CHAPTER VII

RAJA KESAVA DAS AND HIS PUBLIC WORKS

The Raja Kesava Das and his public works gives an account of the various works carried out in and around Trivandrum during his regime. The Trivandrum town, the capital of the state, was improved and beautified by him. The Padmanabhaswamy Temple was repaired; its tower was completed, flag – staff was built and a new structure called the Kulasekharamandapam was erected. The public road leading to the temple was widened and the Chalai Bazar was opened at close quarters. The Killiyar and the Karamana river were bridged.

In 1756, when Hyder Ali was the founder of Dindugal, he had sent an army to help the Palghat Raja against the Zamorin; and the Zamorin who was defeated, had agreed to pay a huge indemnity. This money had not been paid and so in 1766 Hyder Ali, then the Sultan of Mysore invaded Malabar for the first time. The Kolathunad Prince fled
before him and took refuge in Travancore, while the zamorin set fire to his palace which perished in the flames.¹

In 1773, Hyder again invaded Malabar. The zamorin who had in the interval asserted independence held his life in his hands and fled for an asylum. The French and the Dutch refused to harbour him as they were afraid of Hyder, but the Dharma Raja of Travancore gave him ready shelter in his country.²

In 1788 there were a few revolts in Malabar headed by the princes who were discontented with the extortions of Tippu; and to quell them, the Sultan marched into Malabar.³ Plunder, pillage and forcible conversion, which always followed him in his work, spread terror everywhere and several people fled with their families to the hospitable shore of Travancore. The Raja of Cotiotee with his family and the family of the Raja of Cherakkal, all these had fled to Tellicherry with 20 lacs of rupees. Tippu embarked all these onboard a ship and sent them to Rama Raja’s country.⁴ Further, about 2000 Nairs of the Circar’s country with their family fled to Tellicherry.⁵ The Rajas of Kuttanad and Kottayam had

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⁴ Ibrahim Kunju, A.P., *Mysore-Kerala Relations in the 18th Century*, p.34.
fled the country. They escaped to Tellicherry and took boat for Travancore.\(^6\)

Tippu was led to believe that it was the help rendered by the Raja of Travancore that made for the several revolts in Malabar. Thus Travancore had become a convenient base for hostile activities against Mysore. From the past occurrences Tippu concluded that Travancore was one of the major hindrances for the Mysorean occupation of Malabar. It was no wonder therefore that Tippu had from the very beginning resolved to bring Travancore under the control through persuasion or by force.\(^7\)

**Envoy on the Maharaja of Travancore**

Tippu had long been watching with an eagle’s eye for a favourable opportunity to invade Travancore. The increasing property of the country and the wide fame and reputation of the Maharaja aroused his cupidity and envy at the same time and he was therefore watching for the slightest protest to invade and subdue Travancore. With this object in view he had already, about June-August 1787 A.D., reconstructed the several roads leading into Travancore both from the north by way of the coasts and from the east by the Kambum and Gudalur passes.\(^8\) In 963 M.E. (1788 A.D), he renewed his incursions into the Malayalam territory, his

\(^6\) *Ibid.*

\(^7\) Mil-Coun-Corres, Vol.XXXVII, pp.46-47.

depradations being accompanied with additional violence and cruelty. He proclaimed martial law between Ponnany and Cannanore.  

**The New English Alliance and their Intervention**

The worst of Tippoo’s tyrannical proceedings was that he ordered the conversion of all the Hindus indiscriminately whether of high or low caste, male or female to the Mussulman faith and all who objected to acknowledge the prophet were menaced with death.

All the high caste Hindus fled from Malabar; but where could they find shelter? In the Cochin Rajah’s country they could not get an asylum as that potentate was a tributary of the Sultan.

The Hindu portion of the population of Malabar including the royal family of the Zamorin of Calicut and every one of the opulent Numbories resorted to Travancore and begged for protection at the hands of the Maha Rajah.

The generous Maha Rajah, without the least hesitation or fear of the consequences, stretched his charitable hand of protection to the helpless refugees and housed and fed them according to the deserts of each family. Many of these families settled in Travancore and took a pride in becoming naturalized in the country which afforded them protection at a time of necessity.

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This noble and generous behaviour of the Maha Rajah offended Tippoo Sultan still more highly and he sent a message His Highness through some of his confidential Sirdars, asking the Maha Rajah to order back all the refugees on the ground that they were deserters from his dominions.

The Maha Rajah sent a polite and friendly message in reply, to the effect that His Highness was ready to comply with the wishes of the Sultan, provided the people who had come from the northern countries to reside within His Highness’ dominions were willing to return; for it would be unjust, as well as unlawful, for His Highness to cause them to leave Travancore under compulsion.

This message no doubt displeased the Sultan the more; but concealing his anger, he tried again in soft and persuasive terms to attain his object as he was very desirous to get back and punish certain person on whom his Sirdars wished to wreak their vengeance. Of these, one Mandayapurathu Ramunny Menon, a Mussulman convert from Vettathnaud called Meeravoonny, ancestor of the present Eloor Mooppen of Varupulay, was the foremost.

Tippu Sultan found that the Maharaja of Travancore was strengthening his fortifications in the north and increasing his troops there. It was the desire of the Maharaja and his Dewan Kesava Pillai that, the
frontier should be well protected. The Maharaja therefore entered into an agreement with the English Government of Madras by which he undertook to station two battalions of the company’s native infantry on the frontier even in the peace time and meet their expense on condition that if they were inadequate at the time of war, the English Company would engage more forces at their own cost (1788). Thus two battalions of the company’s troops were secured and they were stationed near Ayakotta under the command of Col. Knox.

**Tippu’s Demands**

Meanwhile Tippu, encouraged by the attitude taken by the Government of Madras, put forth his claims to the two forts of Cranganore and Ayacotta on the plea that they really belonged to his tributary, the Cochin Rajah, to whom the Dutch were merely paying rent. On the 13th November 1789 Lord Cornwallis issued definite instructions to the Madras Government in regard to the attitude to be taken about the transaction.

“If they had belonged to the Raja of Cochin subsequently to his becoming tributary to Mysore, the Raja of Travancore was to be compelled to restore them to the former possessor. If not, then the Travancore possession of the place was to be supported. If Tippu had actually taken possession of the place he was not to be forcibly disposed of

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10 Parameswaran Pillai, *op.cit.*, p.35.
them without the sanction of the Supreme Government, unless he had also attacked the other territories of Travancore; but if such attack had occurred then, the Madras Government was positively ordered to deem it as an act of hostility to be followed up vigorously by war.”

This sensible order of Lord Cornwallis saved Travancore from a most embarrassing situation. Later on, as we shall see, it was due to Lord Cornwallis’ firmness and decisive action that Travancore was saved from falling an easy prey into Tippu’s hands. We have already noted that Tippu had reached Palghat with a very large army. He first meant to take Tellicherry and thence to advance against Travancore. The Maharajah had taken every step to strengthen his defences. Kesava Pillai was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the forces. The forts of Cranganore and Ayacotta were repaired and garrisoned. In December 1789 Tippu sent one of his Sirdars to demand on the Travancore Rajah,

1. That his troops holding the Cranganore fort should be withdrawn;

2. That the chiefs and nobles of Malabar who were sheltered by the Rajah of Travancore should be surrendered;

3. That the portion of the Travancore lines on the northern side which crossed the Cochin territory should be demolished; and it was also formally intimated that on his failure to comply with these demands his territory would be invaded by Tippu.
To the first of these proposals the Rajah replied that he acted under the advice of the English and would still be guided by it. With regard to the second, the Governor of Madras had already written to the Travancore Rajah to discontinue the charitable aid and protection afforded to the Sultan’s rebellious subjects, but the Rajah of Travancore out of moral grounds chose “the alternative of not disavowing and concealing a fact which he did not feel to be disgraceful”. And with regard to the lines, the Rajah said that they were in existence long before Cochin became tributary to Mysore.

The Maharaja of Travancore wrote: “The territory of Calicut and Palghafcherry lie contiguous to the wall of my fort and Tippu Sultan particularly at this time is moving frequently through these districts. In consequence of the orders you are pleased to give to me and trusting to the peaceable state of affairs between you and Tippu; I do nothing more than keep a watchful eye over my district, for which purpose I have appointed six battalions and other troops, to guard the place of strength belonging to me; but it is necessary to have officers and sergeants to discipline those battalion. I have therefore to request you will, out of your favour and friendship to me, order ‘4’ officers and ‘12’ sergeants who are well acquainted with the exercise and discipline of troops, that I may employ them for that purpose in my services. I hope your excellency will grant me this favour. Major Eannerman, whom I have spoken to on the subject, has
written to your excellency and I beg leave refer you to what he says. What shall I say more.\textsuperscript{12}

Further, the Maharaja of Travancore suggested the Company that one, two or even three battalions of the Company’s troops might be employed with advantage in securing the Travancore territories against any sudden attack from Tippu. Maharaja also agreed to pay for the maintenance of British troops either in cash or in pepper.\textsuperscript{13} The monthly cost of one battalion was estimated at 1,750 star pagodas, 40 fanams and 40 cash. Accordingly, two regiments, one under the command of Captain Knox stationed near Ayakotta and a civil officer, Mr. George Powney, was sent as agent of the company at the Travancore Court. This officer may be regarded as the first political agent in Travancore, the forerunner of the modern British Resident. The Travancore Maharaja also entered into treaty with the Dutch Governor of Cochin, by which the latter was obliged in the event of an attack to reinforce the forts of unfavoured Ayakotta.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Purchase of Cranganore of Ayakotta}

Cranganore and Ayakotta were situated in the northern boundary of Travancore. Their exact locality is on the northern extremity


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p.406.

of Vaipin, three miles distant. Between the sea and hills ran the Travancore lines which constituted a system of defence. The territory of Cochin extended on both sides of the lines.

The forts of Cranganore and Ayakotta were constructed by the Portuguese. Those forts were occupied by the Dutch. Following their decline of their power in India, they decided to dispose the forts for ready money. Both Tippu and Rama Varma came forward to purchase these forts because of their strategic importance. Moreover Tippu Sultan realized that the possession of those forts by Travancore the ‘friend and ally’ of the English would give a chance to the company to occupy his territory through Palghat and Coimbatore instead of sending an army from Madras or Trichinopally.

Rama Varma of Travancore regarded these forts as the best defence against the approach of an army to the frontier and consequently the Maharaja had been treating with the Dutch Government for the last two years for the purchase of these two forts. In July 1789, the Maharaja wrote to the Dutch Commander: “We have sent Kesava Pillai there to impress upon the Admiral the necessity to do the needful in the matter of Rodungallur and Munampan (Ayakotta). As long as these two places are in the possession of the company, the Nawab (Tippu) will proceed against

15 Velu Pillai, T.K., op.cit., p.408.
them and conquer them, instead of coming against us. Without (Tippu) taking measures against us, our ally, the English company will not move in the matter. If there two places are in our possession, he will not proceed against them; if he proceed (against them) the English will attack him on the ground that he has broken the treaty with them. It is not that account that we are writing to the Admiral”.

The Maharaja thus authorized Dewan Kesava Das to enter into immediate negotiations with the Dutch Governor for the purchase of these two forts. At Palghat he opened negotiations with the Dutch. The whole transaction was carried through in the presence of Mr. Powney who at once communicated it to the Madras Government. The Maharaja too wrote to them about it.

On the 3rd July 1789, the Dewan concluded the bargain. M’Van Angelbic executed the title deeds on the part of the Dutch to Dewan Kesava Pillai, on the part of the Maharaja. The Dutch possessions were sold three lacks of rupees to be paid in several instalments.

When the Sultan heard of the proceedings, he thought that his was too good an opportunity to be lost. So he put forth his claims to the

17 State Archives, Trivandrum, Show Case Record No.278, Letter No.44.
18 Sungoonny Menon, op.cit., p.164.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p.164.
forts of Cranganore and Ayacottah, alleging that they belonged to his tributary, the Cochin Raja and that therefore their purchase by Travancore was unlawful.\textsuperscript{21} Meanwhile Tippu started from Coimbatore with a large army, consisting of infantry, cavalry and artillery, with a detachment.

The attempt of Tippu Sultan to purchase Cranganore and Ayakkotta ended in failure. Therefore in December 1789 he deputed a sirdar to demand from the Maharaja that the chiefs and nobles of Malabar who had taken refuge in Travancore should be immediately surrendered, that his troops holding the Cranganore Fort should be withdrawn and that he should demolish that part of his fortifications which crossed the territory of Cochin because it belonged to the Kingdom of Mysore.\textsuperscript{22}

Rama Varma openly rejected all the three demands and made large scale defensive preparations. Tippu Sultan was also engaged in counter preparations. He dispatched embassies to France and Constantinople. French troops came to strengthen his forces.

Due to the failure of the Raja to give back the places to the Dutch the Governor decided to settle the dispute through negotiation. As per the order of the Governor, the Raja transmitted the copies of all papers regarding the transaction of the places for discussion. Tippu Sultan also deputed his Vakils Abdul Khadur, Oman Khan and Muhammed to enquire

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.167.
\textsuperscript{22} Beveridge, \textit{A Comprehensive History of India}, Vol.III, p.584.
the transaction and to settle the issue. During the source of discussion there was no change in the attitude of the Raja. He refused them altogether and made ready for war.

The success of the war against Tippu gave immense satisfaction to the Maharaja. But the officers of the Company began to make unreasonable demands of the Maharaja, requiring him to meet the whole expenses of the war which, they alleged, was waged to secure the interests of Travancore. The provisions of the treaty of alliance were clear on the subject. According to the agreement of 1788 the Company expressly declared that if any force was found necessary for the defence of the Travancore frontier other than the battalions maintained by the Travancore Government it should be mobilized at the Company’s cost. The demand now made being therefore in violation of the treaty was resented by the Maharaja. But Kesava Pillai knew that the Company’s officers would not yield. He therefore advised the Maharaja to respond to the obstinate demand. The financial position of Travancore at the time was low on account of the large expenditure incurred for the war. However a sum of seven lakhs of rupees was paid. Sir Charles Oakely, the new governor of Madras, pressed for the payment of the whole amount fixed, in annual instalments of ten lakhs of rupees. The method of fixing the amount was unfair. In calculating the expenses of the war the moneys

spent by Travancore on its own troops were not taken into account. The Maharaja protested against this treatment but the Governor continued to press for the payment of the balance. Once again Lord Cornwallis came to the rescue. Travancore was relieved from further payment. A permanent alliance between Travancore and the East India Company was soon established. On the termination of the war the Maharaja intimated to the authorities at Madras that the Company’s forces stationed at Ayakotta might be withdrawn. That government, however, viewed the matter from another stand-point. Ever since the time of Warren Hastings the subsidiary alliance with Indian princes was a favourite idea with British Indian administrators. The agents of the British Government in Travancore impressed upon the Maharaja the wisdom of a perpetual friendship and the latter was prepared to place his faith in them. On the 17th November 1795, a treaty was concluded between the Honourable English East India Company and the Maharaja of Travancore. The following were the terms:

1. Before the breaking out of the last war between the Honourable Company and Tippoo Sultan, the three talooks of Paroor, Alumgar, and Koonatnaar, made part of the Rajah of Travancore’s country, and having by the said Sultan been included in his cessions to the Honourable Company by the Treaty of Peace of the 18th of March 1792, the said Company do, in view to their ancient friendship with and the plea of right preferred by the Rajah of Travancore, renounce
every claim that they may have to the talooks in question, and all the
said three talooks are accordingly left on the former footing as part
of the said Rajah’s country.

2. If any power or States, near or remote, by sea or land, shall, without
aggression on the part of the Rajah of Travancore, attempt or begin
hostility and war upon the country of the said Rajah or of his
successors; under such circumstances, the expulsion of and the
protection of the country against, such enemies rest with the
Company’s Government.

3. In consideration of the stipulation in the second Article, the Rajah of
Travancore doth engage for himself and his successors to pay
annually at Anjengo, both in peace and war, a sum equivalent to the
expense of three of the Honourable Company’s battalions of sepoys,
together with a Company of European artillery and two Companies
of Lascars.

4. The Company stipulate that this force of infantry and artillery shall,
if the Rajah desire it, always be stationed in his country, or on the
frontiers near it, or in any other part within the Company’s
possessions where he shall prefer; and that they shall always be in
readiness; and in respect to such requisitions as the Rajah and his
successors may have occasion to address to the officer in command
of these troops, to proceed to act against foreign enemies who shall have invaded the said Rajah’s country, it is proper that such commanding officer stand previously furnished with instructions from the Government of that Presidency whence he shall have been detached; or otherwise, he is immediately on such requisition to procure instructions and the sanction of his said superiors for repelling such invasion; but in the event of the Rajah’s country being so unexpectedly invaded by an enemy, that the urgency of the danger or attack from without shall not admit of deferring the necessary operations till the orders of the Government of such Presidency can be received, the commanding officer is, under such circumstances, to apply immediately and without objection the force under his command to the defence and protection of the Rajah and his successors; and should it so happen that the aforesaid force and the Rajah’s own army be at any time found unequal to cope with and defend the country against the superior force of the enemy, the expense of such further troops as it may be necessary and requisite for the Company to furnish in such instances, is to be altogether at the said Company’s cost; nor shall their Government in any wise object to furnish such additional force, the expense of which shall in no respect be chargeable on the Rajah or his successors; nor shall the Company ever apply for or demand any sum on that account, nor
possess any plea or claim to make any further requisition for pecuniary aid from the Rajah or his successors, by reason of any warfare or hostility that may hereafter eventually occur.

5. As the Company do only engage to defend and protect the country dependent in the Rajah of Travancore against unprovoked attacks; it is therefore to be clearly and distinctly understood between the parties that the Rajahs, present and future, are not to commit any hostile aggression towards any other State whether Indian or European; and in the event of the Rajah or his successors having any disputes of a political nature or tendency, it is necessary that the same shall be transmitted by the latter to the Honourable Company’s Government who will determine thereon according to justice and policy and mutual concert.

6. The reigning Rajah of Travancore for the time being shall not keep in his service, in any civil or military capacity, nor allow to remain within his dominions as merchants, or under any other plea or pretext, the subjects or citizens of any nation being at war with Great Britain or with the East India Company; nor under any circumstances of peace or war allow any European nation to obtain settlements (i.e. territory or places under his own authority) within the same, nor enter into any new engagements with any European or
Indian States without the previous concurrence of the British Governments in India.

7. When the Company shall require of the Rajah of Travancore any aid of his troops to assist them in war, it shall be incumbent on the said reigning Rajah for the time being to furnish such aid, to such extent and in such numbers as may be in his power, from his regular infantry and cavalry exclusive of the native Nayars of his country, which succours thus furnishable by the Rajah, as far as shall be consistent with the safety of his own country, shall be liable to be employed as far by the Company’s Government on either side of the Peninsula as to Madura and Calicut; and to be, during such service, at the Company’s expense and under their orders.

8. That the pepper contract with the Company shall continue in perpetuity, liable, however, after the expiration of the period of the existing contract, to such modifications as to price, period, or quantity, as may, from time to time, be agreed upon between the parties.

9. The Company engage not to impede in any wise the course of the rule or of administration of the Rajah of Travancore’s Government; nor at all to possess themselves or enter upon any part of what regards the management of the present Rajah’s or his successor’s
country. At the same time it is provided that all the former agreements between the Honourable Company and the Rajahs of Travancore, relative to the settlements of Anjengo and Eddowa or Erawa, and to the Company’s privileges in respect to trade throughout the Rajah’s dominions, remain in full force, according to the practice hitherto; and as otherwise the object of this Treaty is principally to provide for the purposes of external defence, it bears therefore no reference whatever to the Rajah’s situation as a tributary to the Carnatic, concerning which the Rajah of Travancore doth in the sincerity of his heart, of his own accord, acknowledge and declare that in the line of his former fealty, as from of old established, towards the Circar of the soubah of Arcot, there shall never occur any difference or deviation.

10. All unsettled claims of a pecuniary nature which the contracting parties may have had upon each other, relative to warlike expenses, up to the period of the conclusion of the Treaty of peace with Tippoo Sultan, under date the 18th of March 1792, shall be cancelled and declared null and void.

11. The Company engage that none of the Rajahs of Malabar under their jurisdiction shall be allowed to commit excess in the country, or to encroach on the rights of the Rajah of Travancore or of his
successors; and both the contracting parties engage not to give shelter to the rebels, whosoever they may be, of either of the two States within the country of Malabar; but on the contrary to seize on and mutually to deliver up such persons.

12. On the commercial vessels of the said Rajah’s frequenting any of the ports in India appertaining to the Honourable Company, they shall obtain every requisite assistance and supply on paying for the same; and in like manner the Honourable Company’s ships shall experience the like assistance and supply in the ports and roads of his country.”

The 7th Article of this treaty was slightly amended in 1797 by introducing the words “and the boundary of the cavae” after the word ‘Calicut’, thus extending the limits to which the auxiliary forces furnished by the Maharaja might be taken by the Company in times of war.

**Tippu’s Claim over the Paravoor and Alangad**

Tippu summoned the Cochin Raja before him, and his obedient tributary proceeded to Palghatcherry and there paid his homage to his liege lord. The Sultan appears to have found fault with the Raja for the lateness of his appearance. After accepting the Raja’s apologies, Tippu advised him to discover some pretext to provoke the Maharaja of
Travancore to a war. To effect this the Sultan suggested to his vessel that he should claim the districts of Paravoor and Alanguad and on that refusal he should commence hostilities in which he would be strongly assisted by the Mysore army. This proposal embarrassed the Cochin chief, who said that those districts were ceded to Travancore for important assistance given in the defence of his country and that they were ever since in the possession of Travancore.  

But Tippu forced the Raja of Cochin to approach the Maharaja of Travancore with the proposal that he should become a feudatory of Mysore, but Rama Varma received Tippu’s envoys in the presence of British agents and dismissed them with a curt refusal. This was taken as an insult by the Sultan who was already feeling infuriated.

**Religious Conversion**

The worst of Tippu’s tyrannical proceedings was that he ordered the conversion of all the Hindus indiscriminately, whether of high or low caste, male or female to the Mussalman faith, and all who objected to acknowledge the prophet were menaced with death. Further they committed various atrocities and the country was laid waste with fire and sword. Some of the inhabitants fled for shelter to the wild hills of Kunnathunaud, while many were taken captives. Hindu temples and

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Christian Churches were equally desecrated by the followers of Mohammed.\textsuperscript{25} Towers of pagodas, the house of the rich and the huts of the poor, all were burnt to ashes and the scenes throughout the districts of Alanguad and Paravoor were heart-rendering. The ruins which may be seen up to the present day testify to the ferocity of the invaders. Records of antiquity, secured in the archives of pagodas, palaces, churches and the houses of the nobles were all committed to the flames.

It is an record that the Nairs were forced by Tippu Sultan to give up their obscene habits and compelled them to become Mohammedans.\textsuperscript{26} It was reported that in July 1786 prince of Parappanad royal family and ‘Tichera Terooperar (Tirumulpad) a principal Nayar of Nilambur, were forcibly converted to Islam.\textsuperscript{27} Tippu is said to have issued orders to the Dewan of Calicut to convert the Brahmins forcibly to Islam so as to serve as examples to the other inferior castes. A large number of Brahmins were seized, confined and made Mussalmans and compelled to eat beef.\textsuperscript{28} Malabar was always in Tippu’s thoughts and he never wasted an opportunity to plunder its treasures; and to invest the inhabitants with

\textsuperscript{25} Shungoony Menon, P., \textit{op.cit.}, p.173.
\textsuperscript{26} Praxy Fernander, \textit{Storm Over Seringapatam}, Bombay, 1969, p.113.
\textsuperscript{27} Krishna Iyar, \textit{A Short History of Kerala}, Ernakulam, 1966, p.112.
the honour of Islam.\(^{29}\) He even persecuted the people and chiefs
massacring all those who refused to embrace Islam.\(^{30}\)

Due to these humiliating policies of Tippu, all the high caste
Hindus fled from Malabar, but where could they find shelter? In the
Cochin Rajah’s country they could not get any asylum as that potentate
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\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}