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Swathi Thirunal: An Extraordinary Monarch With A Vision And Mission.

Subhashini S
Full-Time Research Scholar
University College, Thiruvananthapuram

Abstract

Swathi Thirunal, popularly called Garbhasreeman is one of the world-renowned monarchs who ruled Travancore. He assumed power from the Regent Rani at the age of 16. He possessed a strong will and exhibited the caliber of a powerful ruler. He ruled the country with his own will and it led to the confrontation with the British. Over all his reign witnessed tremendous progress in all fields.

Key words; *political turbulences, confrontation, Treaty of Perpetual Alliance*

Swathi Thirunal, the prominent monarchs who adorned the throne of Travancore, he was born on 16th April, 1813, and *Swati* is his birth star. He took the administration charge at the age of 16 from Regent Rani Parvathi Bhai.ⁱ More than an administrator, he excelled in several fields like music, arts, and letters. From his childhood days, he exhibited strong will and scholastic talents. He was well-versed in 18 languages and could easily understand the turbulences of the 19th century colonial diaspora.ⁱⁱ

The Travancore state is witnessing the growing power of the British during its time. They emerged as an unavoidable factor, and Travancore even had to reduce its status as a Subsidiary ally of the British. The Treaty of Perpetual Alliance and friendship tied Travancore to the Colonial flag post strongly. Its reflections were more significant even before the commencement of the rule of Swathi Thirunal. His vast reading helped him to realise the indigenous responses against the colonial agenda not only in various native states, but also in the world context.ⁱⁱⁱ He was a keen observer of every new mode of administrative experience.

In the political sphere, he was totally against bribery and corruption.^{iv} He declared it severely punishable and took necessary steps to upgrade the morale of the people. Spending many hours in administrative business every day enriched this knowledge on current affairs of the times. He expressed his opinion freely to the, British also. The Court of Directors in 1829 A D suggested to the Madras Government to reduce the Subsidiary forces in Travancore. They wished to withdraw even the Residency

staff. But Swathi Thirunal was not in favour of that. He freely expressed his will for the retention of the Resident and his staff in Travancore. Matter was brought before the Governor of Bengal. Swathi Thirunal obtained favorable response from there. As a result, the Company withdrew the Company troops at Aruvaimozhi and Bhoothappandi on the eastern border of the state. Likewise, subsidiary troops stationed in Travancore were numerically reduced to one Regiment of native infantry. A part of it was retained at Nagercoil for safety, as most military marches from outside Kerala encroached through Aruvaimozhi Pass.

Beginning of the confrontation with the British

The appointment of the new Dewan marked the beginning of the confrontation. An unfavorable report was presented to the Madras Government by Resident Colonel Morrison. Madras Governor, Lushington, decided to enquire into the matter personally.^v More than that, he had another intention to experience the beauty and comfort of the capital city, Trivandrum, at the expense of the Travancore King. When the Madras Governor visited Travancore, he was astonished at the knowledge, wisdom, and practical experience of the King. He had high admiration for the King in his political dealings. But the Court of Directors had an opposite view regarding the Travancore monarch. On the side of the King, the visit of the Governor generated a clear picture regarding the real intention of the colonial mission. The strict discipline, total punctuality, practice of right ceremonial customs, and well-trained parade attracted the King. He was much impressed by the daring and will of the British man, who came to the far-off native state with a mind to win. The European technique of warfare, the drill, the parade, and even their wartime costumes attracted the King. As a native ruler, he showed no orthodox temperament or inclination towards accepting the European mode of warfare and military discipline.

With the European way of military costumes and training, he ordered the state army to be modified in that manner. Their dress codes were renewed. In that matter, he had no hesitation in accepting the advice of the Court of Directors. New high-bred horses were imported, and they enriched the cavalry power of the state.

When General Cullen became the Resident of Travancore, the confrontation between the King and the British, matters more worsened. He deeply interfered in the everyday administration of the state. His nominee, Krishna Rao, to the post of Deputy Peshkar, poisoned the mind of the resident against the King. The King felt hurt by the humiliation from the Resident; he even wrote the matter to the Madras Governor, but of no use.

Another field concentrated by the King was that of trade and commerce of the state. He at first conducted a detailed analysis of the income and expenditure of the state. He made a thorough study of the economic status of the state. He abolished the duty on 165 articles of different things, which in turn benefited trade promotion^{vi}. For agriculture and trade upliftment, he gave topmost priority to irrigation. He gave instructions to the PWD department to enhance the transport and communication. As a result, Captain Horsely was appointed to supervise the Engineering department. As the Superintendent of Irrigation, the main bridge was constructed. It was over the Karamana River towards Cape Comerin, known as the

Karamana Bridge. Kodayar Dam in Nanchinad, Varkala Tunnel, both project proposals were devised, unfortunately, they became a reality much later.

Along with agriculture, the dairy sector was also duly promoted. A Cowstall was built inside the East Fort, and the finest breeds of Cows were brought from other states also. Regarding the judiciary, his contribution was worthwhile. He ordered to draft a Legal Code. Special courts, Munsif courts, were intended to settle petty civil and police cases. District courts were opened, and a code of regulations, the first code contains 8 regulations, was passed^{vii}.

An overwhelming contribution can be seen in the field of education. An English school was opened at Trivandrum in 1834, and Roberts was entrusted with its charge.^{viii} In 1836 A D, it was converted to the Sircar Free School, and the salary of Roberts was fixed as Rs. 300.^{ix} Later, this school was developed as Maharajas College, presently the University College. Another notable contribution was the stationing of *Granthapura*, which later developed into the famous Oriental Research Institute and Manuscript Library in Trivandrum.^x The origin of the Trivandrum Zoo is also attributed to him. He had a great interest in astronomy, which led to the founding of the Trivandrum Observatory. It was built in 1837. Its construction was supervised by Lieutenant Horsely. A Government Printing Department was established. Necessary equipment was brought from England, and CMS Press started its functioning at Kottayam^{xi}. All these factors testify to the fact that the king was an ordinary personality who gave due attention. To every department and its functioning, he gave due consideration.

Above all, the prime contribution was in the field of music. He was a gifted artist and a great scholar, and a poet.^{xii} His works include *Bhakti Manjari*, *Padmanabha Satakam*, *Ulsava Prabandha*, etc.^{xiii} Some theoretical writings of music in King's own handwriting are preserved in the Oriental manuscript Library. He was very much interested in architecture its net result was the construction of two palaces, *Rangavilasam Kottaram* and *Puthanmalika*^{xiv}.

Conclusion

Swathi Thirunal made an illustrious contribution to the development of Travancore in different sectors. Though he had only a short span of life, he carved for himself a respectable position in the annals of Travancore history. He was a man of vision and a man of action.

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ⁱⁱⁱ V Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual Vol.I*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1989, p.482

^{iv} D Dayanandan, *Thiruvithamkur Charithrathile Chila Edukal*(mal.), State Institute of Languages, Trivandrum, 2016, p.8

^v Sooranad Kunjan Pillai, *Swathi Thirunal Maharajavu* (mal.), Department of Cultural Publications, Government of Kerala, 1950, p.78

^{vi} Ilamkulam, *charithrathitte pachathalathil*, mahanal book stall, kottayam, 1961, p-28

^{vii} Pattom G Ramachandran Nair, *Thiruvananthapurathinte Ithihasam*(mal.), Sahithyavedi, wami and Hariharan, *Royal Patronage to Indian Music*, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 1984, p.115

^{viii} Kizhakkemattom Govindan Nair, *Charithrathinte Edukal*(mal), op.cit.,p.258

^{ix} *Ibid.*, p.268

^x Pattom G Ramachandran Nair, *Thiruvananthapurathinte Ithihasam*(mal.), Sahithyavedi, Trivandrum, 1996, p.203

^{xi} Velayudha panikkasheri, Kerala Charithram, mysuore , p-120

^{xii} T K Ravindranath, *Karnataka Sangeetha Charithram*, (mal.), National Bookstall, Kottayam, 1984, p.62

^{xiii} Poovattoor Ramakrishna Pillai, *Bhakti Manjari of Swathi Thirunal*, Anitha Publications, 1993, p.12

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