

Rich Ship building Heritage of India with special reference to Kerala

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Kerala possesses rich maritime traditions dating back to the Early Historic period. A few types of traditional watercrafts developed indigenously and some are influenced by external contacts. Archaeological excavations revealed a medieval sailboat at Kadakkarappally in 2003 and an Early Historic canoe at Pattanam in 2007. The Early Historic Sangam Tamil texts refer to the watercrafts of Kerala. Traditional boat-building still survives in Kerala.

Kerala's strategic location connects the eastern and western worlds in the Indian Ocean region. Kerala's internal processes and external influences have caused the development of a vibrant maritime culture, including interesting watercraft types, than any other region in India. With the Western Ghats on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west, Kerala is enriched by the monsoons, 44 perennial rivers, 15 backwaters and a 600 km coast. Kerala has rich wood sources suitable for boat-building.

Traditional boat building is strongly backed by the basic knowledge of craftsmanship of local carpenters and the knowledge has been passed from father to son. This can be seen in places like Ponjikkara (Kochi), Beypore and other parts of Kerala. Most of the traditional boats are built in temporary yards and sheds erected by the carpenters wherever they found suitable place for construction of a boat mostly close to banks of the river. The traditional boat building technology differ in different places, as it is purely relay on the availability of raw material, labour and master carpenter and builder's interest. In this presentation we can see how the western and eastern culture influenced the traditional boat building of Kerala.

Experiments undertaken in methods of navigation to survive in the water-filled landscape led to the development of indigenous watercrafts like the kettuvallam, some of which still survive. Traditional Boats are generally used for are: Fishing, Small Cargo Handling (kettuvallam), Passenger carriers in rivers, channels, & Tourism (houseboats) etc. This presentation presents the evidence for traditional boats in Kerala, their historical context, the possible external influences, the types of construction and the parts of Kerala were traditional boat building is still practiced.