

INSURRECTION CREATED BY COL.MUNRO AGAINST THEN SLAVERY OF THE OPPRESSED IN TRAVANCORE

* Y.Immanuel Rajakumar

Assistant Professor in History. Aringar Anna Government Arts College, Attur, Salem Dist.

ABSTRACT

Colonel John Munro, the Resident-Devan in Travancore, was the pioneer who had brought forth renowned reforms intended to centralize the administration of Travancore wherein High caste Hindus had some overbearing manner towards Christians and low castes. On 23rd March 1810, Col. Munro was appointed as the Resident of the princely state Travancore and Cochin by the British Government. In 1818, the princess Ranie Gowri Lakshmi Buie entrusted Col. Munro with the obligation of being the Devan of Travancore. Accordingly, John Munro became the Devan of Travancore (1811-1814 CE) and Cochin (1812-1818 CE) and implemented important social reforms for setting the slaves free and for treating all the castes equally as in the British system of administration. His attention also centered over the abolition of taxes, inequitable justice, sharing of knowledge, police reorganization, women empowerment, temple administration, etc. It is believed that the role played by Col. Munro was beyond the effort of colonial enterprises for modernization, which made him an unforgettable character in the social history of Travancore and Cochin. This paper highlights the major efforts undertaken by Col. Munro for the liberation of oppressed people in Travancore in 1811-1818 CE.

Keywords

- Devanship, Uliyam, Natukuttam, jathi, Devan, Parameswara

INTRODUCTION

Colonel John Munro, who had brought forth renowned reforms intended to centralize the administration of Travancore, was appointed as the Resident of the princely state Travancore and Cochin by the British Government on 23rd March 1810 CE. As soon as Munro entered Travancore, he saw the country was on the verge of a fiscal collapse. The revised treaty of 1805 CE gave a right to the British to keep a subsidiary force in Travancore and right of interventions in internal matters in the event of any troublesome incidents, for which the Travancore had to pay rupees 8 lakhs as a tribute to the paramount power.² In such a political scenario wherein the king Bala Rama Varma died and two characters tried for sovereignty, Munro made a thorough enquiry into the arguments of both claimants and arrived a conclusion of Gowri Lakshmi Baye's claim was legitimate. Rani Lakshmi Baye's coronation took place under the patronage of the Madras Government and the Honourable court of Directors of the East India Company. So, she declared the total reliance and admiration to the Company and the Resident Munro. Since Rani was a young lady who was rather ill-equipped and untrained for such a high

accountable office, she openly declared in the royal court that she had considered Munro as her own elder brother and uttered her enthusiasm to seek guidance and directions from Col. Munro in her ventures.' Her open statements motivated Munro to do something for the modernization of Travancore. In the meantime, misconducts and erroneous handling of state affairs by Devan Ummini Thampi came to light so that the Queen dismissed him and Munro was requested to be the Devan of Travancore.' Munro explained all the matters to the higher authorities that native Devans of Travancore had been oppressive and cruel to low cast people and that it could not be corrected if the Devanship had once again reached the hands of any one belonging to the royal family. **With** the permission of the higher authorities, Colonel Munro took the charge of **ABOLITION OF SLAVERY**

In the first attempt. Munro banned slavery in **1818**. which was the remarkable step forward in the path of the liberation of oppressed in the princely state of Travancore where slave trade was a traditional practice. Munro issued a royal proclamation, on behalf of the princess on 5th December **1818**. that "*Purchase and sale of slaves other than those attached to the soil were strictly prohibited and transgressors were declared liable to the confiscation of property and banishment from the country*" and put into act both in Travancore and Cochin states.' Even though this proclamation could not abolish slavery absolutely from this state. it helped the successor Uthiram Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore for the total abolition of slavery in 1861. Munroe's real insight behind this event should be appreciated in this context.⁹Some historians believe that Munro had abolished slavery on recommendation of protestant Christian: it should not be the reason because even protestant Christians were supporters of slavery and encouraged slavery in America.

By the year 1812. Munro saw a number of half-starved and naked natives at the Dutch settlements in Travancore and Cochin and he came to know that the Portuguese had lodged the slaves in churches without prejudice to the demand of divine service.¹⁰ He had taken appropriate action against the Christians to emancipate them. Even Christians were not much different from Hindus in the approach towards slaves. but since the time of Munro the anti-slavery attitude had been rising year-by-year. Munro invited missionary bands to his resident place and requested them to direct the native people towards the very principle of "*equality Of all men before the God*". He also insisted the Rani Gowri Parvathi Baye to cancel the poll tax levied from low castes and hence the suppressed people started to feel free in their life.¹²Rani thought of that a civilizing agency like Christian missionary bands is indispensable for evangelizing activities for the social uplift of the people and under the influence of Munro she provided rent free lands and woods to construct churches at Nagercoil, Allepy and Kottayam for the purpose of bringing up a social reform." The missionaries carefully released the slaves one- by- one with some risks. Thus Munro was the character of freedom to slaves in Travancore and Cochin. Owing to this effort, Munro gained much influence in the royal court. which of course favoured the Christian missions for the liberation of several slaves in time."

ABOLITION OF ULIYAM

In the pre-colonial Travancore, there was another kind of disgraceful slavery called *Ulivam* and it was compulsory to low casts such as Ehavas, Shannars, Syrian Christians and Parayas." In the name of *Uliyantib*, the low cast people were used to construct roads, buildings, palaces, temples and agricultural works without payment. An inscription of Cholapuram temple (428 ME) also shows that Ehavas, Shannars. Parayas and Pulayas were *Uliyam* workers in the pre-colonial era' but Marthanda Varma included Syrian Christians also for *Uliyam* since he thought of that a large number of people got converted into Christians to get a relief from *Ulivam*.⁸ Col. Munro who noticed the forced labours in Travancore had realized that certain extent of *Ulivam* had to be continued for the existence of the actual culture of the state, and if it was cancelled at once for all the *Ulivam* categories, the *jathi* hierarchy would collapse suddenly and lead to a sudden change in the social structure. Having foreseen the danger of total abolition of *Ulivam*, Munro first exempted the Christians and

converts from the *Uliyam* for Devaswam in 1815 CE and then the Christians who had service mind came to villages and changed the *Uliyam* attitude of *savama* (*uliyam* category) to get a relief." This incident was the basis for the beginning of Shannars' revolt (1822 CE) for being exempted from *Uliyam* service,' but the struggle continued up to 1822 when the temple workers were finally transferred to daily wages. "Forced labour was done away with and it was ordered that people should in no instance be required to sell or make supplies so the State on terms cheaper than what they might demand from private individuals-- so said Parameswara River in the Kerala Society Paper."

DIRECT ADMINISTRATION OF DEVASWAMS

Munro had an opportunity to see that much wealth of temples was in the hands of Devaswam authorities who had voice among the public. Munro felt that it was not good for sovereignty and the well-being of suppressed people, and hence he framed some rules to bring all temples and their properties under the control of the state Government. In a letter to the Chief Secretary of Madras Government, he wrote like this, "There is scarcely a pagoda in Travancore that has not been repeatedly robbed not only of its revenues, but of its religious ornaments, and even its idols by Brahmins and Nairs-23 Munro took a bold step to bring the Devaswams of 248 major temples and 1711 small temples under the direct control of Travancore state for managing their lands, other activities and for increasing the income as well.' The ruling princess gratefully acknowledged the meritorious task done by Munro for efficient administration of temples in Travancore.

CHANGE IN ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP

Munro realized that the administrative machinery of Travancore was rather out dated and most barbaric one and it had to be corrected through proper administrative setup as in the British system. Without disturbing the native customs and conventions, he enforced some laws through the book "Chatta Variolas" and the princess also authorized Col. Munro to issue such acts under his own hand and seal."He rationalized each and every department of the state according to the concepts established in England for the administration of finance, revenue, police and military by appointing Thasildhars and his subordinates.' This alternative administration gave some relief to suppressed people from the high caste Hindus. Munro introduced the first staff selection board for selecting suitable candidates for the Government posts to avoid corruption by the members of royal family during administration; it was the first of its kind in entire India.

There were no proper judicial establishments in Travancore and Cochin until seventeenth century and the local jurisdiction punished low caste people more severely even for petty cases while gave more relaxation to higher castes. With a view of equality before the law, Munro abolished the native system of jurisdiction and introduced a new set of laws in the book Chatta Varigal in 1812, base on which judicial courts were established in Travancore. Even though Brahmins and Nairs were first appointed as judges in the courts, later Christians were also appointed as magistrates in 1816. which was the first step to appoint low castes as a court official in Travancore.

For the purpose of internal safety and avoidance of antagonism among the people, Munro strengthened the police force, which was originally established by Dalava Veluthampi and vested with revenue officials, and retained it under his direct control.29 It opened a way to punish fraud, corruption and morally wrong conducts of all categories of people equally on the part of the Government. Besides these, Munro abandoned the practice of discriminatory and other unjust taxes such as poll tax, rupavari (tax for earning), purushantharam (tax for male), cottage tax, net tax, enikkaranam (tax for having a ladder), etc. from low caste people." In the meantime, he

introduced audit and account officers to avoid the misuse of State funds and hence the revenue had increased from four lakhs to fifteen lakhs. The princess also appreciated his administration and service to the country. The low caste people for the first time felt some relief from the influence and overbearing of high caste Hindus.

ABOLITION OF NATUKUTTAM

When Munro was staying at *Lidavagiri* fort. the members of *Vattukuttam* (village council of Nanchinad vellalas). without permission. went in a grand procession holding aloft their flags and unwanted drumming. the resident found it to be a disrespectful attitude. The rude behaviour and the overbearing manner of vellalas to Shannars and Christians irritated Munro. so that he ordered his subordinates to over power them and break off the drums. Munro abolished *Nattukuttam* councils in Nanchinad by a Royal proclamation in 1818 CE to avoid all unnecessary political meetings of Vellalas.³¹ Thus the attempt started by Ummini Thammpi was completed by Col. Munro.

INTRODUCTION OF WESTERN EDUCATION

All through the Travancore state there was a wickedness that human relations were determined with their birth disabilities as a yardstick and the low caste people were kept in an inferior position." Munro had realized that unless this decadent group of people become educated, it would be impossible to eradicate this evil at the grass root level and hence he requested Christian missionaries from Madras to start educational institutions in Travancore and Cochin. In 1816, the Christian missionaries came here and laboured for the social and cultural uplift of illiterates in the state and even now people of Kerala remember the service rendered by the mission for their education, literature and printing facilities. So, Swami Vivekananda says that "*The British Empire with its all drawbacks is the greatest machine that ever existed for the dissemination of ideas*". The Resident Munro had stated the *Cottayam College* at Kottayam in 1816 for the purpose of providing formal education to the native people. The work of Christian missionaries and the spread of Western Education helped to bring about a radical social change. At the request of Col. Munro, the Government started 33 schools in Cochin in 1818."

CONCLUSION

John Munro brought forth important social reforms for setting the slaves free and for treating all the castes equally as in the British system of administration. The serious and drastic measures taken by Munro cleared all the debts within nine years of his Devanship and he informed it to the East India Company in 1818. As the company called him back from the office of Devan, he resigned his Devanship and served as the Resident in his service time. No doubt, Munro's service had enlightened the peoples mind to throw off *the jathi* hierarchy from the state, which was a long time goal of the people. It was believed that the role played by Col. Munro was beyond the effort of colonial enterprises for modernization, which made him an unforgettable character in the social history of Travancore and Cochin.

REFERENCES

- 1.R.N.Yesudas, Col. John Munro in Travancore, Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1977, p.9.
- 2.The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala. State Editor, The Regional Record Survey Committee, Trivandrum, 1970, pp 112-115.
- 3.T.K. Velupillai, The Travancore State Manual, Vol.", Trivandrum. 1996, p.502.
- 4.Foreign Political Proceedings, Fort William, 10 January 1815, SI. No. 377, No 6, FF 128, 129, National Achieves of India, New Delhi.
- 5.V. Nagam Aiya, Travancore State Manual, Vol.], p.458, 459.
- 6.Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyer, Kerala Society Papers II, Series 7, Vol. II, p.45.
- 7.Ulloor S. Parameswra Aiyer, 'Colonel. Munroe' Kerala Society Papers 11, Series 7, Vol. 11. State Editor, Gazette Dept_ Trivandrum. 1997. p 55.
- 8.C_ Achuthamenon. Cochin State Manual, [1911J. Govt. of Kerala. 1995, p.213.
- 9.T K Velupillai. The Travancore State Manual. VolIV.Trivandrum. 1996. p 332.
- 10.T_K_ Velupillai. The Travancore State Manual. Vol. 111. Trivandrum. 1996. p 55.
- 11.K.K.Kusuman. History of Kerala. Trivandrum. 1968. p.45.
- 12.Arby Varghese, The Contributions of the Baker Family, Benjamin Bailey Research Centre. Kottayam 1999. p.46.
- 13.W. S. Hunt. Slavery in Kerala, Kerala Society Papers, 1997. p. 275- 280. Arby Varghese. op. cit. p.56.
- 14.The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala, Compiled by the Regional Records Suwey Committee of Kerala., Trivandrum, 1970, pp 59, 60.
- 15.Uliyam is the work for food, not for payment.
- 16.Ilamkulam Kunjanpillai, Kerala Charitrathilie Iniladanja Edukal (Mal), NBS, Kottayam. 1983, p 77.
- 17.Samuel Nellimugal, Benjamin Bailey, Achadiude Fttavu. [mall, Benjamin Bailey Study Centre, Kottayam., 1996, pp 17. 18.
- 18.C. M.Agur. Church History of Travancore, Madras, 1903, p 43.
- 19.Ramakrishnan Nair, R. Constitutional Experiments in Kerala, Trivandrum. 1964. p. 245. 346.
20. S.K. Vasanthan, Kerala Chantra Nigandhu, NBS, Kottayam, 1983, pp 70, 71.
21. Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyer, Kerala Society Papers 11, op cit. p 50.
22. Col. Munroe to the chief secretary to the government, Fort St. George, dated,
23. Nagercoil. 7 March 1818. Foreign Political Proceedings. Fort William, 17 July
24. 1818, No. 20, F 61, 62. National Achieves of India. New Delhi.
- 25.Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyer, 'Colonel. Munroe' Kerala Society Papers 11, op cit, p 55
- 26.P. Shungoony Menon, History of Travancore, Madras, 1925, p. 27, 275-280.

27.V. Nagam Aiya, Travancore State Manual, Vol.III, 1996 print, p. 380, 381.

28.P. Shangoonny Menon, op cit. p. 271, 275 -280.

29.Missionary Register, L13 Seely.169, Fleet St.London. 1816, p 453.

30.T.K. Velupillai, op cit, Vol. IV. p 105.

31.C. M. Augur, op cit, Appendix XVIII, p LIV- LVI

32.Ibid. p.569-570.

33.T.K. Velupillai, Vol. II, op cit, p. 510-511.

34.Selections From the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama,

35.Calcutta, 2000, p 524.

36.CMS Proceedings, 1816 - 17. p.455.