

KOCHI

Legacy of Paliath Achans gets a new lease of life



M. P. Praveen

CHENDAMANGALAM, APRIL 20, 2013 00:49

IST UPDATED: APRIL 20, 2013 00:49 IST



Courtyard at the newly renovated Paliam Palace at Chendamangalam near Kochi. Photo: Vipin Chandran

Paliam Palace, Naalukettu at Chendamangalam being renovated as part of Muziris Heritage Project

The tiled pathway, with lamp-posts on either side, leading to the 17th century Paliam Palace wears a deserted look on a hot April afternoon. But, not for much longer. Once the renovation work undertaken as part of the Muziris Heritage Project is completed, the place will teem with visitors.

The Paliam Palace was the abode of the eldest male members of the Paliam family who served as Prime Ministers to the erstwhile Cochin kingdom for over 150 years. Adjoining it is the Naalukettu, an exclusive space for women and children of the family.

The renovation project, which proposed to convert the Palace and the Naalukettu into museums, was launched in 2010 and was progressing at a rapid pace when State Assembly elections were held in 2011. The change of guard at the State hit the renovation work, adversely affecting the original schedule of 12 months stipulated for the completion of the project.

“About 80 per cent of the renovation work has been completed. The government has to take a final call on the content of museums. A committee has been entrusted with content development. More than physical exhibits, the museums will feature content displayed through LCD monitors and panels. Security at the museum, waste management system and infrastructure facilities like boat jetties need to be organised,” said Krishnabalan Paliath, manager, Paliam Eswara Seva Trust.

U.V. Jose, additional director, Tourism, said the content for display at the museum was being fine-tuned and would be ready within a month.

While the museum at the Palace will showcase the history of Cochin kingdom and the Paliam family, the Nalukettu will be an authoritative museum on the lifestyle of joint Nair families. The artefacts belonging to the family have been kept under lock and key in the Palace and will be displayed in the temple gallery proposed as part of the museum.

Unlike popular belief, the Palace was not built entirely by the Dutch as a show of gratitude to Paliath Achan for helping them to oust the Portuguese. The Dutch had developed an existing structure into a palace. “Since Paliath Achans do not accept gifts from anyone other than the Kochi Rajas, the family repaid the Dutch the entire cost of developing the palace,” said Mr. Krishnabalan Paliath. While the Palace is more than 400 years old, the Nalukettu dates back further still.

The Palace was in a bad shape when the State government declared it and the Nalukettu as heritage monuments under the Muziris project. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the tourism director and the manager of the Paliam Eswara Seva Trust, entrusted with the administration of family property, whereby the government would conserve and protect the monuments while the ownership would rest with the trust.

Benny Kuriakose, consultant for the renovation project, said the renovation works undertaken were of the highest quality in confirmation with conservation norms.

The original structure and architectural style have been preserved to the maximum possible extent. Though dilapidated wood was replaced, it was done with extreme care to match the original texture of the structure. With the building being converted into a museum, it has also been strengthened keeping in mind the safety of visitors.

“It’s a mixture of Dutch and Kerala architectural style. The top floor especially resembles the Dutch style with its sash windows and steep angular roof,” Mr. Kuriakose said. The new office block alongside the palace has been built in keeping with the same architectural style.

KITCO Limited (formerly Kerala Industrial and Technical Consultancy Organisation Ltd.), the agency implementing the Rs.6-crore project, said work was almost complete. LCD monitors have been mounted for displaying historic details based on visuals prepared by Centre for Development of Imaging Technology (C-DIT). “Work is progressing on the museum panels and is likely to be completed by the middle of May,” said G. Pramod, senior consultant, KITCO.