

Historical Significance of Galle fort during the Dutch period in Sri Lanka.

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Galle which is situated in the coast line belongs to the wet zone when considered in terms of geographical features. Galle fort expands up to a land area of about 92 acres bordered by sea from three directions. In 1974 Archeological Department of Sri Lanka named Galle fort as an archeological reserve and In 1983 UNESCO inscribed it as a world cultural heritage site.

It held an importance in respect of east and west foreign trade because of Galle is surrounded by the sea from three directions and the sometime situated a useful natural harbour. After the 16th century A.D Galle was governed by Portuguese, Dutch and British which resulted with their influence by way of cultural and religious environment.

In 1505, the Portuguese arrived unintentionally in Galle, their fleet having been driven to shelter by a storm. In 1602 Dutch East India Trading Company was established amalgamating all the other trading companies in Netherland. Objective of this company was to maintain a monopoly of trade in the east and also to constructed fortresses in the countries under their ruling. They paid their special attention towards Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) because it was a central point for trading activities. Although Dutch tried to maintain relationship with the Kandyan kings several times, it was fulfilled only in 1638. It was through an agreement signed between Dutch and king Rajasinghe II, the Kandyan king. (B.N.R. Jayasena, 2007, 177P)

In 1587, Galle was captured by the Portuguese and constructed a temporary fortress. But in 1640 Dutch took charge of Galle and became their administrative center until they capture Colombo. As Dutch wanted to have Galle as a secured place, they built up the Galle fort on a strong and

secured foundation. The moat around fort build by Portuguese as a security measure was further expanded by the Dutch during their rule.

Dutch were improved the Portuguese defenses but closely followed their pattern. The old bastions were much enlarge and reinforced the sun bastion above the eastern causeway, the moon near the centre and the star on the west. (R.K. de silva, 1988, 158p)

The main entrance to Galle fort was called the “Sea Gate” is now re-constructed facing the Galle harbor. This sea gate, which bears the coat of arms of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), a rooster crest and the date 1687 was once the main gate. It opens to the wharfs where the most valuable crop for the European market was shipped. (Ronald lewcok, 2005, 181p) There is a tunnel running towards the sea in the fort. There is a plaque on the facet of the granite wall of the fort facing the sea, figures denoting 1669 could be seen. It could be assumed that this fort may have been constructed in the year 1669 A.D. or either side of the plaque two lion figures and in the center upper portion a figure of cock and the official symbol “VOC” could be seen.

The fort is constructed with large cut stones while the main gate is made up of semicircular metal (stone). On either side of the sea gate there are two storied warehouses with a staircase to reach the upstairs. Their main purpose is to store cinnamon in the warehouse. The warehouse named "Pack huis" is presently use as the naval museum. These buildings are constructed as narrow – long constructions with lines of Doric Pillars.(Aluthwatta, 2008, 33p)

Dutch built up a hospital in Galle fort premises. Only army officials and Europeans were treated there. The staff consisted of a senior surgeon, a surgeon and a trainee medical officer. A monthly payment was made to the medical staff. As there was an epidemic of small-pox, for the first time, an experiment of immunization against small-pox was carried out in Galle hospital.(Uragoda, .1987, 211p)

Another special building which depicts Dutch architectural features is the protestant church constructed by Dutch architect named Abraham Anthonisz in 1751. It is said to have been created by a commander named De Jone when his wife was blessed with a daughter. After completing the construction of the church commander De Jone had baptized his daughter at this

church in 1755 and (R.K. de silva, 1988, 166p) a plaque can be seen on the wall in memory of this incident. This church is constructed under the Baroque and Rococo architectural patterns.

Another speciality of this church is that there are large underground graves in a corner of the aisle and in the compound of the church and also there is a secret tunnel leading towards the sea of which the entrance is blocked with cement at the present. Bodies of the officers and their family members Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie - VOC) are interred in the underground vaults of the church.

Another special feature of the church is that there are no pillars in the church hall to bear the weight of the roof. Entire weight of the roof depends on the wall plates of the four numbers of walls. Arch shaped stained glass windows and projecting illuminations openings of the upper portion of the church provide light for the inner part of the church. (R.K. de silva, 1988, 167p)

Caribbean blue colour was been applied on the semicircular ceiling while the heaven is signified through star composite pictures. Architectural style which was popular in the 17th century in Holland was Corinthian patterns. In most of the Dutch buildings in Sri Lanka Corinthian pattern associated with Baroque and Rococo patterns structures could be seen. The other Corinthian pattern that is available is classical renaissance Corinthian order of architecture. They are with triangular shape and acute lines.

But Baroque and Rococo Corinthian patterns feature with curved lines and complex shapes. On the top of the Corinthians and the on the lower part and on either sides, models of a vase, a shell, a ball, a sea shell or a conch shell could be seen as a decoration. Such decorations could be seen in the Dutch church in Galle fort.

In the fort premises number of official residencies of Dutch governors and the other Dutch officials could be seen. Retired Dutch officials have preferred to stay in Sri Lanka without returning to their home land. Due to this reason it caused the expansion of Dutch architecture in Sri Lanka further. Ordinary Dutch houses were constructed according the popular style existed in the 16th and 17th centuries in Dutch village areas. They are called “Villas”.

In Dutch houses ventilation systems have been made with decorated windows. These houses consist of higher verandas, buttress avoid sea breeze destructions to walls etc. mostly the columns

of these houses are constructed according to Greek Doric style. (Ronald lewcok, 2005, 186-187pp)

Conclusion

In most of the ancient buildings in coastal areas in the western region, Dutch architectural styles could be observed. During the Dutch and even afterwards construction of buildings, have gone through the Dutch architectural influence. Buildings that are existing in the Galle fort have renovated by the patronage of Netherland government reserving the ancient architectural values. All the building available in the Galle fort exhibits the grandeur of Dutch architectural technology.

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