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ADVENT OF THE PORTUGUESE AT KOLLAM



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ABSTRACT

Kollam, the Capital of Erstwhile Venad is an old sea port situated on the southern part of Kerala. Many foreigners made contact with Kollam from the 1st century C.E itself. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish a trading centre at Kollam in 1502. They found that the land was rich in spices and having trade opportunities. During the reign of Ravi Varma, Vasco Da Gama landed at Calicut (1498) and thus the Portuguese relation with Kerala began. Quite often they come in conflict with the native rulers. The supremacy of the Portuguese in the region continued till 1663. Though they destroyed the native temples and harmed the Muslim merchants. The benefits that acquired to Kerala were something that could not be ignored.

KEYWORDS : Portuguese, Kollam, Kerala, Supremacy, Treaty, Zamorin.



INTRODUCTION :

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to set up a strong hold in Kollam. The Keralites normally called Portuguese as 'Parankie'. Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut in 10th May, 1498, but the trade contact with Quilon and Portuguese had started during Gama's second sojourn in 1503 C.E. Before his arrival in 1501 C.E. the ruler of Quilon Rama Varma invited Cabral, the then Portuguese Advent of the Europeans marked the foundation of a new era in Kerala history Viceroy at Cochin to visit Quilon and to have trade with Quilon. But this offer was politely turned down. In 1503 the invitation from Quilon was renewed but Gama was also hesitant to accept the invitation, since he afraid that any agreement between him and any other power on the Malabar Coast might alienate his ally with the king of Cochin. But the ruler of Quilon, who was on friendly terms with the king of Cochin succeeded in persuading him to give his assent to the proposed agreement with Quilon. As per the request two Portuguese ships arrived at Quilon and returned back with pepper in 1503.

In the same year Alfonso de Albuquerque the newly appointed Viceroy of Cochin sent two vessels to Quilon to load pepper. He came to establish commercial depot and factory a there. Till then Quilon was dominated by the Arabs and they resented this new friendship between the Portuguese

and the ruler of Quilon. The Zamorin of Calicut was also against the Portuguese and he sent 30 fleet to Quilon. Zamorin forced the Quilon merchants to suspend all business transactions with the Portuguese and persuaded the king to expel the Portuguese from Quilon.

In 1503 a conflict between the Portuguese and the Arabs started at Quilon port. The raja of Quilon Ravi Varma himself entered into the battle field. Hearing this Albuquerque who was in Cochin reached Quilon. The Dewan of Quilon received him and with the permission of the king Albuquerque was able to fill the ships with pepper and returned.

At that time, the Zamorin who was in ally with the Arabs, sent his ambassadors to Quilon, against the Portuguese. But the king of Quilon desired to hold with Portuguese. When Albuquerque knew the Zamorin was trying to induce the king of Quilon, he wished to seize the ships of the Zamorin and the Arab and also requested the king's officers to give permission for his contemplated move. If the permission was refused, he will enter the port and burn them. The Dewan replied that they had written to the king and the reply will come shortly. It was agreed that since then the ships of Arabs will anchored in the port and could not depart without the permission. A few days later the message of the king came which was in favour of the Portuguese. Condition was also made to the Arabs that not to leave the port without permission. This was acceptable to Albuquerque. The Arabs vessels were granted to leave the shore; they were at once checked by the officers of the king. The spices in the ships were unloaded and sent to the Portuguese factory and good downs of the merchants. Thus the struggle between the Portuguese and the Arabs ended and the relationship between the Portuguese and the Quilon became horizontal. Later Albuquerque sailed back to Cochin on 12th January 1504 leaving Antonio De Sa with 26 men and Fr. Rodrigo, a Roman Catholic Priest there.

In 1505 Francisco de Almeida was appointed as the Portuguese Viceroy in India. He came to Quilon and his main intension was to build a fort there. So he sent Captain Homen to collect pepper. But the situation in Quilon was worse. He noticed the Arab merchants filled in their ships and was about to move. So the Captain ordered to his men to seize these vessels. The aggressive Arab merchants represented his grievances to the Raja and the king's officials demanded Antonio De Sa to return the things which the Captain had seized from the Arabs. But he refused not only to obey the order and but also insulted the officials. This incident led to a fight between De Sa's men in one side and the Nairs of Quilon and the Arabs on the other. An all-out war broke out in 1505. After a prolonged struggle the Arabs got victory. In this war 26 Portuguese participated and 13 of them lost their lives. The 13 surviving Portuguese escaped to the neighbouring temple. But the infuriated mob burnt the temple on 31st October 1505 and thus the remaining 13 Portuguese lost their lives. Immediately after hearing this incident Almeida called back Homen from Quilon and sent his son Dom Lorenzo to Quilon to take revenge to the people for the murder of the Portuguese. Lorenzo landed at Quilon and burnt all the ships which he was able to capture and returned to Cochin. There after there was no active relation between the Portuguese and Quilon.

However the ruler was again trying to have a trade relation with the Portuguese and in 1508 A.D. he sent his message to Cochin to negotiate with the Portuguese, but nothing came out of this mission. In 1515 A.D. Alfonso outdated by Lopo Soares and he soon conclude a peace treaty with Quilon in 1516.

PROVISIONS OF THE TREATY:

- The ruler of Quilon agreed to rebuild the St. Thomas Church.
- To pay 500 Bharas (candies) of pepper in three annual instalments at the same price as they could obtain them at Cochin.

- Not to export any drugs or spices without the prior knowledge of the Portuguese.
- The Portuguese were not to pay any dues for the use of port of Quilon.
- In case of war both party was to assist the other.
- The ruler of Quilon also agreed to treat the local Christians with special favour and consideration.
- The Portuguese should give the right to converting Hindu or Muslims to Christianity.

St. Thomas Fort:

On 1st February, 1517 Rodrigues was appointed as the Captain of Quilon. But the supply of the promised quota of pepper was delayed. With the delay of time he sought the permission from the Rani to build a fort and settlement at Quilon. Soon news spread that the ruler of Quilon had received economic gratifications and presents from the Portuguese. Hence they tried to construct the fort. On the foundation day of the fort Nairs and Muslims mustered strong and tried to hinder the erection of the building, but the Portuguese raise their guns and frightened them. With great effort the fort was completed in September 1519 and named as Fort Thomas.

Immediately after the construction of the fort in Tangaseery the Portuguese demanded to pay the dues. But the Ruler of Quilon thought that they would not have to pay the due because of permission given for the building of the fort. There upon Rodrigues started violent methods to get possession of due. The Rani was bewildered at the severe deed of the Portuguese and she instigated local Nairs and Mappilas under the leadership of Unneri Pillai, Balan Pillai and Kolla Kurup to siege the fort. They entered the fort and imprisoned all the members. The Portuguese within the fort eventually died of hunger and disease.

In the meantime the news of the siege reached at Cochin and the governor of Cochin took necessary steps to break through the blockade and retake the fort. They reached Quilon in August 1520, and saved the lives of those with in the fort. At this time the ruler of Quilon sent a message to the governor of Cochin and started negotiations. In 17th November 1520 a treaty was signed, it was more or less on the lines that of 1516.

Terms of the treaty of 1516:

- The pepper which had fallen in arrears was to be paid immediately.
- All the pepper in the land was here after to be sold only to the king of the Portugal and to none else.
- All the ships arriving at Quilon were to be allowed free access to the port and well received.
- The captain of the fort will grant all assistance to the king.

This agreement improved the relationship between the Portuguese and the ruler of Quilon for time being. Gradually the Portuguese changed their attitudes. In 1543 the Portuguese organised an expedition to plunder the temples on both coasts of South India. The Portuguese heard the news that the temple of Tevalakkara in the Karunagapally taluk was enormously wealthy and went along to loot the same. But the temple officials offered 12,000 gold coins to stop this move. But De Souza, the Portuguese governor didn't stop the move. "The Governors and his reliable persons went inside the temple and shut the door; those outside the building passed a miserable night. Inside, the governors and his friends spent the time in torturing the Brahmins of the temple and in digging up to the floor where the treasures were stored. It was never known exactly what was found except, a gold paten worth 50 pavan. When, in the morning, they started their return journey a group of Nair and local people attacked the Portuguese. In this 30 of the Portuguese were killed and more than 130 were wounded. Anyhow on their way back, they sacked another temple where they obtained some small

amount of silver coins to distribute among the soldiery”.

About this time another treaty was signed between De Souza and Venad (Kollam) by which the former obtained additional privileges in Quilon. It was agreed that in the event of a Portuguese or a native Christian being guilty of any crime the Portuguese Viceroy had the right for trial and punishment and the Portuguese exempted from all taxes and excise duties. Conditions were also made for the special protection of St. Thomas Church. At the same time on their part, promised not to kill cows in Quilon territory.

CONCLUSION

Portuguese spent one more century in Kerala with their trade, aggression and colonial supremacy and their final withdrawal was in. Even though they left the land here remains the lasting impressions of the Portuguese till today. The Portuguese were reluctant pioneers of social reform. Their primary aim was the abolition of the caste system. The Portuguese made education available to all communities. They also recruited all castes into their armies, factories and shipping yards. For all this travails, Quilon was never subject to the rigid caste system prevalent in other parts of Kerala. Kerala status as India's most literate state owes its position in the part to the Portuguese presses that were setup in the 14th century. The cost of the printed books became cheaper than hand written books, and people began to read and acquire knowledge. (the Portuguese word for paper 'kaduthas' is believed to be the origin of its Malayalam equivalent – 'Kadalas'). The Portuguese presses were earliest catalysts for Kerala's literacy revolution.

The Portuguese also shares their enlightened tradition. It is a little known fact that one of the oldest presses in India was established in Tangasseri, Kollam. This press was attached to the San Salvador Seminary in Tangasseri and established by Jesuit priest, Fr. Jao de Faria. Till today that place is known in Tangasseri as 'Achukuddom Parambu' (press place).

The Portuguese contribution to Catholicism in Quilon and Kerala was what has now come to be known as 'practical evangelism'. They set up centres of learning – schools, seminaries and libraries- which led to the growth of the Catholic Church in India. Practical evangelism would serve as major agent of proselytization in Quilon and Kerala.

Quilon's (and Kerala's) Portuguese legacy can also be traced to the several plant varieties that they brought to India from Brazil. The Portuguese on their way to India generally landed on the Brazilian coasts and brought the useful plants to Malabar. Little known to us, these plants and trees today form integral part of Kerala's verdant eco system. . Papaya, guava, bread-fruit, groundnut, bilimbi, love-love, cashew, pine-apple, tobacco, coffee, rubber all made their way to Kerala from Brazil. These plants have become mainstay agricultural products of Kerala. Quilon itself bears testimony to the verdant heritage left by the Portuguese centuries ago. The lifestyle of the west, architecture and design, new ammunition and the manner of production were gains receive from the Portuguese. And it is from these accounts we get the idea of the power hierarchy that existed in Quilon at the time of the Portuguese advent.

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