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KOTTAPURAM FORT

A SITE OF BATTLES FOR CONTROL



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One of the basic features of the modern Indian history is the colonial experience it went through. The gateway for colonisers who arrived crossing the seas happened to be in Kerala. Here in Kodungallur, there remains one of the memorials of the colonial presence and subsequent competition that the Portuguese initiated—the Kottappuram Fort. Like many other memories of colonial times, this fort too is dilapidated. But there are ruins, which offer invaluable lessons in history for us and future generations.

The memories to be preserved are not only that of a glowing heritage but also of lessons of setbacks, which are meant as warnings for the future. These also certainly form pages of history that influence our culture. Deeper knowledge about the history and supporting evidence can be gained from there.

From the 15th century, the Zamorin of Kozhikode claimed to have obtained control of Kodungallur. He is said to have given all kinds of support to the merchants there. It was towards the end of this century that the Portuguese cast an eye over this locality. It was also by this turn of events, that a decisive change was brought about in the commercial equilibrium of this region. The Portuguese built a fort here in 1503, braving the stiff opposition of the Zamorin. The main building materials of the fort were mud and timber. This was the first version of the Kottappuram Fort. There were two more forts like this one along the coast—the Immanuel Fort built also in 1503, and the Pallippuram Fort, built in 1507. All three were the prime

symbols of the Portuguese domination of the Kochi region.

By the end of the same year that the Pallippuram Fort was built, a major division of the Portuguese army returned to their country. Taking advantage of this situation, the Zamorin attacked this fort and captured it. The remaining Portuguese soldiers fled to Vypeen. The Zamorin had been lured by the strategic location of the fort on the bank of the river Periyar, to be utilised for his future invasion of the kingdom of Kochi. But the Portuguese army that returned the next year recaptured the fort. The Zamorin's forces were unable to withstand the fusillade of salvos from the cannons on board the Portuguese battleships that sailed up the Periyar from the Arabian sea. From this time on till 1535, further development of the fort progressed under different Portuguese Governors General. This fort which the Portuguese named "San Thome Fort," was known later on as "Cranganore Fort" or "Kodungallur Fort", indicating the place where it was built, Cranganore being the European connection of the place name "Kodungallur". The exact location where the fort stood came to be known as Kottappuram ("Outside of the Fort"), and eventually, the fort came to be known as "Kottappuram Fort".

The Kottappuram Fort is built, on an elevated place. It has been strategically designed to withstand attacks from the sea or from the land. There were fortifications, and batteries inside the fort. From this fort, one can clearly see the localities of Thuruthippuram, Gothuruthu and Kottayil Kovilakam across the waters. This is the strategic reason why the Portuguese chose this vantage point to build the

fort. A Malayalam poem titled “Padappaattu”(Battle Song) and a Sanskrit poetic work titled Bhramarasandesam mention Kottappuram Fort.

The Dutch captured this fort from the Portuguese in the year 1662. The Dutch breached the fort with cannon fire, and their naval forces entered the fort through the breach and attacked the Portuguese. There are references to Paaliyaththu Acchan, the Prime Minister of the King of Kochi, changing sides, supporting the Dutch, and showing the attacking forces easy access to the fort. The Dutch forces which were wavering in front of the withering cannon fire from the defending Portuguese till that moment soon captured the strategic locations within the fort. While a considerable section of the Portuguese forces escaped through the sea, the rest of them and the Nair soldiers of the King of Kochi were slaughtered within the fort. The Dutch reduced the size of the fort but refurbished it for their use.

Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma, the king of Travancore, forced the Dutch to sell the fort to him. Raja Kesava Das, the Travancore Dalava, procured the fort along with the cannons and gunpowder, on behalf of his king.

Tippu Sultan, during his southern campaigns, attacked the fort in 1790, and caused it damages for about a kilometre, and finally captured it. That was how the Kottappuram Fort had to face a major destructive force for the second time, the first being the Dutch invasion. Tippu and his forces were bent on attacking Travancore; but had to change their plans and rush back to Srirangapatnam, their capital which was under the threat of invasion by the British. Even as they retreated, they attacked the Kottappuram Fort further and caused extensive damage to it, besides looting it. With this, the destruction of the fort was almost complete.

Although the fort was destroyed, the place name “Kottappuram” which was obtained from the presence of the said fort, survived. Kottappuram Fort, which

is one of the earliest European constructions in India, is now a protected monument under the Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala. The renovation and maintenance work, alongside archaeological excavations which began in 2009, are continuing now. Remains of the fort during the Portuguese and Dutch periods were discovered in these excavations. Along with these, archaeological relics of the medieval period have also been found.

As part of the Muziris Heritage Project, many activities of development of the area have been undertaken. These include the construction of a boat jetty, the development of basic infrastructure like the repair and maintenance of the road leading to the fort, protecting the riverbank with granite retaining walls, construction of handrails along the pathway, construction of walkways within the fort area etc., were carried out. A roof has been built over trenches where archaeological excavations were carried out. As part of the beautification of the premises, a lawn has been developed within the fort. This monument taken over for preservation under the Muziris Heritage Project has now been opened for visitors.





Revolt through Poetry

Poets turn mutinous sometimes. Poetry, romanticism and communism are traditional allies. P. Bhaskaran was the rushing stream of poetry that flowed unstoppably in such a direction. A poet who rebelled and romanced through his poetry. He presented to Malayalam, poems as immortal as mutinies.

Even during his student days, P. Bhaskaran was connected to progressive movements. Maharajas College, Ernakulam, where he had his higher studies, became fertile soil for progressive ideas. He had courted incarceration by taking part in the Quit India Movement of 1942. It was after this phase that he began his journey along the avenue of communism. Even as a student, he led a 'typical' political life, complete with living underground, imprisonment and all. P. Bhaskaran was the General Secretary of a students' organisation named All Cochin Students' Association. Even in those days, poetry for him, was a potent weapon for rebellion.

P. Bhaskaran wrote poetry about the agricultural labourers who resisted, with Vaarikkuntam, the crude arecanut-rafter-spears, the Travancore army and its guns sent by Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer:

I will rise and spread all over the land,

Giving it a new life, I will rise again.

I will rise all over the land, rise and still rise I will

Vayalar roars; be ashamed, O pen

That failed to depict the valour

exhibited there.

In those smouldering ashes there,
At least stir with your pen

O the chronicler of the land!

When P.Bhaskaran wrote the poem “Vayalar Roars”, about the Vayalar Rebellion, from which the above quote is culled, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer banned the collection with the eponymous title, which had so provoked him. Leaving behind him such an active political life, he boarded the train to Madras. His next field of action which commenced there, was a monthly publication titled, Jayakeralam.

P.Bhaskaran was born in the historical land of Kodungallur, to Nandilath Padmanabha Menon and Ammalu Amma, on 21st April 1924, as the sixth of their nine offspring. He had his primary education in the Sringapuram School at Kodungallur. He began writing poetry while still in Class Seven. Whatever he wrote was filled with vignettes of his locality which was flooded twice a year, and, the backwaters and the sea which were the features of his land. The open-minded outlook of the people of Kodungallur and its tradition of secularism, were reflected not only in his poems, but in his film lyrics as well:

To set free the human mind

Fling open the unopened doors

Pull down all those walls that

Are a hindrance on the path of human thought.

Man planted the flag of victory atop

The crest of high thought;

It is man who plants a poison tree

In the forest of honey-flowers of the sky,
as well.

(From the lyrics of the film,

Thurakkaaththa Vaathil- Unopened Door-1970, Music by K.Raghavan, sung by K.J.Yesudas)

He brought out his first volume of poems at the age of twenty. Orkkuka Vallappozhum (Remember Me Sometimes), Ottakkambiyulla Thamburu(Tanpura with a Single String), Osyaththu,(The Bequest), Paadum Mantharikal(The Singing Grains of Sand), Odakkuzhalum Laathiyum(The Flute and the Lathi) are his famous works.

Ottakkambiyulla Thamburu won the Odakkuzhal Award in 1981, and the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1982.

From being a poet to becoming a writer of film lyrics was a natural evolution for P. Bhaskaran. He created a new musical path for Kerala, by incorporating music and lines from folk songs in his film and drama lyrics. Baskaran Master who was different from his contemporaries who followed the Sanskrit tradition, and he drew energy from the songs of the agricultural labourers and the songs of the Mappila Muslims. Critics opine that romanticism has always been portrayed by him as simply as possible. It was at a time when the newly founded literary branch of Malayalam film lyrics was filled with a surfeit of Sanskrit influence and mimicking of songs from other languages that Bhaskaran Master had succeeded in bringing in such a simple song tradition. Renowned film lyricist and poet Yusufali Kecheri has famously stated that “If Tunchat Ezhuttachchan is the Father of the Malayalam Language, P.Bhaskaran is the Father of Malayalam Film Songs.”

Apart from being a film lyricist, he left the stamp of his personality in the film field as a director and actor too. The film he and Ramu Karyat jointly directed in 1954, Neelakkuyil,(The Blue Koel) had re-shaped the Malayalam aesthetic sensibility. Its place in the history of Malayalam cinema is as the work that ushered in Social Realism. The national award for cinema came to Malayalam in the form of the President’s Silver Medal, which this film had bagged. Within two years, P.Bhaskaran’s own first directorial venture bore fruit—the film Rarichan Enna Powran(Citizen Rarichan). The P. Bhaskaran films that came following it, Iruttinte Aatmaavu(1964) and Thurakkaaththa Vaathil(1971), won national awards in various categories. He directed a number of documentaries, including the award-winning Vallatthol.

It was through his films, including in Neelakkuyil, that Malayalees recognised P.Bhaskaran, the actor. His role in the film Manoradham(The Chariot of the Mind-1978) was also a noted one.

P.Bhaskaran, who questioned social inequalities and discrimination through his films, was also the flag-bearer of secularism. He used to say that such secular ethos was instilled in him through the experiences of his childhood in Kodungallur—a gift of the childhood when, if one was asked whether you are a Hindu or Muslim, one would respond, “I am a Kodungallur-native.” This is precisely why P. Bhaskaran remains at the top of the list of those who wear the glorious legacy of Kodungallur.





Kathakili

that Tells Stories

A green parrot with a ruby beak, wearing a double uttareeyam around its neck, like a Kathakali character. A parrot-doll which at first sight resembles a 'katthi' character of Kathakali. ("Katha" means story, and "Kili" means a parrot. The word also sounds like 'Kathakali,' the traditional performance art form of Kerala.) It will be fascinating to listen to a parrot narrating a story. This parrot-doll also will tell stories—stories of Kerala, interesting stories that even Malayalees have not heard yet. Lakshmi Menon, the creator of Chekkutti dolls, is narrating stories of Kerala through "Kathakili", following the tradition of Kilippaattu (the literary technique of making the parrot do the narration.)

Kathakili and Mini Stories

Along with each Kathakili episode, there will be a mini story. Stories will be related to audiences of all age-levels, making everyone captivated. Kathakili has been designed to represent Kerala in the Karuna Doll Series. Different types of dolls have been designed for each States. The journey of Karuna Dolls began during Onam.



Malayalees have been introduced to the Itihasas and puranas through the childlike lisp of the parrot(like Thunchatt Ezhuttachan did, adopting the literary technique of making the parrot the opening narrator of his epic works based on Itihasas—works like Ramayanam Kilippaattu, Bharatam Kilippaattu etc). Also, other medieval Malayalam literary works following



the Kilippaattu tradition, enriched literature. In Kathakili too, the parrot becomes the chief character, following the mode in the great Kilippaattu works. We all know about the ability of the parrot to imitate human speech. Kathakili and its story narration have been designed in such a way that a parrot is presented as narrating to us the various sights of all parts of Kerala where the parrot has flown around. Since the parrot is a part of nature, the essentiality of the concept of nature preservation is inherent in the motif of the bird itself.

The Sky-views of the Parrot

Now the story-telling parrot of the programme is known in Kerala as “Kathakili Aashaan”, or Kathakili Teacher. A teacher who can impart knowledge about Kerala through different points of view. The reality is that many Malayalees have no clue about the many and varied riches of Kerala. Information on such matters can be shared by everyone through Kathakili. This is how it works: Bits of such stories would be sent to the designated WhatsApp number. Exciting stories from such messages will be shared through a Facebook group. There is a Facebook page, titled “Kathakili” for this purpose.

Kathakili and Kathakali Come Together

Anyone who hears the name of our State, “Keralam” the image that comes to mind instantly is a Kathakali face, an artifact in sandal wood, rosewood or Plaster of Paris. No other performing art form can represent Malayalam and Malayalee, the way Kathakali can. This is the reason why a Kathakali character (vesham) was assigned for Kathakili. The costume and the uttareeyam of the vesham have been made from handloom fabric.

Rubber fingerguards worn while cutting vegetables, are used to give shape to the Kathakili character that reaches the audience, wearing an uttareeyam like a Kathakali character. Many things like our rich narrative traditions, music, sartorial peculiarities, and others can be presented through Kathakili.

Restoration of the Mala Synagogue and the protection of the Cemetery perimeter wall



VR Sunil Kumar MLA inaugurated the construction work of the restoration of the Mala Synagogue and the protection of the cemetery perimeter wall included in the Muziris Heritage Project. Mr PM Nowshad, Managing Director, Muziris Heritage Project, welcomed the gathering, which was presided over by Ms Sobha Subhash, President, Mala Grama Panchayat. Grama Panchayat Vice President Smt. Gauri Damodaran, Block Panchayat Member Adv. Sona Karim. Muziris Heritage Project Marketing Manager Ibrahim Sabin delivered the thank you note.

Pallippuram Boat Jetty Inauguration



Pallippuram Boat Jetty was inaugurated by S Sharma MLA. Pallippuram Panchayat President PK Radhakrishnan presided over the function. Muziris Heritage Project MD, PM Nowshad welcomed the gathering. Block Panchayat President K. K Joshi, Ward Member Mary Shine and MK Joseph were present.

Thiruvanjikulam Boat Jetty Inauguration



Thiruvanchikulam Boat Jetty was inaugurated on August 18, 2020 by Hon'ble MLA VR Sunilkumar. Kodungallur Municipal Chairman Shri KR Jaithan presided over the function. Muziris Heritage Project MD, PM Nowshad welcomed the gathering. Councilor Sheela Rajkamal & Muziris Heritage Project Marketing Manager Ibrahim Zabin were also present.

Logo unveiling of Alappuzha Heritage Project



The logo of the Alappuzha Heritage Project was unveiled by Kerala Finance Minister Dr TM Thomas Isaac. Alappuzha District Collector A Alexander IAS presided over the function. Mr PM Nowshad, Managing Director, Muziris Projects Ltd., welcomed the audience and Shri. TG Abhilash thanked the gathering.

The logo of the Alappuzha Heritage Project was designed by Shri. M R Abhishek. His father Shri Ramakrishnan received the first prize of Rs 1 lakh for MR Abhishek. The winners were selected from the logos received following the advertisement inviting logos for the Alappuzha Heritage Project. The second prize winner Mrs Tapti Priyanka received Rs. 25,000 and the third prize winner Mrs Akhil KV received Rs. 10,000.

Green Muziris Clean Muziris



About 50 tree saplings were planted as part of the Green Muziris Clean Muziris greening program of the Muziris Muziris Heritage Project. Planting was done on both sides of the road from Kottapuram Cheraman Parambu to Keezhathali junction. Speaking at the inauguration, PM Nowshad, Managing Director, Muziris Heritage Project, said that so far about 7,500 saplings have been planted in various parts of the project area. Muziris Projects Museum Manager Sajjana Vasantharaj welcomed the gathering.

Independence Day



ISHCK Director Prof. at the Muziris International Research and Convention Center in Pullut, Keshavan hoisted the National flag. Muziris Projects Ltd Finance Manager Sony Roy were also present.