

Modern History of Travancore

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Abstract:-- The modern history of Travancore begins with the rule of Bala Marthanda Varma, who ascended the throne in the year 1729 A.D. During the time of his accession, the political conditions were unstable due to rebellions and the incessant inroads made by the Nayak and Nawab forces. But, Marthanda Varma put a check to the invaders by seeking the assistance of the English East India Company. He even proved his ability by meeting the Dutch on the battlefield at Colachel on 10 August 1741. He dedicated his kingdom to the Lord Sri Padmanabhaswamy and this dedication took place on behalf of his tutelary deity.

Keyword:--Modern History, Travancore, Bala Marthanda Varma, Colachel War.

The modern history of Travancore begins with the rule of Bala Marthanda Varma, who ascended the throne in the year 1729 A.D. During the time of his accession, the political conditions were unstable due to rebellions and the incessant inroads made by the Nayak and Nawab forces. But, Marthanda Varma put a check to the invaders by seeking the assistance of the English East India Company. He even proved his ability by meeting the Dutch on the battlefield at Colachel on 10 August 1741. He dedicated his kingdom to the Lord Sri Padmanabhaswamy and this dedication took place on behalf of his tutelary deity.

Marthanda Varma was succeeded by Rama Varma Karthigai Thirunal (1758-1798 A.D). He was popularly known as Dharma Raja. The important historical event in his reign was the invasion of Tippu Sultan and his defeat. Rama Varma was ably assisted by two efficient ministers Ayyappan Marthanda Pillai and Raja Kesavadas.

Balarama Varma succeeded Rama Varma at the age of thirteen. He was an inefficient ruler. The State's finance came down to the verge of bankruptcy. Colonel Macaulay was appointed as resident on the 7th of January 1800 with special and confidential instructions to secure the revision of the existing treaty with the Travancore Maharaja incorporating the provisions of the Subsidiary Alliance, and thereby bring the Travancore Government under the East India Company's effective control.

The British interference in the internal affairs of the State resulted in the conclusion of a treaty of friendship between them and the Venad king Balarama Rama Varma. As per a provision of the treaty, the Travancore State became a protectorate and an ally of the British, paying an annual tribute of Rs.8 lakh.

Quite very soon the relationship between Velu Thambi, the Dewan of Travancore and Colonel Macaulay, the Resident, became very much strained due to the interference of Col.

Macaulay in the administration of the state. The Travancore ruler, therefore appealed to the Governor of Madras Presidency to recall Col. Macaulay which naturally infuriated the Resident, and so he started pressing for the immediate payment of the arrears of tribute to the British Government. This ignited the patriotic fervour of Velu Thambi. So he took up arms against the British in order to liberate the country from foreign rule. The insurrection spread widely in the country during which, many British officers were massacred on January 1809, Velu Thampi issued a proclamation to the public in which he requested them to join the struggle for freedom against the British. The response was tremendous and the whole State rose against the British.

A battle, therefore, caused between the Travancore Army and the British troops, but the British troops too were very formidable for the Travancore Army and hence the Travancore Army met with defeat at Quilon in 1809. The victorious British troops marched into Nanchilnad and destroyed the forts at Padmanabhapuram and Udhayagiri.

All was now lost and Velu Thampi paid his last respects to the Maharaja and left Trivandrum, which he was not destined to see again. It is said that before his flight from the capital, Velu Thampi suggested to the Maharaja to absolve himself of all blame, by blaming the Dalawai. It is said that under the cloth of fleeing from Trivandrum, he mustered the strength for yet another struggle.

The Travancore ruler appointed one Ummuni Thampi in the place of Velu Thampi. A peace negotiation between the British and the Venad ruler was signed, by which the army recruited by Velu Thampi was disbanded and an arrest warrant was issued against Velu Thampi. Velu Thampi dodged arrest and at last he was arrested in his hometown, Mannodi. This disgrace, he could not bear and so he requested his brother to kill him, and on his refusal to do so, Velu Thampi stabbed himself to death. His end is described by Nagam Aiya as, "discomfited and despairing, he had died in the high Roman Fashion, by his own hand". Thus ended

the life of a great patriot, who unfurled the flag of opposition against the East India Company. His followers also were not spared.

Later, Lord Minto, the Governor-General condemned the English interference in the affairs of Velu Thambi and observed thus:

“The ends of Justice and purposes of public security were attained by the death of the Dewan: and prosecution of vindictive policy when the object of it ceased to exist was repugnant to the feelings of common humanity and the principle of civilized Government”.

The Velu Thambi episode in the Travancore Government culminated in the payment of a heavy compensation to the English towards losses sustained by them in the scuffle against Velu Thampi. An English Army was to be maintained for the Travancore Exchequer, as per the provisions of the Subsidiary Alliance between the Travancore king and the British. The people of Nanchilnadu were oppressed by the Ministry of Ummini Thampi for the active role in assisting Velu Thampi in his fight against the British.

Maharani Gowri Parvathi Bai was born to Princess Bharani Thirunal of the Travancore Royal Family in 1802, who was the senior Rani of Attingal (the Maharani's of Travancore were styled as Rani's of Attingal) when her elder sister Maharani Gowri Lakshmi Bai died after childbirth in 1815, Gowri Parvathi Bai was only thirteen years of age. As the only female left in the family, Gowri Parvathi Bai became Regent Maharani on behalf of her nephew, the heir, Maharajah Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma. Upon her accession she was actively counseled by her brother in law Raja Raja Varma of the Changanassery Royal family well on her husband Raghava Varma who belonged to the Royal family Kilimanoor.

Gouri Laximi Bai succeeded Bala Rama Varma and she continued the policy of friendly relation with the British. She dismissed Ummini Thampi and in his place appointed Colonel Munro, as her Dewan. Munro, found indiscipline and rampant corruption in the State administration. As a first step, he brought about the system of gradation among the officers and prescribed corporal punishments against the erring officers. He undertook a state tour and personally assessed the performance of the officers. The system of recruitment to public services was improved. The economic states of the state was also improved by abolishing the sinecure establishments and expending collects of long fallen arrears of takes and simultaneously the oppressive taxes were abolished. An effective system of accounting and audit was introduced. Trade and commerce received a fillip

and regulate Custom Houses called ‘chookies’ were established. The temple administration was re-organised. The temple at Suchindrum and other 347 temples in the state were brought under the management of the state. The re-organisation imposed a check of the growing power of the Yohakars, the temple trustees who had exercised a sinister influence over the people and had established practically an ‘imperium in imperito’ within the state. Munro's administration was therefore a welcome relief to the people. Gouri Laxmi Bai died and was succeeded by her sister, Gowri Parvathi Bai (A.D. 1815-1820) during whose reign also Col. Munro continued to be the Dewan.

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