

The Rebellion of Kalyanswamy (1837 A.D.)

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The Amara Sullia Rebellion (also called Kalyanappana Katakayi or Amara Sullya Raitha) was an armed uprising against the British government organized by the people of Arebhashe and Tulunadu that took place in 1837, twenty years before the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

The existing literature - British administrative records and secondary works - reflect two important interpretations concerning the nature of the rebellion of Kalyanswamy. The imperialist writing tried to underestimate the importance of the rebellion, which some of the native writers glorified it. The British administrators like C.R. Cotton, Mark Cubbon, and M. Lewin in their reports deliberately avoided certain facts inconvenient to the administration. Rev. G. Richter introduced caste feelings in the rebellion, when he considered it as a mere "Gauda - Affair". However, the fact remains that the rebellion of Kalyanswamy has become a part of the folklore of the region and has naturally evoked a lot of interest among native writers. Some of them includes T.T. Sharma, D.N. Krishnaiah, M.V. Krishna Rao, G.S. Halappa and Purushothama B. They identify the spirit of freedom in the rebellion and describe it as the first war of independence in the history of South Kanara.

Background

South Kanara passed into British hands in 1799. But Coorg enjoyed its precarious independence till 1834, when the last of the Haleri chiefs Chikkaviraraja (1820-1834) was deposed. After the annexation of Coorg, the maganes of Amarsullia and Puttur (which had been handed over to the Raja of Coorg in 1804 by the British) were transferred to the province of Kanara for administrative convenience. It resulted in severe hardships to the people of these transferred maganes. The first change they noticed was in the mode of payment of revenue to the Government. Under the Rajas of Coorg, the revenue was paid in kind. The collector of South Kanara now demanded cash payment of revenue to the Government. This was opposed by the peasants, because the peasants of these maganes had to sell their products to realize cash and remit the revenue to the Government. The peasants also resented the system of levying taxes on the sale of agricultural products and items of day to day consumption. The manufacture of salt and tobacco was the monopoly of the Government. This was disliked by the people. The British judicial system and law courts were not welcomed by the natives. The evangelist ambitions of the British were also opposed by the people. All the factors made the people of South Kanara, especially of retransferred areas hostile to the British. Naturally, Kalyanswamy's call for a rebellion provoked considerable response from the natives. They believed that the Haleri rule represented happier days that seemed to have been now consigned to the past, which they hoped to rescue. Thus, the rebellion apparently bore a restorative character, but was in fact nurtured by certain deep-seated resentment which the people felt against the British policy.

The Rebellion:

The origin of the rebellion of Kalyanswamy can be traced to Coorg politics. Soon after the annexation of Coorg (1834) efforts were set on foot in Coorg and South Kanara to expel the British. The resistance movement was led by three leaders in succession - Aparamparaswami and Kalyanswamy in Coorg and later Puttabasappa (acting Kalyanswamy) in South Kanara.

The person who gave inspiration to the rebellion of Kalyanswamy was Swami Aparampara. Much before 1834, he appeared in Coorg as a sanyasi. But previous to the annexation of Coorg he moved to Sullia and took shelter at Kujugodu in the house of one Mallappa Gowda. He claimed that he was Veerappa Odeya, the first son of Appaji Arasu, the uncle of the deposed Raja of Coorg and thus put forth his claim as a legal heir to the throne of Coorg and was able to influence the people there. His object was to attack and occupy the Fort of Mercara on 5th December, 1836. But British smelt the danger and arrested him.

Then his friend Kallianswamy continued the rebellion. He also wanted to get a legal sanction for his claim to the throne and hence styled himself as Nanjudappa, the second son of Appaji Arasu. But he was arrested by the British, with the help of Diwan Ponnappa. But before the arrest the Kalyanswamy and his supporters were able to influence the people of Amara Sullia to rise in revolt against the British.

Kedambadi Rama Gowda of Sullia and HulikadidaNanjaiah of Coorg were mainly responsible for the organization of this rebellion in South Kanara. Rama Gowda also had a house in Upper Coorg. The people of South Kanara never knew that Kalyanswamy was caught. So, Rama Gowda and HulikadidaNanjaiah selected Shivachar or Lingayat peasant by name Puttabasappa or Putta basava of Shanivarasante in Himanani village to play the role of Kalyanswamy.

Puttabasappa or the new Kalyanswamy and Rama Gowda started their activities in early 1837. Kalyanswamy was declared as the Raja. He had already claimed to be a member of the dispossessed Haleri family. This was to get not only a legal sanction to his claim for the throne of Coorg but also to win over mass support on 30th March, 1837, Kalyanswamy (Puttabasappa) declared that if he became the ruler, he would stop the collection of revenue for the first three years and he would abolish the duties on commodities of day to day consumption. He made his aims very clear in his proclamations that his aim was to expel the British and reinstate the rule of the Haleri dynasty.

The declared objectives of the rebellious leader and his supporters seemed to be a threat to the existence of the British in the region of Coorg and South Kanara. On 30th March, 1837, Kalyanswamy (Puttabasappa) issued another proclamation ordering the people to lower Coorg to support him in his task. He had also ordered to Kujugodu Appayya and Malamana Mallappa Gowda to obstruct the postal system and other means of transport and communication. Though the people supported the rebellion, there was also some pro-British groups. The rebels assassinated Altur Ramappayya in March, 1837 for his pro-British attitude. Ramappayya was a loyal supporter of the British and revealed all the secret plans of Kalyanswamy and his supporters. Similarly, the three diwans of Coorg-Laxminaryana, ApparandaBopu, Cheppudira Ponnappa also hated the rebels and supported the British. Padi Subbayya, Ranga Baliga also supported the British. The rebels not only attacked their native rivals but also wrote letters of threatening to get its support for the people.

The British administrators like Mark Cubbon C.R. Cotton, M. Lewin, Blair studied this case carefully and decided to act strongly. The rebellion of Kalyanswamy has been popularly known as Kalyanappana Kata Kayi in South Kanara district. In Kannada "Kata Kayi" means disturbance. Kalyanswamy, the pretender to throne of Coorg had some prominent supporters like Kedambadi Rama Gowda and Hurikadida Nanjaiah. Rama Gowda selected Puttabasappa to play the role of Kalyanswamy. Hurikadida Nanjaiah carried on the tradition of the rebellion of Swami Aparampara to Kalyanswamy. Kalyanswamy was supported by few other important persons. Lakshmappa Banga of Nandavara, Subraya Hegde, Manjappa Heggade, Cheringi Subraya Karnika, Goode Appaiah, Goode Thimmanna, Beranna Bunt, Subedar Krishnaiah, ChettiKudiya, KutraKudiya, PerajeOkanna Bunt, were the supporters of Kalyanswamy. Further, there were a large number of Government servants like Patels, Shanubogue, and peons, who raised the standard of revolt along with Kalyanswamy. These leaders had the support of the peasant population. It is true that most of the participants in the rebellion were Goudas, because Amara Sullia was mainly inhabited by them. But we cannot agree with Rev. G. Richter, that is a mere Gowda affair. It is absurd because there were people belonging to Brahmins, Bunts, Sthanikas, Malekudiya, Muslims etc. participating in it. Here Rev. G. Richter was merely trying to belittle the scope of the movement.

The actual rebellion took place during March and April, 1837. During this period, the rebels under Kalyanswamy had plundered almost the whole southern part of South Kanara. According to the plan of Kalyanswamy the rebellion ought to have commenced on 5th March, 1837 in Coorg and 6th April, 1837 in Amara Sullia. But the pro-British, Altur Ramappayya was killed by the rebels on 29th March, 1837. This marked the beginning of the rebellion in the district. The rebellion started in Amara Sullia comprised of other places like Kedambadi, Kujugodu, Bellare and Subrahmanya. In Bellare on 29th and 30th March, the rebels attacked the Government office and looted the treasury. From Bellare, the troops of Kalyanswamy marched to Puttur and the through Bantwal to Mangalore. In all these centres the rebels attacked the public office and looted the treasuries. At Bantwal on 2nd April, they were supported to Lakshmappa Banga, Manjappa Hegde and Chandrasekhar Chowta. In contrast to these Ranga Baliga of Bantwal helped the British. On 6th April, the rebels marched to Kumble, but British put down the rebels there by the support of Padi Subbayya Shanubogue. From Bantwal the rebellion spread to Mulky and Uppinangady. From Bantwal of the forces of Kalyanswamy marched to Mangalore on 3rd April. In the meantime, Subraya Hegde of Tenka Kumble Kote joined hands with Kalyanswamy. He was marching towards Mangalore, but he could not cross river Nethravathi because of British intervention. He was thrown in to the sea and made to drown.

After entering the Mangalore city, Kalyanswamy broke the prison-gates and free the prisoners. He took over the treasury and set fire to the houses of English officers at Mangalore. For nearly two weeks, Mangalore was in the hands of the rebels and their flag flew on the present Light House hill in the place of company's flag. Kalyanswamy was accepted and declared as the ruler by his men. Kalyanswamy's plan was to conquer Mangalore first and then to march towards Coorg. The followers of Kalyanswamy tried to persuade the people of Coorg to rebel against the Government. Their aim was to attack the Fort of Mercara on 16th April, 1837. But British recovered Mangalore by 16th April, 1837. The rebellion did not get support of the people of Coorg. Because they knew that there existed no real descendent of the Haleri family and they never had any genuine grievance to oppose the Government. As a matter of fact, the people of Coorg were not keen on the restoration of the Haleri family. So, Kalyanswamy's efforts to become the Raja of Coorg failed. He was captured and executed on 19th June, 1837.