



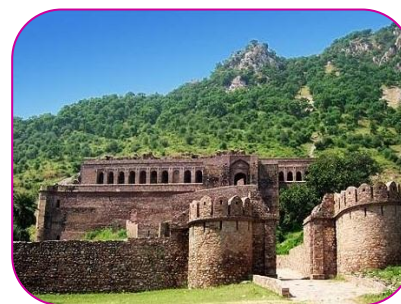
IMPORTANT FORTS OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT- A HISTORICAL ENQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari (also spelt as Kanniyakumari) district is bounded by Tirunelveli district in the north and northeast, by Kerala state in the northwest and confluence of Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean in the west and south.. It abounds with ancient monuments like forts and palaces. Important forts like Udayagiri fort and Vattakkottai are very popular among the local people and the tourists. Apart from these, there are many minor forts found in Kanyakumari District. Therefore, in this paper a historical survey has been made to explore the truths about the unknown forts of Kanyakumari District.



KEY WORDS: forts, palace, udayagiri kottai, vattakottai, padmanabhapuram palace. Poomugam.

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari (also spelt as Kanniyakumari) district is bounded by Tirunelveli district in the north and northeast, by Kerala state in the northwest and confluence of Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean in the west and south.. Kanniyakumari district, once known as "The Granary of Travancore" It abounds with ancient monuments like forts and palaces. Important forts like Udayagiri fort and Vattakkottai are very popular among the local people and the tourists. Apart from these, there are many minor forts found in Kanyakumari District. Therefore, in this paper a historical survey has been made to explore the truths about the unknown forts of Kanyakumari District.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyse the Historical importance of forts of Kanyakumari .
2. To evaluate the feature of forts.
3. To analyse the structure and legend of forts .
4. To study the present conditions of forts.

METHODOLOGY

.Methodology adopted in this work is combined of both descriptive and analytical method. It depends upon primary and secondary sources for data. Primary sources are planned to collect by conducting field visits. This documented information was integrated with historical and epigraphically data. Published literary works were used to understand historical background . The

information given in the present study primarily depends on the observations of the researcher from the field. Maps, plan and photographs are used to supplement the textual information. Observational method also adopted to identify the details of sculpture and paintings with their distinguishing features. Analytical method is used to study the earlier research works done on the subject and to incorporate necessary details in the present work.

Padmanabhapuram Fort

Padmanabhapuram lies about half a mile northwest of Udayagiri fort and on the southern road thirty-three miles from Trivandrum. It is surrounded by a square fortification about 2 1/2 miles in circumference. The area of the ground enclosed is about 186 acres. The fort was constructed to defend the palace and celebrated of Thiruneelakandar and Rasmuswami.

Genesis of the Fort

The padmanabhapuram fort has its origin even before the seventh century of Malabar era. The Mutaliyar Manuscript of Alakia Pandiapuram says that both Padmanabhapuram and Udayagiri fort were planned in 1776 M.E. (1601A.D.). Before 1600 A.D. these forts were in mud. A cadjan record in Malayalam also substantiates it. It says that a "palace with fort in mud and with trenches was built at Padmanabhapuram in Kollam era 776(1601A.D.). It took seven years for the completion of its work. However, the fort gained a definite power and structure under Maharaja Marthanda Varma. He reconstructed the old fort into a granite fort in 1745A.D."

Public contribution

A *nittu* found among the Mutaliyar manuscripts give clear evidences about the contribution given by the Nancinad people. They paid," access of the *panam* on every *ma* of land under cultivation." This amount was used for the "digging of moats (around the forts) the felling of poles and posts and the buying of palm- leaves for thatching the walls" this document, shows the spirit of independence and self-respect of the people of Nanjinad. Though they boldly rejected forced labour they were willing to pay *Nazir*. It was fixed one *panam* per *ma* of *perumpattu* and *sanketam* lands by which, they got their slaves servants exempted from personal service to Venad kings.

Efforts for its Improvement

Sri Vira Ravi Varma was the Venad ruler (1592-1609) when the fortification works started. The *nittu* relating to the contribution of the people of Nanjinad was issued by him in the month of Karthika 26, 776M.E. (26th Nove. 1601 A.D.). he was wise, easily accessible to his subjects and never ready to redress their grievances.

Kalkulam continued to be a place of considerable importance in the beginning of ninth century of Malabar Era. The Travancore King Maharaja Marthanda Varma and his successor Maharaja Rama Varma strengthened its position by the addition of fresh fortification to it. Thus Kalkulam become a fortified town in 765M.E.(1590). The Kalkulam fort was demolished and reconstructed as a quadrangular fort. It was remodeled on the plan submitted by Taikkattu Nambutiri, measuring north-south 220 Vs dandus. The construction began 'in the month of Chitira 915M.E.(April 1740). The fort was completed with granite walls and ramparts in Tai 919M.E. (1744). The mud walls were dismantled and reconstructed with granite by Maharaja Marthanda Varma and later he renamed the city into Padmanabhapuram. T.K. Vellu Pillai, however refuses to accept this truth. He accepts the role Nambutiri in the fortification of Kalkulam and Puliurkuruchi. But

argue that the works came to an end one year before the battle of Colachel i.e.1740A.D. he also neglects the part played by De Lannoy in the fortification works. However, his arguments are biased. In 1744 A.D. the Padmanabhapuram fort work was completed.

Structure of the Fort

The Padmanabhapuram fort is situated in fertile tract. It is a square fortification of stone defended by bastions in about 2 1/2 miles in circumference. There are four main bastions more or less square in shape and size. One of which runs out to detached hill. The height of the redoubt is 220 feet above ramparts of fort.

The height of the wall depends according to the inclination of the soil. It varies from 4.5 metres to 7.5 metres. The parapet is 0.90 meters high. The height and lowest elevations of the wall are 7.5 and 4.5 meters respectively. The wall for a length of 358.1 meters consists of laterite. The principal entrances into the fort are four. There are other smaller gates near the bastions. Each wall has one principal entrance.



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Udayagiri Fort:

the word Udayagiri is a combination of two words. udaya means 'east' and giri means 'Mountain' i.e. the Eastern Mountain from behind which the sun rises. Udayagiri was the principal arsenal of the Travancore Government, with a fine foundry, the only one it is believed in use in India for casting iron guns. Udayagiri fort is situated on the main south road ten miles to the Nagercoil and thirtythree miles from Trivandrum. The fort is at a distance of half mile from Padmanabhapuram .the fort contains the tomb of De Lannoy, the General.

The fort of 1601 A.D. received the affection of Maharaja Marthanda Varma. He demolished the old fort and gave new birth to it by constructing a granite walls with bastions. The board which stands in front of the ruined church states that. This fort was improved under De Lannoy's Supervision from 1741-1744.

Chavakottai (Cremation Fort)

On the way to Kumarakoil on a 200 foot height hillock lies the Cremation Fort. This fort is similar to Padmanabhapuram fort which is situated in an area of 1.4 acres. There is a single entrance. People of this area are called this fort as cannon fort.

This fort had been built to cremate the king or his family members. This fort was built by De Lannoy following the European system. There is no cremation ground till now for people who live inside the Padmanabhapuram fort.

Vengalarajan Fort

The fort was built with big walls in large dimensions. The inside doors and rooms were made by bronze. Hence, this fort was called as Vengalarajan Fort. (Bronze is called as Vengalam in Tamil)

Vengalarajan Fort was situated in an area of 25 acres, on the eastern seashore nearby Muhilankudiruppu, which is situated 10 kms away from Kanyakumari on the way to a fishing village called Manakudy.

As per the Karnaparampara story, Vengalarajan who built this fort was a Palmyra climber who had migrated from Eazham (Sri Lanka) to Kanyakumari area. He had two daughters named Sangumugathazhagi and Tiraimuhathazhagi and they were very beautiful.

Once an old man called as Mooligai Chithar came to his house and asked something to drink for his thirst. He was warmly welcomed and was given Palmyra juice for his thirst and provided food for his hungry. Being much pleased; the man took out a herbal tree he had secretly kept it and using it to changed all iron things into gold.

Vengalarajan learnt from this medicine than the secret of the gold herb and became a rich man. Then he built a fort in bronze. The fort's windows and doors were made of bronze. That is why the fort was called as the Vengalarajan Fort (the bronze fort). In a small clash with another rich man, the entire fort was demolished and both of his daughters were killed.

The fort history says that gold coins also were minted here for the use of local people. When the British Government exchanged 28.5 Chakaram (Rupees) for a rupee and Vengalarajan minted gold coins worth 28.5 rupees. So the angry English Government banned the gold coins minted by Vengalarajan. The English government arrested him and put into the jail.

The place where the Vengalarajan fort was situated is now shown as a playground. The foundation of the fort is still remaining. The remaining of the fort wall was completely destroyed by a tsunami in 2004. One small church is there near by the empty place. If the fort was saved by anyone in the past, now it will be another tourist spot like Vattakottai.

Udachikoitai (Uthachi Fort)

About 7 Kilometers from Marthandam, there is an important place called Kunnathoor. Here is the famous Odachikottai. It is a small stone fortification now in ruins, covering an area of five acres of land. Among the many forts of Kanyakumari District, Uthachi fort has some historical significance. Another significant fact about the fort is that it is situated near by Munchirai Mahadevar temple which is one among the 12 Shiva temples connected by Sivalaya. The fort lies opposite to the Mahadevar temple which is situated at Thirumalai, a hillock 6 kms south of Kuzhithurai in the taluk of Vilavancode. It is connected with the Nayaks of Madura.

An unconfirmed story connects Uthachi Fort with Thirumalai NaNayak of Madurai. Queen Uthachi of Madurai came to Munchirai as per the advice of her astrologer to stay in the Munchirai Mahadevar temple and pray to God to have a child since she had no issues. A palace was built in front of the temple for her worship and stay. The fort might have an area of 1 or 1 ½ acres. At the centre of the fort the Uthachi Palace was situated. The opening of the temple door and the worship in the temple could be seen from the palace itself. When Uthachi was staying here, she conceived even before the stipulated time. The king and the people of Madurai were joyfully celebrated it.

Queen Uthachi named the son as Thirumalai Nayak, as he was born by the grace of Thirumalai Mahadevar. Later, the boy became a famous king and ruled over Madurai efficiently. He invaded Nanjil Nadu in the Kollam year of 810. Because he wanted to bring his place of birth under his control. Thirumalai Nayak used to come to this temple often and donated 182 tolas (10 Tolas = 116

grams) of gold jewels. The kings who succeeded Thinunlai Nayak maintained close contact with Kanyakumari area. In the Kollam year of 839, Chockanatha Nayak of Madurai built a stone mandapa near Kanyakumari shore. Ammaiappan Nayak who succeeded him helped to build stone steps to the Thirupathisaram Thiruvazhimarban temple tank. The Uthachi fort that was historically important is no more now. Individuals have built houses and encroached the fort. The fort was not taken care of and today there is no trace of it

Eraniel Fort

Eraniel is a village in Kanyakumari District with an area of 4.172 sq. miles. Eraniel town is about 15 km away from Nagercoil in the Monday Market road and situated 5 km south of Thuckalay. In the past it was the seat of the royal family of Travancore before Padmanabhapuram became the chief town in South Travancore.

Eraniel was originally known as Iranyasinga-nallur or Nallur known to us by various historical records. The Ay dynasty was the earliest known ruling family of Eraniel region. Before the Venad Rulers the Ays had established their Hale in this region. In fact up to the beginning of 10th century A.D Ays were the dominant power in South Travancore and Venad was only a small principality. When Kothai Ravi Varma Chera Hala extended his sovereignty over South Travancore at that time the Ay rulers donated this land as Irayilee land (tax free land). Later on Ravi Varman who was the brave chieftain captured the place and built a palace called Kunchin Kottiyar Kottaram within this fort. Now the glorious palace is in ruined condition.

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