

EVOLUTION OF THE CORPORATION OF COCHIN

The Historic and Cultural Background

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

However, a well-documented history of last two millenniums will tell us tales about life on this beautiful land. We do have literature from the West and also from the East, mainly classical, 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 covers besides the city of Cochin, the adjoining areas like Kodungallur, Paravur, Chendamangalam Tripunithura etc.

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

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

It is believed that the Greeko-Romans came as early as in the first century of the Christian era and had very close relationship with this land for almost four to five centuries. It is believed that the Arabs and Jews also had close tie-up with the land during these periods. The Chinese and 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 also visible.

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

Then there were people from other parts of the subcontinent, who came here at intervals and made Cochin their permanent home. Gujaratis, Jains, Konkans, Punjabis, Tamils, Marathis, Bengalis, Pathans, Kutchi 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. Cochin can be considered as a classical example of creating an urban environment in which diversity becomes a source of strength rather than that of conflict.

Cochin has been the Chief Port of Malabar for over centuries and it can certainly attribute some links with Mujiris, one of the oldest and biggest port town of western coast in India. Centuries have rolled by since the arrival of ships laden with gold, glided slowly into the inner harbour, steering safely through the deep channel of the Vypin river and anchored quietly in one of the finest natural harbours their wondering eyes had ever beheld. The explores then came in search of the exotic Malabar spices.

Ernakulam was once the capital of the Kingdom of Cochin. The word 'Cochin' derived from the sanskrit word "Balapuri". It is stated in the 'Kerala Mahalmyam'. 'Bala' (small) 'puri' (town) thus became Cochin in course of time. The other version in this behalf according to Shri Achutha Menon is that the word Cochin is derived from the Chinese word "Conchi" which means the seat of King. But according to the architect of Cochin Port R.D. Bristo, the Chinese traders gave the name to the place as Cochin; remembering the name "Cochin" China of the present South Vietnam.

The very name Cochin rightfully known as the "Queen of Arabian Sea", is redolent in history. It is associated with a very old dynasty of kings known no less for the simplicity of their lives and the ancientry of their culture than for their boldness as warriors and their efficiency as administrators. It is a tribute to the justice and cosmopolitanism of these rulers that people of widely different castes and creeds have co-existed peacefully for centuries. Fort Cochin, Mattancherry and Ernakulam were the three Municipalities which were in existence then in Cochin area.

Fort Cochin became a Municipality on the 1st of November 1866.

The first election to the Fort Cochin Municipal Council was conducted on the 6th December 1883. The strength of the Council was 16.

In 1896 sanitary boards were formed separately for Mattancherry and Ernakulam by the Maharajah of Cochin and thus local administration came into existence in these places for the first time. Funds for the functioning of the Boards were given by the Govt. The town councils at Mattancherry and Ernakulam were formed as per the above regulation. In 1956 the erstwhile Elamkulam Panchayat and a portion of Cheranallur Panchayat (Pachalam - Vaduthala) were amalgamated to the Ernakulam Municipality. In 1962 a portion of Palluruthy Panchayat (Mundamveli area) was amalgamated to the then Mattancherry Municipality.

Edappally Panchayat was formed in 1946 and Palluruthy and Vyttila in 1953. In 1952 the then Edappally Panchayat was bifurcated and thus formed a new Panchayat - It was Vennala. Gundu Island and 'Ramanthuruth' were the parts of the Elamkunnappuzha Panchayat and the "Thanthonni thuruth" was the part of Mulavukad Panchayat.

The idea behind the formation of Cochin Corporation was first shaped in the Mattancherry Municipal Council. The Council passed a resolution requesting the Government to form Cochin Corporation amalgamating the Municipalities of Ernakulam, Mattancherry and Fort Cochin. It was on the 9th July, 1960. This resolution was sent to Govt. by the Council. The then Fort Cochin Municipal Council strongly opposed to the proposal and declared that Fort Cochin was against any such formation. The Ernakulam Municipal Council at its meeting held on the 2nd August, 1963 put forward a proposal to form Cochin Corporation amalgamating the more suburban areas. Thus the Govt. in principle approved the proposal of formation of Cochin Corporation and appointed the then Director of Local Bodies, Major Balangadhara Menon, as Special Officer for submitting a report in this behalf. He conducted surveys and studies and submitted his report to Govt. on the 1st July 1967 and the Kerala Assembly approved the formation of Cochin Corporation. Govt. of Kerala as per their order G.O. (MS) 276/67/DD dt. 27/9/67 notified the formation of the Corporation of Cochin by amalgamating the three ancient Municipalities of the state, viz. Ernakulam, Mattancherry and Fort Cochin and the Willington Island and four Panchayats viz. Palluruthy, Vennala, Vyttila and Edappally and the small islands of Gundu Deepu, Ramanthuruth having an area of 83.524 sq. Km. The new born Corporation came into existence on 1-11-1967.