

REASSIGNING THE ROUTES OF ANTI COLONIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: REFLECTIONS ON THE STRUGGLES AGAINST THE PORTUGUESE IN KERALA

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Abstract: Kerala, the spice island, was a focus of attraction to the foreign countries long before the Common Era. Foreign merchants and colonies were common in the country's coastal regions. Vasco da Gama's accidental arrival on the Kerala coast in 1498 signaled the start of direct spice trade between Europe and Kerala. Kerala's polity, which mirrored India's political disunity, effectively used the colonial authority and attempted to build colonial dominance through various tactics such as conciliation and armaments. Despite their failure to establish direct political authority, the Portuguese were able to exert political influence over the native princely states. Kerala was the first region in India to taste the bitterness of colonial intrusion and was inherently rooted in indigenous resistance to colonial oppression. The resistance activities in Kerala against Portuguese intervention in their lives and independence reflect the characteristics of the early resistance movement against colonial powers.

Key words: Colonial Resistance, Besieging, Lading, Reinforcement, Blockade, Grievances.

INTRODUCTION

India was under the yoke of European colonialism for almost five centuries from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. During this period, various European powers like the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English exerted their influence over India in different degrees. Among them the mightiest was the British and they dominated the Indian social and political terrains from 1757 to 1947. The influence of other European forces is also to be considered as it was them who are responsible for sowing the seeds of colonial hegemony in India. Among them, the Portuguese deserves a special mention as they became instrumental for the discovery and the consequent subjugation of India.

The discovery of India as a colony by the Portuguese and the arrival of Vasco De Gama at Calicut were immensely hailed by the Europeans. It opened up a new arena of opportunity to the Europeans as they came into direct contact with the eastern world and its resources for profitable commercial transactions. For the Indian society this enslavement was a turning point in their journey in history. Colonialism led India ultimately to poverty and political dependency. During the next five centuries Indians were subjected to agonies of various kinds emerging out of colonialism. It is important to say that the colonial mechanism in India, like other colonies created a new middle class and native elite out of the fruits of colonialism.

Politically, India was freed from this slavery on 15th August 1947 as a result of constant struggles led by many forces in India. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Bala Gangadhar Tilak etc., strengthened this anti-colonial struggle in different ways. The Non Co-Operation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, the Quit India Movement etc., are some of the important movements that shaped the anti-colonial movement in India.

THEORIES OF THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Since independence, the history of the freedom movement was a sensational idea for few historians and activists. They began to eulogize few leaders of the movement and some incidents in the national movement. Majority of these historians belonged to North India and they argued that the freedom movement in India was purely a North Indian affair. They traced the history of our struggle and fixed the Revolt of 1857 as the commencing point of the national movement.

Few years later, historians from South India began to enter the fray and questioned the idea and argued that the national movement began in India much earlier before the revolt of 1857. In support of this theory they cited many incidents from the history of South India. Spontaneous response to this theory appeared and historians and activists of North India began to explain earlier movements like the Santhal Revolt (1855-56) of Rajmahal Region, the Kuka revolt (1840-41) of Punjab region, the Faraigi Revolt (1838-57) of Faridpur region, the Khasi Revolt (1832-33) of Garo Hills, the Kota Revolt (1831-32) of Chota Nagpur region, Barsal or Hathi Revolt (1831-32) of Barsal region, Ahom Revolt (1831) of Assam region, Bheels Revolt (1828-30) of Maharashtra, Pagalpanthi Revolt (1825-50) of Shergur region, Ramosi revolt (1822-29) of Satara region, Kutch Revolt of (1819-31) Baghara Revolt of (1818-1820) Okka division, Pikarevolt (1817) of Orissa, Bheel Revolt (1812-19) of Khandesh, Chaur revolt (1766-72) of Midnapur, Sanjari revolt (1760) of Bengal etc. While exploring these tribal and peasant resistances to colonialism they were not ready to abandon the claim that the history of freedom movement of India was only a North Indian affair.

THE SOUTH INDIAN RESPONSE

Historians from South India had to reply to this development. New researches and explorations began to take place and it resulted in the unveiling of many smaller anti-colonial movements in South India during the early days of colonialism in India. This newly framed argument put forward the view that the South Indians were not inactive in the national movement. They argued that the South India was the home of the early anti-colonial activities and it was from the South that the freedom movement originated. The Vellore Mutiny (1806), Pazhassi Revolts (1795-1805), Polygar Revolt (1799-1805), Revolt of Paliath Achan, Velu Thampi etc., began to get attention (Gopalakrishnan, 2007, pp. 9-63). They went back up to 1721 (Anjengo Factory Records, 1722, pp. 67-76) and explained that the Attingal Rebellion or Anjengo Revolt was the first war for freedom against the colonial powers (Gopalakrishnan, 2007, p. 71). They challenged the views of the North Indian historians that entire South India was inactive before 1857 against colonialism.

THE ANTI-PORTUGUESE STRUGGLES

The colonial contact with India begins with the landing of the Portuguese at Kappad near Calicut in 1498. The entire European world considered it as a great achievement and naturally expects a revolution in commercial transactions. But as against their expectations, the Portuguese had to face many hardships in Kerala. Of course the land always welcomes traders, but it will not tolerate any highhandedness or unfair activities. In fact Kerala is renowned for its sincerity and integrity in the field of commerce, and the rulers like the Zamorins of Calicut were world famous for their impartial and truthful treatment towards foreign traders. The Portuguese who landed at Kerala expected many concessions and privileges right from the very beginning itself. But the rulers of Kerala, especially the Zamorin of Calicut asked them to conduct trade through fair means. The Portuguese found it very difficult to prosper their fortunes in Kerala as the commercial competition from the Arabs was so intense. Hence they resorted to unfair practices like looting, storming of other ships etc. These unhealthy practices earned them a bad reputation as traders. Besides their approach towards local merchants and officers of the land were highhanded and haughty. All these earned them a bad image: among the local rulers, merchants, other foreigners, natives etc. It was in this context that the land offered stiff resistance to the Portuguese as they thought that the prolonged stay of these foreigners cause many threats to the integrity of the land as well as its people. Hence we can see that wherever the Portuguese exhibited the character of a colonial master, the land offered resistance to it in different ways. The ultimate aim of these struggles was to expel the alien power from the land.

In the course of time the Portuguese established themselves in strategic places like Calicut, Cannannore, Cochin, Thangassery, Cranganore etc. In all these places the natives opposed the Portuguese and resisted their supremacy either independently in their own ways or with the help of their local chieftains. Such incidents occurred at many places like Calicut, Cochin, Cannannore, Quilon etc at different times. This article attempts to expose the spontaneous anti-Portuguese struggles of Kerala in the sixteenth century and suggests the view that these struggles form integral part to the history of Indian freedom movement.

CALICUT

Calicut was a leading commercial centre in Kerala in the fifteenth century and it was internationally famous for commercial transactions with the Chinese and the Arabs. Vasco de Gama first anchored near this place and started Portuguese commercial activities since 1498. During Gama's first visit nothing happened peculiarly and he went back with the merchandise. After him the second Portuguese expedition under Cabral reached Calicut in 1500 (Panikkar, 1929, p. 40). He wished to make some kind of permanency of the Portuguese in their relation with Calicut. Thus he reached in a treaty with the Zamorin (King of Calicut) and won the permission for the erection of a factory at Calicut. Cabral appointed Ayres Correa as its first factor and 70 Europeans were deployed to defend the factory (Unnikrishnan, 2019, p.78).

Thus the Portuguese got a base at Calicut to foster their trade. However, they had to face stiff competition from the Arabs. The Arabs on their part, never engaged in foul plays, but offered fair and healthy competition in trade. Instead of this, the Portuguese could not compete with the Arabs and they failed to collect spices and other articles to fill their ships which had to

return to Lisbon before the outbreak of monsoon. This necessitated the Portuguese to seek a parallel way of plundering other ships which were laden with spices. The Portuguese under Cabral seized two Arab ships as per this plan. These ships were plundered, people on the board were killed and ships were sunk in the sea. However the waves deposited some of the bodies on the shore. Among these, two were that of the leading merchants of Calicut. When the natives realized that this cruelty was committed by the Portuguese, they decided to avenge it. They united into a single group against the Portuguese. With the support of Arabs, the natives attacked the Portuguese factory and destroyed it. Ayres Correa and 53 of his men were killed on 16th December 1500 (Panikkar, 1929, pp. 36-40). “This is the first incident of a concerted effort against a European power”.

Since then the Portuguese were struggling to belittle the Calicut kingdom and its people. There were many Portuguese military raids from the forces led by Gama and Almeida. All these attempts proved futile because of the unity of Arabs and the native forces (Kareem, 1997, p.304). One incident to be remembered in this context is the attack of the capital of Calicut during the time of Albuquerque, under Marshal Coutinho. But here also the joint forces of Calicut succeeded. The Portuguese attack was repulsed and they were forced to flee and in this context they suffered huge loss of many lives including that of their Commander Marshal Coutinho.

Later on by peaceful means, the Portuguese gained the permission for a fort at Calicut in 1513 (Mathew, 1988, p.167). Since the moment the Portuguese settled themselves, they began to exhibit their hegemonic character. The ruling Zamorin was sympathetic towards the Portuguese which give them a free hand in the affairs of Calicut. They started to procure the merchandise from other regions at their will and dictated the terms of trade. All these created much aversion in the minds of the people of Calicut. In 1524, the pro-Portuguese Zamorin died (Bouchen, 1988, p. 31). Now the new Zamorin made elaborate efforts to demolish the Portuguese fort at Calicut. The attacks against the fort were started in 1524 and serious besiege on the fort were commenced from 1525. Captain Kutti Ali was in the forefront against the attacks (Nambiar, 1878, p.78). The serious phase of the blockade started in June 1525 (Logan, 1981, p.371). The Zamorin himself took over the command of the attack. The Viceroy Menezes himself came over to the fort of Calicut to save it from the besiegers. But because of the stiff resistance from the Zamorin and of the harassment from the part of Kutti Ali, the Portuguese came to believe that they cannot hold it anymore (Unnikrishnan, 2019, p. 84). Hence they decided to abandon it and as a result they set fire to the fort. In the whole incident many Portuguese persons lost their lives, the Viceroy himself received wounds and died in 1526 because of it. Thus we can see that a European power was defeated and they were forced to abandon a fort and quit Calicut in the light of stiff resistance. This victory of the Zamorin, his military commander Kunjali-I and of the natives is the first successful anti-colonial fight India ever witnessed.

As Calicut was a land of spices and other rich merchandise, the Portuguese once again wanted to patch up the relations with the Calicut. Hence they entered into negotiations and gained the permission to erect a fort at Chaliyam, in the kingdom of Calicut in the year 1531. Once they firmly established themselves at Chaliyam, they began to exhibit their haughty

character. This offended the feelings of the ruler, merchants and natives alike. Hence once again it was decided to expel the Portuguese from the soil of Calicut. After 40 years, the final charge against the fort was led by Kunjali-III, the admiral of the Zamorin. The fort was besieged and the Portuguese were forced to surrender in 1571 (Muhammad, 1961, p.71). The Chaliyam fort was blazed to the ground. Thus once again the land of Calicut and its freedom loving people eliminated the menace of colonial yoke.

COCHIN

The Portuguese tried to build their chances in Kerala by playing with the whims and fancies of the local rulers. As the Zamorin of Calicut was not offering them what they dreamed, they approached the Cochin ruler. As a traditional foe of the Zamorin, the Cochin ruler welcomed the Portuguese whole heartedly in the hope that with the help of the foreigners he can emerge as the most powerful ruler of Kerala. The first Portuguese leader who contacted with Cochin was Pedro Alvaraz Cabral. He gained the permission to erect a factory at Cochin in December 1500 (Papers Relating to Cochin, p. 511). He also gained the facilities for landing and lading of Portuguese ships. This was the beginning of Portuguese connections with Cochin which was later elaborated by Vasco de Gama in 1503.

Gama in an interview with the king of Cochin earned for the Portuguese somewhat a monopoly of the spices in the Cochin region. He also gained the consent of the King of Cochin for constructing factories at the choice of the Portuguese and also to garrison them (De Souza, 1985, p. 214). The Zamorin of Calicut was not ready to accept the growth of the Portuguese. He was waiting for an opportunity to attack Cochin and thereby to oust the Portuguese from there. Hence the forces of Calicut marched to Cochin in the last week of February 1503. The only demand of the Zamorin was the expulsion of the Portuguese. But the Cochin Raja who had his own ambitions in connections with the Portuguese did not agree. Hence the war broke out on March 1, 1503 and the forces of Cochin were defeated at many places and the Raja was forced to seek asylum in a temple (Innes, 1997, pp. 443-445) . The war continued for many months and the Zamorin was on the verge of expelling the Portuguese from Kerala. But at this time fortunately for the Portuguese a new fleet under Francisco de Albuquerque arrived at Cochin in September 1503. He, with the help of the troops of the Cochin routed out the forces of Zamorin.

As the Cochin region was saved by the Portuguese, the Cochin Raja gave permission for the Portuguese to erect a fort at Cochin. The construction of the same was started on 26.09.1503 (Day, 1863, p. 91). The fort was completed in December and it was opened to function on 01.12.1503 (Mathew, 1982, p.169). This was a great setback to Zamorin. Because he knew it thoroughly that if the Portuguese get enough time to settle in Kerala, it will be very difficult to eliminate them from here. Hence he waited for the right opportunity. After completing the construction of Dom Manuel, the first European fort in India, Francisco de Albuquerque returned to India entrusting Duarte Pacheco and 90 men to defend the fort. On hearing the return of Francisco, Zamorin once again came to Cochin in March 1504 to expel the Portuguese from the soil of Kerala. He gallantly marched straight to Cochin by defeating the forces of Cochin and besieged the fort of Cochin. Normally it was only a matter of time for the surrender of the

Portuguese as they were besieged and their defence was only equipped with 90 soldiers. But for the surprise of all, Duarte Pacheco defended the fort for nearly three and half months. That time there arrived a fresh Portuguese fleet which relieved the Cochin fort from the besiege of the Zamorin. Later afraid of further attacks from the Zamorin, the Dom Manuel fort of Cochin strengthened on the European lines in 1506 (Papers Relating to Cochin, p. 511). Though defeated, the effort of the Zamorin of Calicut to expel the colonial power from Kerala deserves a special mention.

CANNANNORE

The relation between Cannannore and the Portuguese started during Cabral and it was further affirmed by Gama in 1502 (De Souza, 1985, p.2). Later on they got the permission to build a fort at Cannannore (St. Angelo fort) and completed it on 30.10.1505 (Mathew, 1988, p.120). When it was strengthened, it became a menace to the locals. The Portuguese began to interfere in the affairs of the local rulers. The locals on their part did not like this and they took up arms against the Portuguese (Barbosa, 1812, p.81). There were total 13 attempts against the Cannannore fort of the Portuguese. Among them the first was the most ferocious.

The Portuguese permitted no native vessels to use the West Coast without the passes signed by the commandants of either of Cochin or Cannannore. Chenacheri Kurup, the minister of Kolathiri (king of Cannannore) sent a memorial to the King of Portugal praying for an order to the Portuguese captains, not to molest Kolathiri's pretty islands, Laccdive groups and permit native vessels to go annually to Gujarat or Formuz for the purchase of horses (Mathew, 1982, p.154). The Portuguese captains obstructed the implementation of the order issued by the King as requested by the Kolathiri Raja.

The Portuguese captains were not therefore very particular as to what vessels they took. One Gonzalo Vaz meeting a vessel near Cannannore, over hauled her papers and declaring the pass which she carried from Brito, the Cannannore commandant to be a forgery, seized rich prizes and to avoid discovery, plundered and sunk after sewing the crew in a sail and throwing them over board. The stitching had not been firm and the corpses of the crew were washed upon the beach. One of the bodies was identified as the son-in-law of Mameli Marakkar. His father, a very influential merchant, came to Cannannore fort and indignantly upbraided Brito for the breach of faith (Danvers, 1966, p.128). The murdered man's family therefore went to the palace of Kolathiri and demanded vengeance (Mathew, 1982 p.154). The struggle was characterized by the participation of the ordinary people and it started on 25th April 1507 (Logan, 1981, p. 353). For the next four months, the Portuguese were trapped inside the fort and they were reduced to a small number. They were relieved by the arrival of reinforcement from Portugal under De Cunha on 27th August 1505. Thus ended the four months long attack against the Portuguese of Cannannore. Nearly every one of the Portuguese were wounded and exhausted in the attack of the natives. There were twelve more instances of such struggles against the Portuguese and in all these occasions the Portuguese suffered setbacks. This shows that the fight for freedom of the natives against the colonial power in Kerala had started in the Portuguese period.

QUILON

The Portuguese came in to contact with Quilon in 1504. In the same year they constructed a factory in this place. During the time of Almeida they constructed a stone house in Quilon in 1505 (Mathew, 1988, p. 120). Similar to Calicut, the Portuguese faced stiff competition from the Arabs. Thus the Portuguese were in short of supplies. In this circumstance, Almeida instructed the Portuguese to loot Arab ships anchored at Quilon to procure the merchandise. Thus the Arab ships were seized and the loads of these ships were carried to the Portuguese stone house (.Panikkar, 1929, pp. 108-110). The aggrieved Arab merchants went to the Raja and presented their grievances. The officials of the king went to the Portuguese and demanded that they should return the goods. But the Portuguese were not willing to do so and they even insulted the officials of the King. Due to this there ensued a fight between Almeida's men and the Nairs who were joined by the Arabs. The fight was a spontaneous one and no royal order was behind it. The people participated in it in huge number carrying strong anti-Portuguese spirit. The Nairs were led by Bala Pillai, one of the ministers of Quilon (Panikkar, 1929, pp.108-110). They destroyed the stone house and factory. The Portuguese tried to save them by fleeing to a nearby Bhagavathy temple, but that too was surrounded and burnt to ashes by the infuriated mob. Thirteen Portuguese including their factor, Antonia De Sa lost lives in this incident (Menon, 1983, pp. 287-289).

The Portuguese settled their scores with Quilon in 1517 and they gained permission for re- establishing a factory there during the time of the Viceroy Lopo Soarez in 1517 (Mathew, 1988, pp.170-171). Later on the Portuguese under Viceroy Lopez de Sequeira bribed the Queen and the ministers of Quilon such as Ummini Pillai and Balan Pillai Kurup. As a result they gained permission for a fort in 1519 (Menon, 1983, pp.287-289). This was a secret agreement and the Queen asked the Portuguese to construct the fort without the notice of the public. The Portuguese built the fort in September 1519 under the pretension of repairing the factory. But the natives smelt the danger and acted against it. They even hated the very idea of the Portuguese presence at Quilon. Naturally they opposed the Portuguese and also protested against the Queen of Quilon for supporting the Portuguese. A team of 2000 Nairs marched to seize the place and there took place a tough battle. But the Portuguese repulsed the attack by using big guns and canons. An important thing in this context is that the Queen of Quilon was with the Portuguese against the popular demand.

When the Portuguese suppressed the popular revolt, they went against the state of Quilon for their benefits. Now the Queen realized her mistake and ordered for an attack against the Portuguese. This time the attack was led by Prince Marthanda Varma (Panikkar, 1989, pp.42-43). The Nair leaders like Ummini Pillai, Balan Pillai and Kolla Kurup led from the front, but were defeated. Even though these attempts were defeated, they should rightly be remembered in history as they were the pioneers in the attempt to overthrow the colonial power.

KUNJALIS OF PUDUPATTANAM

Kunjali Marakkars (commonly known as the Marakkars) are the traditional admirals of the Zamorins of Calicut. There were actually four Kunjalis (Kunjali-I, Kunjali-II, Kunjali-III and Kunjali-IV) who were famous for their valiant struggles against the enemies of their master, the

Zamorin. The heroic activities of all these Kunjalis were in the sixteenth century. What is important here in this context is that they were a constant threat for the Portuguese in Kerala. The Portuguese were a naval power and nobody in Kerala was a match for them. It was in this circumstance that the Kunjali-I came to the scene in 1524 who raised a fleet with the royal support of the Zamorin (Parappil, 1994, pp. 52-56). Still they cannot be a match for the mighty Portuguese. Hence they devised a new policy of hit and run against the heavy ships of the Portuguese. Hiding under the waves in the waters; they effected sudden attacks on the Portuguese ships and run away when the Portuguese are ready for a battle. They molested the Portuguese trade heavily. They even went up to Thengapattanam and attacked their enemy. The power of the Marakkars reached its height during the time of Kunjali-III. The Portuguese by 1531 once again reached cordial relations with Calicut and gained permission for the erection of a fort at Chaliyam. But soon after the construction of the fort, the Portuguese once again showed their true character and hence the Chaliyam fort became a thorn in the throat of Zamorin. It was Kunjali-III that the Zamorin evacuated the Portuguese from the Chaliyam fort in 1571 (Muhammad, 1961, p.71). Now the Portuguese realized that without removing the threat of the Marakkars, they cannot make further progress in the Kerala coast. Hence they poisoned the ears of the Zamorin and made the king an enemy of the Kunjalis. The Marakkars still fought valiantly by successfully defending the combined attack of both Zamorin and the Portuguese in 1599 (Kareem, 1977, pp.182-184). But the very next year, they once again formed a formidable army and jointly attacked the head- quarters of the Marakkars. Thus Kunjali-IV, the last in the illustrious line fell in 1600. Even though he fell, he along with his proud successors is still considered as the true sons of the soil and the early freedom fighters.

CONCLUSION

The Portuguese trade monopoly and indirect governmental dominance over Kerala lasted for 150 years, until the Dutch beat them in the battle of Kochi in 1663. They were the first European countries to develop direct economic relations with Kerala via sea channels, displacing Arabs, Kerala's primary trading partners. They were distinct from Arabs in the way that they were zealous profiteers who implemented a mercantilist agenda. It altered the country's economic realities, which were eventually mirrored in social, political, and cultural spheres. Competitive trading practices, the use of religion for economic gain, violent military methods, and other factors exacerbated the chaos, giving rise to spontaneous resistance movements. But they are overshadowed by anti-English resistance movements and omitted from the label of early liberation struggles. A detailed examination of resistance movements against the Portuguese in Calicut, Cannannore, Cochin, Kollam, and other places push back the history of colonial resistance movements in India to the early decade of the 16th century.

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