

TRAVANCORE DURING SECOND WORLD WAR, 1939-1945

Dr. N. Amutha Kumari,
Assistant Professor,
Department of History and Research Centre,
Scott Christian College (Autonomous),
Nagercoil.

ABSTRACT: The study on Travancore during Second World War, 1939-1945 is an attempt to highlight the political, economic and social development of Travancore during Second World War. This period was an important period because Travancore had to contribute to the world war because her alliance with the British. On the home-front Travancore had to face the political development, the freedom struggle and economic problem of the state. During this period, the problem in the coir industry, the Quit India Movement, the food crisis and the work of the congress took place. This study also highlights the attitude of the congress party when the war broke out and how it participated in the war and the economic and social effects of the war.

Key Words—world war, alliance, political development, war effort, economic problems, congress party.

1. INTRODUCTION

The name Travancore is the Anglicized form of 'Thiruvithancode' or 'Sriyalum-code' the abode of prosperity. The state had several names like 'Vanchidesam' and 'Dharmarajyam'. Vanchidesam means the kingdom that was ruled by the ancient Cheva Kings who had their capital at Thiruvanchikulam. 'Dharmarajyam' denotes that it was a land of piety, truth and charity. The state was also known as Venad, a corruption 'Vanavanad', the land of celestials (Velupillai, 1940). The land was also known as 'Thiru Adi Desam' (Menon, 1985). The land lying between Cape-Comorin and Puracaud was called Travancore (Poonen, 1948). It was bounded on the north by the Cochin State and the British Indian District of Coimbatore. On the East lies the Western Ghats and the District of Madurai, Ramnad and Tirunelveli. The Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea form the Southern and Western Boundaries respectively.

2. SOURCES

The sources for writing the Travancore during Second World War can be divided into Primary and Secondary Sources. The Administrative reports, The GOs, the official records and correspondences, Letters of correspondences and many other records, the Inscriptions at Swadeshabimani Park, Neyyatinkara, The Travancore Directory, Acts and Proclamations of Travancore are some of the valuable Primary Sources. Nagam Aiya's Travancore State Manuel, Shungoony Menon's History of Travancore, Samuel Mateer's Native Life in Travancore, Ramnath Aiyar's A History of Travancore, etc. are some of the Secondary Sources that are useful for the study. Besides these, The Hindu Trivandrum Daily News, Malayalam Rajyam are some of the important sources that makes the study useful and present a wholesome account.

3. TRAVANCORE ON THE EVE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

On the eve of the Second World War Travancore was torn between civil disobedience movement, The Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936, and the world wide depression that was caused due to the First World War and the consequent coir factory workers strike. The Congress party induced the people and almost a war like situation was forced upon the state. The government adopted repressive measures to suppress the Travancore state congress (Malayalam Rajyam, 1939)

3.1 THE CONGRESS ULTIMATUM

The congress organized Civil Disobedience Movement. In several places, the people especially students condemned the leaders of the loyalist parties as anti-nationals and opportunists. It resulted in a police lathi charge in the Science College at Trivandrum. (Proceedings of the Travancore Srimulam Assembly, vol. xii, 1939)

3.2 THE GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

The government decided to take strong steps to face the situations caused due to the civil disobedience. The government increased the strength of police force. Five hundred temporary Reserve Police were recruited. Ex-Military service men from Madras and Bangalore were called to service. The government recruited emergency staff and a few short hand reporters to take down the speeches at political meetings. (Travancore Administrative Report, 1939)

3.3 ALL TRAVANCORE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE COMMITTEE

Soon after the military firing in various places including Neyyatinkara, the leaders thought that it was appropriate to form a new committee called the All Travancore Civil Disobedience Committee at Trivandrum to make propaganda and to explain to the people the need for responsible government. (Malayala Manorama, 1939). C. Narayana Pillai, S. Nilakanta Pillai, A. Achuthan, K.C. George and M.N. Govindhan Nair were the members of the committee. (Pillai, 1972). The committee organized hundreds of

meetings throughout Travancore. They visited the rural areas and educated the people about the Civil Disobedience Movement. (Vasudevan Pillai, 1939)

3.4 WORLD WAR II AND SUSPENSION OF THE MOVEMENT

On 1st September 1939, the Second World War broke out. Germany marched into Poland. Britain foreseeing the danger to the free existence declared war on Germany on 3rd September. On the same day Lord Linlithgow, the Governor General of India was at war with Germany. It was a unilateral decision taken by the Viceroy without consulting the Indian Leaders.

The congress working committee met on 10th October 1939. In the meeting they expressed their sympathy with the free world. But on 17th October 1939, the British gave an evasive reply. Hence it took time to India to join the war. (Agarwal, 1942)

4. THE WAR EFFORTS OF TRAVANCORE

Immediately on the declaration of war Travancore had to support the English because Travancore was an alloy of British from 1792, when Tipu Sultan waged a war. It was in subsidiary alliance with the English (Achyuta Menon, 1995). The I and II infantaries of Travancore state forces had been sent on active service outside the state. Travancore University also played significant role. The Workshops of the College of Engineering were forced to work day and night. Technicians, Fitters, Engine Drivers, Electrician, Blacksmith, Tin and Coppersmith and Welders who were given intensive course of training for about a year were sent with the Indian Army Ordinance Corps. (Administrative Report, 1941)

4.1 POPULAR WAR EFFORTS

The government and the people of the state have thrown themselves heart and soul into the organization of war efforts and have made notable contributions in a variety of ways. "The Travancore War Purpose Central Committee" was constituted with Sachivottama Sir C.P. Rama Swami Iyer as president to direct popular war efforts and committee has since been tackling the various problems connected with war efforts through its several sub committees. That is an Executive Committee, Finance Sub Committers, Women's Sub Committee, a Sub Committee for Training in the First-Aid and Fire Fighting and Propaganda Sub Committee.

4.1 THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN

The central committee had a Women's Sub Committee which dealt with war working among women. Her Highness Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bai had been taking keen interest in the work of this subcommittee and was the source of inspiration for the women's branch of the war purposes committee. A large number of women throughout the state were working under the auspices and guidance of the subcommittee and they were turning out useful articles like Shirts, Hand Kerchiefs, Pants, Jackets Mufflers, Aprons, Swabs, Dressing, etc. for the comforts of the service personnel. (Administrative Report, 1943)

4.2 FIRST AID CLASSES

The Sub Committee for training in First Aid and Fire Fighting started first aid classes in about thirty centres and in two centres classes for St. John Ambulance course were started. An examination was conducted for those who underwent the first aid course and certificates of merit were awarded to 222 candidates who were found to be eligible at a public meeting presided over by the Vice President. Under the auspices of the committee a series of Air Raid Precaution Lectures were also delivered in different parts of the state. These lectures attracted large crowds. By previous arrangement an Aeroplane from Madras flew over the city of Trivandrum and distributed a large number of propaganda leaflets prepared by the committee. The propaganda subcommittees had been issuing series of propaganda matter from time to time. (Fortnightly Report, 1942)

5. WAR PROPAGANDA

For the purpose of war publicity their work was to be co-ordinated and controlled by the Director of General Information. The Director General of Information was loaded with the responsibilities of control and censorship of press, issues of news relating to the war, collection of information relating to the war and proper presentation to the public of India, the war aims through suitable media. (Administrative Report, 1940)

The provincial war committee was organized on 17th June 1940. This committee had three subcommittees namely; Finance, Recruitment and Propaganda. Early in 1941, the General Information Bureau was opened. In September 1941, the establishment of a central publicity Head Quarters was sanctioned. It was named "Victory House". A press section was attached to the "Victory House". It published weekly "Madras War Review" in English. (Yudda Sanchikai, 1941)

5.1 ADVERTISEMENT SECTION

The Advertisement Section was an important appendage. Its function was monthly review, pamphlets preparation and distribution and posters. At the District level the District war committee contained three subcommittee namely Finance, Recruitment and Propaganda. On the model of the Madras Victory House, Local Victory Houses were established in the Districts. They were to serve as War Information Bureaus and an official headquarters of National Warfront. By the end of the year 1943, there were thirty seven victory houses situated in nineteen districts. (Executive Committee Minutes, 1942)

5.1 THE READING CIRCLES

Reading Circles were formed to carry on the propaganda in the district. They began to function early in 1942, under orders of the government. The object was to disseminate correct and up to date war news. On 30-06-1945 Quilon, Chertalai, Varkalai, Trivandrum, Neyyatinkara, Parasala, Karungapalli, Kottayam and in many other places had innumerable reading circles (Administrative Report, 1945). The Reading Circles were supplied with Bulletins in Tamil, Telugu and English along with local newspapers. Ladies were also appointed to carry the messages to the women's.

5.2 FILMS

The most important media of mass communication were the films. The government was realizing the need for producing war films. By the end of April 1941 thirty seven war films had been circulated with great success.

5.3 UNIT OF MOBILE PUBLICITY

The mobile vans rendered yeomen service by carrying on publicity in remote villages. The Simpson Company, Madras made a voluntary gift of van fully equipped. The van was ordered to be used for the purpose of; to exhibit sound film, to exhibit silent films, to play Gramophone Records, to amplify speeches made from the van and to re-broad cast programme from any Indian Broad Casting Station. (Administrative Report, 1942)

6. GOVERNMENT'S REACTION

The government thought that the movement would not continue because of the arrest of the leaders. In order to suppress the further growth of the movement, the Government resorted to more effective and stronger measures.

6.1 PENALISATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES

The government adopted repressive measures against the revolutionaries. The rebels were arrested and severely punished. The Policeman of Travancore with enormous power was given a free hand to deal with the revolutionaries. The local rowdies assisted the regular police to disturb and disperse the political meetings and processions of the congress known as "Five Rupee Police". They threw stones in the congress meetings and created confusion and panic among the people. They also helped the policeman to identify and arrest the congress volunteers. They arrested leaders and severely punished. The policeman resorted to Lathie Charge at many places. Many persons were injured. (Sivan Pillai, 1954)

6.2 ACTION AGAINST STUDENTS

The students participated in demonstration and processions outside their institutions and getting mixed up with the crowds were punished like non-students. But the government could not restrict the participation of students. Many students were dismissed from school. (Karunakaran Nair, 1948)

6.3 REPRESSIVE MEASURES ON PRESS

The Government banned the publications which were against its interest. It restricted the publication of the news relating to the mass movement of the congress. The newspapers were divided to publish only the news given by the government. (Perunna Nair, 1986)

6.4 SUPPRESSION OF CONGRESS

The Government policy towards the congress was more rigorous than on the press. The reasons were obvious. The congress was the principal organ which induced revolution in the state. So the government decided to suppress congress by all means. (Sivan Pillai, 1984)

7. ECONOMIC CRISIS OF TRAVANCORE

On the outbreak of war, the retail prices of almost all commodities whether locally produced or imported rose sharply. On 6th September 1940 the government issued a communiqué warning traders that profiteering would not be allowed. (Fortnightly Report, 1940)

The prices of paddy and rice however continued to register an upward tendency steadily. The agriculturists had passed through a depression just before the war. In spite of the rise in prices, the agriculturists did not reap the benefits and the government felt that the rise in prices was artificial. There was a acute food shortage in Malabar District. Early in the year 1943, fire-wood supply became scarce in the city of Madras. (Administrative Report, 1943)

The prices of commodities such as fish, meat, vegetables, egg and fowls were found to be shooting up. These commodities were required by Army on a large scale. (Administrative Report, 1947)

Immediately after the declaration of the war, Government began to take steps to prevent profiteering and hoarding and to stabilize the market in respect of foodstuffs, textiles, medical preparations, kerosene and other essential commodities.

The "Grow More Food" campaign started in 1943, was mainly for diverting land from cash crops and intensive cultivation. It was an important innovation and its impact lasted much longer even after the cessation of hostilities. (Annual Report, 1951)

8. COMMUNIST UPRISING

The communists who had infiltrated into All India Leadership of the congress socialist group had no other alternative but to act as congress socialist and worked secretly for the development of communism. These groups were also able to establish contact with E.M.S. Namboothiripad, P. Krishna Pillai and other Kerala congress socialist leaders to convert them to communism. A secret Kerala branch of communist party started functioning in 1937 and when the Second World War broke out the congress socialist group in Kerala went over to communist party enblock. (George, 1967)

8.1 FORMATION OF COMMUNIST PARTY

Under such circumstances a conference of the Kerala congress socialist party was held at Pinarai on December 1939. After a long discussion the Kerala congress socialist party held transformed itself into the communist party. (Balram, 1942)

8.2 GROWTH OF COMMUNIST PARTY

By 1940-1942 most of the labour unions turned out to be under the control of the communist party. Taking advantage of the discontent among the workers, they concentrated their attention on organization work. They published pamphlets which painted the sufferings of labourers. The communists strengthening the organization. The party conducted study classes and set up volunteer camps at several centres like; Allepy, Kottayam, Cheng Anacherry, Quilon and Balaramapuram and trained them in “Gnerilla Warfare”, Squad drill, etc. Population in Alleppy over 40,000 strong passed under the district control of the communist party. (Namboothiripad, 1981)

9. CONCLUSION

During nineteen thirties there were labour problems. The workers of the coir industry faced sufferings and they organized demonstrations throughout Travancore demanding better working conditions and proper wages. Travancore was an ally of the British because Travancore had already entered into the alliance with the British in 1795. By this alliance mutual help should be provided by the two parties. Now it was the turn of Travancore to help the British against the German. The Travancore Government, the congress and the common people of Travancore entered into war efforts. Immediately after the declaration of war, the King of Travancore offered the entire resources of the state at the disposal of Great Britain. His Highness Sanctioned 7 lakhs rupees for building a trawler and two fighter planes. The Maharaja again contributed seven lakhs of rupees to the Viceroy's war fund. Two infantry divisions of the Travancore state forces were sent on active service outside the state. The growth of the communist party in Travancore is the most important effect of the Second World War. In 1945 the Second World War came to an end in favour of the allies at heavy cost. Thousands of people all over India including Travancore sacrificed their lives for the sake of democracy against dictatorship.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

During the war period Travancore concentrated its attention for the maintenance of the highways. At present in Kerala we can find excellent roadways. The Travancore Maharaja presented two fighter planes of the British which is due course paved the way for the construction of the aerodrome in Trivandrum. Likewise Railway system was also developed during the Second World War especially for the movement of soldiers. The development of Railways in Kerala has been the impact of Second World War.

REFERENCES

- Vellupillai, T. K; *The Travancore State Manuel*, Vol-I, Trivandrum, 1940, p.1.
- Shangoony Menon; *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, New Delhi, 1985, p.1.
- Poonen; *The Dutch in Malabar*, Trichy, 1948, p.3.
- Travancore Directory for 1939, part II, Trivandrum, 1939, p.3.
- Malayala Rajyam, 1939, p.8.
- Proceedings of Travancore Simulam Assembly, Vol-XII, 1939, p.10.
- Travancore Administration Report, 1939, p.11.
- Malayala Manorama, 1939, p.4.
- Sivan Pillai, S; *My Part in Freedom Struggle in South Travancore*, Theroor, 1984, p.61.
- Agarwar, R. C; *Constitutional Development of India and National Movement*, New Delhi, 1938, p.54.
- Achutta Menon, C; *The Cochin State Manuel, Kerala*, 1995, p.5.
- Travancore Administrative Report, 1941, p.18.
- Travancore Administrative Report, 1944, p.26.
- Perunna K. N. Nayar; *Keralathil Congress Prasthanam*, Cochin, 1986, p.98.
- Fortnightly Report, 1940, p.8.
- George Wood Cock; Kerala, London, 1967, p.20.
- Namboothiri Pad, E.M.A; *Sakhakkal Suhruthukal (mal.)*, Trivandrum, 1981, p.96.