## Mediating Heritage Notes on History and Photographic Spaces of Travancore

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**Abstract**

*In this paper, I consider analyzing the official photographs of colonial Travancore to understand how the photographic sites of heritage (architecture of buildings, institutions and landscapes) function as space for the production and reproduction of forms of colonel knowledge in tune with the political economy of colonialism and modernity. As in any other part of the colonial world, the early history of photography in Kerala was intrinsically connected with the official documentation of the Travancore region by the government.*

**Key words**: Heritage and visual culture, Space and culture, Colonial spaces, Official Photographs of Travancore, Kerala and Cultural History. Photography and History

## Introduction

Although small by comparison, the Department of Photography evolved like Post and Telegraphs, and Radio Broadcasting as an independent department of the government in Travancore. In September 1880, Zachariah D'cruz was appointed as government photographer and mechanic with a monthly salary of Rs. 55. The arrival of the new technology, however, was not formally recorded nor was the Department's functions well defined[1]. The nature of the photographs that were taken during the period between 1900 and 1920s by the Department shows that the frames of official photography would remain confined largely to the genres of the architectural beauty of the palaces and other official buildings such as museums, railway stations, guest houses, residency buildings and forts; educational institutions like newly established schools and colleges; religious institutions such as temples and churches and their architectural grandeur; major geographical locations represented through the photographs of canals,

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[1] Dewan's order dated 23 April 1934. File No 708/35/Genrl. Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum (hereafter KSA TVM).

rivers and backwaters, viewed as the centres of the economic activities and finally as the sites of development such as dams and bridges **(see Table 1).** This genres produced different discursive effects and distinct visual fields: one kind is ornamental and iconic pictures of royalty; another is supplementary to this and monumental: palaces and other views, third is the material progress and reforms of the region: educational and lastly; beauty of the cultural and economic landscapes of the region along with people and some time without them. The new photographs coexisted with the older one recorded by the department at a different time and were invariably inserted in the albums presented to the guests (mainly colonial administrative officials), this bringing together various traditional symbols and locations as well as emblems of modern development in Travancore. These ideally visualise a confined and unified territory as well as its institutional apparatus within the jurisdiction of the Princely state of Travancore.

**Table1:**

List of Photographs taken by the Photographic Department in the period between 1880-1920 : *List of serviceable negatives of Views and Public Buildings in Travancore*

Size 10 x 8

| | |
|---|---|
| 1.Trivandrum Temple, new | 2. Do. Temple & Teppakulam, new |
| 3. Satelmond Palace, new | 4. kalpalakadavu, old. |
| 5.Kaudiar Palace before reconstruction, new. | 6. Vallathoral Pier, new. |
| 7. Bhaktivilas , new. | 8. Public offices, old. |
| 9. Law college, old | 10. Science College, old. |
| 11. E.H. School for girls, old | 12. V.J. Town Hall, old |
| 13. School of Arts ,old | 14. Public libraray, old |

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|---|---|
| 15. Napier Museum, old | 16. Museum and Band stand, new. |
| 17. Public Gardens, old. | 18. Kanakakunnu Palace, new. |
| 19. State Guest House, 2 negatives, old . Different positions. | 20. View of East of Guest House, old. |
| 21. Golf Pavilion , old. | 22. Golf pavilion & Fountain, old. |
| 23. Golf Links &Gardens, old. | 24. Shungumukhom,new. |
| 25. Chakay Landing ghat, old. | 26. Cape Comorin, 2 views, old. |
| 27. Cape Temple & Bathing Ghat, new | 28. Cape View, new. |
| 29. Suchindran Pagoda &Temple, old. | 30. Suchindran Pagoda Entrance.old |
| 31. Vattakotai Fort, Exterior, new | 32.Vattakotai Fort, Interior, new. |
| 33. Ponnanai Head Works, old. | 34. Paralayar, old |
| 35. Villikiri Aqueduct, new. | 36. Oodayagerry , new. |
| 37. Thadikarakonam Syphon, near view, new | 38. Ditto, General View, new. |
| 39.Pachipara Dam, Sluice &Channel, new. | 40. Pachipara Channel leading to Thadikarakonam Syphon, new. |
| 41 Pachipara Dam with  the Ghats in the back-ground, new. | 42. Kuzhithoral Bridge, new. |
| 43. Ditto, River, new. | 44. Meenmutti River, old. |
| 45. Valey Lake and R. Bridge facing | 46. Aakulam, new. |

| North, new. | |
|---|---|
| 47. Valey Lake and R. Bridge facing South, new. | 48. Kadinamkulam,new. |
| 49. Chiraayinkil River, old. | 50. Anjengo Fort.old. |
| 51. Ditto, Interior with Flag Staff, old. | 52. Vettoor, new. |
| 53. Warkalay Tunnel, Facing North, new. | 54. Warkalay Cliffs, new |
| 55. Warkalay Sanatorium, Bird's-eye View, new. | 56 Warkalay Bend, new |

The List is based on the Government Photographer reply to Chief Secretary. No 198/34, dated 18-7-34. File No 3396/34/Gl.

## Heritage sites:  Architecture and visual spaces

The official frames should be understood as photographic representations of a different 'colonial space' as an area of knowledge production (Noyes 1995).  The structuration of the space is effected at a number of levels, but it seems that the goal of colonisation has always been to organise geopolitical space in such a way that its productivity is maximised (ibid, 188). I shall consider here, only photographically visualised modern spaces of Travancore, which had undergone colonial mediation. The official photographs mirror the regalia of the Raj and the luxury of native courts, elites and their position in the social hierarchy. The photographs of heritage spaces produced by the Department was sometimes confined to the space where the modern subject-making process was taking place, for example, schools, courts, prisons, and other official institutions. Therefore, this heritage space was imbued with the power of the new governmentality overshadowed by colonialism.  It is in this context that the cultural space of

institutional photographs could be conceptualised, following what Foucault calls 'disciplinary regime' where the individuals have increasingly become subjects and objects of surveillance and knowledge by various institutions (prison, medical clinic, school). These institutional spaces themselves were sites par excellence of colonial modernity, which induced effects of power through the institutional apparatus and knowledge that disciplined the visions of new temporality.

Institutional photographs of the Photographic Department as well as photographs published in Somerset Playne's 'Southern India' (1915) attest to the way in which colonial events remained largely coeval with the idea of 'improvement." At the same time, they enunciate an ideology of colonialism to show the enduring differences between Britain (colonialism) and India (Indian past) (Metcalf 1998, 113–59). These differences have been articulated in the heritage and institutional photographs in two ways. Firstly, the spectacle of the institutional photographs whether of dam or canals, or buildings housing educational institutions, railways, factories, scientific and medical institutions, or plantations, show the colonial initiatives and the Indian collaboration to 'improve' India from its 'state of ruin'. The British civilising enterprise is discernible in these construction activities following the mutiny and the take-over of Indian affairs by the Crown (ibid, 156–59). The photographic representation of the newly constructed dams and canals in the region display the sign of 'progress' of colonial period. On the other hand, the colossal views of these structures ideally transformed the existing landscape into a modern spatio-temporality. The unidentifiable human figures within these photographic spaces were visualised as objects as well as subjects of this new spatiality.

Secondly, the architectural design of these heritage buildings in the institutional photographs has exhibited an engagement with the new understanding of progress that the princely state universalised under colonial conditions. The building design simultaneously announces a clear difference between

spaces of the 'civilised' colonial intercession and the 'uncivilised' spaces of the natives. During the Company rule most British administrative buildings in India were based on the architectural design of European Classicism.[2] It is in this context that building photographs record the new style of architecture (known as Indo-Saracenic) that blends different existing styles. It was an idyllic amalgamation of 'European science' and 'native art' of 'traditional' forms and 'modern' functions (Metcalf 1998, 158). Almost all institutional building structures that were constructed during the Raj whether the public administrative offices, power houses, legal courts, bungalows, educational buildings, museums, dams, hospitals, or factories, have followed this concept of symmetrical forms to project the historical transformation of society in the context of the modern notion of progress under colonial paramountcy. Here photography has 'flickered around' these institutional spaces. (Pinney 1997, 70; Tagg 1988, 63) It is at this point that one should think why photographic spectacle is being replenished with the institutional spaces such as school, railway, court, museum, hospital, factory, administrative buildings as well as the spaces of economic production and reproduction such as sites of the tea, coffee and rubber plantations that developed under the initiatives of the princely Travancore.

## Institutional Photography: Sites and spaces of heritage

Each genre of institutional heritage photography is value loaded with this baggage of material existence which is part of the ideological apparatus that can be split into the elements of revered tradition and the coveted modern. The contextualisation of the institutional photographs within the structure of paramountcy is to understand the 'material operation of ideological apparatus, to which correspond a

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[2] From1860s onwards, a new design known as 'Indo-Saracenic', was evolved, which incorporated Indic features into architectural designs. Building architecture stands apart informing the presence of the British rule in the region. The architectural style was a combination of different elements of design from across India as well as the European style ideally suited to the British vision of themselves as not merely foreign conquerors but legitimate indigenous rulers (Metcalf 1998, 156–57).

certain number of specific practices' (Tagg 1988, 188).[3] These photographs also help us to understand the invariable way of dissemination of new knowledge and structuring of society and its subjects into the new rhythms of colonial modernity. The new structuring of society does not take place in a vacuum and as a result of it one could observe the coming of spaces that are different from the capitalist spaces in spite of certain similarities.

The emergence of new institutional heritage spaces is important in the evolving social formation in Kerala. It was this site of colonial modernity that constitutes definite historical spaces for photographic representation and practice. Within the discursive field of colonialism, a process of subjectification developed almost parallel to the development of new institutions in Kerala by the adoption of new techniques of surveillance, recording, disciplining, training and reform. In Kerala, especially in Travancore, new institutions such as the educational institutions, court and prison, hospital, railway and factories were established by the colonial state, missionaries and the princely state. These institutions followed different strategies of discipline to form the new subjectivity. The visuality of photographs, as medium of record-keeping, was bound up with the emergence of new institutions and their practices. As John Tagg has argued, 'these new techniques of representation and regulation … were … central to the restructuring of the local and national state in industrial societies' (1988, 5). In our context, though an industrial society was absent, the views of institutions bear witness to the transformation of colonial Kerala, and are a part of the 'spectacle of modernity' in the region.

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[3]The question here is bound with the colonial ideology and its diffusion of knowledge through various institutions to create a disciplined and docile subject for its dominance and capital accumulation. Colonial ideology transmits through its various institutional spaces by adopting different strategise. Following Foucault, it could be understood as a space of a new strategy of power knowledge. When I refer to photograph and its ideological representation, ideology is not something that exists outside the reality, rather ideology is inlaid in the spectacled object of the photographs. In the institutional photographs the ideological effect disseminates through the state apparatus. These institutions were integrated in to the ideological apparatus of the princely state and paramountcy in Travancore. As Louis Althusser has pointed out, 'an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice or practices. This existence is material' (as quoted in Tagg 1988, 188)

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As I have already argued these institutional spectacles were significant elements of the hybridity of colonial modernity where a new subjectivity was in formation through redefining of existing knowledge and cultural habitus. The individuals saw themselves as subjects of, and participants within, the institutional social spaces of colonial modernity. In colonial Kerala these institutions can be considered sites or spheres of colonial modernity where the process of colonial subjectification took hold. For instance, in colonial Kerala changes were brought about through the spread of Western education and schooling, practice and popularisation of Western medicine, circulation of knowledge through printing and redefining of the legal practices through the colonial legal system (Mohan 1999; Washbrook, 1981). These institutions disseminated and shaped knowledge for the colonial subjects and their discourse could create a new colonial subjectivity in Kerala. The modernity that was encountered here has its roots within these institutional apparatuses of colonial power. The photographic record then has interlaced with these visions of colonial modernity, as 'views' and 'scenes' of Kerala in the colonial period. Here, photographs do not function as mere 'evidence' for history; instead they are themselves history. Photographs encompass and diffuse the knowledge of a particular social and economic formation. They function as another institution which was subject to the regulation of the state. In Travancore, both the Photographic Department and the new institutional apparatus developed simultaneously within the discourse of colonialism. The effects of power produced by this apparatus and related subjectivity is the threshold that photographs could open up.

It can be said that the structural design of these institutions itself induces effects of power within the discursive realm of colonialism. The photographic depiction of palaces of kings and residencies of Travancore and its vernacular architectural forms transmits an idea of the distinguishable presence of the princely state within the paramountcy of colonial rule. The circulation of these photographs for exhibition in metropolitan cities, their reproduction in local and national newspapers as

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well as their publication in ethnographic and history books as the 'views' of Kerala during this period tended to emphasise Travancore's autonomous statehood.

Instead of pursuing textual analysis of genres of institutional photographs, what I would prefer to do here is a contextual analysis, where in each genres treated as a 'site': site where intervention, encounter, anxiety, resistance, recognition and invention of 'modern subject' being articulated and contested. In this context, I am not using any photographic index, as an example to discuss this, rather focus will be on 'site' which the photographs highlighted as the site of par excellence of modernity. Photographs of factories, for instance, had a high symbolic value within the discourse of modernity and capitalist penetration in the region. It is a site of 'modern development' that was facilitated by capital. New spatial relations emerged within the site of factories. These new disciplined spatial relations were regulated and ordered with the new time consciousness. It produces both goods and subject positions. New habits were formed within the spatiality of the factory.[4] At the same time the new discipline of time of the factory affected the schedule of the workers and their families (Mcquire 1998, 115). It has been observed in the context of the missionary work among the slave castes that performed social production in Travancore that they were gradually brought under the regime of modern notion of time that the missionaries followed. The subject position of labour can be located within the discursive realms of the factory. These new labour habits and time discipline cannot be restricted within the spatial relation of the factory or industries; rather it creates a new mentality among the working class people.

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[4] New habitus formed by adoptions of different strategies followed within the space of the factories, such as the division of labour, the supervision of labour, fine and punishment, bells, clocks and time schedule, and money incentives (Thompson 1993, 394).

It has been noticed that like the factory, spatial relations in the plantation industries also were coupled with the disciplinary regulation and rules of capitalist expansion in the region.[5]. The work or labour time was controlled by the 'clock-work' time. Contextually, the spatial relations that emerged within the sites of plantation industries also provided a new spatial location for inhabitations and related social mobility to the lower-caste labourers who participated in coffee and tea cultivation in plantations owned by missionaries. Social mobility was made possible, through the progressive elimination of caste restrictions imposed upon the depressed castes by the caste hierarchy through administrative measures that were not always adhered to even by the state (Tharakan 1998, 12). However, it cannot be generalised that the emergence of a new subject position within the discourses of institutions were absolutely free from the existing social/caste hierarchy of Kerala. Genres of photographs that I am examining in the last section of this chapter will foreground this aspect.

The framescape of railway photographs symbolically stands as a sign of a new interactive space that eventually produced a more accessible social space for the people. By the latter half of the 19th century, major port towns in India were connected with the railway and by the end of the century India possessed the fifth longest railway system in the world (Metcalf and Metcalf 2002, 96). The railways played a crucial role not only in connecting the 'imagined nation' and its people but also made possible the export of commercial crops of the colonial economy like cotton, jute and tea in return for textiles and other manufactured goods (ibid, 96–70). It was also used for the transportation of army, labour and foodstuffs. In addition to this, railways played a crucial role in incorporating Indian economy into the

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[5] Though there existed different coercive methods and rules, the most important aspect of plantation labour is related to time. As Ravi Raman has observed, 'the estate gong/siren signaled the time for everything that the workers did. They rose from bed at 4.30 or 5 a.m., gathered for their daily roll-call and inspection at 6 to 6.30 a.m., and then it was a hard day's toil up to 5 p.m in the evening' (2002,13–14).

'world economy' and its capitalist order (Raman, 69). Railway made the world 'physically more accessible, photography made it visually and conceptually more accessible' (Schwarz and Ryan 2003, 3).

Photographs were extensively used in the topographical surveys for the construction of the new railway lines in different parts of India. Photography and railways that were the most important agents of social spatialisation in the 19th century have developed a powerful relationship because 'both regulated and ordered time and space'. (Foster 2003, 141). At the same time both were an integral part of colonial governance and imagined nation building through the construction and visualisation of new political geographies (ibid). The visual spectacle of the railway buildings (railway stations) symbolically stands as an icon of modern nation building. In the colonial period most of the railway buildings were constructed in the architectural style similar to the railway terminus of metropolitan cities or adopted an Indo-Saracenic design. Both ways it becomes a significant visual spectacle to establish India's central position in the larger imperial system.[6] Considering the practices of photography in India, the railway terminus was one of the popular backgrounds against which people got photographed and photographs of the major railway stations were one of the important visual subjects for the print media in Kerala in this period. These photographs of railway stations were widely circulated through the print media as one of the iconographic events in the realm of progress and transformation of the Kerala society.

The genre of educational institution photographs needs to be understood within the wider ideology and practice of the colonial subject making process. In the archive of official photography of Kerala, photographs of educational institutions are the highest in number. This is one of the important

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[6] For example, as Metcalf points out, Bombay's neo-Gothic Victoria Terminus, completed in 1887, a popular subject for painting and photography, was architecturally similar to railway terminus in London and Melbourne (Metcalf and Metcalf 2003, 128).

genres of visual spectacle that appeared not only in the official photography of Travancore but also in the colonial ethnographies as well as missionary journals and documentation.

Perhaps the most effective site of the reproduction of colonial ideology of dominance, were the educational institutions. The princely state of Travancore, the missionaries and the colonial state were all engaged in thinking about the education of the lower castes. From the late 19th century onwards there were efforts to open schools for all sections of the society although it was resisted by the upper castes. The schooling process helped the colonised to evolve a modern social self. Apart from this, a dialogue between east and west, traditional and modern evolved in the process of the creation of the new 'subjective self' (Panikkar 1995, 51–53). Although the space of the school could be identified as a sphere of colonial dominance,[7] it could also be understood as an emerging 'public space'.

**Conclusion**

In general, the surface of the institutional photographs of heritage sites, which carries inscriptions of colonial ideology freezes the newly emerged dynamism of the society and advocates a spatially and temporally unified homogenous time of modernity. However, these homogeneous politics of modernity and its representation was always being conflated with the heterogeneous histories and times of the people (Chatterjee 1999, 132). Though the new institutions and their spaces brought different social groups into a new unified temporality, the polysemous histories of the past that were embedded with the subjects give a retrospective idea about how the modernity's time and space encompassed the heterogeneities of Kerala society. These new temporalised spaces and their relations with the 'polysemous histories of past spatial relations' are one of the chief characteristics of institutional

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[7] 'By undertaking the education of its subjects in Western science, language, and literature, England was able to insert Indians into the colonial administrative apparatus and make them useful servants of empire' (Viswanathan 1998, 5).

photography. The space of institutional photography can be problematised as an economic and social site where new forms of knowledge introduced by the princely state with the active collaboration of the colonial power brought in the process of subjectification. Land has been transformed in institutional photographs as a cultural space infused with the broader ideological structures of colonial paramountcy and modernity. These cultural spaces involved production of visuality of economic, political and social knowledge that had originated in the colonial context and embedded in the polysemous past social relations of the region.

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