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MARTHANDA VARMA – The Legend of Modern Travancore

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ABSTRACT

The former Hindu feudal kingdom of Travancore is one of India's most beautiful regions. Thiruvithamkodu, the Sanskrit name for Travancore, translates as 'the abode of prosperity.' Named after the term Thiruvithamcode, which was the city's capital at one time. From 1729 to 1758, Anizham Thirunal Marthandavarma served as King of Travancore. The reign of Marthandavarma heralded the beginning of a new period in the history of Travancore's administrative past. Overpowering subjects were brought under control and peace and order were restored in his kingdom within many years of him taking power. A few of his northern neighbors were eventually conquered as a result of his later wars. It didn't stop him from constructing an efficient administration and carrying out several nation-building efforts despite these battles with his foes. At the Battle of Colachel, only the Indian ruler Marthandavarma defeated the Dutch. Marthandavarma reorganized all of the departments for the sake of efficiency. Travancore's empire was brought together using a blood and iron strategy. The assistance of Captain De Lannoy allowed him to implement European-style discipline in his army.

Keywords: Mandapathum Vathukkal and Marthandavarma are two of the most important places in Tamil Nadu's cultural landscape.

Introduction

When King Rama Varma was born, Thrippappur Swaroopam (Thiruvithamkur) was a minor principality that stretched from Edava in the north to Aaralvaimozhi in the south. It was difficult for King Venad to hold on to his kingdom because of the fragility of his authority. King Rama Varma was compelled to enlist the help of Tamil Nadu's military in order to collect debts and maintain law and order in his kingdom. The issue in Travancore had already gotten worse when Marthandavarma ascended the throne. Travancore was formed by expanding Venad's territory by military force. ¹ As the architect of modern Travancore, he is a household name.

Early Life Thirunal Anizham Maharani Karthika Thirunal, the queen of Travancore, gave birth to Marthandavarma in 1706 A.D., and his parents were Raghava Varma and Karthika Thirunal. At 14 years old, King Veera Rama Varma appointed Anizham Thirunal as the "Prince of Neyyattinkara," in recognition of his maturity and leadership abilities. His reign as king of Travancore began in 1729 A.D., and he is widely regarded as the only Indian monarch to defeat a European army in battle. For his own safety, Marthandavarma was forced to abandon the capital city. For many years, he had to move from place to place in order to avoid his adversaries.

Administrative Reforms

The State was divided into fifteen MandapathumVathukkals*3 for administrative purposes, with officers referred to as Karyakkar in charge. 4 There were multiple Adhikarams, or villages, in each taluk. Depending on where you were in Nanchinad, you might have heard him referred to as Adhikari or Pravartikar, depending on where you were. The smallest administrative division was the village. Direct appointment by the King was made for the village officer. Village Accountant*5, Assessment Assistant, and other Assistants are examples of subordinates. It was the duty of the Adhikari to collect taxes and carry out royal directives. He ensures that all temples and shrines under his jurisdiction are properly managed and assigns a manager to each one. 6King Marthandavarma instituted sweeping changes to the state's revenue, budget, and public works departments in addition to his military triumphs. Reorganizing the commercial sector and taking over the spice trade were two of his most notable accomplishments. Traders and merchants began to flock to Mavelikkara. Everywhere in the realm, there were new roads and inns. The citizens of the state were protected by the establishment of seven military outposts. Varkala-to-Cochin water transportation was established.

Agriculture was a major focus of Marthandavarma, the founder of modern Travancore. Travancore's southernmost region, Kanyakumari, was referred to as Travancore Kanyakumari. Nanjilnadu, a region east of Nagercoil town known for its enormous paddy rice cultivation, was dubbed the "Granary of Travancore"8. Because of Marthandavarma's irrigation system, this region had abundant fertility. For irrigation, he dug new canals. They built dams and waterways in South Travancore in order to extend irrigation capabilities there. There were advantages for the lands in Kalkulam and EranielTaluks because of the project. The irrigation system ensured that the residents ofThe area around Padmanabhapuram. Drought-stricken areas were cultivated. Kalkulam's additional irrigation needs were met by the construction of auxiliary channels leading from Kothayar. In the Agastheeswaramtaluk, irrigation tanks were built with the help of a special team. The Pallipuram village also saw the construction of a massive earthen dam and a network of distributary waterways. 9

Single-crop paddy fields were converted to double-crop paddy fields, resulting in a twofold increase in yield. The king built Ponmana Dam and Puthen Dam, both of which are still in use today. 10 Thovala lands were irrigated with a new irrigation channel named Puthanar.

The pursuit of conquest and consolidation necessitated a large financial commitment. Unconventional taxation procedures had been implemented by Marthandavarma to deal with the circumstance. He had to become heavily involved in the economic affairs of the people due to the tremendous and frequent demand for money. He introduced the concept of land revenue. State monopolies were established in the pepper, tobacco, and salt industries. To cover administrative and military costs, Marthandavarma took these budgetary measures.

Marthandavarma resolved to establish a public service based on faithful service after the old monopoly of state services of Nair Madampimar, Pillamar, and Kariakkar was broken. Entrusting public services to hereditary families was something he had witnessed firsthand.

Marthandavarma restructured the public sector from the ground up, emphasizing effectiveness and long-term commitment. ChempakaramanPillai was the name he gave to the Knighthood he created in his honor. 11 Marthandavarma devised new ways to honor those who had contributed to the success of the kingdom. Members of the military forces and other branches of the government were rewarded for their dedication with various titles, distinctions, and privileges.

Enormous expansion required a reliable Postal service. It was built by the Travancore Anchal Pettis*12. If the mail is not delivered on time, the MandapathumVathukkal should investigate and penalize the mail carrier or postal clerk responsible.

During wartime, the nation's transportation relies heavily on interior waterways. Because of this, Marthandavarma designed an in-water transportation network connecting the major backwaters on the western side of Travancore by a system of canals.

Land Revenue Settlement

For the first time in the country's history, land surveys and assessments were conducted on a regular basis. During the period of 1738-39 AD, the first revenue settlement was made. Working only in Venad areas was not an option. The settlement procedure lasted nearly ten years. Fines, Varippanam,*13 customs, monopolies, customary dues, and market dues were all sources of revenue. Merchants and the general public alike were taxed whenever there was a large expenditure on rare goods. These customs-duties obtained mostly from pepper exports financed fortifications and war debt. Depots were set up in various sections of the state to accept and store these items. It was illegal for individuals to import or export these goods. Sea and land-based trade was common.¹⁴

The highest bidder was awarded the privilege to collect market tolls. However, as the toll rates were already established, the bidder was not permitted to collect further money. Paddy, salt, dried fish, coconuts, betel leaves, and other market purchases like pepper all had a toll attached to them. There was no charge for the toll.

Devasoms, Oottupuras,*16 Palaces, revenue and military establishments, pension and grants were among the reforms implemented by Marthandavarma in the administration. The spending was closely watched. Misappropriation is punishable by jail time and a requirement that the victim repay the money taken. There were no exceptions to the royal code of conduct. Forts and Fortifications

There were five Venad forts at the commencement of Marthandavarma's reign—Thovala, Neeyattinkara, Puthenkotta in Trivandrum, Attingal, and Kilimanoor. Travancore erected multiple fortresses at Thottapalli and Vaikom to guard key locations during the battles. Kaduttara to Kanyakumari Coast saw the construction of a mud- and stone-walled fort. These quadrangular forts replaced the original rectangular ones at Kalkulam and Puliyurkurichi. In 1744, the granite walls of Valiyakoyikkal Palace fort were completed and called Padmanabhapuram fort. A granite wall with bastions around the hill was constructed at Udayagiri in India. Batteries and powder bunkers were also erected inside the fortress. At Udayagiri, an iron foundry was created where cannons, mortars, and bullets were made. Many additional historic forts were renovated and made ready for military use. ¹⁸

Army Organization

When Marthandavarma completed the defenses, he turned his focus to the formation of an effective army. On the models of Europe, they were honed in on 19 De Lannoy, who was taken prisoner in the Battle of Colachel, helped the king in this endeavor. Infantry, cavalry, artillery, and irregular forces made up the bulk of the army. The monarch of Travancore lavished praise on De Lannoy's military training efforts and awarded him the title of ValiyaKappithan (Great Commander).

Fort Attingal in Travancore is defended by British troops with assistance from the Travancore army. Dutch POWs enlisted in Travancore's army and participated in the fight against the country's foes. Marthandavarma used foreign mercenaries on multiple occasions to expand and consolidate his empire.

20

Military Career

In addition to being a brilliant tactician and an excellent monarch, King Marthandavarma was also an accomplished military commander. Then he turned his focus to the neighboring states after crushing the feudal lords' tremendous powers. Kayamkulam and Kollam were added to his territory. ²¹ Travancore Raja and Kayamkulam Raja signed a treaty known as the Treaty of Mannar. That Raja was finally defeated in 1746, and his realm was taken over by Travancore. As a result, the Travancore kingdom

stretched all the way up to Kayamkulam in the north, from Kanyakumari. 22 As a result of this, Travancore annexed the cities of Ambalapuzha, Kottayam and Changanassery in 1753 AD, as well. It was annexed by the Kingdom of Meenachil. This time, Travancore took Karappuram and Aalangad as well. The Zamorin of Calicut was also in 1755 A.D.

defeated at a battle in Purakkad. The support of the armies of some other local kings, made almost all the kings of Kerala prostrate before the power of Marthandavarma. He was ably assisted in his military conquests by RamayyanDalawa, later his Prime Minister and Diwan on Travancore. 23

Battle of Colachel

This decision was made by the Dutch in 1741 A.D., when they reinstated the Queen of the Kottarakara realm in defiance of Marthandavarma's wishes. The Dutch's actions enraged Maharaja, who annexed Kottarakara in full to Travancore. The Queen escaped to Cochin and got a pension from the Dutch. As a result of the crucial Battle of Colachel, the Dutch Empire in Kerala was overthrown. It was not until 1753 A.D. that the treaty of peace between Spain and Holland was completed, despite both battles taking place on August 10, 1741.

At the Battle of Colachel, more than a dozen Dutch soldiers were captured. It was because of the Maharaja's kindness that the inmates were pleased and willing to serve him. De Lannoy and Donadi, two of the Maharaja's favorites, were among them. General De Lannoy was promoted to this position. He helped Marthandavarma a great deal in the subsequent fights. 24 During the Treaty of Mavelikkara, signed by Marthandavarma and the Dutch on August 15 of that year, the two nations agreed to live peacefully.

Palaces

Suchindram, Padmanabhapuram, Neyyattinkara, Nedumangad, Kottarakkara, Kunnathur, and Harippad were just a few of the palaces outside of Trivandrum to be found. Krishnapuram, a second palace, was built in the vicinity of Kayamkulam. RamayyanDalawa oversaw the construction of the palaces of Padmanabhapuram and Krishnapuram. 25 PulikkottuKoyikkal and ValiyaKoyikkal were the two palaces in Trivandrum. ThevarattuKoyikkal, the third palace in Trivandrum, was designated as the royal abode whenever the monarch was in town.

Temples and Dharmasalas

The temple of Sri Padmanabhaswamy was renovated by Marthandavarma. The OttakkalMandapam was the first structure to be built in this region. 26 It took 42 days to get this boulder from the Thirumala Hills. Another set of four temples was finished as well: Sreekovil, Thekkedam, Balikkalpura and Seevelipurua. In Paikuni month of 1733 A.D., the Kalasam (purification) ceremony was performed, and regular pujas began in 1735 A.D. from Alpasi. Several Oottupuras and Vazhiyambalams (rest houses) were erected across the nation. Free meals were served to Brahmins all year round in Oottupuras, which were attached to temples. 27

Culture

Marthandavarma rebuilt the Sri PadmanabhaSwamy temple and inserted new rituals such as Murajapam and Bhadradeepam into it. Sri Lankan Salagramams purchased from Nepal were used to rebuild the temple's main deity, which was damaged in a fire during the era of his ancestors. 'OttakkalMandapam' and 'Seevelippura' were also among his creations. Gopuram, or spire, of the temple There are seven floors. When Marthandavarma ruled, five of these projects were completed. Due to its proximity to neighboring countries, Travancore became a cultural hub because of the acquisition

of these areas. Koothu, Koodiyattam, Kathakali, and Thullal were among the temple art forms that received support from the king. His court poets were RamapurathuWarrier and KunchanNambiar. 28

Many festivals were resurrected and established during Marthandavarma's reign. According to the orders of the King, the Alpasi and Painkuni festivities are held. The Lakshadeepam festival was held in 1750 A.D. It was a sight to behold, with 1,000,000 LED lights illuminating the SheeveliMandapam and the event it accompanied. Three times throughout Marthandavarma's reign, Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple's Murajapam, one of the most important religious ceremonies, was held.²⁹

Thrippadidaanam

Thirty-nine-year-old king Marthandavarma was a superb conqueror and organizer, but he decided to devote his realm to Sri Padmanabha and rule as the deity's vice-regent. Since then, he is known as SreeAnizhamThirunalVeeraBaaloMarthandavarmaKulasekharaPerumal following the dedication on January 3, 1750 A.D. Thripadidaanam refers to Padmanabha's acquisition of the throne. ³² As a result, Sri Padmanabhaswamy, the presiding deity of the Travancore Royal line, inherited the Travancore kingdom.

Conclusion

Marthandavarma's reign was the most significant in Travancore's history. When he came to office, he discovered a weak and divided country. The king was able to save and protect the country from a condition of absolute turmoil and disorder. In his efforts to expand his inherited territories, he annexed numerous nearby states and united the entire southern region of Kerala into his empire. He also had a significant impact on Travancore's consolidation and expansion as Prime Minister of Marthandavarma. Maharaja Marthandavarma transformed Travancore's capital city, Trivandrum, into a world-class metropolis.

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