

Second World War and Its Repercussions: Impetus on Poverty in Travancore

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In the first half of the twentieth century the world witnessed two deadliest wars and it directly or indirectly affected the countries all over the world. The First World War from 1914-1918 and the Second World War from 1939-1945 shooked the base of the socio-economic and political structure of the entire world. When compared to the Second World War, the First World War confined only within the boundaries of Europe and has a minimal effect on the other parts of the world. The Second World War was most destructive in nature and it changed the existing socio-economic and political setup of the world countries.

A war always creates its impacts on the world affairs. Both positive and negative results were produced by Second World War. One of the positive outcomes of the Second World War was that the nationalist movements in the colonies of the European countries got a new vigor and later it culminated into the liberation of such countries from their colonial masters.

Second World War was one of the deadliest military conflicts ever experienced by humanity in the world history. More than sixty million people lost their lives due to the Second World War, which was about 3% of the world population at that time. The countries used major share of their income in the cause of the war and which made a number of serious problems all over the world. Economic conditions of the world countries were deteriorated and lives of the citizens were become pathetic. Famines were occurred in different parts of the world due to the lack of attention on agriculture. Hike in prices were one of the major issues and which made the living condition of common man very miserable. Price hike of food grains, and other articles of day to

day use were become a heavy burden to the people. The governments increased taxes for meet the expenses of war.

India was one of the colony of Great Britain, one of the members of allied powers and thus India become a part of the Second World War. In 1939, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India proclaimed that India was to be also at war.¹ The political parties of India were stood against the decision of the British government. The government made no discussions with the political parties on the matter of Indian participation in the Second World War. But the princely states in India, who were the allies of Britain, welcomed the British decision and they were ready to support the British Empire.

Travancore was one of the erstwhile princely states of India which have maintained a friendly relationship with the British for centuries. After the Batting Revolt of 1721, the English power was penetrated in Travancore. The rapport between the Travancore and the English was strengthened after the treaties of 1795 and 1805. The successors of Marthandavarma maintained a good relationship with the British. Sri Chithira Thirunal Balaramavarma came to the throne of Travancore in 1931. With the advice of Lord Willingdon, Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer was appointed as the Legal and Constitutional advisor to the Maharaja. CP came to the post of Prime Minister or *Diwan* of Travancore in 1936. C P Ramaswamy Iyer also had a good relation with the British government.

When the Second World War was started in 1939, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India proclaimed that India is to be a part of World War. Like other princely states of India, Travancore extended its support to the British Empire for the termination of the war. The Travancore government issued a proclamation promulgating the defense of Travancore rules like that of the defense of India rules introduced by the Government of India on 3rd September 1939.²

Maharaja Sri Chithira Thirunal placed all the resources of the state at the disposal of Britain and contributed a large sum of money to Britain's war funds.³

Sethu Parvathi Bayi, mother of Chithira Thirunal donated a substantial amount of money to the private fund of the king to meet the war efforts. The Houses of the Legislature and the public of Travancore under the *Diwan* C P Ramaswamy Iyer are taking the deepest interest in making Travancore's war efforts worthy of traditions and its loyal devotion to the Empire.⁴

As a trusted ally of the British Empire, the government of Travancore rendered great assistance to Britain's war efforts. Travancore try to support the British government by giving man power and money. Travancore presented a warship to the Royal Indian Navy worth of six lakhs rupees. It was a trawler and a minesweeper named HMIS Travancore, the first warship to be built in India. Two fighter planes named Travancore I and Travancore II at a cost of rupees one and half lakhs were contributed to the Royal Air Force by the Maharaja Sri Chithira Thirunal. The Travancore State Forces were also placed at the disposal of the British government. Travancore sent two divisions of its infantry for the service of Britain. The entire expenditures of these two divisions were met by the Travancore government.

The Maharaja of Travancore donated a huge amount of money to the Viceroy's War Fund and various organizations engaged in relief work. The contribution made by the ruler of Travancore amounted to rupees 2851000.⁵ Travancore supplied essential war materials to the British Government besides its contributions in the form of men and money. Rubber, tea, timber, coir, and carbonized coconut shells were supplied by the state to the Supply Department of the Government of India to meet the needs of the war. The rubber factory at Travancore, Travancore Rubber Works, and the Ceramics factory at Kundara increased its production to supply for war field. Travancore was one of the chief suppliers of rubber to the Government of India for the purpose of defense.

Impact of World War on Travancore

The problems of unemployment and food shortage were occurred as soon as war breakout in one corner of fertile Travancore.⁶ Travancore was primarily a

maritime state. The major portions of the lands were used for cultivating commercial crops rather than food crops. Travancore needs 617000 tons of rice annually. But her production was only 250000 tons. For the rest, it depends on the import of rice from other parts of India and foreign countries like Burma and Siam.⁷ Annual import of rice into India during the pre-war period was about twelve lakhs tons. Import of rice into Travancore during this time was consist 3.6 lakh tons. Nearly thirty percentage of the total import of rice to India was taken by Travancore.⁸ Travancore's dependence on other countries for rice created problems during the Second World War. Price hike in the commodities of daily use was one of the important issues in these days.

With the outbreak of Second World War the rice imports from Burma were severely reduced and later cut off altogether with the Japanese invasion on Burma.⁹ The coastal region of North Travancore from Aleppy to Sherthalai and Vaikkom were underwent serious problems. The coir industry lost its markets due to the outbreak of war. There was widespread unemployment and starvation and even deaths from famine. More than twenty thousand deaths were reported in these regions due to starvation.¹⁰ The survey undertaken by the YCCA workers in these famine affected areas reveals the intensity of famines and food scarcity and even famine deaths. "Frequency of Meals" was one criterion of the Y.C.C.A survey, which reveals most of the families had one meal a day, but there were some families which had one meal in three days.¹¹

The government of Travancore undertook several steps to overcome the problems happened at northern parts of the state. A Relief Committee was formed at Aleppy in October 1939. It consist members from managements and labors to consider relief works and the distribution of rice to the poor and needy. The government planned public works, to give job to the unemployed. But the Travancore government was least bothered about the workers of cottage industries and it further aggravated the problems in these areas.

War & Remedial Programmes

Food scarcity, price hike in the commodities, and unemployment were the serious problems faced by Travancore during the time of Second World War. The capture of Burma by the Japanese army creates scarcity of rice in Travancore, because Burma was one of the chief exporters of rice to Travancore. The Government of Travancore under *Diwan* Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer tries to overcome the problem by different means. CP made serious discussions with the Madras government and Madras came to the rescue of Travancore. CP made discussions with Dixon, *Diwan* of Cochin on the matter of food problem. As a result of the serious discussions with the Madras government by Sir CP and Dixon, the government of Madras was agreed to supply three fifth of the rice that was needed for Travancore and Cochin from the district of Tanjore and certain other specified localities in the northern Circars.¹² Travancore along with Cochin appointed their representatives at Tanjore and Northern Circars to deal with the wholesalers and distributors in these places on the matter of rice purchase.

Travancore and Cochin agreed to share the purchased rice in the proportion of 4:1 and there was also a written agreement between the States that they would come to help each other in case of sudden or unexpected deficiency of food stuffs in their state.¹³ Both states issued orders prohibiting export of food grains from either state without the permission of government.¹⁴ This helped to prevent private speculation and profiteering. By these prompt actions, many of the subjects were saved from hunger and starvation.

The government of Travancore adopted several measures to ensure equitable distribution of the rice delivered from outside and to prevent the falling of grains into the hands of profiteering distributors. The government did it through four stages. The first step was the bulk purchase of commodities from outside state. Second stage was the transportation of goods to various places within the state. Third one was the distribution of food grains to wholesale merchants and retailers. The last one was the fixation of price for goods. Maximum price for rice was fixed by the government to meet the inflation due to Second World War. Prices of essential commodities like dhal,

tapioca, kerosene oil etc were put under price control. Maximum prices for the articles like paper, medicines and drugs, razor blades, appliances, cement, hardware items etc were fixed by the government to avoid hoarding and profiteering.¹⁵

The government setup local committees for vigilance purpose and to reporting on the issues of hoarding and profiteering. They were entrusted to analyze the trends in demand and supply of various commodities. District committees were coordinate the reports of local committees and informed to the Central Committee. The Central Committee consist senior officers like the Chief Secretary, the Land Revenue Commissioner, the Excise Commissioner, and the Inspector General of Police. The Central Committee advice the *Diwan* to made changes in the policies if necessary.¹⁶ The price control introduced by the government of Travancore was faced objection from the government of India who were interested in protecting the business interest of the Europeans. A committee of landholders was setup by the government to check the hoarding and profiteering by the landholders.

The government banned polishing of rice in mills and those mills which persisted were proceeded against under the Defense of Travancore Rules. Merchants indulging in the practices of hoarding were arrested and proceeded against. Several prominent persons who held rice stocks were arrested and faced trails in courts of law. One of the important among them was the son of former Chief Secretary of the state Mr. Nilakantha Aiyar. The ration of the individuals those who gets meals from the temples were reduced by the distributing agencies for to avoid enjoying double benefit. Transportation of rice between 10pm and 6am was prohibited by the government of Travancore in order to prevent black marketing.¹⁷ Travancore government appointed an officer, Grain Purchasing Officer, to purchase food grains from inside the state. The government tried to popularize tapioca as a substitute for the rice. Cultivation of tapioca was encouraged and was purchased by the state government. The purchased tapioca was distributed through the Anchal Offices on a fixed rate. In order to save tapioca for food purposes, the government issued an order preventing the export of tapioca and tapioca starch. In 1942, the government of India

made a request to the government of Travancore demanding the supply of 30000 tons of tapioca for produce starch for textile mills. The government of India was ready to repay an equivalent quantity of rice should be available to Travancore.

The government of Travancore organized a Central Committee includes the Director of Agriculture, the Director of Transport and the Excise Commissioner for collecting the statistics and result of the rice control and they were insisted to tender proper advice to the government. Food Control Committees were setup in every taluk for the efficient allocation of rice and tapioca. It comprised Tahasildar, the Chairman of Local Cooperative Society and Chairman of the Municipal council, representatives of Legislature, NSS, SNDP Yogam etc as members.

“Grow More Food” campaign was introduced by the government of Travancore in 1942. In the same year the government assumed the control of entire output of paddy and tapioca in the state. In 1943, the government of Travancore introduced rationing system for food grains, first in capital and then the larger towns.¹⁸ A number of relief organizations were formed during this period. Serve India Travancore Relief Centre was formed in 1944 at Alleppy. It provided mid-day meals 2500 poor school children in the taluks of Karunagappally, Karthikappalli and Ambalapuzha and 3700 children in Alleppy at an expense of rupees 900 per day.

The government of Travancore tries to overcome the unemployment occur in coir industry. A large number of workers lost their jobs in coir factories at Shertalai, Alleppy and Chirayinkil due to the loss of the markets of coir in worldwide due to Second World War. CP meets the officers of War Department of the Government of India in order to discuss about the supply of coir products. As a result the coir industries in Travancore got orders extending over several lakhs rupees from the War Department of the Government of India and it give a new energy to the industry. It gave employment to thousands of unemployed subjects of the state. In 1944, after mutual consultations with the Supply Department of the Government of India, the Governments of Travancore and Cochin formulated a scheme for the production and

supply of coir. The scheme regulated the production and supply of coir and coir products in the Travancore and Cochin states to help the coir industry to overcome the depression caused by decay in its exports.¹⁹

Burma resumed its export of rice to Travancore in 1945, and it later created a problem of surplus in the food reserve of Travancore. C P Ramaswamy Iyer devised several measures for disposing the excess rice. He reduced the price of rice and the officers of the Public Works, Excise, Police and Forest Departments were directed to pay their workers including the coolies and *maistries*, half in rice and half in money.²⁰ The government supplied rice to the schools on a low rate on the condition of providing mid-day meal to the students. The government relaxed the ban on the export of tapioca starch from Travancore by the end of Second World War. The food situation in Travancore was improved within a few years with the active policies taken by the government.

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