

## CONQUEST OF TRAVANCORE BY CHANDA SAHIB

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Chanda Sahib has been known to Travancore historians only as an intruder bought off by Marthanda Varma<sup>i</sup> (1729-1758). His invasion of South Travancore in 1740 has not been evaluated because the English factory records and other Indian sources do not speak much of it. A first hand picture of the same is available from the letters of Henk and Danen, the Dutch factors at Cape-Comorin, addressed to Tuticorin and Colombo<sup>ii</sup>.

Henk and Danen first noticed military movements in the area in the last week of November 1739, with the arrival of 300 cavalry and 600 infantry at Singikulam in Nangunery taluk<sup>iii</sup>. In the first week of December, fifty to sixty horsemen and some infantry moved on to the village of Panakudi and thence to Travancore. They marched to the Cape from Panakudi through a side route and not through the Aramboli pass. The rumours were that the Dutch factory would be attacked for booty. Mana Tevan, a chief of Travancore residing at the Kovalam, wondered in fact why “the Arameneso” were slow to act even though there were no Dutch ships on the shore. The paravas, the inhabitants of Agasteeswaram fled for safety. The Dutch factors wrote to Tuticorin for safety. The Dutch factors wrote to Tuticorin for a yacht to defend themselves. A great assembly of Nairs at Kottar was reported by their spies and Aruda Perumal Chetty, their merchant at Kottar, informed them of the arrival of 500 horse and some infantry from Madurai for the service of the Travancore king. But Travancore was facing another invasion from the Dutch at Cochin and their confederates who, after defeating her at Quilon on 12th November 1739, were fast advancing towards the South<sup>iv</sup>.

The progress of the enemy was fast and uninterrupted. By December 6<sup>th</sup> the Dutch factory at the Cape was under siege and no food or water could be brought in<sup>v</sup>. News about the arrival of a cannot at Panakudi worsened their fears of the Dutch. On the afternoon of the 11<sup>th</sup> December the factory itself was attacked by the enemy armed with guns. The Dutch factory had 18 Europeans, 13 Balliers and some lascars for defence. Probably due to their superior fire power the skirmish ended in Dutch Victory. “The Pattanees” who lost their leader in it and

had 15 of them injured did not dare for further attempts on the factory. They stayed on for some more time in the neighbour hood and withdrew to Karunkulam. Sixty Maravas, well armed with guns and other weapons joined them there. A yacht arrived from Ceylon with 39 soldiers, towards the end of December to give the factors the much needed relief. The invaders seem to have fallen out with the local Nadars. Iswara Murthy Pillay, described by the factors as the Manigar of Panakudi, demanded the release of a Nadar in Dutch custody. The factors did not oblige him and replied that the prisoner was a subject of the Travancore king.

December 1739 was a busy month for Travancore. In the Northern front, without respite, the Dutch and their allies marched from Quilon to Peritally and then, in the last week of the month, made further moves towards Attingal<sup>vi</sup>. Hackert, the Dutch captain commanding the expedition, noted in his diary on 22nd December spy reports that the King of Travancore would be going to Cape-Comorin to meet “the Nawab”<sup>vii</sup> Writing to Tuticorin on 31 st December, Henk and Danen referred to rumours about the king of Travancore being at Suchindram<sup>viii</sup>. A report from Kottar confirmed the same to be true. With the arrival of the king, vigorous preparations for defence began. Stones were brought from Kadayapattanam to fortify Manacudi to prevent possible attacks on Kottar. Four to five hundred horses arrived from Madurai, probably what the king had asked for. By the end of January 1740 the cavalry was ready. In the meanwhile Captain Hackert Marched to Airoor and tried to take Attingal.

At Karunkulam the enemy got a spacious thatched house ready for the arrival of a contingent from Tinneveli under the command of Nalla perumal pillai<sup>ix</sup>. The head of the ‘Nawab’s’ cavalry and a Brahmin Pandit were reported to be accompanying the incoming host. Sometime in the first week of February 1740 the enemy, in full strength, moved through the villages of Panakudi, Muppandal and Madellawaram<sup>x</sup>, At five O clock on the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> February the enemy charged with elephants on the advance guard and passed through them to the Travancore lines. Unable to withstand the sudden onslaught, the king of Travancore and the entire army took to flight. According to reports received by the Dutch factors at the Cape, the Maravas who were in the service of the Rajah had betrayed and shown to the enemy the way at the foot of a hill leading to the Travancore camp. Since the Aramboli pass was closed, the invaders had taken a deviation Muppandal to reach Towala.

From Towala the victors proceeded to Suchindram<sup>xi</sup>, Kottar, a centre of clothe Trade, was plundered and two hundred houses were burned down. A lascar, sent to Kottar by the Dutch factors found the place deserted. Ponmale, a servant of Aruda Perumal, the merchant of the Dutch, told him that his master had fled, with his stock of clothes, to Kolachel, At Suchindram the invaders burnt down the temple chariot. In their letter to Tuticorin dated 11<sup>th</sup> March, the Dutch factors wrote that “the Mughal has taken up his position at Suchindram”. Peace negotiations by Travancore seem to have been begun earlier. Because on 11<sup>th</sup> March Captain Hackert at Airoor

received reports that Travancore had offered the ‘Nawab’ 1, 20,000 Gold Panams and 6 elephants<sup>xii</sup> and that he, rejecting the offer of Travancore to pay half the sum immediately for withdrawal from Towala, insisted on full satisfaction. In his letter to Batavia dated 9<sup>th</sup> April 1740, Stein Van Gollenesse wrote that Travancore had offered the ‘Nawab’ ten lakhs rupees<sup>xiii</sup>. By 15<sup>th</sup> arch the enemy withdrew from Suchindram to Towala on the way out. Passing by, they plundered and dug up the houses on the road at Suchindram and Kottar. No information is available about the actual terms settled by Travancore. The arrival of reinforcements from the South to the Travancore Camp in Attingal in the first week of March indicates a definite settlement of the terms of peace. In all probability the invaders would have been induced to accept half the demanded sum for immediate withdrawal from Towala and the promise to pay the balance later. In August 1740 Aruda Perumal Chetty wrote from Kottar that “Travancore has not paid the Nawab who will try to get the tribute by force<sup>xiv</sup>”. This later development due from Travancore. *The Rajyakaryam Churuna*. Which alone mentions Chanda Sahib and Bada Sahib specifically by their names, is silent about the settlement effected with them.

Chanda sahib’s invasion was a crisis for Travancore. IT came close on the heels of her war with the Dutch which had begun in November 1739; The troubles in the south exposed her to imminent conquest by captain Hackert, who had come to Airoor on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1740. Lack of sufficient manpower on the part of the Dutch only saved the situation for Travancore. Her forces did not fare better in the south and the enemy had to be bought off. The widespread pillage and arson, committed by the soldiers of Chanda Sahib, made this event a bitter memory for Travancore<sup>xv</sup>. Along with the challenge of Dutch, this invasion made Travancore seek a French alliance. On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1740 the Dutch factors at the Cape came to know of an order of the Travancore king to offer all help to any French arriving<sup>xvi</sup>. In March that the French landed fifty to sixty men at Kolachel, who were received by Narayana Kutty, a chief of Travancore, Gollenesse had known on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1740 about a French plan to make a landing in Travancore and about a visit of Travancore envoys to Mahe<sup>xvii</sup>. These moves towards the French were dictated by the alarming advance of the Dutch and their confederates to Attingal and the Worsening of the situation by the attack of Chanda Sahib from the South.

## REFERENCES:

<sup>i</sup> T.K. Velu Pillai, The Travancore State Manual, Vol. II, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, p.307.

<sup>ii</sup> Dutch MSS,No.292 ,Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai,

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, P.4.

<sup>iv</sup> Dairy of captain Hackert, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, p. 4, Dutch record No.10, Government of Madras 1909.

- <sup>v</sup> Dutch MSS, No. 292, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, p. 6.
- <sup>vi</sup> Dairy of captain Hackert, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, pp. 13-14.,
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.
- <sup>viii</sup> Dutch MSS, No. 292, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, p. 11.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15,
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, P.113,
- <sup>xi</sup> Dutch MSS, No. 292 Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai p. 34.
- <sup>xii</sup> Dairy of captain Hackert, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai pp. 20.,
- <sup>xiii</sup> Dutch MSS, No. 298, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai p. 73.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid.*, p.292, p.59.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35- 36.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Dutch MSS. Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai, 296, P.4.