

## REVOLT OF 1809

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### ABSTRACT

The Revolt of 1809 was occurred during the period of VeluThampi, Dalawai. VeluThampi was born on 6th May 1765 in an aristocratic Nair family at Thalakkulam, a small village situated near Eraniel in Kanyakumari District. He was a straight forward person and he strongly protested the persons who indulged in anti - social activities. He was appointed as Dalawa in 1801. He was very particular to strengthen the friendship existing between the company and his state. VeluThampi was stationed at Allepy. The Cochin Plot could be swift and successful if a portion of the Resident's escort could be removed. For this, the Dalawa pretended that he has ready to retire on a British pension and reside somewhere in Calicut as Macaulay suggested some time ago. He summoned Col. VeluThampi wrote letters to PaliyattAchan and the Zamoirn of Calicut to strengthen their struggle against the British. When Macaulay heard that Col. St. Leger and the British army had camped near the capital, he visited the camp. Under pressure from Macaulay and Col. Leger, several intimations were dispatched to all places by the Maharaja to arrest VeluThampi and his close associates. But the spark of the freedom he had lit fanned into flame half a century later in the Indian Revolt of 1857 and into a conflagration a century afterwards in the national struggle for Indian freedom. Free Indian owes a debt of gratitude of Velu Thampi in the history of the state first embraced martyrdom on the alter of freedom.

**Keywords:** revolt, India, VeluThampi

The Revolt of 1809 was occurred during the period of VeluThampiDalawai. VeluThampi was born on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1765 in an aristocratic Nair family at Thalakkulam, a small village situated near Eraniel in Kanyakumari District<sup>1</sup>. He was a straight forward person and he strongly protested the persons who indulged in anti-social activities. He was appointed as Dalawa in 1801. He was very particular to strengthen the friendship existing between the company and his state<sup>2</sup>.

Several uncomfortable developments took place and were taking place in South India and elsewhere in the country forbade the company form any kind of military interferences in the state. In 1808, a rumour had also spread that the French army had already began in onward march.<sup>3</sup> He had dispatched messengers with letters requesting aid and assistance from the poligars and Mappilas extending over an area from Madras to Cannannore.<sup>4</sup>

On 5<sup>th</sup> December, one of Col. Macaulay's confidential agents from Cirayinkil reported that since 22<sup>nd</sup> November, the Dewan had collected about twenty thousand men with arms of various kinds. To enroll 8,000 men of the Nadar case in the eight adhikarams of Colachel, and to enroll 2,000 Nayars in each adhikaram with bows and arrows. Iron was transported from a mine in Aralvaimozhi to Udayagiri Fort to make bullets. The Aralvaimozhilines

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towards Tirunelveli was completely repaired and three guns were placed in each tower. Guns and gunpowder were continuously manufactured in Udayagiri. The disbanded troopers who resided at Nagercoil were ordered to be ready for re-enrichments.<sup>5</sup>

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Daly, and communicated through him to the Resident his willingness to accept the British troops to escort him to Calicut. He met VeluThampi who, after pursuing the Resident's letter, asked his officers to prepare his letter to resignation to be sent to the Maharaja and informed Col. Daly that he would start next day evening at night. Accordingly, the Dalawa submitted his resignation letter to the Raja on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1808 in which he observed that in consequence of failures on his part in the fulfillment of the terms of the treaties, subsisting between his highness and the Honourable company, his highness and the inhabitants might feel uneasiness and trouble.<sup>7</sup>

Agreeably to this request, arrangement were made for his removal from Allepy to Calicut on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1808, a sum of money was advanced for his expenses and owing to the alleged fears of the Dalawa that his person was not safe in Travancore, a large body of troops was also got ready at Allepy to exhort him, thereby weakening the force stationed at the Residency.<sup>8</sup>

The armed attack against the life of the Resident began at Cochin in the night of 28 December 1808, a body of armed men surrounded the Residency at Bolgahatty and surprised the Resident with a volley of several pieces of musketry at all the opening of the house.<sup>9</sup>

The native soldiers who entered the house were disappointed with the disappearance of the Resident and Kunnu Krishna Menon. According to Shungoonny Menon, "The Travancore sepoys overpowered the few British sepoys who formed the Resident's exhort killing many who resisted and afterwards entered Col. Macaulay's residence; ransacked the house murdered the domestic servants and others whom they found in the house, afterwards returned considerably chagrined at not finding the Resident and KunnuKrishana Menon."<sup>10</sup>

At daybreak, they beheld a British ship enter the harbor and other ships were seen at a distance making way for the port. They immediately retreated to Travancore much disappointed, thus affording Col. Macaulay in opportunity to get on board the ship piedmont that had just arrived at the

harbor with pat of the reinforcements from Malabar. Kunnu Krishna Menon also made his escape and joined Col. Macaulay on board the ship.<sup>11</sup> Barlow gives the description of the attack of the Resident as the house of Resident was surrounded by a large body of armed troops headed by confidential friend of the Dewan and the minister of the Raja of Cochin who after killing some attempted resistance, broke into resident's home which was entirely plundered. The escape of Lt.

Col. Macauley against whom the endeavours of the assassins were chiefly directed, is stated to have been miraculous, but that officer was enabled providentially.

As a result of the attack on resident, he dispatched order to the officers commanding the British army at Tirunelveli, Malabar, Ceylon and Srirangapatnam for the immediate dispatch of sizable contingents to Travancore.<sup>12</sup> On hearing the discouraging tidings VeluThampi quitted Alleppy for Quilon where he found himself at the head of a large number of armed men well supplied with ammunition.<sup>13</sup> But by the time troubles arose at Quilon. Hearing the news that the British began dumping soldiers at Quilon, people from neighbouring taluks began to assemble there. Some among them were members of the popular army organized under the behest of the Dalawa. On finding his way to Quilon blocked at Neendakara by the British troops the Dalawa decided to enter East Quilon via Kottarakara and from there proceeded to Killikollur where his followers had been eagerly awaiting his arrival.<sup>14</sup>

It was blockade that forced VeluThampi and his army to deviate their route to Quilon through Kottarakara. Reaching Quilon and joining with security forces encamped there, he made his war time headquarters at a place called Kundara, near Quilon. The Maharaja himself deputed the commander – in chief of the army to take over large part of the defense of the fort at Aruvamozhi of the eastern border.<sup>15</sup> What happened, in Travancore thus became unknown to the Madras Governor's council, depending on the allegation that Col. Macaulay was the cause of the disturbances in Travancore, gave orders to replace him by the Resident of Tanjore.<sup>16</sup>

On 30<sup>th</sup> December, the Travancore troops made two daring attempts to surround the English encampment at Quilon. They were forced to retreat with heavy losses. Next day the subsidiary force occupied the house of the Dewan. On hearing that a large enemy contingent was rapidly proceeding from Paravur to Quilon. Col. Chalmers strengthened his defence though he was facing acute shortage of food and communication.<sup>17</sup>

By the time reinforcement to the British arrived together with the British Government's decision to the provisions of the revised Treaty of 1805 and the Madras Governor's instruction to the Maharaja to keep himself apart

from the activities of the Dalawa, VeluThampi had no other alternative than rousing the people, address them in person, and inspire them to action. He described the oppression and tyranny of the British and exhorted his countrymen to sacrifice their energies for the freedom of their motherland from foreign domination. He also, like a prophet, said about the bitter experiences they had to encounter in future if doubts delayed them to strike. The discourse published on 16 January 1809 of the information, guidance and prompt action of the people at the famous kundra proclamation.<sup>18</sup>

Returning to Kumdara, VeluThampi wrote letters to PaliyattAchan and the Zamorin of Calicut to strengthen their struggle against the British. But the Secretary of the Zamorin proved treacherous and he, instead of giving VeluThampi's letters to the Zamorin, handed it over to the British Collector in Malabar.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the Madras Governor issued a proclamation for the information of the people of Travancore that the moving British forces would soon enter the state, destroy VeluThampi and his seditious activities, and establish peace and order. The effects of the British Proclamation became visible first at Cochin. PaliyatAchan supposed to be the best and most trustworthy friend and ally of VeluThampi fought bravely against the first battalion of British army entered Cochin Malabar. But when he heard that another regiment from Ponnani was marching towards Travancore, he was frightened. The undaunted VeluThampi, in spite of the reverses and the desertion of his allies, was determined to fight even at the cost of his life. To counter act the insurrection the Government of Fort St. George took urgent measures. Col. Cuppage with five regiments came from Malabar and a detachment of artillery. A regiment from Ceylon joined him.<sup>20</sup>

The news of the arrival of British forces from the north increased the tension at Quilon. There were attacks and counter attacks on both sides. However, British troops appeared on the western, northern and eastern boundaries of the State. The British force under the command of the honourable Col. St. Leger arrived at the southern frontier of Travancore and commenced an attack on the Aramboly lines and forced an entrance into the forts on the February 1809.<sup>21</sup>

At this critical movement, another unfortunate event took place at Nanchilnad in South Travancore. On 18 February 1809 the Fort of Udayagiri and Padmanabhapuram fell into their hands. Col St. Leger then advanced towards Trivandrum and encamped at Pappanamcode,<sup>22</sup> where they were stationed. VeluThampi met the Maharaja on 8 March 1809 and told His Highness that he alone was the enemy declared by the British and the Raja was free to proceed which matters as such. He also requested to the Maharaja to remove him from office to the next day onwards.<sup>23</sup> He took leave of the Raja, telling the later that he was going to Kundara. According to

P. ShungoonyMenon, DewanVeluThampi, "being a patriotic Minister and a faithful subject of Travancore, and conscious of his own quilt and wrong doing resolved honestly to take the blame upon himself and save his sovereign and the blame might be clearly and distinctly imputed to him, when the British government would question his highness."<sup>24</sup>

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The delay in the apprehension of VeluThampi caused disposition in Macaulay over the new Diwan, Kumara Pillai. So the resident appointed UmminiThampi, a palace depended quite unknown man until then, as the new Dalawa, of the state on 13 March 1813.

VeluThampi was moving through the Kunnatturtaluk receiving the hospitality of the local chieftains. He wished to organize a more powerful upsurge with the aid of range and some of the active Kingdom in India. Tradition says that he did so with a desperate obstinacy to collect men and money for yet another struggle.<sup>26</sup>

Searching parties closely pursued him KoccusankaraPillai, the confidential Secretary of the fallen Dewan, was apprehended. Most brutal manner. In the course of their search they apprehended some close friends and servants of the Dewan. But it did little to accomplish their mission. After several attempts on 27<sup>th</sup> from Kisten, a boy servant of the Dewan's plan to conceal himself in a Madam at Mannady.<sup>27</sup>

VeluThampi had heard of the offer of the award and the arrival of the British soldiers. He remained unperturbed. The morning of 10 March 1809 dawned ominous. Shouts were heard in front of the mansion where VeluThampi was residing. Soon British soldiers surrounded the building with loaded guns pointed in every direction. Some of them began kicking the doors to break them open. Others climbed over the roof to pull down the thatched leaves. From inside was heard the clashing of swords.

The ill-treatment meted out to his dead body by Col. Macaulay and Col. Leger was so barbarous as to pick the conscience of even Lord Minto, the British Governor – General. The dead body of the Dewan was taken to Trivandrum, carried naked through the streets of the capital "exposed one gibbet at Kannammalay for public execration"<sup>28</sup> and later given a criminal's burial on the hill to Ulloor. VeluThampi's house was destroyed, his property confiscated and his relative deported to Maldives. KunjuviraThampi the younger brother of the Dalwa and some of the other members, including men, women, and children escaped to other countries.<sup>29</sup>



The Resident adopted all measures to punish the people who participated in the revolt. PadmanabapuramThampi was imprisoned and on 10 April 1809, he was hanged at Quilon on the allegation that took part in the assassination of Doctor Hume and other Europeans near Allepey. On the same charge, VaikomPadmanabhaPillai and others were hanged at Quilon, Parakkad and Palathuruthy. The Resident defended his vindictive measures on the plea that they were nothing more than a just, retribution for the foul treachery and sanguinary cruelty of the Dalawa and his Brother.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, those who helped the company in finding out the Dalawa were rewarded. MallanPillai was entitled for the rewards and distinctions proposed for the apprehension of the VeluThampi. He was promoted to the high rank of ValiyaSarvadhikarikkar. The death of VeluThampi ended the late British proceedings and finally established British Paramount upon Travancore.

Thus “the Diwan championed the cause of the freedom of the state only after his relation with the company had strained beyond redemption.<sup>31</sup> Though he organized a mass upsurge against the British it became a mere abortive crisis following his sudden departure from active Warfield and concealment for personal safety.

But the spark of the freedom he had lit fanned into flame half a century later in the Indian Revolt of 1857 and into a conflagration a century afterwards in the national struggle for Indian freedom. Free India owes a debt of gratitude of VeluThampi in the history of the state first embraced martyrdom on the altar of freedom.

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