



HIS HIGHNESS SRI RAVI VARMA
Maharaja of Cochin

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HIS HIGHNESS SRI RAVI VARMA Maharaja of Cochin, was born on the 16th Vrischigam 1041. He is the son of Brahmasree Panamanakal Kuttan Nambudiripad and the junior Raneer of Cochin who demised in 1093, and is the younger brother of the late Maharaja.

His Highness had his early education under such erudite scholars as Paramakavu Raman Nambiyar, Elamana Rama Menon and G. Narayana Ayyar. Under Robert White who was in charge of the Palace School, he learned English. The system of instruction then imparted in that school was quite different from that given in the present-day educational institutions. Each student was instructed according to his capacity, tastes and aptitude and special individual attention was devoted in giving instruction. Under this system of training His Highness received all the benefits of a sound general education and attained proficiency in Sanskrit and English. After his educational career he improved and widened his knowledge by extensive reading especially books on religion and economics in which he obtained a firm grip of the fundamental principles of political

economy. He has been a careful and regular reader of the daily newspapers for the last fifty years and more. In his youth His Highness actively participated in physical activities. He has travelled widely and has visited many cities in India, especially such places of pilgrimage as Benares, Rameswaram, etc.

Like his late brother, His Highness takes particular delight in agriculture and is keenly interested in the welfare and well-being of the tillers of the soil. In His Highness there is a happy and harmonious blending of all the noble and glorious traits of the Cochin Royal Family such as piety, love of art and deep and abiding solicitude for the welfare of the subjects. He has all the attributes and accomplishments of a benevolent constitutional Ruler. And to the great task of discharging the heavy responsibilities of a Ruler he brings rich experience, wide knowledge, a high sense of duty and wisdom of years.

His Highness' consort Sreemathi Kamakshi Nethyamma belongs to the ancient and aristocratic Parakat tarawad. His Highness has two sons and one daughter.

also became an ally of the Dutch. It is interesting to read what some of the Dutch writers have written about the then Rajas of Cochin. Prince Neiuhoff wrote thus: "He (the Raja) often came to visit us, being commonly clad in white calico, with his hair tied in a knot on the top of his head, rings on his fingers and a gold chain hanging before him. He speaks the Portugese and Malayalam tongue, and was of a pleasant conversation". It was the brother of this king who once sailed to Colombo with Paliath Achan to meet the Dutch Governor.

Speaking about another Raja of those times, Raja Rama Varma, the Dutch wrote that he was "crafty and designing" was "delighted in wars, though with his own soldiers he did but little execution, and laid the chief burden of prosecuting it upon the Company". Probably no greater compliment could have been earned by a Prince of Malabar at that time.

Anxious Days.—In those days there was a time when the future of the Cochin Ruling Family looked like anything but bright. Travancore under the leadership of King Marthanda Varma had grown into a great power in the south, and the Zamorin was still strong in the north. Between these two Cochin had some very anxious days. The situation was, however, saved by the then Raja who entered into a pact with Travancore as a result of which Travancore and Cochin together fought the Zamorin and defeated him in 1763. After that the Zamorin never regained his former glory.

The next few years in this part of South India were the years of Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan of Mysore. Cochin's relations with Hyder were generally friendly; and on one occasion Hyder presented the king with a rich palanquin inlaid with ivory. But with Tippu the Raja did not get on well.

The Raja at this time was Raja Rama Varma, popularly known as Saktan Thampuram. He ascended the Musnad in 1790, but, at the request of the Travancore Raja and the Dutch Governor, his uncle had entrusted him with the duties of Government even as early as 1769. He was hardly twenty years of age when he took up the reins of administration. He was a strong, resolute, energetic and ambitious young person and he made a mark in the history of Cochin. A Carmelite missionary at Cochin described him as follows: "I had several times an audience of him at Mattanchira (Mattancheri) when he frequently sent for me to the Palace, as he wished to be made acquainted with different particulars of Europe. He spoke Dutch exceedingly well and was desirous of learning English also. As he was a brave and enterprising man possessed of considerable talent he could not bear the idea of being satisfied with the income enjoyed by his predecessors". And he did increase it by trade. He owned several coasting vessels manned by European captains and conducted a brisk trade all along the coast.

He was a stern but wise ruler. He knew from the example of Travancore that the future of Cochin depended upon a strong executive. He, therefore, turned his attention ruthlessly to curtail the powers of the chieftains, and along with that he also abolished the post of the hereditary Prime Minister vested in the Nayar Paliath Family. The Karanavans of this family known as Paliath Achans had been virtually the Prime Ministers of Cochin for over 150 years. Their influence started a little before the Dutch landed at Malabar. With the advent of the Dutch their position and power strengthened. The Dutch looked to them as one of their foremost friends in Cochin. Saktan Thampuram didn't appreciate very much the idea of concentrating political power in the hands of one single family in the State. He was, therefore, from

the very outset determined to terminate the institution of hereditary Prime Ministership, and with the death of the then Achan he cancelled the appointment of Paliath Achans as Prime Ministers and instead appointed one Govinda Menon as his Valia Sarvadhikariakar.

Treaty with East India Company.—

It was during the time of this Raja the first treaty with the Honourable the English East India Company was signed. That was on the 6th January, 1791. Though to start with he was an admirer of the English, later on his relations with them grew strained, and in the later years of his life it was even suspected that he was in alliance with the French against them. It is a fact that he received a portrait of Napoleon through Dutch intermediaries. Whatever may have been his personal relations with the English East India Company, he never overlooked the might of the new power that had risen in the land. He died at Trichur in the year 1805 A.D.

The Prince who next ascended the Gadi was weak in mind and he was easily persuaded to restore once again the Premiership to the Paliath Family. But they didn't enjoy the honour for long this time. The new Achan rose in revolt against the English with the connivance of Velu Thampi, the Premier of Travancore. The rebellion was, however, soon quelled, and Achan was deported to Madras and thence to Benares. Velu Thampi fled to the jungles and committed suicide. The British Resident thought that it was more the Ministers than the Rajas who were responsible for the outbreak and, therefore, so far as Cochin was concerned the affair was finally settled by imposing a fresh treaty which was signed on the 6th of May, 1809. Since then this State has never known the excitements of war.

Modern Times.—Coming to more modern times, there are many now alive

who remember with gratitude and pride the wise, paternal and affectionate rule of Raja Sir Rama Varma who ruled for a long period of more than 23 years assisted by Thottekat Sankunni Menon, one of the ablest of the Diwans of Cochin.

Then there was the regime of his cousin, Raja Sir Sree Rama Varma, G. C. S. I., G. C. I. E., who ascended the Musnad in September, 1895, and ruled till the end of 1914. At the end of this period His Highness abdicated the throne and retired to private life. During his time the administrative machinery of the State was completely overhauled. Also during His Highness' regime several valuable rights, fiscal and administrative, were secured by anxious protracted correspondence with the Government of Madras. Further, the State was then first laid open to the benefits of railway communication.

He was succeeded by his cousin Sir Sree Rama Varma, G. C. I. E. who ruled for 17 and odd years and breathed his last at Madras on 12th Meenam 1107 M. E. During His Highness' regime the scheme of the Cochin Harbour development which had been given up as impracticable several years before was once again taken up. It was also decided to convert the then metre gauge Railway line between Ernakulam and Shoranur into broadgauge. The Panchayat Department was enlarged, a steady impetus was given to the development of agriculture and industries, and many progressive measures were adopted for the amelioration of the economic condition of the people. The two important pieces of social legislation passed during His Highness' rule were the Nayar Act and the Christian Law of succession. The former removed most of the evils of Marumakkathayam law by which the Nayers were governed and the latter settled the law applicable to the

native Christians of the State. His Majesty the King Emperor was pleased to honour His Highness with the hereditary title of Maharaja, and it was His Highness who granted the Legislative Council to the country. His Highness inaugurated it personally at the Hill Palace.

His Highness Sir Sri Rama Varma, G. C. I. E., D. Litt., succeeded to the throne on the 12th Meenam 1107 M.E. His Highness' rule has been memorable for more than one beneficent reform. The Legislative Council received wider powers, the franchise was extended four-fold, agrarian reforms of far-reaching importance were introduced and the scheme of Cochin Harbour Development received a fresh impetus. Besides, in the matter of communication considerable progress was made, and the conditions for a general revival of industries were made available by the introduction of cheap electric power in all the important centres of the State. To crown all these achievements as it were, His Highness was pleased to announce on the occasion of His Highness' last Birthday Durbar his noble intention to co-opt a Minister selected out of the elected representatives of the Legislative Council to assist him in the day to day administration of certain important departments of Government. This wise and bold step has once again

confirmed the position of Cochin as one of the most advanced of Indian States.

His Highness Sir Sri Kerala Varma ascended the Gadi on the 30th Meenam 1116 M. E. His Highness guided the ship of State through a period of unexampled strain and stress. His warm and abiding interest in the well-being of his subjects found expression in the various ameliorative measures adumbrated to relieve unemployment, to alleviate suffering and to feed the population of the State. Agriculture received a great impetus and the Verumpattamdars' Act that gave fixity of tenure to the ordinary lessee has been hailed as the magna carta of the tiller of the soil. He was a renowned specialist in the treatment of poison cases and during his regime ayurvedic system of treatment made rapid progress. His Highness also introduced several far-reaching social reforms.

The Rajas of Cochin have been generally noted for their piety, love of art and deep solicitude for the welfare of their subjects. In His Highness the present Maharaja there is a happy, sweet blending of all these family traits. His Highness has earned the love, affection and respect of all of His Highness' subjects, and it is the ardent wish and prayer of everyone of them that God may bless His Highness with many more years of prosperity, happiness and vigour.