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The Great Flood of 99-Geographical and Historical Dimensions

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Abstract

The two most important mountain ecosystems in the Indian sub-continent are the Himalayas and the Western Ghats. Development programmes have resulted in considerable changes in the flora and fauna of these mountainous regions affecting the local population as well as those who live far away. The ecological vulnerability of the mountain ecosystems warrants special attention. In Peninsular India, the Western Ghats have specific ecological functions and the hydrology in the region is largely dependent on what happens in the Ghats.

The vast majority of the streams of Travancore start from the Western Ghats. When the monsoon rainy season affected a heavy flood hit Travancore in 1924 and it was known as the flood of 99 because it happened in Kollam Era 1099(1099 M.E). The adverse effects of such large-scale destruction of dense forests sites the steep slopes of the Western Ghats up to an elevation of about 1500 m with average rainfall of 2500 to 6000 mm per annum increased the casualties. The Travancore government has come forward to face the widespread casualties.

Key words: Kollam Era, Shola, Muthirapuzha, Monsoon, Ariel Ropeway

Introduction

Shola forests belong to the broad category of tropical mountain forests represented in the continents of Asia, Africa and America. Technically, shola forests and the more recent and generally accepted terminology is Southern Wet Temperate Forests, distributed above 1500 m southern Western Ghats of peninsular India. In fact, sholas of Kerala, mainly distributed in Idukki and Palakkad districts. The term Shola is gotten from the word 'Cholai' in the nearby Tamil language which is 'Chola' in the Malayalam dialect of Kerala State. The word Cholai is by and large used to assign a shaded and wet region or a little water body inside a vegetation cover. The deforestation in the Shola woods in the high ranges, in the nineteenth Century, extraordinary rainfalls and gigantic increment of water level in the river Periyar made incredible ruin the general population because of flood. The administration of Travancore constituted flood relief committees and flood relief measures in order to reduce the havoc caused by flood.

Objective of the Study

1. To study the environmental problems arising from past developments in this region
2. To examine soil erosion and landslides in the light of flood of 1924
3. To analyse the flood relief measures adopted by the government of Travancore
4. To assess the environmental impact due to the floods

Methodology

The article, prepared based on both archival and secondary sources written as per the method of scientific Historical Research. The methodology followed is descriptive and argumentative in nature.

Annual rainfall, slope, soil erosion and runoff were record both the catchments and analysis and correlation of the data indicated that Shola forest play a positive role in maintaining the watercourses emerging from high ranges Western Ghats.¹ During the latter half of 19th century, large areas were leased for cultivation of Coffee, rubber by the Maharajas in Travancore and Cochin in and by the British in Malabar. The leased out areas amounted to about 120000 ha in Travancore and 5000 ha in Cochin.²

The High ranges from the viewpoint of evolution and ecology, but also form the basis of mobility of the water regime of the area, imparting a perennial nature to some of the watercourses. High altitude grasslands and interspersed shola formations are natural means of arresting surface runoff from the high hill slopes during the rains. The water retained in these slopes by the clumps of grasses and humus layers in the depressions is released gradually. Thus, all such catchment areas impart the perennial status to the rain-fed drainage originating from these areas.³

There are two distinct rainfall zones: (i) the Upland tract and (ii) the Nilgiris and South Sahyadri Hills. The rainfall increases med sharply from the Tamil Nadu Upland (600 mm) to the South Sahyadri Hills (2,000 mm). Towards the western flanks of the South Sahyadri the rainfall is much higher due to the south-west Ghats monsoon (1,500 to 2,200 mm).⁴

While droughts frequently occur in South Travancore, floods cause great havoc.⁵ During the heavy south-west monsoon (June-August) the Periar river was often in flooded. In 1924, the floods were very severe; thousands of houses were swept away, crops were ruined, and the homeless people huddled together on the high grounds.⁶ It resulted in unusual floods in all the rivers of North and, central Travancore. There were heavy slips and landslides in the planting districts.⁷

The first tea plantations in high ranges of Travencore began at Sevamala near Devikulam. The Englishman Sharpe was supervised by this. In 1895, when Sir John Moore worked with H.N Knight in the Finlay Company, agriculture began to grow. Pankul Company has also started by A.Supenchetty to assist Finlay Company⁸ Finlay's Company's first headquarters was at Mattupetty. When the reservoir constructed, Munnar replaced it. At this point, there were good transportation systems in Bodinayakanoor and Munnar by way of Kallar, Thattekadu and Alappuzha.⁹ The ropeway built at Chittavarai to transport goods. For electricity Near Korangini hydroelectric power plant was constructed

The British company known as Malayalam Plantation started the tea industry at that time. Tealeaf processing factory also started in Munnar. The tea produced in Munnar was exported to Great Britain. In 1908, the Lite Railway system existed which connected Munnar and Top Stations. The Tea boxes are brought to the Munnar top station and transported through the rope way. The tea arrives in Tuticorin or Madras by road was transported to England by ship. Bullock Carts carried Boxes of Tea to Munnar from the vending factories.

The bullock cart drivers also engagement strike in 1912. Their main complaint was that the bulls did not get enough water and grass during the summer season. As a result, the TTE Company decided to purchase and cards in order to transport boxes of 30 from Kozhikkanam to Kottayam.¹⁰ Later two Lorries were imported from England by Ashley and Tiford Tea Company. It was aimed to transport boxes of teas and passengers from Kottayam to Mundakayam. Two Lorries that purchased in 1912 was a great success. But later all the efforts went in vain because it was unable to drive these lorries from the terrian Mundakayam areas. Not being, disappointed by this, Richardson think about transporting the boxes of teas to Mundakayam by constructing ropeway.¹¹

For this purpose the Mundakayam Peerumede Motor transport and aerial ropeway Company Limited was formed by Richardson in 1914. The company also made survey for the construction of the ropeway. first world war started at the time of the formation of the company by Richardson. In addition, unfortunately the materials for constructing the ropeway through ship was attacked and destroyed in the Mediterranean sea by the enemy of Britain 1916. Later the construction of the ropeway was completed in 1924. The Rope way from kuttikkanam to Mundakayam left due to its damage. The remains of the ropeway was found in the boys stage near Mundakayam. The locals population also find out the reason behind the failure of the ropeway as the ropeway was fixed in the mountain where the saints lived.¹²

But heavy floods in 1924 crumbled across the traffic system. The floods wrecked high ranges including the Munnar. The factories and bridges that were wiped out. Several landslides burst in the mountains. Munnar was wiped out. Many people and cattle died in the flow. Peermde had got rainfall of 145 inches in July. Mundakayam and Kuttikkanam roads and the iron bridges vanished. Peerumedu and Vandipari areas were under water. Documents show that heavy rains and floods have caused enormous damage.¹³ Light rail service has functioned in Munnar for 15 years. However, the heavy rains in 1924 and the subsequent floods broke up the railway system like everything else. Its remains are still in Munnar.¹⁴

The rainfall all over the country and especially in the Peermade District was unprecedented and the river was already in flood due to these rains and the partial opening of the sluice valves. Then it is said that the authorities found the water level in the lake had risen much over the maximum limit and they opened the sluices to the full height thereby flushing the river. The water came down a wall more than 30 feet in height and swept away everything before it.¹⁵ History says that the extraordinary flood of 1924 has crushed Munnar by harming every one of its offices including the Kundala valley railroad. One of only a handful few staying British-period suspension spans Margaret Bridge at Old Munnar .Constructed crosswise over Muthirapuzha, the 1924-improved scaffold was an availability to domain labourers who lived on the opposite side of the waterway. The extension is said to be named after Princess Margaret, the main kin of Queen Elizabeth II.¹⁶ Most of the roads in devikulam and peerumedu taluks were destroyed in the heavy rainfall. In Mundakayam and kuttikkanam route two roads were disappeared along with two iron bridges. As a result it was essential to construct new roads.¹⁷

Protective irrigation chiefly implemented to the restoration of the damages caused by the heavy rains and floods in that year 1099 M.E in Travancore to prevent floods.¹⁸The taluk of Parūr and the low-lying lands of Kuttanad sustained the heaviest damage. Portions of other taluks were also seriously affected by the floods, habitations, public buildings, communications and crops alike suffered. The Kanni crop was practically lost and the seedlings for the Kumbham crop damaged in most cases. There was considerable loss of cattle, but human mortality was on the whole small.¹⁹

Relief Measures

The Travancore government was quick to begin relief work in when the emergency set in. A Flood Relief Committee set up by the administration. Devan T. Raghavaiah, was deputed by the Madras Presidency, and assumed an imperative job in the alleviation work, sending in many cash to zones, which were affected by the floods. "By early August, a great many exiles and dislodged families were being bolstered at various help focuses: 4000 at Ambalapuzha, 3000 at Alleppey, 5000 in Kottayam, 3000 in Changanassery, 8000 in Parur and so on," writes Pillai. Representatives of the state travelled across to every affected locality as a means to boost public morale and did everything possible to ensure that starvation of people is minimum.²⁰

Further, after assessing the amazing misfortune caused on agriculture, the government reported that in the most noticeably bad influenced districts, charges would be transmitted for that financial year. An aggregate of Rs 4 lakh was likewise put aside to give rural advances. The woods office was issued requests to supply free bamboo and other lodging material with the end goal to give temporary private courses of action to poor people. The administration additionally put aside a lodging reproduction support and took various measures to guarantee that nourishment value steadiness kept up.²¹

To ease the sufferings of the general population, Government gave immediate unwarranted alleviation to the degree of about a large portion of a lakh of rupees in the state of circulation of sustenance, apparel, rice and cash in every single influenced zone. Building materials, for example, bamboos, grass and reeds, were masterminded to be circulated by the Forest Department from helpful focuses in the influenced territories, free of expense, to poor ryots, and at cost to bonafide buyers from the better classes, Drift wilderness wood and other timber were likewise sold at shoddy rates to the general population. A total of Rs. 5,50,000 was separate for dispersion as advances for reproduction and reclamation..... A general Flood Relief Committee was composed to co-ordinate the help work done by the Government and the neighborhood advisory groups. They have possessed the capacity to gather over Rs. 60,000 and convey the greater part of the accumulations in the state of free allows to the poorest among the sufferers to empower them to recreate their cottages and to restore themselves in others ways."²²

In 1924, countless, schools, offices, and associations inside and outside the state had liberally added to the alleviation reserve to reconstruct infrastructure of the state of Travancore. Commitments poured in simply indistinguishable path from help fills the chief minister's alleviation finance currently, obviously, there was no

contention over tolerating help from outside nations at that point as records demonstrate that cash poured in from outside, for example, Jaffna, Kenya, Singapore, and Malaya. According to the report of the Travancore Central Flood Relief Committee, distributed in December 1925, the aggregate commitment made by the general population from within and outside the state was Rs 73307.²³

Sri Mulanm Popular Assembly that met at the VJT Hall in March 1925, alleviation to the tune of Rs 50,000 was allotted from the state exchequer finance accumulation from people in general was more than what was at first distributed by the exchequer. According to the report, the then ruler Sri Mulam Thirunal began the store preparation drive by contributing Rs 5000 only just before his demise. The most astounding sum gotten by the reserve was Rs 6,000 contributed from the Madras Central Flood Relief Fund. The flood help board of trustees had recorded the names of the considerable number of patrons, including around 80 people and associations, which contributed around Rs5 each. The report additionally noticed that the board was effective in its endeavors to gather finances declared by three people worth around Rs 138 The aggregate open commitment likewise included around Rs 14,035 made by the Madras Central Flood Relief Fund, the Bombay Flood Relief Committees, the South India Flood Relief Fund.

Reports demonstrate that experts circulated the assets in deliberately and in a very much-arranged way: Of the aggregate Rs 73,307 collected, Rs 71,803 was appropriated as flood relief from July 28, 1924 to November 30 1925. The rest of the sum was accounted as cost for appropriation. The total rundown of circulation in taluks and 'pakuthis' (a division of zone like towns) is accessible in the report. Strangely, the appropriation was made by classifying flood unfortunate casualties dependent on their monetary status as exceptionally poor and lower-white collar class. A total of 3,243 people were given flood relief, of which 2,498 had a place with extremely poor classification. A cautious division of work was worked out at the start among government and the council. The advisory group focussed on aiding the 'extremely poorest trusting government would help the others.'²⁴

Later, it became evident that there were a large number of people falling between these two categories. Large numbers of the so-called lower-middle class, unable to furnish the security required by government, were unable to get any loans to rebuild their usually more substantial houses. They were a most needy class," it said. The then regent maharani Sethu LakshmiBayi made a special donation insisting that it was distributed to a select few upon careful investigation. Accordingly, agents identified four needy persons in each of the 10-flooded areas and distributed her donation. Accordingly, the contribution worth Rs 1,000 distributed among 40 needy persons.

Afterward, it ended up obvious that there were countless falling between these two classes. Expansive quantities of the alleged lower-working class, unfit to outfit the security required by government, were not able get any advances to modify their generally more considerable houses. They were a most penniless class," it said. The then Regent Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi made an extraordinary gift demanding that it was conveyed to a select group upon watchful examination. As needs be, specialists distinguished four destitute people in every one of the 10-overflown

territories and dispersed her gift. In like manner, the commitment worth Rs 1,000 appropriated among 40 penniless people. The committee had mentioned that the entire fund properly audited.²⁵ When floods of 1924 ravaged, Mahatma Gandhi had termed the misery of the people as “unimaginable” and stepped in to mobilise over Rs 6,000 to flood relief fund.²⁶

Conclusion

During the great flood of 99, it had received about 650 millimetre of rain. Records show that thousands of individuals lost their lives and property, flora and fauna were destroyed. The splendour of Munnar met with a nasty twist in the 1924 floods. During recent years there had been many instances of landslides, rock bursts (Urul Pottal) and flash floods. The Western Ghats, inflicting untold misery to the people and destruction of life and which traced to the indiscriminate removal of vegetation cover. Apart from the serving as "raiment for the earth's surface, these forests have additionally become economically valuable with the development of timber-using industries, during the previous couple of decades.

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