

MARTHANDAVARMA-THE ARCHITECT OF MODERN TRAVANCORE

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Abstract

The modern history of Travancore started with the reign of Bala Marthandavarma. The princely state of Travancore forming the southern part of the present Kerala State is endowed with favourable geography most suited for the growth and prosperity of the Kingdom. Several major events involving the survival of the kingdom took place here. The modern era in the political history of Travancore is said to have dawned with the epoch-making reign of Bala Marthandavarma, one of the famous Travancore rulers. Marthandavarma was born in 1706 to queen Karthika Thirunal, the Queen of Attingal, and Raghava Varma of Kilimanoor Palace. During the reign of Marthandavarma, the famous Battle of Colachel was took place in 1741 A.D, and the Dutch were completely defeated. Besides decisive military victories, Marthandavarma brought about administrative reforms within the state revenue, budgetary, and public works sectors amongst others. The policy of Marthandavarma was a mercantile policy. The political developments during his period brought Travancore and the English very close. The close friendship and alliance of the Raja of Travancore with the English East India Company made Travancore a strong force in Kerala. After the extension of the territory, Marthandavarma directed his attention to the internal reforms of his kingdom. New roads and inns were opened throughout the state with military outposts. Water transport from Varkala, Thiruvananthapuram to Cochin was implemented under Marthandavarma while he also renovated the Padmanabhapuram Palace and built Krishnapuram Palace, Alappuzha. He paid special attention to improving agriculture in the state. Marthandavarma made a determined bid to consolidate his authority by the use of the Indian Ocean spice trade. Puthan dam, built by him near Padmanabhapuram, provided drinking water to that area. Marthanda Varma was followed by Rama Varma, a weak ruler compared to his predecessor.

Key Words: Travancore - Marthandavarma - Kingdom - Battle of Colachel - political - developments - mercantile policy - authority - Padmanabhapuram - spice trade - agriculture - East India Company - military

Introduction:

The princely state of Travancore forming the southern part of the present Kerala State is endowed with favourable geography most suited for the growth and prosperity of the Kingdom and it is certainly one of the most important portions of the Indian Subcontinent. Travancore is bounded by the Cochin state on the north, Coimbatore district on the east, the Indian Ocean on the south, and the Arabian Sea on the west. Its shape is triangular with the apex towards the south a narrow strip of land belonging to the state of Cochin makes a deep indentation on the northwest angle and destroys the continuity and compactness of its shape. The rulers of Travancore originally held sway over a limited piece of land. The unique blend of languages and cultures, climates, and religions seems to be ebbing away in the face of the current upsurge of religious revival and a moral politicization of religion, unleashed by some vested interests on the

people. Several major events involving the survival of the kingdom took place here. The modern era in the political history of Travancore is said to have dawned with the epoch-making reign of Bala Marthandavarma, one of the famous Travancore rulers.

Marthandavarma;

Marthandavarma was born in 1706 to queen Karthika Thirunal, the Queen of Attingal, and Raghava Varma of Kilimanoor Palace. Queen Karthika Thirunal Uma Devi - an adoptee from the northern Kolathunadu ruling family - was the senior queen of Attingal at the time. His father Raghava Varma Koil Thampuran died of severe fever when he was one year old. At the time of Varma's birth, Trippappur Swaroopam (Travancore) was a small chieftom extending from Edava in the north to Aralvaimozhi in the south. Marthanadavarma facing a threat from the Ettuveetil Family fled to many places and reached Adoor, there disguised as a beggar he approached the rich family of Tharakan asking for some food, the family sent him off, he then approached the house of an old grandmother of Nellimuttill family and asked her for food, she fed him heartily and he narrated his whole story to her, she helped him by sending his sons to help him. Marthanda Varma ascended the throne when the crisis in Travancore had already deepened. King Rama Varma was forced to invite troops from Tamil Nadu to collect dues and impose order. Even the Padmanabha Swamy Temple affairs were heading towards a crisis due to lack of funds. The Thampi brothers, sons of Rama Varma, immediately revolted against Marthanda Varma with the assistance of a Tamil army. When Marthanadavarma came to the throne again he took the grandmother with him. The fundamental politico-economic structure of medieval Kerala was going through a crisis. The power of the king of Venad was very weak and he could not sustain his control over his territory. The old political structure of medieval Kerala was going through a crisis at the beginning of the 18th century. The influence of the local landlords is called the Ettuveetil Pillamar and the barons were known as Madampimar. The authority of the throne was also curbed by the Council of Eight and a Half (the Yogakkar), the managing committee of the Padmanabhaswamy temple.

The constant Dutch blockade of the Malabar Coast. Trade with the Europeans was an important source for augmenting the financial reserves of the Kerala kingdoms. Trade rivalries between the Dutch and English companies had a role in intensifying the conflict among the branches. An English East India Company factory was established at Vizhinjam in 1644. The Ajengo fort was established in 1695. The ruler Rama Varma (1722 - 1729) entered into treaties with the English East India Company (1723) and

the Madurai Nayaks to strengthen his position. The role played by Marthandavarma in these moves is highlighted by P.Shungoonny Menon, the 19th-century Travancore court historian. The Dutch Company positioned itself against the emerging Travancore by helping Quilon and Kayamkulam. The English Company became an ally of Travancore against the Dutch.

Political History

The modern history of Travancore started with the reign of Bala Marthandavarma. Travancore had a long and continuous history ever at the Commencement of the Christian era. The ruling family of Travancore traces its direct and unbroken descent from the old Chera dynasty, one of the three great Tamil dynasties of the ancient period. In later times, Travancore came to be divided into small states and Principalities, the most important were Venad, Attingal, Kayankulam, Designanad, Purakkad, Tekkumkur, and Vadakkumkur. The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English established relations with these states. Travancore, however, attained its territorial configuration during the reign of Maharaja Martanda Varma, who ruled from 1729 to 1758 A.D. He consolidated the royal authority, and he dedicated the Kingdom to his tutelary deity Sri Padmanabhaswami of Trivandrum and the kings, ruled as *dasas* or servants of the deity. To run the administration on sound lines, Marthandavarma appointed a Chief Minister called *dalawa* and reorganized the administration. He undertook a large number of works of public utility which included improvement of communications, agriculture, and irrigation.

Expeditions:

The 17th century witnessed a period of trial and tribulations for the people of Travancore. The invasions of the Nayaks brought greater suffering to the masses. The important Nayak rulers who invaded Travancore were Tirumalai Nayak and Rani Mangammal. After 1542 AD following the death of Achutha Raya, the Nayaks of Madurai asserted their independence. However, in the first half of the 17th Century A.D the repeated attacks started on Travancore by the Nayaks of Madurai. A regular invasion was undertaken by Tirumalai Nayak in 1634 A.D. Tirumalai Nayak undertook an expedition against this region when was ruled by Ravi Varma. Tirumalai sent an army under Velayyan, but the invaders were repulsed with heavy losses. To avenge the defeat, Tirumalai immediately collected a huge army and sent it under his able Commander Ramapayyan. The task of defending the Country against the Nayak forces fell on the gallant shoulders of Ravi Kutti Pillai. He vehemently attacked the invaders at Kaniyakulam in 1635 A.D.

In this battle, the Nayak forces cut off the head of Ravi Kutti Pillai and carried it to Tirumalai Nayak. In the year 1697 A.D. Rani Mangammal invaded Travancore. This invasion made the people of this region helpless. Damages to property and cultivation were immense. The people were in jeopardy and life insecure. But the ruler of Travancore did practically everything to alleviate the sufferings of the people. When Marthandavarma (1729-58A.D.) became the ruler, Chanda Sahib led his expedition against this region. Ramayan Dalava, the able minister of Marthandavarma played an active part in bringing out a settlement with Chanda Sahib. But after some time, the settlement was broken, and Chanda Sahib once again attacked Travancore, marching through Kottaram and ravaging the places as they entered south Travancore. Having caused much havoc in the Suchindrum temple, the army proceeded to Kottar. But Marthandavarma sent his men to negotiate a rapprochement with Chanda Sahib through payment of money and only then the army withdrew.

Battle of Colachel:

During the reign of Marthandavarma, the famous Battle of Colachel was took place in 1741 A.D, and the Dutch were completely defeated. During his reign, the Dutch captured the area from Kottaru to Colachel. Then the Dutch army marched towards Padmanabhapuram, the capital of Travancore. But Marthandavarma and Ramayan, the Diwan of Travancore resisted the Dutch army. In 1741 A.D, the battle of Colachel was fought between the Dutch army and the Travancore forces. Finally, the Dutch were defeated by the Travancore forces. The Travancore army took 24 prisoners, besides 389 muskets, a few pieces of cannon, and a large number of swords. Among the prisoners, Eustachius De-Lannoy and Donadi were especially attracted to the King's notice and whom he appointed to high military officers in the Travancore State. De-Lannoy, the Dutch commander arrested by the Travancore forces as a war captive. A pillar commemorating the stirring event stands on the beach of Colachel. The battle of Colachel is very important in the history of Travancore. After the battle of Colachel, Marthandavarma took special steps to strengthen his defenses at Udayagiri Fort. The fort was reconstructed and used as their strong defensive structure. The army was also rearranged on the European model by De-Lannoy. The army was divided into regiments and Battalions. An arsenal was established at Udayagiri Fort for the manufacture of heavy ammunition. He not only trained the soldiers of Travancore in the European method of warfare, not only produced the western type of guns at Udayagiri Fort but also led the army northward up to Cochin

annexing the kingdoms all along the way. In short, one wonders what the history of Travancore would have been if there had been no De-Lannoy.

Treaty of Mavelikkara (1753)

Following the expulsion of the Dutch, Marthandavarma now turned his attention once again towards Kayamkulam (which continued to seek help from the Dutch Company). In 1742, Travancore forces attacked Kayamkulam possessions at Kollam and fought the Kayamkulam army led by Achuta Warriar and chiefs from Valiya Kakkanadu Madam. Although Travancore was defeated in this battle, Marthanada Varma reinforced his army with cavalry brought in from Tirunelveli before mounting an attack on Kayamkulam, which led to the final defeat of the chiefdom. A treaty known as the Treaty of Mannar (1742) was signed, under which Kayamkulam became a tributary state of Travancore. However, by 1746, the Kayamkulam chief once again showed signs of rebellion and when his "conspiracies" with the northern chiefdoms such as Kottayam, Changanassery, Cochi, and Ambalapuzha came to the attention of Marthandavarma, Kayamkulam was annexed by a final battle in which the chief fled to Cochi and a branch of the family settled near Charamood known as "Moothantedom". Travancore now extended from Kanyakumari to Kayamkulam in the north. Following this, Ambalapuzha, Kottayam, and Changanassery were also annexed to Travancore by 1753. The principality of Meenachil was also annexed. In 1753, the tributary states of Cochi collectively known as Karappuram and Alangad were ceded to Travancore. In 1755, the ruler of Kozhikode was also defeated at a battle in Purakkad. He was supported by the armies of some other local chiefs. The ascent of Travancore seems to have been particularly rapid after about 1749. Marthandavarma had declared a state monopoly on pepper in Travancore in 1743, thereby delivering a serious blow to the commerce of the Dutch. The treaty of Mavelikkara was concluded between Marthandavarma and the Dutch East India Company. It was signed at Mavelikkara on 15th August 1753. Thereafter, the Dutch Company officials report that "considerable spice producing lands came under direct royal control, while those merchants participating in illegal trade in spices stood in danger of being executed".

Relations with the British

The Indian states had political relations with the British Government in India. With the expansion of British power, the states came under its influence. In Travancore, the English first settled in Vizhinjam, situated South of Trivandrum, in 1644. In 1684, the Rani of Attingal permitted the English to open a

factory at Anjengo, situated Northwest of Trivandrum. Maharaja Marthandavarma allied with the English East India Company and maintained friendly relations. In the wars of East India Company with the chieftains of Madurai and Tirunelveli and against Mysore, Travancore rendered military assistance to it. In 1729 Marthandavarma ascended the throne of Travancore. During his reign, when internal troubles increased, the British helped him by providing arms and ammunition. But, Marthandavarma being so diplomatic, later changed his trade policy. After the overthrow of his enemies, he held back pepper and other goods in which the British traded on this coast. This new trade policy was detested both by the merchants and the English. In exasperation at the ever-dwindling supply of pepper, the English factors curtailed the supply of arms and other warlike stores, badly needed by the King. This led to mutual recriminations. On 13th August 1748, the Anjengo factories observed that the good old days of free trade had gone forever. Ramayan Dalva, the Minister told the Anjengo factories that in no uncertain terms in April 1750 that His Majesty is determined to keep this branch of trade in his hands, having been at a very great expense in the late wars. The English complained against this new policy and demanded its withdrawal. But the king made full use of the monopoly by demanding more war materials for a limited supply of pepper. Whenever the British supplied arms, they reminded the king to supply more pepper. Thus, the policy of Marthandavarma was a mercantile policy. In the beginning, the English were not in a position to break with Travancore. Marthanda Varna was followed by Rama Varma, a weak ruler compared to his predecessor. The political developments during the period brought Travancore and the English very close. The close friendship and alliance of the Raja of Travancore with the English East India Company made Travancore a strong force in Kerala.

Reforms of Marthandavarma:

After the extension of the territory, Marthandavarma directed his attention to the internal reforms of his kingdom. With this view, he commissioned General De-Lannoy to improve the Military department. Until the time of Marthandavarma, the king had depended upon the Nayar Military of the land. So, he wanted to organize a permanent force. Marthandavarma, well impressed with the military knowledge of De-Lannoy. So he was appointed Commander-in-chief of the Travancore forces and was raised to the rank of a General. It was during the reign of Marthandavarma that efficient arrangements were made for the manufacture of firearms, swords, and guns, the building of forts and arsenals, and the training of the troops in the modern arts of war. The Travancore Royal family followed the matrilineal system of succession.

The kings were succeeded by their sister's sons. Until the time of Ramavarma, king's mother stayed at Attingal and the king alone lived in the capital at Padmanabhapuram. The Palace is situated at the very center of the Padmanabhapuram fort with an area of 186 acres of land amidst dales and rivers of the Veli hills. The Palace is a complex which consists of fourteen palaces spread over an area of 6.5 acres is a unique instance that shows all the features of the architecture of ancient Kerala. The stone fort with granite wall was constructed to protect the palace at Padmanabhapuram. A wall was thrown around the palace. The Udayagiri hill was also fortified. De-Lannoy's technical skill was utilized in improving the fortifications of Kalkulam and Udayagiri. Stone bastions were also erected. While another fort was constructed near Cape Comorin, which is popularly known as "Vattakottai". From there a strong wall was constructed to Aralvoimozhi between the sea and the hills rebuilding and strengthening the old ones. Bastions and powder – magazines were erected in convenient places.

The special interest evinced by Marthandavarma with the help of De-Lannoy in the improvement of the State forces has made military service particularly attractive. Marthandavarma and his successor won many battles with the help of De-Lannoy. The Travancore Lines" (a mud rampart) constructed by De-Lannoy in northern Travancore eventually served as a fortification against the ferocious attacks of Tippu Sultan of Mysore and the concerted attack of the kings of Cochin and Kozhikode. Besides decisive military victories, Marthandavarma brought about administrative reforms within the state revenue, budgetary, and public works sectors amongst others. He also instituted a new knighthood for his loyal officers known as Chempakaraman Pillai, re-organized the commercial sector, and monopolized the spice trade. New roads and inns were opened throughout the state with military outposts. Water transport from Varkala, Thiruvananthapuram to Cochin was implemented by Marthandavarma while he also renovated the Padmanabhapuram Palace and built Krishnapuram Palace, Alappuzha. Marthandavarma also made villages the most basic sector of the kingdom and created a post known as the *Mandapathu Vathilkkal*, similar to the later *tehsildar*. He paid special attention to improving agriculture in the state. Marthandavarma made a determined bid to consolidate his authority by the use of the Indian Ocean spice trade. The portions of land lying east of Nagercoil, Kanyakumari called Nanjil Nadu was considered the granary of Kerala due to its extensive cultivation of paddy rice. The fertility of this area was only due to the irrigation facilities introduced by Marthandavarma. His edicts on the subject of irrigation issued between 1729 and 1758 fill several pages in Travancore Land Revenue Manual by R Mahadeva Iyer. Only due to the digging of new

canals for irrigation during his reign, the single-crop paddy fields of that area became double-crop fields, almost doubling their production. Pallikondan dam, Chattuputhoor dam, Sabari dam, Kumari dam, and Chozhanthitta dam, all on the river Pazhaya in the vicinity of Nagercoil, were constructed by him and are still operational.

Near Bhoothappandy, the Chattuputhoor dam was constructed and a new channel named Puthanaaru was dug from it to irrigate the Thovalai areas. Puthan dam, built by him near Padmanabhapuram, provided drinking water to that area. Padmanabhaswamy temple, Thiruvananthapuram was re-created as the gigantic structure of today and new state ceremonies such as *Murajapam*, *Bhadra Deepam*, and others were introduced by Marthandavarma. The main idol of the shrine, which was mostly destroyed in a fire during his predecessor Rama Varma's time, was also reconstructed using *salagramas* imported from Nepal. He also created *Ottakkal Mandapam* as well as the *Sheevelippura*. Out of the seven floors of the temple-gopuram, five were finished during his reign. As a result of the annexation of neighbouring places, the artists and scholars from these places migrated to Trivandrum, turning it into a cultural center. He gave patronage to different art forms including *Koothu*, *Padhakam*, *Kathakali*, *Thullal*, and *Koodiyaattam*. The artists like Ramapurathu Warriar and Kunchan Nambiar amongst others served as his court poets.

Thrippadidanam

Marthandavarma decided to donate his realm to Sri Padmanabha and thereafter rule as the deity's "vice-regent". The dedication took place on January 3, 1750, and thereafter he was referred to as Sree Padmanabhadasa. The title of Sree Padmanabhadasa was prefixed to the name of every Travancore king while the women were *Sree Padmanabhasevinis*. To be eligible for the title of "*Sree Padmanabhadasa*", certain rituals had to be completed. On the first birthday of every royal male, the child would be placed on the 'Ottakkalmandapam' of the Padmanabhaswamy temple and holy water from the temple would be sprinkled on the baby. Only after completion of this ceremony was the royal child proclaimed as "Sree Padmanabhadasa" in a ritual known as *Adimayidal*. Female royals also underwent the *Padiyettam* ritual, which was conducted only after their 'Pallikettu'. Only those male and female members who completed these ceremonies were allowed in the temple affairs and were also provided respect as well as the titles associated with the temple as well as the royal family

Conclusion:

Prime Minister Ramayyan Dalawa's death in 1756 caused Marthandavarma great pain. Not only had Ramayyan Dalawa been his minister but also his friend. The king's health began to deteriorate thereafter and he died two years later in 1758. Before his death, Marthandavarma summoned his nephew and successor Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma and gave his final instructions. This mainly concerned maintenance of all the *poojas* and ceremonies as well as other matters concerning the Padmanabhaswamy temple without attempts to meddle with them. Another instruction was that the expenses of the state should never exceed its revenue while no infighting in the royal family was to be ever allowed. Within a short time of these final instructions, the king died at the age of 53. Before he died, Marthandavarma's last words to Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma emphasized the importance of a continuing relationship with the English East India Company.

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