plate inscriptions, wooden and stone sculptures, weaponry, coins, paintings, and household objects related to the region's history and heritage. The museum features several preserved wooden sculptures, including Dwarapalaka, Rathi Devi, Saraswathi Devi, and Ladies with Veena. The Dwarapalaka, crafted from teak wood, was discovered in the Padmanabapuram locality in the 1700s. Rathi Devi is another wooden sculpture displayed in the museum that was also found locally during the 1700s. The wooden sculptures of Saraswathi Devi and Ladies with Veena were discovered in Padmanabhapuram during the 1600s. The Venadu Royal family was heavily influenced by their relatives of Chola and Pandyan cultures, while the impact of the Vijayanagara Empire became more pronounced during the 16th century. The Archaeological Museum of Padmanabhapuram Palace also contains copper plate inscriptions such as the Parthivapuram copper plate inscription of the Aay ruler Karunandakkan (857-880 A.D.), the Paliyam copper plate inscription of Vikramaditya Varaguna, Mampalli copper plate inscription, etc.

COINS

It was Marthandavarma who issued the Kaliyuga panam, which was a gold coin. He also minted the Velli Chakkaram. Balarama Varma issued the Arachakram, a silver coin, along with the Anantharayan Panam, which was a gold coin. The Lakshmi Vavarahan was issued by Rani Parvati Bhair; it was a silver coin valued at half a rupee. Swathi Thirunal issued copper coins as cash, marked with the symbol of a conch. Utram Thirunal Marthanda Varma also minted copper coins. Ayilyam Thirunal Ramavarma issued the silver Chakram, while Vishakham Thirunal Rama Varma issued the Vira Rayan Panam, a silver coin. Moolam Thirunal Ramavarma released a series of copper coins with values such as one cash, four cash, and eight cash. Additionally, Balarama Varma issued quarter-rupee and half-rupee silver coins.

Archaeological Survey of India Protected Monument

Padmanabhapuram Palace is a monument protected by law and managed by the Kerala Department of Archaeology. All aspects of the property's authenticity and integrity are well-maintained. This is further supported by the traditional building systems in Kerala, which facilitate building restoration. These practices align with the documented techniques of traditional woodwork architecture. As the oldest, largest, and best-preserved example of traditional wooden architecture in India, Padmanabhapuram Palace exemplifies a fusion of building techniques, exquisite craftsmanship, and advanced material science. It stands as a testament to traditional timber architecture, adhering closely to the traditional building code. This code provides detailed guidelines for every aspect of a structure, including its function, placement, orientation, size, design, and the layout of specific spaces within individual buildings.

2. CONCLUSION

Padmanabhapuram Palace is an exceedingly outstanding example of wood architecture of the South Asian region, which has no representation at all either on the World Heritage List or the Tentative Lists. The wood architecture displayed at Padmanabhapuram Palace is testimony of Venadu's unique traditional knowledge system that not only produced buildings pleasingly proportioned and in complete harmony with nature but also resulted in the creation of a well-defined style, unique to Kerala.

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