

Church bungalow may turn Chavittunatakam museum

Muziris Heritage Project team meets St. Sebastian's Forane Church priest

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It was an afterthought that nudged the authorities of the St. Sebastian's Forane Church at Gothuruth to have a meeting with the working team of the Muziris Heritage Project (MHP) on church complex the other day.

Fr. Tom Rajesh Palliyil, the popular parish priest, sat at the church bungalow listening to the proposal to turn the building he was residing into a Chavittunatakam museum as part of the heritage conservation project. "So, basically, you want to throw me out of this place?" the jovial priest asked in jest, as the project consultant, conservation architect Benny Kuriakose explained the plan in detail.

"No, no, we don't want to acquire the building. Taking over is not on the agenda. The government would enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Parish Council, following discussions, before setting up the museum," assured M.V. Kunhiraman, special officer of the MHP when Parish Council member, former government servant Joy Kaimathuruthy sounded sceptical about the plan.

"It's going to be a participatory museum, like all other museums integrated into the tour circuit. The place being the fount of Chavittunatakam must have a museum showcasing the art, its costumes, texts, documents pertaining to it and the like. It fits snugly into the overall scheme of the conservation project," said Mr. Kuriakose. "But, then, the perform-



Studied steps: Gothuruth, being the fount of Chavittunatakam, must have a museum showcasing the art, says conservation architect Benny Kuriakose.

ance space, an auditorium and a restaurant constructed for regular Chavittunatakam performance are in bad shape, with seepage and pattering rain inundating the hall," Mr. Kaimathuruthy butted in.

"Of course, maybe the seal wasn't applied on the ceiling the way it should have been. Or maybe it's the material used. We are seized of the need to rectify problems with the structures erected as part of the project and are addressing them as well," maintained Mr. Kuriakose.

"For the priests, staying in the bungalow, the original plan was to offer them alternative accommodation. Let's make a detailed proposal and have a discussion with the Parish Council."

The need to have a boat jetty adjacent to the Valia

Palli, as the church is known in the area, was acknowledged by everyone, but Mr. Kaimathuruthy remained sceptical about gathering adequate artefacts on Chavittunatakam.

Specifics stressed

"There are a few masters on the island right now, like Thambi Payyapilly, the senior most among them, but none seems to have put together a performance code for the dance-theatre. The efforts have only begun now. Say, for instance, nobody can say for sure if it's the right foot or the left foot that should be tapped on the dance floor first. It's an oral tradition and should be properly codified," he said.

Rubin D'Cruz, assistant editor at National Book Trust who as director of Kerala State Institute of Children's

Literature had put together the literature on MHP, assured Mr. Kaimathuruthy that the MHP would go by the version of the dance drama as it was documented by the Kendra Sangeet Natak Akademi.

"We will wait for the detailed proposal before taking a call on this," said Mr. Kaimathuruthy.

The tiny island has already become a haven for arts, more so for performing arts and a Chavittunatakam performing space built with assistance from Cochin Shipyard was opened by actor Mammooty the other day. "There are programmes aplenty on the island, and the number of children learning Chavittunatakam has grown manifold over the years. There is a renewed interest in the art," said an islander.