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Kazhakkootam: A Legacy bolstered by Technopark

Thought
Leadership



Two decades ago, *Kazhakuttam* or *Kazhakkoottam* as it is alternatively spelt could have been easily passed off as any other typical village in Kerala – paddy fields, coconut grooves, thatched cottages and a slow pace of life. But this languorous village, just 15 km from Trivandrum city center, is fast emerging as a twin-city – a suburb threatening to surpass the state capital.

“If you would understand anything, observe its beginning and its development”, wrote Aristotle. This sleepy village Kazhakuttam, was one of the palatial houses of Kazhakkoottathu Ugran Pillai, the powerful among the *Ettuveetil Pillais*, who threatened the sovereignty of Marthanda Varma, the ruler of erstwhile princely state of

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Travancore. Marthanda Varma wiped out all the Pillais, along with their families but the memoir of that event and days still stands in the form of Sri Mahadevar temple in Kazhakuttam. Interesting to note is the meaning of the name Kazhakkoottam which comes from two malayalam word – *kazhakam* (gathering or association) and *kootam* (group). In ancient day, there used to be annual get-togethers of Nair joint

families known as *kazhakam(ngal)*, and since most of the days there more than one *kazhakam* held in that area, the place came to be known as Kazhakkoottam. Today the meaning still holds good. Only difference being, it transcends Nair families to a global family - the global workforce of Technopark, the IT hub of Kerala – resulting in the birth of a new city.

Technopark boasts of being the largest technology park in India. It is the single largest source of employment in Kerala, employing nearly 17,000 people directly and generating another 30,000 employment indirectly. It's nearly two decades of remarkable growth and performance, has pushed the government, trade and industry to match up their offerings. The major infrastructural necessities are already in place with government making massive investments in road networks, railway station at Kazhakuttam, power, telecommunication, etc. and the private sector pitching the other facilities of a modern city. The high-income IT workforce has sent frenzy among the real estate developers, with each vying for a pie of the lucrative high-end apartments, multiplexes, retail complexes and hotels market. But what's in for the Kazhakuttam villagers and local residents?

Technopark was envisioned for creating an innovation hub; the people around

the park were no less innovative in identifying and commercializing the opportunities for sustaining this IT revolution. Though the residents of Kazhakuttam have moved away from their traditional agrarian livelihood, the entrepreneurial skills of many have brought them life transforming opportunities.

The influx of young IT professional, mostly single and from outside Trivandrum created huge demand for housing. In the initial days of Technopark, the only option for these young professionals was to rent a house in city. But being new to the city and not wanting to spend a large amount of time commuting, there was a need for housing facilities in the close vicinity of Technopark. To fill in the gap, the residents of Kazhakuttam stepped in, constructing additional rooms for rentals and few going to the extent of throwing open their spacious rooms to the guests and they themselves reclining in corners. Today, most houses around Technopark house paying guests. Where once, houses were constructed solely for the purpose of shelter for ones' own family, owning multiple houses, flats or constructing additional floors for rentals is now a norm. And the rental received is sufficient to cover most household expenses for the month. Real estate value in the area has grown over 800 times. Chunks of marshy land, which till a couple of years

ago were lying unclaimed, are now commanding premium rates. The buzz of activity is spreading beyond Kazhakuttam. Nevertheless, it's not just the boom in the real estate market that is responsible for the prosperity and economic freedom of Kazhakuttam residents.

From small tea stalls to full fledged, multi-cuisine hotels; from vegetable and fruit stalls to supermarkets; from white goods stores to white goods rentals and repair shops; from simple laundry services to entire housekeeping services; dance and music schools to educational and coaching institutes; hundreds of Kazhakuttam residents and other city entrepreneurs have found opportunities of self employment.

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The success stories like that of a man selling miscellaneous goods on the road side of the Kazhakuttam junction now owning a shop at the junction; or a cleaning boy who now contracts the housekeeping operations around Technopark; or once upon a time drivers who now own fleet of cars and buses, running shuttle services for Technopark companies; continues to inspire the young Kazhakuttam residents, who dream of making it big themselves. There are still others who are enchanted

by the world inside the Technopark and would like to emulate the white collar paying guests in their homes. This is not an elusive dream for these teenagers, many of whose parents have never had any formal education. From a lower primary school, and a Sainik School, access to which was limited for Kazhakuttam residents, the village now boasts of multiple schools. The healthcare facilities too have improved from a taluk hospital to multi-specialty hospitals. On the human development

index, Kazhakuttam stands a mark higher than many of the cities in Kerala.

For those who didn't lose their hopes when their land was bartered for Technopark, those who changed with time and complimented the opportunity with their hard work, this drossy village has been in its true potential, an El Dorado. The joys and laughter of yesteryears family get-togethers is no more a part of history for Kazhakuttam, it has grown beyond the family.

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