

## Vicissitudes of the Dutch Trade in Kerala

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### ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the history of the Dutch trade relations with Kerala. It was pepper that brought the Dutch East India Company to the coast of Kerala in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch tried to establish monopoly of pepper trade in Kerala through political conquests. They had trade relations with many native kingdoms of the period. The Dutch had many settlements in Kerala like Kollam, Cochin, Kodungallur and Kannur. The rise of Travancore under Marthanda Varma shattered the hopes of the Dutch ambitions of trade in Kerala.

**KEYWORDS:** *Admiral Van Der Hagen-John Nieuhoff-trade treaties-swaroopams-Purakkad-Thekkumkoor-Vadakkumkoor-conquest of Kollam-conquest of Cochin-pepper trade-battle of Colachel-Treaty of Mavelikkara*

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The European powers who came to Kerala for trade and colonisation during medieval period were the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English. They changed the economy and altered the trade relations of the period. There was no competition between traders like the Arabs, Jews and Chinese who engaged in the maritime trade before the arrival of these colonial powers in Kerala. But these European Companies brought competition and rivalry among traders and made attempts for colonisation.

The Dutch were the first protestant country of Europe which established trade contact with Kerala by expelling the Portuguese from the coastline.<sup>1</sup>They appeared on the Kerala coast in 1604. It was pepper that brought the Dutch East India Company to Kerala.<sup>2</sup>The conquest of Cochin 1663 marked the beginning of Dutch trade and settlements in Kerala.<sup>3</sup>The headquarters of the Company in Kerala was at Cochin. To enforce monopoly of trade the Dutch tried to establish political authority in Kerala with military assistance.

The Dutch East India Company was established in the year 1592. The Dutch appeared first in the Indian Ocean in 1595. The first Dutch establishment in India was at Cambay.<sup>4</sup>The first Dutch expedition to Kerala was led by Admiral Steven Van Der Hagen who

landed at Calicut and signed a treaty with the Zamorin on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1604. This was the first political contract between an Indian ruler and the Dutch in India. This treaty was an attempt of the Dutch to destroy the Portuguese monopoly of trade on the Malabar Coast. By this treaty the Zamorin gave permission to the Dutch to conduct trade in his domain and he also agreed to expel the Portuguese from his territories. In 1608 admiral Verhoff visited Calicut and signed a new treaty which provided the Dutch to establish a storehouse at Calicut. In 1625 Van Speult visited the Zamorin of Calicut and obtained permission to erect a factory in his domain and he agreed to supply 3000 candies of pepper annually to the Dutch.<sup>5</sup>

Soon the Dutch turned their attention to the south which produced pepper in abundance. They had trade relations with various swaropams of the period like Trippapur, Desiganatu, Kayamkulam, Perunthelli, Perumpadappu, Thekkumkoor, and Vadakkumkoor.<sup>6</sup> In May 1642 the Dutch signed a treaty with the Raja of Purakkad for the supply of pepper and other spices and obtained the permission to build a factory at Purakkad. Later the Dutch signed treaties with the rajas of Kayamkulam and Purakkad in 1643 and by this treaties they agreed to supply all the pepper of

their domains to the Dutch and in return the Dutch offered political protection to these local Kingdoms.<sup>7</sup>

The Dutch got the permission to build factory at Kayamkulam in 1650.<sup>8</sup> In December 1658 the Dutch Admiral Van Goens conquered Kollam from the Portuguese and a signed a treaty with queen of Kollam in January 1659 and by this treaty the Dutch obtained the monopoly of trade in spices in Kollam. The Dutch also signed a treaty with the King of Travancore in March 1662 and by this treaty the Raja agreed to expel the Portuguese from his territories and the Dutch secured the monopoly of pepper trade in Travancore.<sup>9</sup>

In 1662 Dutch East India Company sent John Nieuhoff to a mission to Kerala enter treaties with local rulers to establish their monopoly of trade.<sup>10</sup> He played an important role in establishing trade relations with local rulers in the south. He visited Kayamkulam and Purakkad in 1664. The Raja Purakkad agreed to sell pepper to the Dutch by a treaty. He later visited Maraturkulagara and signed a treaty to sell pepper to the Dutch Company.<sup>11</sup> Later he went to Travancore and signed a treaty with King on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1664 which provided the Dutch the sole right to export pepper and cinnamon from Travancore.<sup>12</sup> Later he went to Kollam and signed a treaty with the Queen of Kollam to conduct trade in her domain.

The Dutch had friendly relations with both Thekkumkoor and Vadakkumkoor Kingdoms. Golleneesse, the Dutch governer of Cochin in his account says that 'Thekkumkoor was the only bright spot for the Dutch in Kerala'.<sup>13</sup> In 1664 the Dutch signed a treaty with the Raja of Thekkumkoor which provided the sale of all pepper and cinnamon produced in the country to them.<sup>14</sup> In 1674 the Dutch renewed the earlier treaty with the king. The Dutch collected pepper and other spices from the uplands of Thekkumkoor and transported this to the factory at Purakkad by using inland river routes.<sup>15</sup> In 1665 the Dutch signed a treaty with Vadakkumkoor which provided the sale of pepper and other spices produced in the country to them.<sup>16</sup>

The Dutch recognized the strategic importance of Cochin as a port and a major trading centre on the Malabar Coast. The Dutch soon got an opportunity to intervene in the political affairs of the Kingdom of Cochin. The Dutch supported the *Mutha Tavazhi* prince in the war of succession to throne of Cochin and on the other hand the Portuguese supported the *Elaya Tavazhi*. The Dutch fleet conquered Cochin on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1663. After that they installed Vira Kerala Varma of *Mutha Tavazhi* on the throne of Cochin. The Dutch signed a treaty with the King of Cochin on

March 20 1663 and by this treaty the Raja of Cochin accepted the political supremacy of the Dutch and agreed to supply all the pepper and cinnamon produced in his domain to them. The Dutch fortified Cochin in 1665. In 1663 they conquered Kodungallur from the Portuguese. In 1718 Chettuvai became a settlement of the Dutch establishment in Kerala by reaching a treaty with the Zamorin of Calicut.

The policy of the Dutch in Malabar can be described as maximum pepper trade through minimum expense.<sup>17</sup> The main aim of the Dutch in Kerala was to attain maximum profit through pepper trade. Golleneosse states that it was for the sake of this grain that company maintained its expensive establishments in Kerala.<sup>18</sup> Trade was their main concern and they entered into treaties with local kingdoms for the supply of pepper and other commodities at lower prices and the local merchants could export pepper only in small quantities.<sup>19</sup> They tried to restrict the other European rival companies from the export of pepper and other spices through naval power.

The abundant availability of pepper and other spices attracted the Dutch Company to the Malabar Coast.<sup>20</sup> The Dutch established their monopoly of trade in Kerala by conquests and political interventions in local kingdoms. They succeeded in controlling the coastal trade by the conquest of Cochin. They established many factories, forts and settlements on the coast by defeating the Portuguese. They signed treaties with local rulers for the supply of pepper and other spices for export.

The Dutch territories in Kerala were governed by a commandeur who was responsible to the supreme government of Batavia in Indonesia.<sup>21</sup> They had settlements all over Kerala from the north to the south. Their Malabar command was composed of forts, factories, lodges and landed properties.<sup>22</sup> They build small forts at Kodungallur and Chettuvai to defend the Zamorin and also for trading activities. They had lodges in Purakkad and Kayamkulam. They had military outposts in 11 places like Alappuzha, Ayakotta, Pappinivattam and Ponnani to prohibit the export of pepper by local merchants through ports. The Dutch established factories at Kanayakumari, Tengapattanam, Kollam, Kayamkulam, Purakkad, Kochi and Kannur. These fortified factories were meant for collecting pepper from local kingdoms and merchants and sales outlets for Dutch spices from Indonesia and other countries.<sup>23</sup> The Dutch collected pepper mainly from the south. Most of the Dutch pepper came from the Dutch factories at Purakkad, Kayamkulam, Karunagapally, Travancore and Kollam. Thekkumkoor and its suburbs supplied pepper to the Dutch factory at Purakkad.

Karthikapally was feeder to the Dutch factory at Kayamkulam. Pandarathuruthu was the feeder to the factory of Karunagapally and Elayedathu swaroopam supplied pepper to the Dutch factory at Kollam.<sup>24</sup>

The company's trade in Malabar was divided into two departments' viz., goods sold in Malabar and goods for sale in Europe. The Dutch had the monopoly of the sale opium and exchanged this for pepper.<sup>25</sup> They also traded cotton produced in Kottar and Eraniel. The Company also conducted trade in imported articles such as opium, sugar, Chinese silk, copper, arms and ammunition. The Company imported directly or brought from the Indian merchants.

The most important item of their trade was pepper. The trade in pepper gave much profit to the Dutch Company. They purchased pepper from local markets and sold it in the European markets for higher prices than other European companies. The Dutch signed contracts with local rules in the presence of merchants and fixed the price of pepper. The price pepper was 12 ducats per candy of 500 lbs. The Dutch collected pepper from local merchants at rates far below the market prices. It was collected in the factories of Cochin, Kollam, Purakkad, Kayamkulam, Chettuvai and Peza. In the year 1721-22 both Thekkumkooor and Vadakkumkooor provided 884300 lbs of pepper to the Dutch.<sup>26</sup> In 1726, the Dutch could export 1952979 lbs of pepper from Kerala.<sup>27</sup> The Dutch could be able to collect 1,000,000 lbs of pepper from Vadakkumkooor by an agreement with the Raja since 1740.<sup>28</sup> In 1753-56, the Dutch collected about 5495245 lbs of pepper. The Dutch collected 9973615 lbs of peeper from Kerala in between 1756 to 1760.<sup>29</sup>

The Dutch also traded other articles like cotton, cardamom, sandal, cowries, Indigo, timber, lime, bricks, rice, coir, coconut, charcoal etc. The Dutch traded merchants who came from the ports of Kutch, Sindh, and Mangalapuram. They also traded with merchants of Kollam, Thengapattanam, Anjengo and Colachel ports and also with merchants of Jaffna, China, Tuticorin and Nagapattanam.<sup>30</sup>

The Dutch succeeded to maintain the monopoly of pepper trade in the early days but later they failed to sustain this. It was mainly due to the hike of price in pepper. Marthanda Varma brought pepper trade under state control and this forced the Dutch to buy pepper from the Travancore government. They paid a high price for the King for the purchase of pepper. In 1746, they purchased 1200 candies of pepper from Travancore. By the treaty of *Mavelikkara* Travancore could supply only 17549 candies of pepper to the Dutch from 1756 to 1760.<sup>31</sup> The high price of pepper and shortage of pepper affected their trade ambitions and profits.

The rise of Travancore under Marthanda Varma became a menace to the Dutch political and commercial ambitions in Kerala. Marthanda Varma defeated the Dutch in battle of Colachel in 1741 and it was the first defeat of a European power in Asian soil.<sup>32</sup> He later annexed territories such as Kayamkulam, Purakkad, Thekkumkooor and Vadakkumkooor during 1746-50 which were the feeders of pepper to the Dutch factories. Apart from that Travancore conquered Dutch settlements at Kollam, Kayamkulam, Karunagapally and Purakkad. By the treaty of Mavelikkara signed in 1753 with Travancore the Dutch agreed that they will not provide any military assistance to the local rulers in times their conflict with Travancore.

The Dutch East India Company forced to maintain huge military establishments and to adopt a particular commercial policy in order to sustain their monopoly of trade in Kerala. So they established military and political alliances with local Kingdoms. The local rulers violated their treaties with the Dutch when the price of the pepper increased by exporting pepper to the markets of Coromandel Coast. The Dutch failed to contain the export of pepper through land routes. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Kerala appeared as an unattractive and unprofitable area for the Dutch in the East.<sup>33</sup>

There are many ups and downs in the history of Dutch hegemony in Kerala. There are several reasons for the failure for the Dutch power in Kerala, The foremost reason was the rise of Travancore as a military state under Marthanda Varma. The presence of other European trading companies was another cause for the Dutch failure. They lost settlements like Cochin and Ceylon to the English in later period. This helped the local rulers to organize their army with help of other European Companies. They fought a number battles with native rulers. Thus Malabar later became an expensive settlement for the Dutch Company in the East.

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