

Utilization Of Western Treatment Facilities In Travancore: A Historical Rereading

Ashik Pradeep. V

*Research Scholar, Department of History,
University of Kerala, Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala*

ABSTRACT

Spread of epidemics in the native state of Travancore, played a pivotal role in the establishment of Western Medicine in the relevant area. The government that was ruling the state was unable to tackle the situation at hand due to the incompetency of local treatment methods. This forced them to look elsewhere for a remedy. Hence western medicine was institutionalized and buttressed by the authorities. The effectiveness of the new form of healing influenced the inhabitants of the area to choose western form of treatment over indigenous medicine. Consequently, there was increase in the utilization of treatment facility in Travancore. This paper is an earnest attempt to decipher the attitude and utilization of western medical facilities under the banner of Travancore government, by the people residing in the area.

Keywords: *Health, Hospitals, Patients, Travancore, Treatment, Utilization*

Introduction

The development of the health sector in the erstwhile native state of Travancore was a steady process that took place under the auspices of the visionary rulers, who foresaw the impending danger of epidemics in the state. Indigenous medicine that was in vogue was not effective in dealing with the impediments caused by epidemics. This led to the spurt of various contagious diseases in the state of Travancore. The rulers of the land were dumbstruck by the gravity of the outbreak. Ayurveda and other native medicines that were available in the area were not equipped to curb the spread of these ailments. Hence mortality rate went up in Travancore. This forced the authorities to intervene in the matter. This paved the way for the establishment of western medicine in the native state which is located in the southernmost tip of Kerala.

Western Medicine in Travancore

The initiation of Western Medicine in the state of Travancore was a daunting challenge due to various aspects. One of the most important factors that influenced the implementation of the alien form of treatment in the state was the cynicism of the British. The British officials in the state were in denial mode of the danger that was looming in the area. This escalated the situation to epidemic proportion. Manifestly speaking, the authorities who argued against the implementation of western medicine in the area were forced to reconsider their decision as epidemics started to ail their people. Resident Munroe who was stationed at Travancore met with the Travancore royal family to discuss the issue. After much deliberation the government decided to enunciate inoculation in the state. Hence the cornerstone for modern medicine in the state of Travancore was stowed by the combined efforts of the ruling family and the alien rulers.

The process of initiation of the alien form of treatment faced rough weather due to the opposition of the general public.¹ Both educated and illiterate people of the state detested vaccination due to fear of its concomitant. Superstitions also played a crucial role in determining the decision of masses. This led to a serious clash between the authorities and people. Government understood the fact that, retaliatory measures won't fetch the prescribed results and hence started to allure people to the ambit of western medicine. Soon the residents of Travancore became affiliated to the new form of treatment. The success rate of modern medicine attracted more people to its fold. Hence hospitals were started in various parts of the state to cater to the needs of the people.² Travancore royal family was at the forefront for providing western treatment to the people. They also supported Christian Medical Mission activities in the state.

During the initial days the luxury of modern medicine was limited to the ruling authorities and high class people.³ It changed slowly as these facilities were extended to prisoners, officers, and students. The common people of the state were also allowed to seek medical remedy at times of ailments. Caste difference was a hindrance for providing treatment for the lower castes in the society. The high castes were given treatment inside hospitals and hence the lower castes were not allowed to enter into these institutions.

Table No 1.1**Utilization of Government Hospitals by patients (1937-38)⁴**

Particulars	1937	1938	Increase	Decrease
No of In-patients Treated	77,002	87,1010	10,099	...
No of Out-patients Treated	23,52,673	26,09,770	2,57,097	...
No of beds available	3,176	3,740	564	...
Percentage of Mortality	3.34	3.04	...`	.30
No of Surgical Operations	90,093	98,384	8,291	...
Post Mortem Examination (Medico legal)	596	658	62	...
Post Mortem Examination (Pathological)	59	46	...	13
Total Expenditure	8,74,837	11,16,572	2,41,735	...

The demand for better facilities in favor of the lower castes soon gathered momentum. Government took notice of the same and provided separate wards for the lower castes in the society.⁵ This enhanced the infrastructure of government run hospitals in the state. The increase in number of patients is apparent, while analyzing the data related to the utilization of hospital facilities by patients in 1937-38 periods.

On peruse, it can be stated that there was an increase in the number of in-patients and outpatients who used medical remedy in Travancore. The number of in-patients who resorted to medical assistance increased to 871010 in 1938 from 77002 in 1937. This is same in the case of out-patient category, as there was an increase of more than 2, 57,097 patients from

1937 to 1938 period. The decrease in mortality rate by .30 per cent is a pointer to the better treatment provided in the state of Travancore. The enhancement of total expenditure in public sector hospitals was made possible by the welfare attitude of the royal family.

While analyzing the date of in-patients treated in various government hospitals in 1938, it becomes clear that people in Travancore, flocked institutions under the banner of western medicine. General Hospital which is located at the heart of Trivandrum was in the forefront for providing good treatment to the people. In the year 1938, more than Sixteen Thousand Four Hundred and Forty Eight people visited this hospital, for seeking medical remedy. It was one of the best hospitals in Travancore with qualified doctors and staffs along with upright infrastructure facilities. Women and Children's Hospital was yet another institution which garnered fame for its specialty care offered to mothers and their infants. She had more than Eleven Thousand visitors in the year 1938. Quilon had two government institutions that offered treatment for its people in the aforementioned year. Victoria Hospital and District Hospital conjointly treated Ten Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty Seven people in the year 1938.

The District Hospital in Alleppey and Kottayam were not far behind in treating diseases. The infrastructure developments of these institutions were going on during the aforesaid period. This was one of the reasons for the comparatively lower number in-patients in the hospitals. Still both these hospitals had attendance for more than Two Thousand patients.

Table No 1.2

Number of Inpatients Treated in Government Hospitals⁶

Sl. No	Total of Institutions	Total number of In-patients
1	General Hospital, Trivandrum	16,448
2	Women and Children's Hospital	11,674
3	Victoria Hospital, Quilon	5,732
4	District Hospital, Quilon	5,155

5	District Hospital, Alleppey	2,700
6	Ophthalmic Hospital, Trivandrum	2,608
7	District Hospital, Kottayam	2,559
8	Hospital for Chronic Diseases	2,331
9	District Hospital, Neyyatinkara	2,276
10	Leper Colony, Nooranad	2,141
11	District Hospital, Thiruvalla	2,087

Conclusion

Spread of English education coupled with fervent social reform movement that ensued in the native state of Travancore was responsible for the increased utilization of western medicine in the germane area. The effectual inoculation practices along with persuasive awareness programs influenced the mindset of the common people. They flocked government institutions, which were affiliated to western medicine for healing their ailments. Tacitly speaking, this forced the government to enhance the infrastructure facilities under the banner of modern medicine.

References

1. Sunitha B Nair, 'Social History of Western Medical Practice in Travancore: An enquiry into the Administrative Process', in Deepak Kumar (ed.), *Disease & Medicine in India: A Historical Overview*, New Delhi, 2001, p.219.
2. T. K Velu Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.III, Thiruvananthapuram, 1996, p.758.
3. A. S Vysakh, 'Milestones in Medical and Health Care in Travancore: Assessing Chithira Thirunals Reign', in *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. XXXIX, Thiruvananthapuram, 2012, p.40.
4. Departmental Administration Reports, 1113 M.E, Thiruvananthapuram, 1939, p.23.
5. M. Kabir, T. N Krishnan, *Social intermediation and Health Transition: Lessons from Kerala*, Working paper no.251, 1992, Trivandrum.p.15.
6. Departmental Administration Reports, *op.cit.*, p.15.