

Cochin – The City of Heritage



Corporation of Cochin



Centre for Heritage, Environment and Development

(The Heritage and Environment Management Wing of the Corporation of Cochin)



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Cochin symbolizes the hopes and aspirations of the people of Kerala in the context of development. In the annals of history the name Cochin is imprinted with golden letters; its spices making the most and deepest impact. Etymologically, Cochin is the latest name given to this beautiful land in its various manifestations.

Muciris, one of the oldest urban centers in the western coast of India is believed to be the earliest manifestation of the place Cochin. The city also is dynamically linked to the Cochin Royal Dynasty and they played an important role in the growth of this city. The Portuguese, who emphasized their presence very strong in the city starting from 15th century inwards. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch, French and English. The relics of their presence are seen even today here in the form of architecture, language and other cultural nuances. There are also people from the sub-continent who came here at intervals and made Cochin their home. Gujrathis, Jains, Konkans, Punjabis, Tamils, Marathis, Bengalis, Pathans, Kutchis, Saits, to name a few. This vibrant cultural landscape, wherein almost sixteen different linguistic and cultural groups co-exist even today, is marked by its rich customs, traditions and art forms. The Modern Cochin city can be envisaged as a classical example of creating an urban area in which diversity becomes a source of strength rather than of conflict.

It is not yet known when exactly man started inhabiting this beautiful piece of land known now as Cochin. However the material evidences, though sporadic in nature, do suggest that this place witnessed the inhabitation of man at least from the Neolithic period onwards. The megalithic-Iron Age, a period subsequent to the Neolithic in Kerala, also witnessed intense human occupational activities in this area as the evidences envisage. Further research has to be carried out in order to ascertain the exact nature of the man-environment interaction of those distant past.

However, a well-documented history of last two millenniums will tell us tales about life on this beautiful landscape. We do have literature from west, Pliny, Strabo, Periplus of the Erythrian Sea etc., and also from the East, mainly classical Tamil, to authenticate this history. Material evidences in the forms of Monuments, Ceramics, Coins, Inscription, Icons and Architecture do substantiate what is in the written form. In the context of history and culture, the geographic extent of Cochin would cover, besides the city of Cochin,



adjoining areas like kodungallor, Paravur, Chendamangalam and Tripunitura.

Time has brought in many changes to this land. Its natural landscape has been eroded quite a bit over the years owing to the intervention of many natural and human factors. Its cultural landscape has been subjected to 'changes' and the land has become a living repository of divergent culture and traditions. Every nook and corner of this great land has tales to tell of eventful history and the said history is reflected in its rich cultural heritage and traditions.

Records and monuments speak volumes about people who came to this land from various parts of the land and had trading and cultural relationships with people of this land. People from Greco-Roman world, Arabs, Jews, Chinese and other East Asians, Portuguese, Dutch, French and English, to name the most important among the lot; migrated to Cochin and almost all of them left their mark on this land, irrespective of the duration of their stay here. They are in the forms of structural monuments, coins, inscriptions, icons, texts, language and art forms.

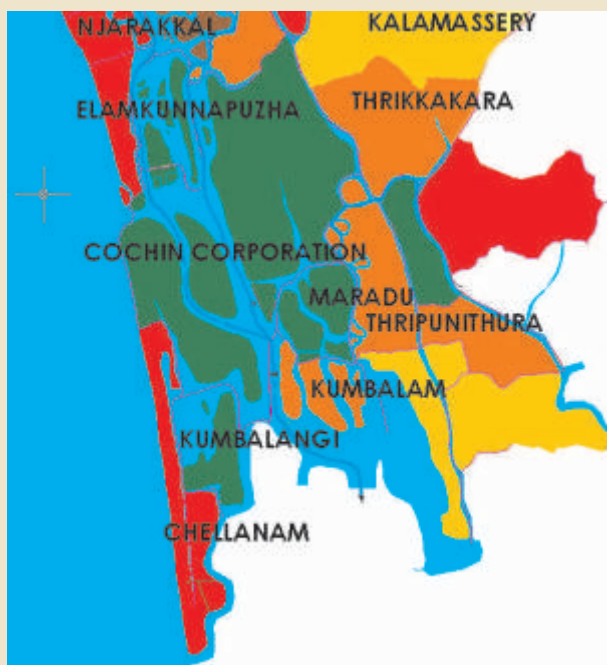
It is believed that the Greco-Romans came as early as in the first century of the Christian era itself and had very close relationships with this land for almost four centuries. The discovery of the Roman gold coin hoards from the various parts of this region stand testimony to this. Further investigations into this aspect by unearthing diagnostic evidences for this relation in the form of Terra- Sigilate, Amphora and Roulette ceramics may throw more light to this period. It is believed that the Arabs and Jews also had the close tie up with the land during these periods. In Kodungalloor, you find the first mosque in India, said to have been built by Malik-I-Dinar in the 6th century A.D. In Chendamangalam, Paravur, Ernakulam, Mattanchery and elsewhere you see



Synagogues standing as dynamic link between the past and the time they were built. The Chinese and the others from East Asia had also started their interaction with the land sooner or later. From the Medieval period onwards a strong presence of Chinese was visible in this area. Digging in to occupational layers belonging to medieval period, whether it is in Kodungallor, Tripunithura or at mattanchery would certainly yield a sizable number of Chinese made celadon ceramic ware. And for that matter, the Chinese fishing net, considered as a unique feature of Cochin, is believed to have its origin in Our Chinese connection.

Then the seen was occupied by the Portuguese, from the 15th century on. They built an empire here and in the process built buildings, forts, churches, houses etc., with an element of Portuguese architecture in all of them. After sometime the Dutch wrested the 'empire' from the Portuguese and improved it considerably by giving a Dutch touch to all those structures and also by laying out streets and gardens. The English turn took it out of the hands of Dutch, and pulled down everything their predecessors had taken so much labour and expense to rear up, and all but succeeded in putting back the city to its old position of comparative obscurity.

Cochin City has always been special for its Heritage and Pluralistic Culture through out its history, which is primarily based on trade and shipping activity. Being an Island City, Cochin has unique environmental features and a cultural heritage, which is intertwined with the environment. The city's ever-growing demand and potential for growth opportunities constantly interact and depend on its valuable natural and cultural heritage.

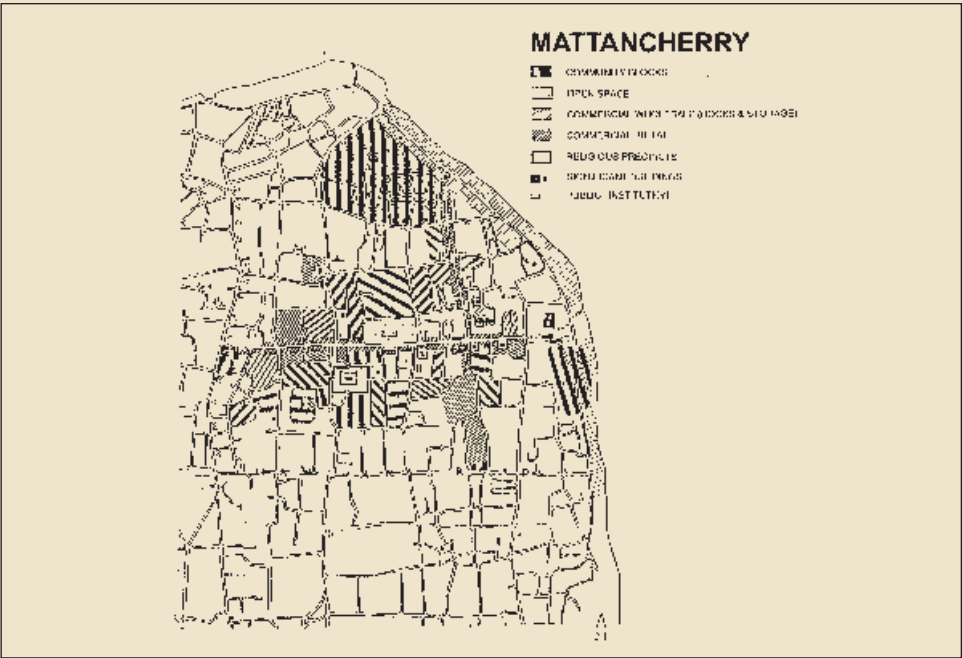


MAJOR HERITAGE ZONES IN COCHIN & DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Fort Cochin, Mattancherry, Fort Vypeen Integrated Heritage Zone

During 1440 AD Cochin City grew around Mattancherry settlement as a city of 5 miles of circumference and Chinese and Arabs used to trade with the natives of the town. Cochin was ruled by the Cochin Rajas in the period from 12th Centaury onwards.

In 16th Centaury AD Portuguese came to Cochin and subsequently built their Fort and thus the formation of Fort Cochin. The trade activities flourished after Kodungallur port and Jews, Konkinis and many other ethnic groups moved to Cochin and settled here. In 17th Century AD, the Dutch and subsequently British in 18th Century invaded Cochin. The Fort Cochin, Mattancherry and Fort Vypeen placed right at the sea mouth has experienced immense trade related activities and has developed a rich pluralistic culture and tradition unique to this heritage zone. This is reflected in the heritage of this area, which exhibits great monuments, structures and settlements of outstanding heritage value. Fort Cochin & Mattancherry can proudly claim the uniqueness in the entire heritage zone which is not seen anywhere else in the region, and this makes it a major attraction for the tourists as well.



Issues Related to Heritage

The development issues related to heritage are also unique to this heritage zone. As the City of Cochin grew around Ernakulam as a major town, this area had been left behind by developments and investments. However, due to the growing demand of the tourism industry has made this heritage zone alive again. The areas and settlements in Mattancherry and Fort Cochin is facing a serious threat of urban degeneration. Sanitation and health has become one of the major issues. Pulling down and unauthorized modifying of valuable heritage structures and public spaces is also a major issue in this zone. Unsympathetic and alien developments destroying the harmony in heritage zones due to lack of proper development guidelines. Public spaces of intense use such as streets and markets choke with traffic jams resulting in unfriendly public areas. Too much dependence on tourism has resulted in displacement of original citizens and this adds to urban degeneration.

Willingdon Island Heritage Zone

During the period of the British Rule, in early 20th century, Dredging of Port and formation of Willingdon Island was executed under the design and direction of Sir Robert Bristow. Subsequently Cochin emerged as the major port in the entire region. Willingdon Island grew as the port and seat of power of British. The entire port town was designed by Sir Robert Bristow and left an outstanding heritage settlement built during the British period. The Heritage structures including that of the Port Trust, Bungalows and godowns and Public spaces in the Navy area etc. become part of this heritage zone.

Issues Related to Heritage

This beautiful island of outstanding heritage value poses some unique issues in the field of heritage. Cochin Port Trust and Indian Navy mostly own the Island, which leave little regulations being effective in these areas. Unsympathetic and alien developments destroying the harmony in heritage zone and water edge skyline due to lack of proper development guidelines is experienced in this area. The beautiful water edges and public spaces associated to this island do not share it with the citizen of Cochin except in few cases.

Ernakulam Central Area Heritage Zone

In 19th Century during the British Rule, Cochin rulers shift to Ernakulam. Market and associated settlements flourished. The Ernakulam Heritage Zone is in fact the heart of today's City of Cochin. Most work places, Administrative and institutional centers and market places are located here. Moreover the City's widely used parks and public open spaces are located defining the landward edge of this zone, which connects the city to its natural heritage of backwaters. Institutions such as the Cochin University on foreshore road, Maharaja's College, Law College, St. Theresa's college and St. Albert's College etc. As many cultural and religious institutions with some of the oldest temples churches, mosques and synagogues also become part of this heritage zone. Heritage structures, which represent many cultural and ethnic groups who have come and settled here during its history, are spread all over. City level institutions such as the Corporation of Cochin, GIDA etc culminate at the northern part with the High Court complex of the state. Most of all, the city's breathing spaces such as the Subhash Park, the walkway at Marine Drive and the Durbar Hall round etc are the most used and celebrated public spaces of the city.

Issues Related to Heritage

The development issues related to heritage are mostly to do with the rapid urbanization and demand posed by the ever-growing needs of the city. This has resulted in unsympathetic and alien developments destroying the harmony in heritage zone due to lack of proper development guidelines. Pulling down and unauthorized modifying of valuable heritage structures and public spaces is also a major issue in this zone. Public spaces of intense use such as streets and markets choke with traffic jams resulting unfriendly public areas. Infrastructure, Sanitation and health has become one of the major issues in areas like Ernakulam Market.



Canal & Backwater Network Heritage Zone

Canal Networks is part of our regional traditional heritage planning. These canal systems can be commonly experienced throughout in Kerala in the low-lying coastal areas. They, once upon a time, used to be the drainage system, transportation corridor & irrigation system of traditional development. The entire development in the low-lying coastal areas has been dependent on such canal systems integrated by backwaters, lagoons and Estuary and was instrumental for trade and commercial activities. The Canals Network in Cochin is very much intertwined with rivers and backwaters. Most of the traditional areas and heritage zones are connected by such canal system. Most public spaces, settlements and institutions are also grown along them.

Issues Related to Heritage

The canal Network is both a natural as well as cultural heritage of our city. It has played an important role in the history of Cochin. The issues related to the Canal Network are basically the major issues of Cochin City itself. Sanitation, mosquito breeding, drainage etc. are the major issues of the City and all related very much to the Canal Network. Accessibility to the canal is another issue of equity. Encroachment is another issue related to the canal & Backwater precincts.

Mangalavanam Natural Heritage

Known for its small bird sanctuary, Mangalavanam mangroves is situated in the Ernakulam District of Kerala State. This small mangrove area comprising of a shallow tidal lake in the center with its edges covered with thick mangrove vegetation, the lake here is connected with backwaters by a canal. Mangalavanam gained importance because of the mangrove vegetation, and also due to the congregation of commonly breeding birds. Apart from these, it is considered a 'green lung' of Ernakulam City, which is polluted by many industries and motor vehicles.

Issues Related to Heritage

Major issues related to this Natural Heritage are associated with the issues related to canals and backwaters. The quantity of water flowing into Mangalavanam is extremely harmful for the species habitat in this zone. Lack of Urban Development guidelines in the area surrounding this heritage zone is a serious threat to the future of this small forest in Cochin.

Cochin Estuary Natural Heritage Zone

Cochin Estuary is an important Natural Ecological Feature in the entire

Vembanad Lake Region. The Vembanad Lake Region, which extends about 70 Kms to the South of the Cochin Sea mouth and 35 Kms to the North, flushes out 7 major rivers through Cochin Estuary. A major transactional point for most of the marine species and habitat for many of them, Cochin Estuary becomes a major zone of great environmental significance. This zone also becomes Cochin City's most happening place with the placement of Port and proposed Container Transshipment, Navy etc. right the harbour.

Issues Related to Heritage

The major issues related to this zone are the absence of planning for the Natural Heritage and marine habitat of this estuary. The water edge development guidelines lack environmental sensitivity. Methods to effective reduction of pollution during the port activity are also not ensured. Environmental guidelines for accretion and landfills are also absent.



Thripunithura Heritage Zone

This living fossil of Royal glory has an important place in the history of Kerala. It was the capital of the Kingdom of Cochin from 1755 onwards.

The main area covers the following major heritage features like the Fort area, Hill Palace, Temples, Palaces, Malikas, Churches, Christian settlement, Tamil Brahmin settlement and Konkini settlement.

Some important points about city planning in Thripunithura

The temple forms the focal point of the city. The growth of the city started from around the temple. The main spine, the heart of the Fort, passes through the temple in the east-west direction starting from the east arch and ending at the west arch. The main spine runs from the west Irumpanam iron bridge to the east Statue junction through the temple. The east is guarded by arch. The spine forms the main element of the city. The fort is surrounded by water on 3 sides. The west arch has an iron bridge in front over the river. The east-west axis road is the Kings way. The city has come up in such a way that the commercial units are all around the temple.





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