



## HISTORICAL MONUMENTS IN VELLORE TOWN

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### ABSTRACT :

*For the study of ancient period, the archeological sources supply valuable information. The historians are reconstructing the history of ancient period with the help of available sources the literacy sources archeological, sources and Foreign Accounts. In order to establish the authenticity the ancient monuments are very helpful. In Tamil Nadu number monuments are surviving . Through these monuments the social, economic and religious conditions of the people in particular period is known. In Vellore Town several historical monuments are surviving which attract tourists from all over India. The rulers had left their legacies in the form of heritage monuments. Vellore and the region around it have a rich and varied historical remains. Despite many forts in Vellore district the Vellore Fort stands out for its architectural splendour Tourist from other states , history students, school students research scholars and general public use to visit this historic fort frequently. At present it is preserved well by the Archeological Department.*

**KEYWORDS :** Vellore Fort, Moat, Mahal, British, Tippu Sultan, Archaeological Department, Sri Jalakanteswarar Temple

### INTRODUCTION

Right from the dawn of civilization the human being has always sought a protective cover against calamities both natural and man-made. This has been proved by the discovery of ample evidence in the form of forts, fortification, ramparts, moats etc., during the excavation at Mohenjodaro and Harappa, Kalibangan, Nagarjunakonda and many other places. Even from the early days fort walls ramparts the moat etc were raised in accordance with the nature of the topography of the area, surrounding of the area surrounding the cities and places.

The forts were provided with citadels entrance towers, gateways, moat etc., required for defence purposes. The forts in India have played a vital role in reconstructing the history. The literature, epics and puranas bear testimony to the existence of many forts in India. At present there are about 2500 forts in India and in Vellore District alone, there are twenty forts and this district must be called the "District of Forts" .One such beautiful land fort is located in the heart of the Town of Vellore.<sup>1</sup>

### The Vellore Fort

The fort and the moat are located in carpet area of about 135 acres of land in an almost rectangular plan. The walls and the moat adjacent to it are running to a length of about 3 kilometers The walls of the fort are made of huge granite stones called cyclopean stones on both sides. In between the two walls the filling has been



done with earth. The place from where the earth was excavated and removed (very close to the outer fortification walls) was later converted in to a moat.

The moat was formed was purposefully used as a first defense to the fort. The moat was filled with water and many crocodiles left there to prevent the enemy from crossing the same by swimming or any other means. There was a drawbridge near the front entrance of the fort. The fort has only one main entrance from the east and a small one on the south. After the disappearance of the kings from the scene and the frequent wars between them, the usage of the fort, the buildings inside and the moat have completely changed and the fort became an historical monument for generations to come. The building inside have been put to use for housing the Government officers and the northern part of the moat has been converted in to an area for fishing and the southern part for growing grass.<sup>2</sup>

### LAY-OUT OF THE MOAT

The general view of the cross-section of the moat and for except for some minor changes here and there, is as follow. The moat has retaining wall immediately after the glacis for about 2.5meters height and then after a landing of about 2.50 meters another wall (embankment) of about 10 to 12 meters dept is available. The width of the moat is 67 meters vary form 3 meters to 6 meters (The present level). Then the outer fortification all is of about 9 meters height watch towers located at rectangular intervals Then there is an rampart landing space of about 9 meters width and then immediately after the landing space are the inner fort walls with 6.30 meters height and 2.80 meters width. The inner rampart landing space to a width of 8 meters and finally with a downward wall up to the ground level inside to a depth of 3 meters (height) forming part of the fort.<sup>3</sup>

### WATER SOURCE TO THE MOAT

The ancient drainage system prevailed in the heart of the town at Vellore. The original drainage system for the easy flow of water, laid in those days is still available and that too in working condition in most of its route. But the growth of the modern Vellore Town has disturbed the system at several places which has resulted in the entry of waste water inner the moat and caused pollution to the stagnated water there. Town sewage water has been stopped now.

Originally the excess water of the Ottery lake on the southern side of the city used to flow to the tank called 'Suryakualm' which is located on be southern side of the fort and is not in existence now due to the filling of the debris and filth by the Municipality. The water from the tank would enter into the moat thought an underground canal which is controlled by an iron gate in sluice (which is existing even today) . The excess water of the temple and the inner carpet area of the fort is also collected into this moat through an underground drain and the excess water of the moat is drained out through an outer sluice located on the northern side (under the Banalore highways) and connected to an open drain called Nickelson canal.

The southern half of the moat is left without water due to the accumulation of silt in course of time, and has become the ground for growing grass and less filled side i.e., the northern half of the moat has been left with some water which has enabled to the fisheries department to develop the area for fishing activities. This is the present condition and usage of the moat of the fort at Vellore.<sup>4</sup>

Incidentally there is no irrefutable record to prove when the temple and the fort were built. According to one legend the fort was built to rectify a defect in the temple building as regards to the time of commencement of the construction work. It is also said that it is not clear why such a strong fort was built to safeguard a temple. The historians have studied inscription, the style of the building and other sources and have come to the following conclusion.

1. The inner fortification of the Vellore Fort and the inner *prakara* with shrines of Sri Jalakanteswarar Temple were built by Sambuvarayar King Vendrumankonda Sambuvaraya between AD 1322 – AD 1339.

2. The outer fortification wall of the for including the moat the glacis and the outer *prakara* wall including the Kalyanamandapa and the huge front gopura were built by the Vijayangara king Sadasivadeva Maharaya of 16<sup>th</sup> Century AD, when Chinna Bomma Nayak was the chieftain of Vellore. The temple was endowed with several villages which were recorded by Chinna Bomma Nayaka, with the permission of the Emperor of Vijayanagar.<sup>5</sup>

Vellore Fort is technically labelled as Ekmukha Durga according to Vishvakaram Vastu Sashtira. It has only one entrance, hence the label Ekmukha (ek, one; mukha, fact). When the building work was undertaken centuries ago, the place was a plain with 'vel' tress growing in abundance. The fort was built on the bank of the river Palar, which flows on its northern side. Then that river would have been perennial.

The fort is almost rectangular in shape. The length of the outer wall surrounding it comes to three kilometres.<sup>6</sup> There are two rampart walls. There is the inner wall and at a lower level the outer wall. and then there is the fortification. Next to it, there is the moat with its outer retaining wall. Adjoining to it there is glacis, in the form of a plain sloping down from the fort. The fort is built on an area of 136 acres.<sup>7</sup> On its eastern side there is an entrance. That is the only entrance to the fort. There is yet another pathway built of cobbled pieces of stones that leads to the fort to its southern side. It is called as *thittivasal* and it has a strong gate. It is said that this gate would have used for the entry and exist of the royal servants or some important persons. A masonry bridge had been built much later, across the moat which connects glacis to outer plain. There had been a draw bridge across the moat very close to the gateway. There was yet another entrance on the left which would have been used when the draw bridge was closed. At present this entrance has been closed by masonry wall.

From the gate there runs an approach road. There are masonry walls made of huge stone blocks on either side of this approach road. There is an entrance on the southern side. That gateway leads to the lion's tank (*Simhakulam*). This tank and the surrounding ground have been converted as the Recreation Club by the staff of the Public Works Department. There is yet wooden door which is kept closed. The approach road leads to open space on its south and Jalakanteswarar Temple on its north. Perhaps it would have been a huge vacant ground to make the soliders and their animal camp. The English erected many large living quarters. They got fancy names as mahals which were used to keep the members of the royal families confined within fort so that they do not come in contact with other citizens.

At the end of the approach road there are slopes of rampart on either side. Those slopes would have been used for moving the cannon carts to the strategy points close to the fort's outer wall. The fortification comprises main rampart which is nearly eight meters wide. This is broken at regular intervals by round towers and rectangular projections. The outer wall of this rampart is made of brick work with lime plastering over it. The researchers feel that this rampart wall would have been rebuilt by the British to make it suitable for moving cannons over it. There are small openings found at regular intervals in the rampart. Each of these openings is a meter wide inside and three metres wide outside. Similarly there are sentry posts at several places on the main rampart. These posts have limited space. Just one person can stand, and if needed, turn around. These posts would have served as watch towers.

Adjoining to these there is walking space, about nine meters wide. This runs by the main wall. This walking space is 6.3 meters below the level of the main rampart. The width of this pathway is maintained equally all around. There also stand 34 watch towers in the shape of rooms. These rooms are built of granite stones, abetting the inner face of the outer wall. All the thirty four rooms have been built symmetrically. Each has sufficient space to allow the sentry free movement. The unique feature of all these sentry rooms is that the occupant is not visible from outside. The inner wall of the moat and the outer wall of the fort are one and the same. This wall is nearly nine meters above the water level of the moat on an average. This wall has been built in fully dressed granite stones with joints. The top row is provide with series of cyclopean stones. Balconies are projected out at regular intervals. One can see beauty combined with utility manifest in this.

Each stone has three holes facing three different directions. The holes are made for shortens to place their guns in them and shoot at the opponent. The holes are made in such a way that the shooter from the rampart could see the attackers on the glacis and shoot, but those at the glacis could not see the attackers. Next to the main wall there is the moat. It is said to be 67 meters deep.<sup>8</sup> It is believed that the depth of the moat was much more in the beginning and that there were many crocodiles in these waters. As such no enemy could dare cross the moat to enter the fort. Previously the moat was completely filled with water. At present the southern wing is dry due to accumulation of silt and seepage from the two feeding water bodies – Otteri and Suriyakulam.

### **DRAINAGE SYSTEM OF THE FORT**

The builders of the fort, moat and the temple had planned and implemented elaborate and meticulous drainage system with copious supply of water and systematic discharge of used and excess water. In the southern direction of the town not far from the fort there is a water body known as Suryakulam. Further south there is yet another tank called as Otteri. During rains, water flows down the hillocks surrounding the town on the southern and eastern side and get collected in this tank and a couple of similar tanks. This water then reaches Suryakulam and from there to the moat. The water supply to the moat is controlled by iron shutter provided in the sluice at the entrance on the southern side of the fort. The excess water is let out through an underground drainage system provided. There is an outlet on the northern side of the moat which is also controlled by a shutter. The excess water gets discharged from this shutter and flows down to the river Palar.

There are channels connecting the plain and the temple to the moat. The *abiseka* water collected inside the temple and the rain water on the carpet area and the buildings flow through channels to the moat. The drainage system is marvelous. The underground drains are constructed using bricks and lime mortar. The drains are spacious enough to allow persons move inside easily and clean them.

The builder of this fort never intended this structure to be an abode of a king or a chieftain. After all it was built as a remedy to counterbalance a defect. The temple was the objective and the fort an afterthought. But its construction was so strong that it was used as military garrison. Many chieftains had laid siege to the fort for months without success. Excepting for the rampart and the temple there was no constructed structure. When this fort fell into the hands of the Nayaks and Carnatic Nawabs a few buildings were constructed for the deputies of the monarch to live.

Till the British take over no one thought that this strong construction could be used to keep a defeated monarch and his family members as captives. Being a fort with just a single entrance, with a moat very deep and walls as strong as they could be the captives could be kept with minimum sentry personnel. When Tipu Sultan was killed in the battlefield all members of his family along with their close relatives and hordes of servants were brought to Vellore and housed in this fort. Similar was the fate of the king Vikramaraja Singh who was defeated, taken captive and transported to Vellore fort along with his family and relatives. The buildings in which the above were settled are known by the occupants. As such there are five buildings which came to be called as Mahals. They are Tipu Mahal , Hyder Mahal, Basha (Raja) Mahal, Begum (Rani) Mahal and Kandy Mahal.<sup>9</sup>

### **TIPU MAHAL AND HYDER MAHAL IN VELLORE FORT**

In the battle of Srirangapatnam fought in 1799, Tipu Sultan, the staunch opponent of the British was killed. The English army took captive twelve sons and eight daughter of Tipu Sultan besides the monarch's sisters, brothers-in-law, their children the wives of late Hyder Ali retinue and servants. In total these captives were 1378.<sup>10</sup> They were brought to Vellore Fort and kept in two buildings which came to be called as Tipu Mahal and Hyder Mahal, not because they built them but because their relatives were kept in them as captives. They were kept there, till the Indian soldiers historic uprising in 1806. After the uprising the English suspected that somewhere the sons of Tipu had played a dominant role in making this uprising happen. So that most of the male members and servants among the captives were dispatched to Calcutta. The

remaining members continued to live in these building till one by one they undertook the final journey to meet their maker. The Tamil Nadu Government used these two buildings have for keeping LTTE volunteers.<sup>11</sup> At present they are being used by the police Training School.

### **BASHA (RAJA) MAHAL AND BEGUM (RANI) MAHAL**

The Tipu's family, their retinue and servants comprising 1378 members had to be accommodated inside the fort. The available built in space was insufficient. So these two buildings were constructed till the transfer of district headquarters to Vellore. It was in use by the royal family members and were left vacant after their demise.

When Vellore became the district headquarters the office of the district collector was located in this twin construction. Later this office was moved to new premises at Sathuvachari in 1991.<sup>12</sup> At present they are used as museums.

### **KANDY MAHAL (MUTHU MANDAPAM)**

Sri Vikaramaraja Singh ruled over Sri Lanka between 1789 and 1815 This king belonged to the family of Nayaks of Kandy . These Nayaks were of Telugu origin and belonged to the family of Madurai rulers In the battle fought is 1816 Vikaramaraja was defeated by the British forces The monarch and all his family members were taken captive and brought to Vellore and kept in separate building inside the fort.

It is said that the king and his family members were treated kindly by the captors. All their needs were provided including jewels and ornaments. The king lived as a captive for seventeen years till 30<sup>th</sup> January 1832 when he died of dropsy. He was cremated on the bank of the river Palar. A Memorial – Muthu Mandabam- was built at the side of crimation.

For the present, Kandy Mahal serves as the office of the district register Besides these Mahals and a few buildings added from time to time there.

### **ABDULLAPRAM PALACE**

In 1676 A.D. under the command of Thukhajirao, the Marthans laid siege to the Vellore Fort After a prolonged resistance, Abdullakhan the vassal of the Bijapur Sultans accepted defeat and surrendered. He was allowed to establish a village by name Abdullapuram , 5 kilometers west of Vellore where he built a palace and took rest. The ruins of that palace are still found on the left side of the Vellore-Bangalore road. This building was built with brick and lime mortar. On the other side opposite this building is found the tomb of Abdullakhan.

### **The Graveyard of Tippu's Family**

Tippu sultan's relatives who were imprisoned in Vellore Fort petitioned the British East India Company to allot a piece of land to bury the bodies of their relatives The British Government allotted 15 acres of land at Arugantham Poondi. There are about 400 small tombs and big monuments on this land . Now the land has shrunken to mere 4 acres.

The big monuments were built of brick and lime mortar in Bijapur architectural style . Tippu's wives ,sons, sons-in-law and Ministers were buried there. These monuments have fine decorations both inside and outside and domes are constructed .

Tippu's wives Bakshi Begum and Begum died in 1808 Tippu's daughter Fathima Begum was buried in this mausoleum along with her brother. All Tippu's descendants are buried in this graveyard.

### **Hill Forts**

There are three small forts built atop the hillocks on the eastern side of Vellore. The ramparts of these forts are still attracting the passers by along the Arcot road between Kagithapattari and Sathuvachari.

The ruins of the moat are found ever today in front of the Collectoratae and on the mountains slopes. It is presumed that these forts contains barracks and watch posts for soldiers to keep a vigil on the enemy movement between Arcot and Vellore.

### Sajjaro Fort

The southern fort is slightly larger than the other two. This is called Sajjarao. Fort. It was built during the Maratha regime. It has three entrances. The southern entrances has stone-cut steps. The northern and the Western entrances have no proper flight of steps. All the three entrances have mantapas (Halls). There is a palace-like structure inside the southern entrance. It has no roof . There is a secret underground chamber beside. It has to watch holes to watch unseen the movements of people out side There is a water tank to store water for the use of the residents There is also a well for bath water for the use of the residents There is gunpowder godown inside the fort. The four corners of the fort have each a turret (circular tower) provided with embrasures or gun-holes to shoot –down the invading enemies, unseen, seen Since the southern part happens to be an easily ascendable hillock the walls are provided with gun-holes to shoot down the enemies. To defend the eastern entrance of the fort, there are two mounted cannons. The northern and the western entrance have no such defence This fort is provided with all the amenities The walls have been built of rectangular bricks and lime mortar The halls palace and other structures have all been built of brick and lime mortar The compound walls (ramparts) are approximately 4 meters high and the perimeter is 700 metres.

### Gajaro Fort

Gajaro fort is situated on the northern side of Sajjarao fort. This fort has also been built of brick and lime mortar. The four corners have each a circular turret. There are gun-holes for cannons in the ramparts. The brick and mortar gunpowder godown is in ruins.

### Murdish Fort

The fort near Saidapet was called Murdish fort . Granite pillars have been used in the construction of this fort. The rampart walls are 3.5 meter high . There is an inner compound wall also for this fort. There is a ruined gunpowder godown built of bricks and lime mortar. There is a dilapidated guard room near by and there is a granite-walled well with steps.

### King of Kandy's Tomb (Pearl Mantapa)

Vikrama Rajasingha was the last Tamil King who ruled Kandy in Srilanka from 1798 A.D. to 1815 A.D. His kingdom was seized from him in 1815 by the British and he was banished to Tamil Country along with 21relatives He was imprisoned in Vellore Fort Jail in 1816, Vikrama Rajasingha who had been a king for 17 years and a prisoner for 17 years languished and at last died in 1832. The king's relatives obtained 10 kani land west of the old palar bridge at Aganthapoondi from the British East India company to erect to tomb on the King's grave. The tomb bears the following epitaph.

“His Majesty Sri Vikramaraja Singha Last  
Ex-King of Kandly Died 1832”

Around the king's tomb, there are six other tombs of his three queens and there other relatives. In 1989, Tamil Nadu Government erected a monument in the shape of a pearl oyster to commemorate King Vikrama Rajasingha's heroic fight against the British imperialism.

### Clock Tower

The Clock Tower in the Long Bazaar Vellore was erected in commemoration of the coronation of King George- V and Queen Marry in Delhi in 1920. This brick and lime mortar Clock Tower is 10 Metres high.



### State Government Museum

Government of Tamil Nadu established a museum to the public in Vellore town in 1985. It consists of objects of art, archeology, Pre-history, Weapons, Sculptures, Bronze, Wood Carvings, Handicrafts, Numismatic, Philately, Botany, Geology, Zoology. It treasures ancient and present day Curious relating to Anthropology, Art and Archaeology, Botany, Geology, Numismatics, Pre-history, Zoology etc.,

Through the ancient objects it is known the social, economic and religious conditions of the people of the past for the reconstruction of the history of Ancient Tamil Country. The treasures which are preserved in the Vellore museum are very helpful. The school children, college students and the general public are used to visit the museum. In order to witness the treasures of the past, the Tamil Nadu government a minimum fee. Further the Vellore Town is known for Christian Medical Hospital(CMC), Golden Temple, Vellore Institute for Technology (Deemed University) . Hence the patients, students, devotes from other states and even from the Foreign Countries are visiting Vellore frequently. On such occasions they are used to visit the Museum. The historical monuments of the composite North Arcot District are gracefully depicted in the Gallery. This Museum is kept open in all days. The museum was housed at Town hall near the old bus stand. Due to lack of space, later the museum was shifted from Town Hall to inside the Vellore fort in 1999. The curators organized several seminars on Vellore Rebellion of 1806. Even today a number of new inscriptions which are discovered around Vellore are brought and preserved in the Museum. At present, there are 2990 sculptures, 111 zoological objects , 373 Ancient statues , more than 1457 stamps, 96 geological objects, 525 archeological remains, 290 anthropological objects , 58 old coins which are well preserved in the Museum. More than nine staff members are appointed by the State Government to look after the Museum.<sup>13</sup>

The Museum consists of six rooms and an average of 200 people daily visiting the Museum. During the Summer Holiday students from all over India as well as from foreign countries are visiting the Museum. The people who are visiting Vellore Fort are compulsorily visiting the Museum. Many facilities are provided to the tourists by the Tourist Department. The Fort and Museum are very helpful for the over all development of Vellore Town.

To conclude, Vellore is known for her ancient remains and monuments. The Vellore Fort was used for both protection and imprisonment during the Colonial period. The Vellore Fort is in main part part of the Vellore Town. It attracts a large number of visitors who includes, tourists, historical site seekers and the students of all over the India. This place occupies a significant place in the historical map of the British India. The imprisonment of the Tipu's family members at Vellore Fort and the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 occupies an important place in the India's struggle for freedom.

### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mani, R., *History of Vellore Fort and other Archeological Monuments in Vellore and Tiruvannamalai District*, Vellore :Poogavanam Ramasamy Illam, 2004, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.p.10-12.

<sup>5</sup> Seshadri, A.K., *Vellore Fort and the Temple Through the Ages*, Vellore : Sri Jalakanteswarar Dharma Sthabanam, 2006) p.45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Sarvanan, Ka., Velur Kottai, Vellore Fort Museum – a pamphlet.

<sup>8</sup> Notice board of the Archaeological Department of India at Vellore Fort.

<sup>9</sup> Sarvanan, Ka ., – Velur Kottai – a pamphlet.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Madura Welcome, Tamil Nadu, Tourist Guide, Part-II other districts