

AP AHEAD

CONTRIBUTION OF 'COTTON MAHARISHI' TO THE ENDURING PROSPERITY OF THE GODAVARI DELTA. HE STOOD AT THE CROSSROADS POST-BIFURCATION OF ANDHRA PRADESH. HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM, HE CAUTIONS THAT THE DERRING-DO OF THE EARLIER ERA WON'T WORK ANY MORE. A CALL FOR A NEW PARADIGM — THINK HARD, SET HOUSE IN ORDER AND FACE THE GHOSTS OF THE PAST

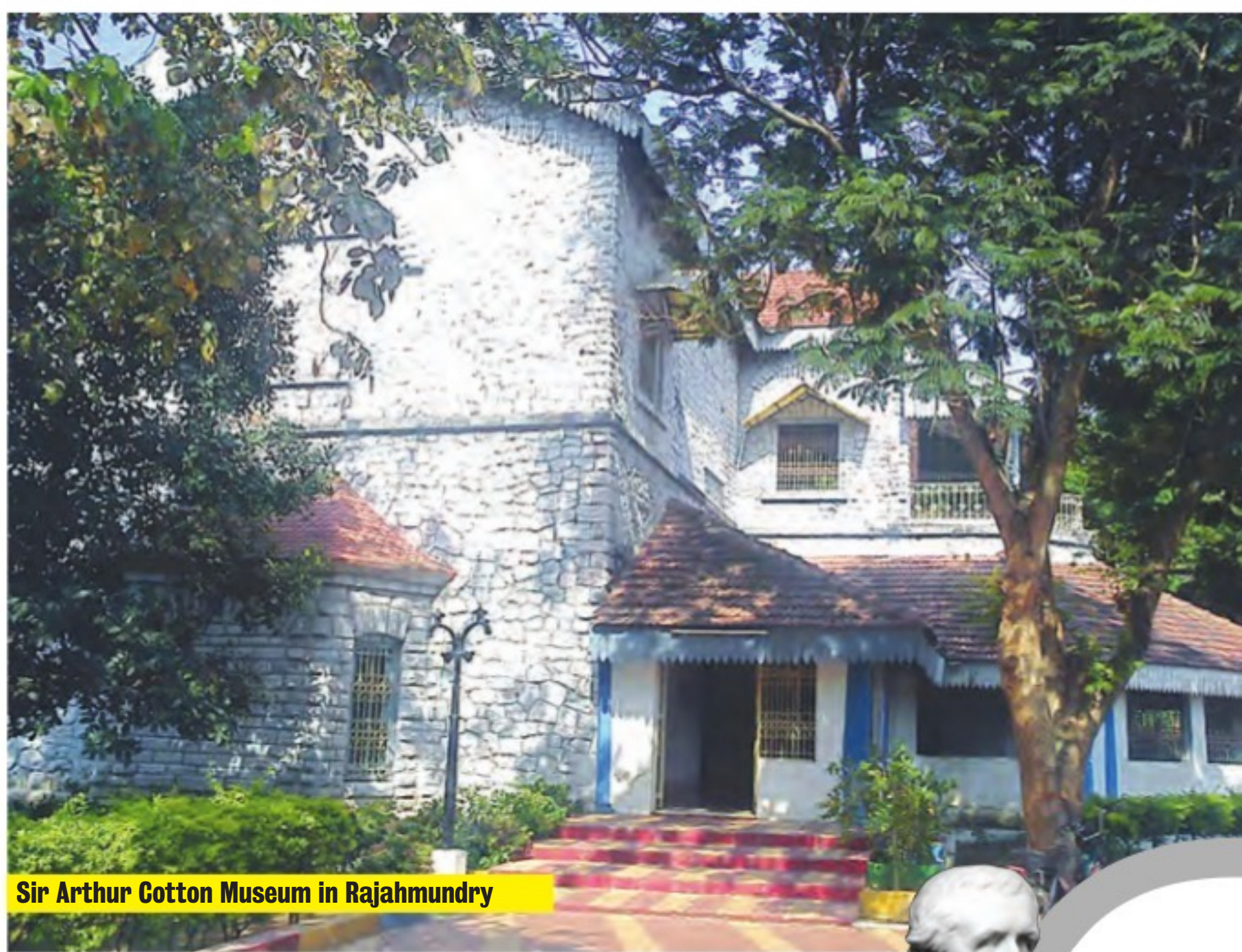
SIR ARTHUR COTTON

The Godavari districts would not be in the shape they are in today but for the work of Sir Arthur Cotton 150 years ago. He lives in the memory of the people as 'Cotton Maharishi' and 'Apara Bhageeratha'. Some 3000 statues of him stand today, and he is worshipped as if he were a God. Arthur Cotton is the reigning deity in the mythology of the Godavari Delta. That is as it should be in India, for that is how we remember, embellish and exaggerate the gifts of our heroes.

Arthur Cotton was one of seven sons. His father was Henry Calveley Cotton, himself the tenth son of Sir Lynch Cotton, the fourth holder of the baronetcy created in 1677. Arthur Cotton's father had few resources in a system where the eldest son inherited all or most of the family properties. Yet, six of his sons distinguished themselves: Gen. Sir Sydney Cotton; Charles Cotton (ICS); Gen. Frederick Cotton (Royal Engineers), Col. Hugh Claveley Cotton, (Royal Engineers); Adm. Frank Vere Cotton, Rev RJ Cotton (provost of Worcester College, Oxford) and Sir Arthur Cotton. Any father would be proud of such sons. Arthur Cotton joined Addiscombe (East India Company's College) at the age of 16. After education there, he was considered so able that he was taken into the Royal Engineers without having to take an exam.

After training in Wales, he was posted to India at the age of 19. Cast into the unknown, he became an ardent Christian and turned to the Bible for comfort and support. He set his face against drink and gambling and devoted himself to his work.

His first assignment was the cutting of a passage in the Pamban Channel. This saved ships a journey of several hundred miles around Ceylon. This, 200 years later, is now



Sir Arthur Cotton Museum in Rajahmundry

sought to be extended by the controversial and ill-fated Rama Setu project. His next assignment lodged a life-long interest in his heart.

This was a project to repair the dilapidated Grand Anicut on the Cauvery. After careful study in 1827, he proceeded to remodel and renovate this great dam, which had stood for 2000 years. He grasped its basic operative principle: that of a weir which raised the water level sufficient to allow it to flow into the canals. Excess water just flowed over the anicut, which offered little or no resistance.

In this activity, he was assisted by his brother, Hugh Cotton. With the completion of this work, prosperity returned to the Tanjore delta, and Arthur Cotton saw the dramatic result as a demonstration of what could be

done all over India by providing irrigation.

At the time when Cotton was engaged in his Tanjore project, there was great misery in the Guntur and Rajahmundry Circar districts. Textiles from England, products of the new industrial revolution, were driving the spinners and weavers of that area out of business. The land was racked by a great famine in 1832. Nearly 40% of the population of Guntur died

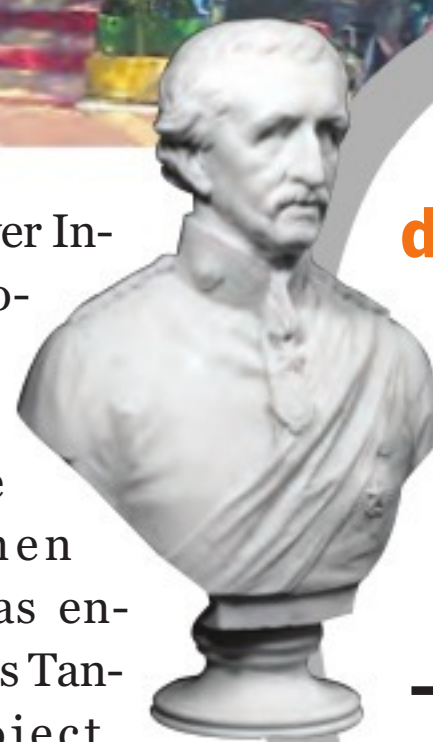
of hunger, and 25% in Rajahmundry. And in 1839, a great cyclone devastated the areas around Kakinada, Samalkota and Rajahmundry. Remedial steps were required and Sir Henry Montgomery was sent as commissioner to inquire and recommend measures. Montgomery had been collector of Tanjore and seen what Arthur Cotton did there. So the great engineer was deputed to the Godavari area in 1844.

He suggested a project like the Grand Anicut on the Godavari at Dowleshwaram. Detailed plans were made, and justifications were listed. The approval came in 1845. Though the amount sanctioned by the East India Company was only 47,575 pounds, Sir Arthur's estimate for the anicut alone was 47,575 pounds and for the whole project 1,20,000 pounds (₹49.44 crore today) (A pound was equal to 10 rupees or 11.66 grams of silver worth ₹412 today!)

Arthur Cotton was generous in his acknowledgement of the assistance he received from his Indian staff. He said of his overseer Veenam Veranah, "I could say less that that if we had not found an Indian of his remarkable qualifications, considering the state of the district when the works were commenced, I do not see how they could have been executed, for no European could have supplied his place, and no Indian equal to him appeared."

The British made Veranah a sub-engineer and conferred the title of Rai Bahadur. He died in 1867. Sir Charles Trevelyan, the governor of Madras, wrote: "Colonel Cotton's name will be venerated by millions yet unborn, when many, who now occupy a much larger place in the public view, will be forgotten; and although it concerns not him, it would be a matter of regret if Colonel Cotton were not to receive due acknowledgment during his lifetime." In 1860, Cotton was knighted by Queen Victoria.

After his retirement to England, he continued to fight for irrigation, and died peacefully in 1899 at the ripe old age of 97. Surely the blessings of people of the Godavari Delta helped.



My Lord, one day's flow in the Godavari river during high floods is equal to one whole year's flow in the Thames

— Sir Arthur Cotton in a letter to the then Secretary of State, justifying his Godavari project

COTTON LORE

Pallamma Ammavaru is a venerated local deity in the Godavari districts. A temple to her on the banks of the Gowthami river in Vanapalli village (Kothapeta mandal) is a much-visited pilgrimage site. At the time of the digging of the main canal from Rajahmundry to Kundaleswaram, it was suggested to Sir Arthur Cotton that the temple would have to be dismantled because it lay in the way. Local mythology has it that the deity appeared to the great engineer in a dream and assured him the temple would not fall in the way of the canal. He decided not to remove the temple and continued to dig. By divine intervention, the canal went wide off the temple. The temple lived and the people prospered. It is a tradition in these parts to name their daughters as Pallamma and sons as Pallamraju after this deity.



The Pallamma Temple in Vanapalli in East Godavari District

FORGOTTEN IN TN?

Oddly, Arthur Cotton's efforts to repair the Grand Anicut on the Cauvery are barely acknowledged in Tamil Nadu today. But then even Karikala Chola, who built the anicut in 280 BC, is little remembered! Only recently have the Cauvery Delta farmers demanded that the government must honour Arthur Cotton. In contrast, the people of the Godavari delta did not need the government to honour Arthur Cotton.