

Historical Significance of Muziris Heritage Project of Kerala

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Abstract

Muziris, somewhere around modern Kodungalloor in Kerala, was an ancient thriving port that finds mention in Sangam literature as well as Greek, Roman, Arab travelogues. Kodungalloor in little Kerala still holds a kind of beauty that reflects the history and culture. Archaeological excavations are now unearthing the history and tradition, which slept in the bosom of the earth for two thousand years - a historical treasure that is finally getting unearthed. The market places bounded by backwaters and canals take us on a sail back in time to the history and architectural treasures of the past. Muziris welcomes you to the cape of cultural foot prints left by travellers from around the world - waves of Azhikode where Christianity first entered India, the Cheraman mosque which gave out the first Muslim call for prayers in India, the Jewish synagogue that predates advent of Christianity in symphony with the Kodungalloor Bhagavathy temple, the villages where handlooms spin traditional attire, the Palium palace along the old waterways that once led visitors to Muziris. To rediscover and reinstate the historical and cultural significance of the legendary port, Government of Kerala has initiated the Muziris Heritage Project (MHP).

Key Words: Heritage, Joint Family, Muziris, Nalukettu, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

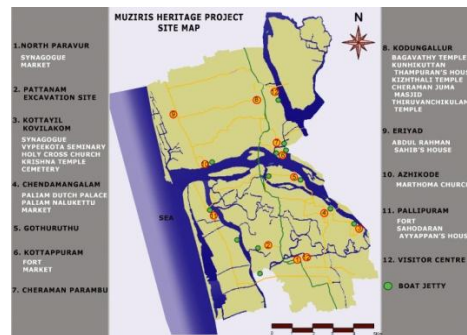
The Muziris Heritage Project of Kerala is a unique kind of project, because it aims at capturing the history of a region and bringing it back to life for the benefit of the present generation - to give them a firsthand experience of the region's past. The project is research-oriented and educational in its goals. Historical records have made it clear to us that the Parur- Kodungalloor regions had a great past- a past that is worth reviving for the sake of future generations. Seven panchayats and two municipalities have thrown themselves into the project because of its historical and archaeological importance. The Jewish culture that flourished in the region during the period in focus is being probed into and studied in detail. Several organisations work in collaboration with the Department of Tourism here. Research students find plenty of matter to work on. It is hoped that a future is within sight when the past of the Muziris region has come back to the limelight.

“In 1341, the profile of the water bodies in the Periyar River basin, on the Malabar Coast in Kerala underwent a major transformation. The prosperous city-port of Muziris, at the mouth of the Periyar overlooking the Arabian Sea, suddenly dropped off the map, due to a landslide or earthquake, or both. Muziris was silted over and its site was left to conjecture. The excavations by the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR), in 2007 & 2008 unearthed valuable information that threw light on its location and more. The archaeological and historical data gathering on 'Muziris' since then, provides further evidence to show that it was a veritable business and cultural centre, with far reaching international associations. It is found that, through the Muziris trade channels, the people of South India were afforded connections and opportunities with many civilizations in Western Asia, the Near East, Europe and further. This excavation project has proved to be a turning point, as the wealth of information now available is not only on the port, but also on its hinterland, the whole Periyar Basin, and the historic towns of Kodungalloor, Pattanam and Paravur. Muziris was an active port in the 1st century BC, though it is still not known when the city-port was established. The merchants of Muziris had instituted Indo-Greek and Indo-Roman-Egyptian trade channels, dealing in gold and other metals, pepper and spices, gemstones and textiles. From the 1st century onwards, they traded with Jews, Arabs, Portuguese, Dutch, Chinese, British, and many other travellers. The monuments from the Muziris era speak volumes. However, these monuments are today in a dilapidated condition and are hardly attractive to tourists, whether foreign or local. As our industrial consumer society developed, during the last four decades, it has done severe damage to our natural and built environment”¹.

General Description of the MHP Area

¹ Narrated with the help of Muziris Heritage Project reports and other related papers

The proposed study area of MHP conservation area extends itself to two municipalities of Kerala State of India in two districts one in Ernakulam ie. North Paravur Municipality and the other in Trissur district ie., Kodungallur Municipality and seven Panchayats spread over two districts ie., Chendamangalam, Chittattukara, Vadakkekara and Pallippuram of Ernakulam district and Eriyad (Azhikode), Sreenarayanapuram and Mathilakam of Trissur District.



MUZIRIS HERITAGE PROJECT SITE MAP

Muziris holds the key to a good chunk of Kerala's ancient history. Accidental and by chance unearthing of certain artifacts of past heritage compelled the professionals to go for MHP. Many artifacts of interest have been unearthed at various sites in North Paravur-Kodungalloor region of Kerala, through excavations as part of the Muziris Heritage Project. Utensils, clothes, coins, agricultural tools and inscriptions on plates or papyrus, along with folklore, tell us about the lives of the people of that time. Muziris has the distinction of having yielded a complete human skeleton for the first time in India, from the Kottappuram fort area. Other items excavated here include Chinese coins, Chinese inscriptions, and pieces of decorated porcelain, West Arabian pottery pieces, iron nails, bullets, stone beads, 17th century Dutch coins and tiles. These will eventually go into the museums to be set up. Other parts of the Muziris Heritage Project that awaits the excavation are Cheraman Parambu, Kottayil Kovilakom, Pallipuram Fort among others. Muziris is reputed to be the ancient world's greatest trading centre in the East. As the focal point of commerce for over 2500 years, this bustling seaport traded in everything from spices to precious stones with the Greeks, Romans and the rest of the world. It was also the doorway to India for varied cultures and races: Buddhists, Arabs, Chinese, Jews, Romans, Portuguese, Dutch and even the British.

Extensive Excavations at the Pattanam Archaeological Site



Photograph1-PattanamExcavationSite

The Pattanam Archaeological site is a prominent location in the Muziris Heritage Project. Pattanam is about one-and-a-half kilometers from Kodungalloor on the North Parur route in Kerala. At Pattanam, the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) has undertaken a massive research project. The Pattanam excavation is the first ever multi-disciplinary excavation undertaken by the Government of Kerala. The first part of the project was a surface survey for archaeological and historical evidence in the region, which was followed by extensive excavations at the early historic site. The main objective of the excavations was to identify an early historic urban settlement and the ancient Indo-Roman port of Muziris on the Malabar Coast. The structures unearthed indicate a vast urban settlement. They suggest that the site was first occupied by the indigenous Iron Age people.

A large number of objects of Roman origin have been unearthed from the site. This serves as evidence to the extensive maritime contacts of this region during the early historic period. The significance of Pattanam is thus manifold.

Important finds from Pattanam include:

Important finds from Pattanam include human bones, storage jars, a gold ornament, glass beads, stone beads, a six meter long wooden canoe, objects made of stone, copper and iron, typical pottery, early Chera coins, brick wall and brick platform.

Kottapuram



Photograph 2 – Kottapuram fort

The recent archaeological work done in the area has unearthed a Portuguese Fort and numerous remnants of other past cultures. Chinese ware, red slipped ware, other pottery artefacts and iron objects

Historical Facts of the Area

The Muziris Heritage Project is one of the biggest conservation projects in India, where the state and the central governments have come together to conserve a rich culture that is as old as 3000 years or more. The panchayats of Eriyad and Methala also will be part of the project along with Chendamangalam, Chittatukara, Vadakkekara, and Paliipuram. Shrines, forts, palaces, seminaries, cemeteries, boatyards and markets spread over the municipality of North Parur in Ernakulam district to municipality of Kodungalloor in Thrissur district. Added to this, will be the various performing arts that represent the non-physical aspect of the Muziris region. In the initial phase of the project, four of the 27 museums were opened to the public- the Palium Nalukettu, Palium Dutch Palace, the Chendamangalam Jewish synagogue and the Parur Jewish synagogue. Two archaeological sites, Pattanam and Kottappuram where archaeological excavations and explorations are being undertaken will also be in focus.

Tracing back to the history of Muziris heritage project site area of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala is not an easy task. In this context, details on this regard in some old Tamil literature are significant. In the Tamil literature, Agom 149 there is a statement that a Pandya King invaded Kodungalloor of the Cheras with a large elephant force. This means that the Pandyan Kingdom extended up to the river Periyar at that time.

Present Chennamangalam, in the Muziris heritage region, and the original name of which was Jayanthamangalam, named after the Pandyan King Jayanthan ,supports the view that Pandyan sway extended up to Periyar in the 7th century AD. The fact that ten out of 13 important Vaishnavite temples of Malanadu were situated south of river Periyar in the 9th century indicates the Pandyan influence in the region during the time of Jatila Parantaka (765-815) who claimed to be a Parama Vaishnava. Part of Malabar, south of Kerala, was under the sway of the Pandyan of Madura. In the first century AD, Pliny has recorded that Neacinda in the Pamba valley was in the domain of the Pandyan. Musiri was subjected to attacks from the pirates of Nitrias. And the attack of the Nitrians must be in reprisal to the conquest of Musiri by the Chera King. And the Tamil literature Agom 2 says that Utian Cheral was the first Chera king whose territory is said to have extended up to the Western sea.

Information about the Rulers of Musiri/Muziris Heritage region

Rulers of the Musiri/Muziris heritage project site area of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala had many interesting details and peculiarities and studying them is also interesting. The Perumals-Rulers – were all raised to that position after serving the Chola Empire as commanders, military governors or petty kings. The installations of the first Perumal took place in 887 AD at Thirunavai. He was Thanu Ravi. The reign of Thanu Ravi cannot be earlier than the last quarter of the 9th century. Thanu Ravi and many of his successors were Cheras. Bhaskara Ravi who issued Jewish copper plate from Musiri was not a resident of that place.

It is clearly stated in the document that he was only camping at that place when he issued the document. Mushikas and Venadu Kings were subservient to Karnataka and the Pandyan rulers respectively, the central region of Malainaduviz, Kerala, continued as a province of the Chera Kingdom. Hence Malanadu got the name Kerala and the institution of Perumal came to be known as Kerala Perumal. As Eastern Cheras were vassals of Karnataka, they were known as

Kongu Cheras and that part of the Chera country came to be known as Kongunadu. This region which was the hinterland of Musiri and Thondi, was the cause of importance and glory of the two port cities. With the loss of that territory, the primacy of Musiri was lost and Thondi faded into oblivion

Political History of Musiri

Studying the political history of the Musiri/Muziris heritage project site area of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala is interesting. The most important port cities in the early centuries of Christian era, as seen from ancient records were Naura of Periplus or Naravu of Sangham poetry which may be modern Valapattanam. Further south was Thondi of Sangham poetry or Tyndis of western geographers which must be Kadalundi or Beypore of today. Then comes the most important port city of Malabar, Muziris of the Westerners, Musiri of Sangham poetry and Kodungalloor of today. In the first century, the country consisted of three political divisions. The author of Periplus and Pliny (1st century AD) has recorded that at that time Thondi and Muziris were under the rule of Keralaputras who were none other than the Cheras of Karur. From the statement of Pliny, it would appear that the Cheras who were foreigners took possession of the West Coast only recently. This view is supported by the statement that Musiri was at that time subjected to attacks from the pirates of Nitrias. Nitrias of Pliny and Nitran of Ptolemy is the modern port of Mangalapuram, upon the mouth of river Netravadi. That was the principal port of Thondi and Musiri until the Cheras took possession of them in the first century. This view is further supported by the Sangham poetry. The contests for ocean supremacy continued for centuries. The Cheras established out-posts at Kodungalloor and Thondi and made that part of Malayalam a province of the Chera country, called Kudanadu. Kudanadu means Western province. Later, Kodungalloor became the capital of Kudanadu where from the Chera princes ruled until the end of 10th century.

Chera Rulers of Kodungalloor in the Muziris Heritage Area

Cheraman Parambu is part of the Muziris Heritage project site area of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala. Historically it is a very important place. Once the Palace of the Perumals – Chera rulers of Kodungalloor, Kerala- was here. Till it has been included in the prestigious Muziris Heritage project, Cheraman Parambu was a deserted place.



Photograph No – 3 Cheraman Parambu

The word Perumal means Chief. Perumals in the Chera rulers of Kodungalloor is also known as Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram. Post of Perumal was not hereditary and that each Perumal had a different capital. Kerala was the Kingdom between Mushika country and Kupaka country alias Venadu. The Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram were the protectors of the Brahmin settlements of Malainadu, but they never enjoyed any supremacy over Venadu or Mushika Kingdom. We know only of three Kulasekharas. The first is Ravi Kulasekhara, the patron of Sankara Narayana, the author of Laghu BhaskareeyaVyakhya. Ramakulasekhara, the patron of Yamaka poet Vasudeva Bhattathiri is another. The third is KulasekhraVarma, the dramatist. Kannadikas were known as Kongus in the Tamil country. Although the Cheras of Kodungalloor continued their relation with the Kongu Cheras, Kerala became the weakest of the three Kingdoms of Malainadu. As the Kongus were Jains, the Brahmins from Kongunadu migrated to Kerala and set up settlements up to Pamba Valley. The Cheras of Kodungalloor who patronized the Brahmin immigration, thus extended their influence up to the Pamba Valley through the Brahmin settlements.

KodungalloorKovilakam



Photograph 4 – Kodungalloor Kovilakam

The Kodungalloor in the Muziris Heritage region echoes with tales of its illustrious past. The Kodungalloor royal family (Kovilakam) produced a new school of poetry. The most towering figure among the poets of the Kodungalloor Kovilakom was KunjikuttanThampuran. He was one of the best and talented writers of Malayalam literature. Kovilakam always had gifted members and they made their imprints in the literary history of Kerala. Kodungalloor Kovilakam was known as the 'Nalanda of Kerala' and it was an abode of preceptor and had a great tradition of imparting knowledge in different topics like literature, science and art. Even foreign scholars were inmates in the Kovilakam. Knowledge sharing tradition of Kovilakam from the period of Kodungalloor Vidwanllaya Thampuran (1800-1851) was well known. His disciple, Kumbhakonam Krishna Sastrikal later became a great grammarian. Valiya Thampuran and Ilayala Thampuran were exponents in astrology. Goda Varma Thampuran was another famous member of the Kovilakam. Vidwan Kunjirama Varma Thampuran (1850-1917) was a poet and grammarian. Kochunni Thampuran was an exponent in astrology and architecture and Kunjan Thampuran was an expert in dialectics. Cheriya Kochunni Thampuran was a poet and Bhatta Sree GodaVarma Thampuran was an expert in legal science and all these members hailed the glory of Kodungallur Kovilakam time to time.

History of Paliam



Photograph 5 – Paliyam kovilakam

History of Paliam should be read along with the history of Kerala. Muziris Heritage project promotes the importance of the history of Paliam. During the period following the break-up of the Kulasekhara Empire in 1102 AD, Kerala lost its political unity. A number of independent Swarupams (States) rose in different parts of the country. The Perumpadappu Swaroopam had its seat at Chitrakutam in the Perumpadappu village in Vanneri in Malappuram till the end of the 13th century but its Chief had a palace of his own at Mahodayapuram in Thrissur. When the Zamorin of Calicut invaded Valluvanad in the latter half of the 13th century the Perumpadappu Swarupam abandoned the Vanneri palace and migrated to Mahodayapuram on a permanent basis. It continued to have its capital at Mahodayapuram till about 1405, when it was transferred to Cochin. Relationship between Paliam and Kochi was there from the earlier period. Along with Perumpadappu chief, PaliathAchan also started living in Thiruvanchikulam.

The present PaliathValiachan

Paliam is an ancient Nair family in the erstwhile Cochin state of Kerala. Paliam has its main tharavad (ancestral home) located at Chendamangalam in Ernakulam district, about 4 km from North Parur. The famous Achans of Paliam were hereditary prime ministers to the maharajas of Cochin from 1663 to 1809. This history places prominence on Paliam in the Muziris Heritage Project. Sri.P V K Achan is the present Paliath Valiachan, or the senior-most member of the Paliam family. Born in 1918, he serves as the Trustee of the Paliam trust. PVK Achan graduated from Guindy Engineering College, he served the Southern Railways as Asst Engineer. He was the Executive Director, BHEL and after retirement served all units of BHEL as their Advisor.

He has also served as Director, Steel Industrial Kerala Limited, Director, Hindustan Steel Construction Company, Kolkata, Member of Advisory Committee of Public undertakings of the Ministry of Finance, Govt of India, Member of

the Advisory Committee of the Regional Engineering College, Kozhikode and as President of the Indian Institution of Quality Assurance. PVK Achan appreciates the huge joint family system that existed at Paliam in the early 20th century, and the strong family values that it had. He remembers that the then Valiachan or the senior - most member of the family managed the family affairs so well. That was a time when 30-35 families stayed together as one huge joint family.

History of Jews in Muziris Heritage Area

The Jews who lived in Kerala had enriched the history of Kerala. Studying their history is part of the Muziris Heritage project. They received the munificent patronage of the Hindu rulers as was evidenced by the Jewish Copper Plate Grant of the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varman dated 1000 AD which records the royal gift to Joseph Rabban, the Jewish Chief, of valuable rights and privileges. This document is an eloquent testimony to the policy of religious toleration followed by the rulers of ancient Kerala. For centuries the Jews formed an important commercial community in Central Kerala. Under the Dutch and the British they enjoyed full freedom to carry on their commercial and religious activities. With the birth of the Jewish State of Israel, 1948, the vast majority of the Kerala Jews preferred to migrate from here to Israel. Most of the old Jewish settlements have since become dysfunctional. At present only two Jewish houses exist in this Jews Street, although around 75 Jewish families stayed here in 15th century.

Jewish Immigration to Muziris Heritage Area

Study of Jewish settlements is an integral part of Muziris Heritage Project. The Jewish immigration to Kerala was the direct effect of the early commercial contacts with Israel. According to tradition some 10,000 Jews came to Kerala coast in 68 AD in order to escape from religious persecution at home. They landed first at Muziris and founded a settlement. The Jews developed in to a prosperous business community with the generous patronage of the native rulers. They enjoyed a high standing in society till the arrival of the Portuguese who persecuted them and compelled them to leave Kodungalloor for Kochi in 1565 temporarily. Jewish community became a force to be reckoned with in the social, economic and the political life of Kerala. Apart from the fact that the services of the Jews were necessary for the economic development of the Chera Kingdom, and particularly for the commercial prosperity of Muziris, their unstinted support and co-operation had become an imperative need in the Cholas to the territorial integrity and independence of the Chera Kingdom. Apart from the historic, cultural and aesthetic importance, Jewish Synagogue at Chendamangalam also has great potentiality as a tourist destination.



Photograph no- 6 Chendamangalam Jewish synagogue

Jewish Diaspora

“Any *diaspora* is a challenge that is poised towards the past memories of the members of particular community. Any dispersion from one’s own homeland is normally known as a *diaspora* but that is normally compulsory in nature. Certain people are compelled by the circumstances to get dispersed for their own survival. In some other cases the people voluntarily opt for a dispersion of themselves for a progressive expectation. That can be materialized or not, but they opt for the chances. Here in the case of Jews they got dispersed by the circumstances of unavoidable history, but in certain cases they opted for their own better prospects. The Jews of Cochin tried to survive with distinctive features of their own while co-opted themselves with much warranted assimilation process. Natural synchronization never made them alien in their own community as they always used their *own* cultures and other social vestiges.

In this paper we analyze the historical significance of a recollective rich past of the Jewish *diaspora* in the MHP area in the past and their actual status today where Government of Kerala tries to infuse the vigour and energy of the *Diasporas* who settled in Kerala.

The people of *diaspora* in MHP area are uniquely unified in a different manner than the ordinary social members. Primarily their thick unity is a survival necessity. In the case of Jews, the unity they maintained is a social aloofness for themselves in the religious matters. They tried to keep themselves and their bond together with one another but in everything else they assimilated themselves with the society in which they lived in though they kept their own elements in social life. Soon after the independence of India, the making of modern State of Israel had given them a chance to be in their own country- a long cherished and longed desire of Holy Land- by many generations could not achieve. They took the opportunity. Thus, the number of Jews in Kerala, particularly *paradesi* Jews dwindled in number considerably. They went back to their Holy Land along with their 'different' *diasporic* culture².

Roman Trade in the Muziris Region

Muziris Heritage Project of Kerala envisages promoting knowledge of the site and its significance to a local and global audience. Knowing history is part of promoting knowledge. Roman trade at Muziris had special peculiarities. During the first centuries, roman trade was carried on by extraordinary big vessels, whose size was comparable with the big ships. Such unusual size was required for the volume and the weight of pepper which was imported from the Malabar Coast. Muziris flourished in ships coming from Roman Egypt. Ships bound for Muziris sailed according to a fixed timetable, already traditional in AD 51. The famous "Muziris papyrus" is a loan contract. In the first decades of Indo-Roman trade at Muziris, in order to exactly define legal responsibility in case of shipwreck, maritime loan contracts for Muziris must have explicitly specified that borrower would leave India by a particular date. The value of a cargo of a very big vessels sailing back from Muziris could thus be enormous.

Some Important References about Muziris

The Muziris Heritage Project of Kerala spreads in two districts of Ernakulam and Thrissur, and mostly covering the Parur-Kodungalloor region. Many interesting references occur in the Tamil texts regarding the old port town of Muciri/Muziris. The much quoted *Akan Anooru* poem 149 mentions that the well builds crafts of the Yavanas or Yona came on the Periyar.

Muziris was the 'first emporium of India' for the Romans, where the ships of the Yavanas arrived in large numbers and took back pepper, and other products in exchange of gold. Evidence from a papyrus in the Vienna museum, speaks of trade agreement between Muziris and Alexandria, following a trade agreement between a trader from Muziris and a trader from Alexandria. All these references indicate that a substantial amount of trade flourished between India and the Greco Roman world that passed through Muziris. Early Tamil literature known as Sangam Literature and the Greco-Roman accounts are clear in linking this port town with the early Cheras. Hebrew stone inscription

At Muziris, trade and religion grew together. Jews had settled in Parur and Kodungalloor regions and though they all but faded away, both the market in Parur and the two synagogues still exist. The lives of the Jews and the monuments that tell their history have an important place in the Muziris Heritage Project. Though there are no Jews living in this area, the region was sacred for them. The Hebrew tomb-stone inscription of Sarah Bat Israel stands in front of the Chendamangalam Jewish synagogue. The stone inscription from 1269 CE was erected on a concrete column with an additional slab that says the Government of Kochi erected it in 1936. The epigraph in Hebrew says, 'here rests Sarah Bat Israel, who died and joined her creator on (day) (month) and (Year)'. It forms part of the Jewish custom to erect a Hebrew written stone with the Hebrew date on a dead person's tomb. The Jewish cemetery situated a little away from the synagogue on the hillock Kottayil Kovilakom and near the Krishna Temple, the Muslim mosque and the Christian church is ample evidence to the religious harmony.



Photograph No - 7 Hebrew stone outside Chendamangalam Jewish synagogue

The Historical importance of the Muziris Heritage Project

The Muziris Heritage Project of Kerala is a unique kind of project, because it aims at capturing the history of a region and bringing it back to life for the benefit of the present generation - to give them a firsthand experience of the region's past. The project is research-oriented and educational in its goals. Historical records have made it clear to us that the Parur- Kodungallore regions had a great past- a past that is worth reviving for the sake of future generations. Eight panchayats and two municipalities have thrown themselves into the project because of its historical and archaeological importance. The Jewish culture that flourished in the region during the period in focus is being probed in to and studied in detail. Several organisations work in collaboration with the Department of Tourism here. Research students find plenty of matter to work on. It is hoped that a future is within sight when the past of the Muziris region has come back for a second life.

An Ancient University - The Kodungalloor Gurukulam.

The Kodungalloor Gurukulam was an inexhaustible mine of knowledge; it could very well be called the first university of Kerala. In any discussion of the importance of the Muziris Heritage Project, the greatness of this noble institution will have a prominent place. The Kodungalloor Gurukulam was a centre of excellence as far as scholarship was concerned. Grammar, sculpture, Vedanta, astronomy and the medical sciences were some of the subjects handled very efficiently here. Scholars like Vidwan KunjiramaVarma, Kochunni Thampuram, KunjanThampuram were among the teachers who gave training here. The students had the freedom to opt for the subjects of their choice. In those days, a poet's association known under the famous label 'Kodungallore Kalari' was in operation with the kovilakom as its centre of functioning.

Madhava of Sangamagramma (c. AD 1340–1425)

“Madhava was probably the greatest of the Indian medieval astronomer-mathematicians, but he has come to the fore only in recent years as a result of growing knowledge of Kerala mathematics. It was Madhava who “took the decisive step onwards from the finite procedures of ancient mathematics to treat their limit-passage to infinity, which is the kernel of modern classical analysis” (Rajagopal and Rangachari 1978, p. 101). Sangamagramma was a village with a temple dedicated to a deity of the same name and situated near Cochin in Kerala. This place-name is often given when referring to Madhava so as to distinguish him from others such as the astrologer Vidya Madhava. Later astronomers called him Golavid (or Master of Spherics). Of his works that have survived, all are astronomical treatises; for his mathematical contributions we rely on reports by his contemporaries and successors”³.

Kadavallur Anyonyam

“Kadavallur Anyonyam is conducted in the month of November (Vrischikam) every year at the famous Sri Ramaswamy temple. Traditional scholars of Rigveda assemble in the temple and enter in severe competitions in the chanting of Rigveda for eight days. In Kerala, only the Rig Veda used to have an institutionalised teaching system. The Yajur and Sama Vedas were traditionally taught in Namboothiri homes.

Anyonyam represents the meeting of two major Rig Veda practitioner groups based in Thirunavaya Math and Brahswom Math, which were once patronised by the Zamorin and Cochin kings respectively. The competition, which was revived in its present form in 1989, had been wound up in 1947. But ever since, it has been held without fail under the aegis of the Kadavallur Anyonya Parishath.

The two schools send around 16 aspirants each to take part in this cumbersome examination, which is the only one of its kind in the country. The participants are selected at the two madhoms through rigorous tests known as ‘kizhakkupadinjaru’ (literally, east-west) noted for its complexity. The namboothiri boys who are initiated into learning the Vedas at an early age undergo arduous disciplining for several years. Not only are the intonations of supreme importance, but the diction and modulation of the verses, numbering 10,472 riks, can be perfected through a systematic practice, for which a ritualistic and highly disciplined life style is imperative for students.

A spirit of healthy rivalry and competition is discernible even in the preparations, well before the event. The modes of oral test are technically called ‘Vaaramirikkal’, ‘Ratha’ and ‘Jata’ and they are held in the night. One has to recite the verses selected from a particular ‘varga’ of Rig Veda without any slip during the first one. If the memory fails one, a helping hand is rendered by the Gurus, but strictly through gestures, which form an intrinsic part of the training as well. While ‘Vaaramirikkal’ is held prior to supper, both the jata and ratha, for the winners of the previous one, are conducted during supper. These are more complex as they demand an admixture of both ascending and descending order of recitation of the selected verse.

While it is prestigious to have come out of the three tests successfully, to enter the ‘Kadannirikkal’ and ‘Valiya Kadannirikkal’, the higher tests, are really challenging. The sitting postures of the two opponents, who face each other during these feats, are suggestive of the higher levels to which the competitions are carried out in this unique exercise⁴.

The Paliam family

Today, the members of the Paliam family live at Chendamangalam, and in many other parts of India and abroad as well. The rich and historic tradition of the family keeps them close together even today. The fact that Paliathachans held the position of Prime Minister in erstwhile Cochin State in Kerala for more than 150 years proves their historical background. And for the same reason, Paliam holds a significant position in the Muziris Heritage Project. Ms. M. Radhadevi Retd. Professor of Maharajas College, Ernakulam in Kerala and a member of the Paliam family has contributed information on the family in the ‘Paliam Info’. Ms. Radhadevi writes in detail about the three eminent ‘Achans’ – KomiAchan I, KomiAchan II and GovindanAchan who were the three most remarkable figures in the history of Paliam. KomiAchan I, is supposed to have gone to Colombo seeking Dutch help and signed a treaty with them, thus setting the beginning for a long Paliam Dutch friendship. Komi Achan II was a daring adventurer and is believed to have mastered many languages and the use of weapons. Govindan Achan well-known as GovindanValiachan was the last to hold the office of the Prime Minister. It was he who retrieved the lost picture of Virgin Mary and permitted the islanders to install it at Vallarpadom, Kochi. Until recently, the practice of keeping alight the ‘kedavilakku’ donated by Achan to the Vallarpadom church, with oil taken from Paliam continued.

Paliam joint family system

The Paliam Palace was once used as the residence of the Paliath Achans, who were the prime ministers to the former Maharajas of the State of Kochi. The Paliam Dutch Palace and the Paliam Nalukettu are among the four museums envisaged under the first phase of the Muziris Heritage Project in Kerala. When Paliamnalukettu and Dutch palace becomes museums under the Muziris Heritage Project, people will be able to take a walk down Kochi of the early 20th century.



Photograph No- 8 Paliyam Nalukettu

⁴<http://kadavalluranyonyam.org/>

The joint family system prevailed that time and there were 30-35 families staying together in separate suites or rooms. Every family was offered the service of a maid and a male servant and a common kitchen. The dining hall could serve food for 60-70 people at a time. At the nalukettu only women and children were allowed to stay. Boys after 12 years had to move out to a boy's hostel. Only during festivals and birthdays they were allowed to come to the main building and share the common food. The family affairs were totally managed by Valiachan, the senior-most male member who had an office with about 30-40 staff members. The elder member of the Paliyam family built the Paliyam Nalukettu in the year 1786 for the women and minor boys. The last members left from this Nalukettu after partition, and so the building is no longer occupied. As in the way Paliyam family has a Historical Importance in the Kerala History, Paliyam Nalukettu and also the Paliyam Dutch palace too has a very significant place in the Muziris Heritage project.

The Paliyam that holds a significant position in the Muziris Heritage project owns 41 temples spread over large parts of Kerala. These temples function under the Paliyam Group Devaswom Trust and Paliyam Valiachan, the eldest member of the family heads the Paliyam Trust. Many a literary reference can be found on Chendamangalam. In the 'Kokilasandesha' of UddandaSastrigal, the place is referred to as 'Jayantamangalam', which may have been the Sanskrit version of Chendamangalam. In the 'Kokilasandesha', a love message is sent by the hero from Kanchi through a parrot to the heroine who resides at Chendamangalam. The place has been noted for its opulence and the temple of Vishnu. Another reference to the Vishnu temple can be seen in the Vishnu VilasaMahakavya by Ramapanivada who wrote it under the patronage of the PaliathachanRamakubera. The Paliyam family owned a good collection of manuscripts in Malayalam and Sanskrit. This later became part of the Kerala University Manuscript Library, when the family partition took place. The rare and important drama in Sanskrit from this collection named 'Bhagavadajjukiyam' used to be performed in Chendamangalam Siva temple.

Kottappuram Market Front

As a part of the Muziris Heritage Project, renovation of the Kottappuram market facing the River Periyar at Kodungalloor in Thrissur district, which was in a dilapidated condition, has progressed much. There has been a modest attempt at preserving the quaintness of the 'traditional market', which offers an added attraction to the visitors. Though modern rebuilding techniques have been employed in the conservation of the market, special care has been taken in maintain Old Dutch buildings almost the same way. The waterfront has been beautified with the addition of two jetties. The amphitheater which has been newly built at the river mouth can be used for staging regional art forms. It is essentially a raised podium. The Kodungalloor Tourism Society has already made it vibrant with activity by holding musical evenings there. Information counters, snack bars and other such amenities are in the process of getting ready.



Photograph No 9 - Kottappuram market

Conclusion

The Muziris Heritage Project has defined the concepts related with the project very clearly. The conceptual ideas outlined the project helped very much to understand the issues related with the project. Moreover the history behind the MHP is very clearly explained which clarifies the conceptual ideas neatly. The traditional – oral and written documents along with acculturation of the Muziris traditions- living conditions and linguistic expressions are advantageous to all people to understand the historical setting of MHP. All the historical sites at Pattanam, Kottappuram, Kodungallur are the adjacent areas which are well explained by the MHP authorities. Furthermore the MHP authorities tried to integrate the missing historical links for the benefits of the public as well as scholars.

They well explained the linkages of Roman, Chinese, Jewish, Portuguese and Dutch cultures and linguistic expressions and a revival of the cultural traditions of the same clearly along with their architectural settings and geographical locations.

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