

THE DIWANS OF COCHIN

BY

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(Continued from last issue.)

Sankara Warriar was Diwan from 1015 to 1032 M. E., and his son, Mr. Thottakkat Sankunni Menon, from 1035 to 1055 M. E. In between them came Mr. Venkita Rao who was Diwan from 1032 to 1035 M. E. But he left no mark in the country as he was mainly busy with a quarrel with his quondam friend Parameswara Pattar Sarvadhikariakar, and had to retire because the people loudly prayed for his removal. After Sankunni Menon, his brother, Mr. Govinda Menon was the Diwan from 1055 to 1065 M. E. His first few years were taken up with the boundary and territorial disputes with Travancore. After these were settled by arbitration, he was able to attend to the judicial reforms which were started by his predecessor. During his tenure of office, a Raja's Court of Appeal was constituted, the Civil and Criminal Procedure Codes were brought into line with the British Indian Acts, and a Police Force was organised on modern lines. The standard of the existing schools were raised and bettered, a Grant-in-aid Code was introduced, and English schools for girls were for the first time opened. Though he was not so great as his father and his brother, yet he was as systematic as them in his habits, and tried to walk in their steps with reverence and patriotism. He was generous and gentlemanly in his habits, with an avuncular beneficence about him which was irresistible. I am anticipating. I shall go back to Sankara Warriar and Sankunni Menon.

“The foundation of the modern administration of the State,” says Mr. C. Achyutha Menon, and he ought to know, “was laid and the basement built by Sankara Warriar, while its superstructure was raised by his son, Sankunni Menon.

The father was a man of the type of Sir Salar Jung and Sir Dinkar Rao as an administrator, while the son was the compeer of his contemporaries and friends, Sir Madhava Rao and Sir Seshayya Sastri. Both received in their time unstinted praise for their magnificent work from the Government of Madras, the Board of Directors and the Secretary of State, and the heartfelt gratitude, respect and admiration of their countrymen." It was from their time that Cochin came to be known to the outside world as one of the most progressive and well governed among the Indian States. Both had intelligence, courage and independence, in an uncommon degree; their education and experience chastened those qualities; and their tireless industry and glowing patriotism adapted them for the benefit of their country. Throughout their administration, they had the vigorous support of the British Government, although one of the Rajas tried for a time his best to dispense with the services of Sankara Warriar, and Parameswara Pattar, Sarvadhi, until his deportation, threw all sorts of obstacles in the way of Sankunni Menon. They were so kind and considerate to the subordinates that the officers of the State were loyal to them and scrupulously honest, and were always willing to undergo any sacrifice to give satisfaction to them. There was no department of the administration which they did not touch; and none that did not improve by their handling. Medical relief, agricultural development, roads and communications, education, public works, irrigation, judicial reforms, industry and commerce, every one of these subjects had their close and careful attention. The financial condition which was in a deplorable condition, they improved so well that, without in any way harrassing the people, nor infringing on the ordinary functions of the Government, they were able to spend handsomely on the larger issues that count, and to invest a large amount on Government securities. The anchal was by Sankunni Menon made available for the convenience of the people as well. He also organised the Press Department, and began the publication of the Administration Reports. Sankunni Menon was so keen on extending the railway line into Cochin that he even built the Shoranur bridge with an eye on the

introduction. But because the Raja was emphatic that no debts could be incurred under that head, he had to give way to the wishes of the master. The Interportal Trade Convention to which Sankunni Menon was a party will always remind even a casual observer of the foresight of the Diwan. It swept away the vexatious practices that were then rampant due to the absence of any agreement in regard to the trade relations of the three Governments, and gave an incentive to trade and commerce in the State, and secured to Cochin the right to share in the customs receipts of British Cochin. In spite of his incessant work, he found time to read and to engage himself in games. But, the work did tell on him and his failing health reluctantly forced the Raja to permit him to retire. In a letter which His Highness wrote to the Diwan he feelingly referred to the services of Sankunni Menon in these graceful terms: "We shall lose in you a safe and prudent administrator, and it shall be a constant regret that the conduct of affairs shall no longer be guided by your wise and sagacious counsels. We fully realise that during your tenure of office the country has made vast progress in material prosperity; the resources of the land have been remarkably developed; commerce and agriculture have been widely extended; and the revenue had attained to an amount that is the highest on record." That was praise worth winning.

The periods during which Messrs. Thiruvencatachariar, Subramanya Pillai, and Locke were at the helm of the administration are not marked with any noteworthy steps. All three were in the judicial service of the State at the time they were promoted to the highest office of the State, the two last being the Chief Judges of the Appeal Court. They only carried on the affairs of the State on the lines laid down by Sankunni Menon. Credit may be given to the first for giving an impetus to the cause of elementary education, and to the second for reorganising the medical department and placing it under a full-time Chief Medical Officer. Mr. Achariar caused some stir by an order forbidding the princes from going outside Cochin except under certain conditions. This gave occasion for a

spirited memorial, drafted by Mr. Eardley Norton, to the Ruler.

With the advent of Mr. P. Rajagopala Chari as Diwan, a vigorous forward policy was introduced into the administration of the State. The long-contemplated construction of a railway line from Shoranur to Ernakulam was commenced and completed during his tenure of office, as also a good portion of the Forest Tramway. The cost of these it was possible to meet out of the reserve funds of the Durbar. A scientific cadastral survey of the State was started by him and vigorously pursued. The Accounts Department was reorganised along with a revision of the accounts of the State, and a Financial Code was compiled. The work of the Forest Department was carefully systematised. The administration of the Jails was reformed and the intra-mural work in the jails was developed. The two outstanding events that took place in the course of his stewardship were the fitting celebration of the Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, and of the visit, for the first time, of a Viceroy of India to the State. Lord Curzon was charmed by "this land of perpetual summer of the feathery palm and the landlocked lagoons." He complimented the State on its administration in terms which bear appropriate repetition here. "During the time I have been in India, I have kept a careful watch upon the circumstances and the development of the Native States of India, and nowhere have I observed a more intelligent and progressive administration than in this Cochin State."

Mr. N. Pattabhirama Rao who succeeded Mr. Rajagopala Chari was one who liked a steady, firm, pedestrian step. The old-world grace of a gentleman always hung about him, whether at the office desk or at a musical concert. He was a firm, conscientious officer too good to be vain, too modest to be advertised. The survey operations were pushed on, and the new revenue settlement for which he was responsible resulted in a substantial increase to the land revenue. The completion of

the Forest Tramway, the improvement of the Excise administration, the revision of the grant-in-aid rules, and the passing of several Regulations are other items of his work.

He was followed by Mr. A. R. Banerji, a member of the Indian Civil Service. He put into practice a policy of animated moderation, and for the term of about seven years he held office, his record of work will compare favourably with that of the other best Diwans of the State. He was untouched by considerations other than the welfare of the country. He was prepared to make concessions to time-honoured and reasonable conventions, but positively refused to pander to the whims and caprices of mob psychology. A detailed enumeration of all that he did is not possible, and so is not attempted here. A thorough overhauling of the important parts of the State machinery was effected, without any increase of expenditure, so as to readily respond to the increase of work; and the scheme of decentralisation put into force along with it increased the output of work by a reduction of petty routine in the disposal of official business. With the termination of the survey and settlement work, steps were taken for the strict maintenance of Land Records, and a Land Revenue Manual, and a Village Officers' Manual were prepared and brought into force. The preparation of the Cochin State Manual was also done on his initiative. The beginnings of Local Self-Government were brought into being by the constitution of Town Councils in the important towns of the State, and a scheme for constitutional reform was carefully framed by the Durbar to be the basis of discussion with the Madras Government. The Department of Agriculture underwent a thorough reorganisation, and as a result of it, Demonstration Farms and Veterinary Dispensaries came into existence. An Industrial and Economic Survey was followed by the opening of industrial, technical and commercial schools. Provision was also made for free vernacular education throughout the State. An investigation into the possibility of developing the Fishery Industry occasioned the organising of a special department for it. A department of Public Health was constituted to improve the sanitation of towns and rural parts, and a Leper Asylum was also opened. Revenue officers were divested of

their magisterial functions, and Stationary Magistrates' Courts were established wherever they were found needed. A complete separation of Devaswom and State Funds was effected, and in the management of the incorporated devaswoms stringent reforms were introduced. He conferred a great boon on Ernakulam by the distribution of filtered water brought from Chowerah by means of a pipe-line. Elaborate enquiries were conducted with a view to bring into existence a Tenancy Regulation which would be beneficial to the tenants and not unacceptable to the landlords. He was very anxious to develop the Cochin Harbour and applied his mind to that vital subject in all earnestness, so that it was possible for him to record in one of his reports, "after 30 years of fruitless discussion, the scheme of the Cochin Harbour is being seriously considered and investigated." Although the Railway was opened in 1077 M. E., it was only after a hard fight by Mr. Banerji, in which even the Secretary of State for India had to intervene, that the Durbar's share of the net earnings was appreciably increased. Similarly, before it began to get its due quota, Cochin had to make a representation to the British Government for the proper allocation of its half share of the actual net customs collections under the Interportal Trade Convention. It was during his time that an agricultural and industrial exhibition on an elaborate scale was for the first time held in the State. It was again he who first introduced social amenities into the civic life of the people. He paid anxious, personal attention in the preparation of the budget, and exercised rigid economy in the expenditure of money, so that, after making provision for all liabilities, he was able to set by a net surplus of about ten lakhs of rupees. Unlike Mr. Rajagopala Chari, his policy was to always give preference to indigenous talents before indenting on other Governments or going in for men outside the State. On the occasion of the great celebrations of the Shashtyabdapoorthi of His Highness, the Abdicated Maharaja, a rare and unique event in the State, endowments were created for the development and encouragement of the Sanskrit and Malayalam Languages and Literature. In all important matters, he took the people into his confidence, and their

disinterested views had his best consideration. But he never countenanced sectarian or communal claims, and his considered opinion which he deliberately recorded on this serious problem is worthy of attention of all who have the future greatness of the country at heart. "It will be a bad day for Cochin if State appointments were to be made in mathematical precision according to population or according to communities represented in the public service and not according strictly to the principle of fitness and efficiency. Encouragement to backward communities must, of course, be given by the grant of special facilities for education, training, and other means, but not by putting square men in round holes in the administration of the State which must look to the greatest good of the greatest number."

Mr. J. W. Bhore, who succeeded Mr. Banerji, was circumspect even to a fault. "Every advance" he remarked in one of his reports, "has to be made good by a great deal of spade work which the public do not see.....A steady advance with an attempt to consolidate each position attained is regarded as stagnation, so that each milestone on the path of progress is 'wetted with tears instead of being crowned with roses.' He did much silent and arduous work in devising schemes to establish a hydro-electric installation and to start Paper Pulp and Ceramic Industries in the State. But, on account of the great European War, and certain other causes, he was not able to materialise them. For the war, the State made handsome contributions on different occasions. He, however, organised a department for Industries. A systematic attempt was made to popularise the cause of the Co-operative Credit Societies in the State, and, under his fostering care, Village Panchayats settled down to regular work, and were gradually entrusted with judicial functions as well. Codes and Manuals for the guidance of several departments were published. To avoid the publication of garbled reports about official and public matters, a Press Room was opened to supply correct information to the public. Mr. Bhore followed the lead given by Mr. Banerji as to Exhibitions, Garden Parties and Inter-School Sports.

A comprehensive scheme of communications by land and water based on a well defined policy was set on foot. Finding that the pronounced literary type of education did not cover all needs and was productive of a positive dis-service to society, Mr. Bhore opened industrial schools in different parts of the State and took steps to start an agricultural school attached to the Centarl Farm at Ollukkara. The one extraordinary event that took place during his administration was the abdication of the Ruler after a notable rule of 19 years.

Mr. T. Vijayaraghava Chari, who was the next Diwan, owned an optimistic temperament, and always bubbled with enthusiasm. He faced blasts with a cheer and loved the great adventure. Though, in the early days of his Diwanship, he had the luck to celebrate the peace after the world weary war, yet they were clouded with an outbreak of epidemics and a shortness of food-stuffs, in an unprecedented manner. He toiled hard, cheered the sick and the needy, and dared the difficult days with a bold heart. For the housing and the education of the depressed classes he spent liberally. One of Mr. Bhore's schemes, the starting of a porcelain and pottery factory was put into shape by him. He also assisted in the starting of a Tannery by an indigenous enterprise. The first piece of social legislation, the Nair Regulation, was brought into the Statute book. The revision of the Education Code, and the extension of female education engaged his attention. A Regulation for rendering Village Panchayats self-contained, administrative and legal units, and for giving them increased legal and financial powers, and one for endowing Municipalities with a considerable measure of financial and administrative independence were passed into law. Agreeably to the gracious announcement made by the Ruler in the reply to the address presented to His Highness by the Cochin Mahajana Sabha that it was his earnest desire to associate his people in an increasing measure with the government of the country, measures were matured for the establishment of a Legislative Council.

Mr. P. Narayana Menon had the privilege of assisting in the inauguration of the Legislative Council in the State. The

Council contained a non-official majority. The electorate was constituted on a broad franchise and with no sex disqualification; and Cochin had the signal honour of having the first lady member in a Legislative Council in India. The experimental portion of the Cochin Harbour scheme was completed during his time, and actual work was commenced on the reclamation.

Mr. T. S. Narayana Iyer presided over the first session of the Legislative Council. Before he became the Prime Minister, he was for long the first Judge of the Chief Court of the State, and his judicial equanimity he brought to bear on the administration of the land. Trichur, Mattancheri, Nemmara, and Aylore were supplied with drinking water by the pipe system. The work of the Potteries and Tanneries was suspended on account of the loss sustained in their working. The completion of the 70th year of the Ruler was celebrated throughout the State in a manner befitting that event unique in the annals of the State.

The administration of Mr. C. G. Herbert, a man with a magnificent modesty, was eventful. The conversion of the Cochin-Shoranur Railway from meter into broad-gauge was begun and the completion of the third stage of the Harbour works were effected in his time. In the discussion over the questions connected with the jurisdiction and administration of the port area, and in the preliminary negotiations linked with the Indian Federation, his meed of praise cannot be denied him for the hard, self-sacrificing work he put in. A Protector of the Depressed Classes and a Superintendent of Vernacular Education were appointed by him. A State loan was floated to meet the expenses connected with the Railway and Harbour Works. Special loans were given to agriculturists whose holdings were in danger of being sold for debts. The Income-tax Regulation was passed into law in 1108 M. E. The Rama Varmah Central Ayurvedic Hospital was started at Trichur which not only give medical advice free but also the needed medicines under certain salutary conditions.

On the 25th of Meenom 1110, Sir Shanmukham Chetty became the Diwan. With his coming, a vigorous policy was ushered in. The reform of the Secretariat, the nerve-centre of the administration, engaged his early attention. A Land Mortgage Bank and a Debt Conciliation Board were created by him to give, in some measure, relief to those groaning under an increasing burden of debts. His verve and vivacity were distinctly reflected in the satisfactory solution of the longstanding disputes over the territorial jurisdiction over a part of the backwaters near the mouth of the Cochin Harbour, and over the fourth stage works of the Harbour. A Law Commission has brought the laws of the State on a line with those obtainable in British India. The constitution of the Staff Selection Board for recruitment in the public services has set at rest the interested hue and cry over every appointment made in the State. The scheme is intended to protect the interests of all communities without in the slightest degree sacrificing the efficiency of the administrative machinery. The interest that he takes in town-planning has already gone to beautify Ernakulam and Trichur, where the introduction of electric lights have considerably enhanced the elegance of these centres. The economic welfare of the State is an important item of his consideration. He is also keen in exercising the utmost economy in the expenditure in retrenching which he takes every possible opportunity. To one who has successfully piloted the Indian Assembly, it is not much of an effort to carry on, as he is doing, the deliberations of the Legislative Council with marked harmony and mutual courtesy. Although he is one who is prepared to show propitiatory gestures to reasonable demands, yet he is out to strangle the tangled coil of communal squabbles, and refuses to be stampeded into a fearful apprehension by the indignant outbursts of mob psychology. Above all, he is gifted with that faculty to get at those cardinal facts of a far-sighted administration that lie cushioned in the solid foundation of basal principles. The Government of Cochin Act will furnish even to remote posterity reasons to recall his name with gratitude.

By this Act, Cochin is given a popular minister to administer a few of its departments, and the Chief Court is raised into a High Court.

As Sir Shanmukham Chetty is still the Diwan of the State, it is too early to take stock of the important events in the record of his administration. But, I believe, his bold statesmanlike pronouncement or "constitutional democracy" will be a fitting conclusion to this short paper on the *Diwans of Cochin*: "I feel that, as the result of practical experience, of close and intimate contact with a Ruler, I have really come to the conclusion that democracy can be safe in India only when we have got some sort of a stabilising influence like a great Ruler of the Cochin type".

[The primary object of this short sketch is to set out succinctly in their proper setting the salient features in the administration of the several Diwans of the State. Even of these only the bare enumeration is all that is possible in a short paper like this. For most of the materials I am indebted to the Reports of Administration, Mr. K. P. Padmanabha Menon's *History of Cochin* and the *State Manual*. Strictly speaking, Col. Munro must be considered to have been the first Diwan. But, as he was the British Resident, that designation was not ordinarily used in official correspondence. That is why the State Calender begins with Mr. Nanjappaya as the first Dewan. There, the name of Mr. S. Locké is twice entered as the holder of the acting Diwanship, while the names of Messrs. K. Narayana Marar, T. V. Kasturi Ranga Iyer and of P. Damodara Menon, who also had acted as Dewans, are not so referred to. However, I have taken the Calender as my guide. On account of the restriction as to space a desperately condensed sketch appeared in the special Cochin Supplement of the "Hindu" to whose management my acknowledgements are due.]