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KOTTAPPURAM MARKET

UNFADING GRANDEUR



KOTTAPPURAM MARKET - UNFADING GRANDEUR

Time has the ability to convert anything and everything into ever new forms. Nothing --be it art, culture, constructs or even human society—is exempt from this universal reality. While certain things change wholly, only the outer layer of change will be visible in the case of some other things. Kottappuram Market is one such. Although it has undergone changes over time, it still retains its inner strength solidly. The natural uniqueness of this market has been somewhat whittled away by the development and changes brought over by the hands of time. Yet, the extraordinarily intertwined veins of history and culture can be seen there vividly.

Kottappuram Market is a site where elements of the indigenous styles of Kerala and the exotic colours of foreign cultures blend harmoniously. Even now, one can see remnants of buildings rich in the beautiful forms of Kerala architecture, along with the enticing relics of Dutch and Portuguese architectural legacies. These streets would have witnessed many exchanges, bargaining, and business strategies over the centuries!

Kottappuram Market, founded formally in 1790 during the reign of King Rama Varma Saktan Thampuran of Kochi, was made use of mostly by the inhabitants of Kottappuram, N.Paravur, Kodungallur and Gothuruth. The market is situated in a site measuring about one and a half acres of land, with Vijayan Canal to the east, and the Kottappuram Backwaters to the south. Most of the trading conducted here was centred on small-time, ordinary goods. It was here that the bulk of the rice-trade of Kodungallur was done. Kottappuram was the centre of indigenous trading. It was the primary market for eggs,

chicken, ducks, coconut, cashew-nut, areca-nut etc. Snake-charmers, slaked lime-sellers, country circus troupes and cardsharps used to be inseparable aspects of this market.

Not long ago, people used to frequent this market using waterways to sell their products and buy items that they wanted. It was the trips of boats and rafts to and from the market that played an essential part in the commercial communication among the various centres in this region. Even before this market was formally founded, this site was an important centre of trading in foreign goods that came to the river port of Muziris since ancient times. There were two boat-jetties nearby, meant exclusively for this market area, proclaiming its importance. However, since the advent of the various bridges that spanned across the arms of the estuarine river-branches and backwaters, and the highway connecting N.Paravur, Kodungallur etc., the localised, small-scale businesses lost their relevance, and Kottappuram Market became a hub of wholesale trade.

The busiest market days in Kottappuram Market are Mondays and Thursdays. On those days, most of the business establishments in the market would be open and functioning, and people from different parts would jostle for space there.

Even as the business thrives in the market that comes alive with crowds and vehicles, it is fascinating to note that there is scope for further expansion. It is a fact that a significant number of the buildings of Kottappuram Market remain shut nowadays. Many of the buildings are lying out of use owing to their age. There are standing buildings here which are more than one hundred and fifty years old. Many have been demolished and new ones erected in their place. There are

many more which are lying unusable, and yet, are undemolished. Therefore, what motivates those passionate about reviving this market is that there is more potential for development and structural transformation here.

One of the main attractions of Kottappuram Market is the long row of buildings with slanting roofs. Along with the beauty of antiquity, the structures of this market enjoy the advantages of spaciousness as well. Although new buildings are coming up daily, many constructions reminiscent of the heydays of the market have survived. The speciality of the old buildings is that they have, along with the slanting roofs, long verandas, windows painted in variegated colours, doorjambs, door-shutters formed of single, upright separate planks, carved columns and other such features. Although various attempts at developing the market area without a farsighted plan have affected the inherent beauty of this market to a certain extent, the fact remains that the unseen cords of a rich heritage have bound the people of modern times too to this place.

The temporary sheds that are erected on the market days give a new expression to the energetic flow of activity there. In such sheds, vegetables, fruits, and dried fish are the goods that are traded. Those who sell baskets, coconut-shell-ladles and screw-pine mats too build such temporary sheds. The main buildings of the market are now used chiefly for the trading of groceries. As much as

40 tonnes of vegetables are sold a single day here. Each market day, 1000 gunny bagsful of sugar and fifteen truckloads of rice are sold. Besides, 40 tonnes of maida, three truckloads of onion and one truckload of molasses are sold in a day here.

COVID-19 crisis has affected Kottappuram Market too, where

Kottappuram Market from states like Tamilnadu and Maharashtra. Those states struggling in the firm grip of the pandemic has indeed injured the prospects of the market to a great extent. The trading of vegetables is now restricted to 10 AM, and that of groceries to 12 noon. This has dramatically affected the market in an adverse manner.

Old buildings and shops in the market have been renovated as part of the conservation efforts. The ancient cupola was rebuilt in the traditional way. Another significant development activity is the 'Portuguese' restaurant, which is arranged in three blocks. The amphitheatre built under the Muziris project and its cultural events attract tourists and locals alike.

Newly built shops have also been handed over to the Kodungalloor Municipality. It is being used to rehabilitate evacuated traders from the market as part of enhancements. The state government has expended more than Rs 6 crore for the development of the market and the waterfront area.

The streets of Kottappuram Market are to be returned to their grandeur of olden days. We need broad and lively streets here. Free access to vehicles should also be ensured along with this. Extensive parking facilities should be provided here.

If the Kottappuram Fort and the Kottappuram Watersports Festival are also connected to this general plan, it will pay rich dividends. Through the revival of the

Kottappuram Market, the aim should be that the most prominent trading hub will also be converted to the most famous tourist centre and even to the most significant heritage monument.



immense crowds gather on market days. The market days have shrunk from Mondays and Thursdays, to merely on Mondays. Goods reach



UNENDING LESSONS IN SURVIVAL

HANDICRAFTS



The course of the history of Old Kodungallur was rewritten by a deluge. The river port Muziris which the River Periyar ravaged changing its course, caused the eventual extinction of the traditionally mighty royal dynasty of the land. Once the international maritime traders forsook this port, its grandeur could not be matched by the port of Kochi that developed in its place in later centuries. Now those ancient memories are part of history.

After several centuries, in 2018 to be exact, another deluge nearly wiped off the remaining pulses of the old ways of life in the Muziris region—in North Paravur and Chendamangalam. But the land wrote a new chapter of survival, when the fame of the cottage industry of handloom fabrics at Chendamangalam, which was submerged in the slush of the deluge, was revived owing solely to the iconic acceptance that Chekkutty ragdolls garnered from all around. Thus, when the excellence of Chendamangalam handlooms was on the ascendance once again, disaster struck the in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic. But it is certain that a land, for which disasters and

surviving them have become a part of daily life, will certainly see the present crisis also through.

The Famed Handloom Industry of Chendamangalam

Among the handicrafts that survive in commercial importance from the heyday of Muziris and its hinterland, the pride of place is still held by the Chendamangalam Handloom industry. The deluge of 2018 had submerged 273 handloom units here. The industry resuscitated itself, holding on to the skirt-tail of the Chekkutty ragdolls.

It was the handlooms at Chendamangalam that wove the school uniforms the government supplied free of cost to the needy when schools reopened after the floods. In fact, the clothes for school uniforms have been woven here from 2016.

The looms were out of working condition for about a month after the floods. The several handloom co-operative societies also had to be shut down. The looms installed in the houses of four families were destroyed in the floods. The yarns and other raw materials kept ready for use in production were all rendered

useless due to waterlogging. But this land retrieved everything that was lost, thanks to the joint efforts of the government, the handloom cooperative societies and the workers.

The Muziris Project area abounds in many other handicrafts apart from handloom. One of the main objectives of the Muziris Project is to conserve and encourage these and other near-extinct cottage industries in this region. Through this, the revival of the local economy and employment generation in this region would become possible.

A Symbol of Survival

The Chekkutty ragdolls, which were born for the revival of the Chendamangalam handlooms, are a symbol of Kerala itself that emerged

surviving the deadly deluge. “Cheru” means “slush” and “kutty” means child—“Chekkutty” is “The child that survived the slush.” The unique concept behind its emergence was meant for the resurrection of Chendamangalam handlooms. Ms. Lakshmy and Gopinath from Kochi are behind the reaction of the Chekkutty ragdolls. They used the Chendamangalam handloom fabric items like sarees and mundus that were ruined in the slush left by the deluge, to create the dolls from, after washing and bleaching them. From a saree worth Rs.1500, they produced 250- to 360 Chekkutty dolls, and from a mundu, another 140. The doll was priced at Rs.25 per piece. Through their sale, several lives that had sunk in the floods, could be salvaged. Within a short period, orders to the tune of Rs.16 lakhs were received for the dolls.

beautiful of the concepts to give a hand and uplift the Chendamangalam region which got bogged down in the slush of the deluge, was that of the Chekkutty dolls. Perhaps, Chekkutty dolls had scripted the most creative chapter in the re-emergence of Kerala from the deluge.

The Chekkutty doll-making units that were set up in the streets of Kochi at that time have sprung up in all districts of the state, all over the country, and even in the United States, among the ex-pat Malayalee communities, thus creating history. Schools, Residents’ Associations, Neighbourhood Collectives, and volunteers came forward to produce Chekkutty dolls. The dolls were born in JNU Campus in Delhi, Infopark in Kochi, and even the Malayalee Community at Elizabeth Park, Fremont, California, USA. Thus, the post-deluge Kerala witnessed the developing of the loving saga of Chekkutty, “the Child in the Slush,” growing into an “International Kutty.”

The most

In the post-deluge Kerala, even as the demon of the pandemic COVID-19 is poised to swallow the world, the heroic tale of Chekkutty remains, inspiring hope for Chendamangalam Handlooms.

Chendamangalam Handlooms.

The Strength of Coir

North Paravur, a part of the Muziris region, was once famous for traditional crafts like coir-making, pottery, and agriculture. The government scheme to produce earth-retaining coir garments has given a fillip to the near-extinct coir sector. Although “Paravur Coir” is a speciality brand in Kerala’s coir market, the coir-production in this region has not progressed much as it should have



been, owing to the lack of infrastructural facilities. This has resulted in those coir-workers who have received specialised training in Paravur Coir production, leaving it and looking for other occupations. The basic coir-production unit along with the necessary machines would cost at least five lakhs rupees.

During the times when waterways was the main mode of transportation, it was from Moothakunnam jetty near here, that products like coir and screw-pine mat carried used to be transported in huge riceboats. Vadakkekara, north of N.Paravur, was one of the main coir production centres. After the deluge of 2018, artisans from the textile industry, including those from foreign countries, came here to visit the traditional coir-making, handloom, and khadi production centres. They inspected several rural units of handloom weaving, khadi weaving and coir-products around N. Paravur. Co-operative units which extract coir fibre directly from raw coconut husk (and not by employing the traditional method of decaying the husk submerged in water) and make coir using traditional methods are still active in this region. The sight of khadi cloth being woven, in looms powered by hands and feet and without the use of motors, is also a wondrous sight.

Pottery Unshattered

As quality clay used in pottery became unavailable, the pottery sector is in crisis in N. Paravur as elsewhere. Clay that was used in pottery used to be collected from fields that were excavated for mud to be used in brick-manufacturing. As extracting mud on a large scale for industrial

purposes such as brickmaking, and consequently the collection of clay, were stopped, the cottage industry of pottery came to a grinding halt. The clay for pottery is collected from the fields, removing a layer of mud twelve feet deep. As the Thanneerthadam (Amendment) Ordinance of the Government of Kerala, of 2018, was promulgated, this type of soil mining was also stopped. Yet, in the whole of Ernakulam district, it is in N. Paravur where whatever remains of the traditional pottery cottage industry can be found. In the coconut palm-toddy tapping sector which is very active now, the demand for toddy-pitchers made in a place called Valluvally near N.Paravur, is still very famous.

Survival of the Fittest

N. Paravur region provides the express illustration of the concept of "The Survival of the Fittest." When the waters of Periyar and Chalakkudippuzha had rushed over seven Panchayaths, agriculture, commerce and cottage industries like handlooms had been washed away. Yet, the people of this region had, without letting life also be submerged along with them, been rowing on towards the shores of hope. Naturally, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck recently and a lockdown was declared over a prolonged period in several phases, adversely affecting the economy of the State, it also changed the handicrafts and traditional cottage industries of the Muziris region. Yet, this land knows perfectly well that this is a temporary crisis, and that no virus can wreak so much havoc as a deluge can.



Book Review:

The deluge in the 14th century owing to the flooding of River Periyar had destroyed a trading headquarters that had the potential to become a source of permanent fortune to our state. It was with this cataclysmic event that the literal dilapidation of Muziris began. There are only tales of prosperity to be told, in the centuries before that. The glowing stories Kerala's trade-links with the Roman empire.

The nerve centre of the intense Indo-Roman trade that flourished between the 2nd century and 6th century CE was the port city of Muziris. There is no clear picture available now which describes the beginnings of this trade. However, a historical document that was discovered in 1985, Muziris Papyrus, records that the flourishing period of this trade was the 2nd century C.E.

The book *The Indo-Roman Pepper Trade and The Muziris Papyrus*, written by Federico De Romanis, comprises a detailed analysis of that historical document, and an authoritative study of the Roman economy and the history of trade and commerce in its context.

The Muziris Papyrus has two main parts. The first part is a loan agreement, related to advancing an amount of money for concluding a business deal in Muziris. It is the record of financial transactions between a financier based in Alexandria in Egypt and a merchant of Muziris. The second part deals with the commercial value of the merchandise brought to Muziris in a ship named *Hermopolen*.

Yet, *The Muziris Papyrus* is not merely an accounts register of commercial transactions. But it is a detailed record of the history of commerce in a particular era. Though the first few pages dealing with maritime commerce are lost, the pages that are left, dealing with the taxation systems of those days, systems of buying and selling, provide a priceless historical testimony revealing even details

THE INDO - ROMAN PEPPER TRADE AND THE MUZIRIS PAPYRUS

Author: Federico De Romanis | Published in 2020 | Oxford University Press

about making payments to the owners of camels used in transporting merchandise! This book also provides a clear orientation as to the Roman system of exacting customs on goods that were exported to the south of India.

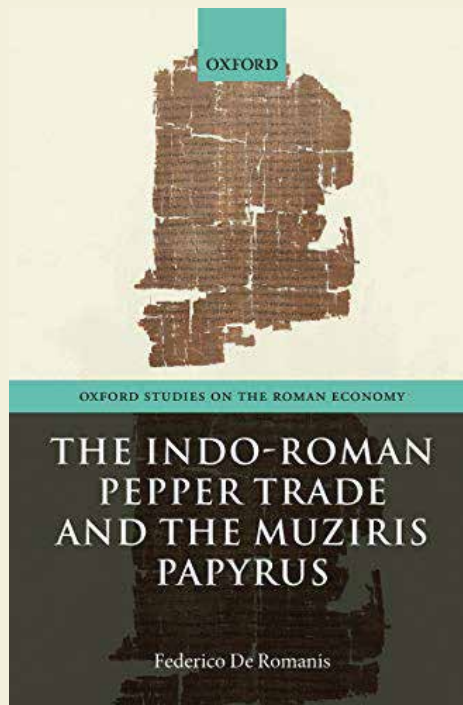
Perhaps because of the importance of the study of both parts of *The Muziris Papyrus* was lost on the concerned scholars initially, no

merchants to Muziris, and the financial and legal details of the loan agreement in connection with a deposit of money related to a business enterprise, also invite our attention to the industrial and commercial history of those times.

This study by Federico De Romanis throws new light on the economic policy followed by the Roman empire with regard to the south Indian trade zone. The structure and system of the economic activity of the stakeholders in the south Indian trade sector are discussed in detail in this study. It also explains about the role of private tax collectors in the commerce of those days.

This study sheds light on the Roman economy of the first two centuries of the Christian Era in two different ways. In the first, insight is gained through the balanced assessment of details and sources from south India. The second one formulates a farsighted perspective about south Indian pepper in the western markets, comparing the pepper trade in the ancient times, in the medieval period and the early modern times.

The Indo-Roman Pepper Trade and The Muziris Papyrus, which deals with the trade relations in the middle of the 2nd century CE, is a systematic analysis with scope for newer interpretations, and thus it becomes relevant to contemporary times as well. The descriptions of a prosperous commercial past and the records that deal in detail about the ways business was conducted in those days, will no doubt prove to be a presence that energises the formulation of our future economic policies.



serious research was conducted on this subject in the early days after the discovery of the document. What makes this great effort by Federico De Romanis unparalleled is his recognition of this record as an invaluable source that gives accurate details about the trade relations that existed between the Roman empire and south India during that period. Among this, the knowledge that is imparted regarding the trade-related voyages of Roman



MUZIRIS -MIYAWAKI FOREST CULTIVATION

Miyawaki Forest or crowd foresting is a natural forestry project developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki. As part of the Muziris Heritage Project, a similar initiative has been launched in Kerala too. One of the first projects was in the twenty cents of land near the sea and the backwaters at Munakkal beach, Azhikkode. Three thousand two hundred fifty tree saplings, belonging to hundreds of varieties including karuka, tamarind, mango, berries, and aryaveppu etc. were planted. In three years, the place will be transformed into a natural forest. Ten such schemes are envisaged in Kerala.

This method allows for planting more numbers of trees in small spaces. The method is different from the ordinary planting methods. A pit has to be dug, and its dimensions depend on the available space. Before digging the pit, the list of tree species should be chosen judiciously. As there is very little space to work around with, trees with varying heights should be selected. Fill it with one layer of compost, followed by a layer of natural waste such as bagasse and coconut shells and then top it with a layer of red soil.

Rs. 3.5 lacs has been allotted for The Miyawaki Forest Project in Munakkal. Three-year long maintenance arrangements have also been made.

A fifteen year old Miyawaki forest is equal to a hundred year old natural forest. Only trees that grow naturally in each area are used and, they are replanted after three months.

The launching ceremony of the Miyawaki Forest Project in Munakkal Beach was attended by ET Tyson Master MLA, Panchayat President Prasadini Mohanan, District Panchayat member Noushad Kaithavapilipi and Muziris Heritage Project MD PM Noushad.



ENVIRONMENT DAY



May 27th to June 8th Short Term Training Programme in Tour Guiding and Escorting for guides in MPL

- Pre historic and Megalithic culture of Kerala by Ms Jane Peter, Asst Prof. UC College Aluva
- Early Historic period of Kerala by Mr. C Adarsh, Asst. Prof. Vimala College Thrissur, Online Class by Mr. Dineshan, Kerala Council of Historical Research (KCHR)
- Medieval Period of Kerala by Dr. Alex George, HOD Dept. of History Christ College, Iringalakkuda, Dr. Midhun C Sekhar, Museum Manager, Muziris Project Ltd
- European Colonization and Basics of Archaeology - Various Fort by Ms. Reema M S, Research Assistant, Muziris Project Ltd
- Principles and Methods of Tourism by Mr. Robin C Koshy, Asst. Prof. MES Asmabi College, Vemballore,
- Topic on Renaissance Leaders by Mr. Koduvazhanga Balakrishnan, Rtd Teacher and Writer

ENVIRONMENT DAY

- 'Ente maram', an initiative from Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat on the occasion of World Environment Day, was inaugurated by Shri P M Nowshad, MD, Muziris Heritage Project. Grama Panchayat President Adv. T G Anoop, Vice President Smt. Nita Stalin, Development Standing Committee Chairman Shri A M Ismail, Muziris Project Marketing Manager Shri Ibrahim Zabin, Muziris Project Museum Manager KB Nimmy, among others participated.
- On the occasion of World Environment Day, and in connection with the 'Clean Muziris Green Muziris' campaign, Shri P M Nowshad, MD, Muziris Heritage Project, planted trees at the Kottappuram Muziris waterfront. Shri Ibrahim Zabin, Marketing Manager, Muziris Heritage Project, Kottappuram Muziris boat jetty manager Smt Sajna Vasanthraj, Muziris staff and others participated.
- As part of observing World Environment Day, Shri P M Nowshad, MD, Muziris Heritage Project planted trees for a greener tomorrow, at the Cheraman Parambu Muziris Activity Center. Kodungallur Municipal Councilor Shri Johnyuttan also participated. Shri Nowshad also distributed saplings to the locals, 'Kudumbasree' and NREG workers who were present on the occasion.
- Globally, World Environment Day offers a platform for inspiring positive change. Various activities were organised as part of this. 'Aaranyatheeram' project organised jointly by Muziris Heritage Project and 'Kaavu', Kottappuram, at the Azhikkode Muziris Munakkal beach was inaugurated by Shri E T Tyson Master MLA. P M Nowshad, MD, Muziris Heritage Project, Prasadini Mohan, Eriyad Panchayat President, ward member P M Abdulla, 'Kaavu' President Abdul Gani, and many others participated.