

NEW FACTS ABOUT RAMAYYAN DALAVA

By

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IN the illustrious roll-call of the Prime Ministers of Travancore, no name stands higher than that of Ramayyan Dalava, the trusted lieutenant of Maharaja Martanda Varma the Great, who ruled over the State from 1729 to 1748 A. D. This was a period crowned with mighty achievements, and in almost every one of them, Ramayyan was the never-failing counsellor and co-adjutor of his sovereign-master. Holding at first the comparatively insignificant appointment of *Samprati* or head clerk of the Palace, he was elevated in 1736 to the onerous post of Dalava, and he held that exalted office, in which were combined the functions of premier and commander-in-chief, with matchless credit to himself and manifold advantage to the State. Extending over nineteen years, his was by far the longest period of premiership in the history of Travancore. It is impossible, in this brief paper, to recount his many-sided victories in the realms of war and peace. They



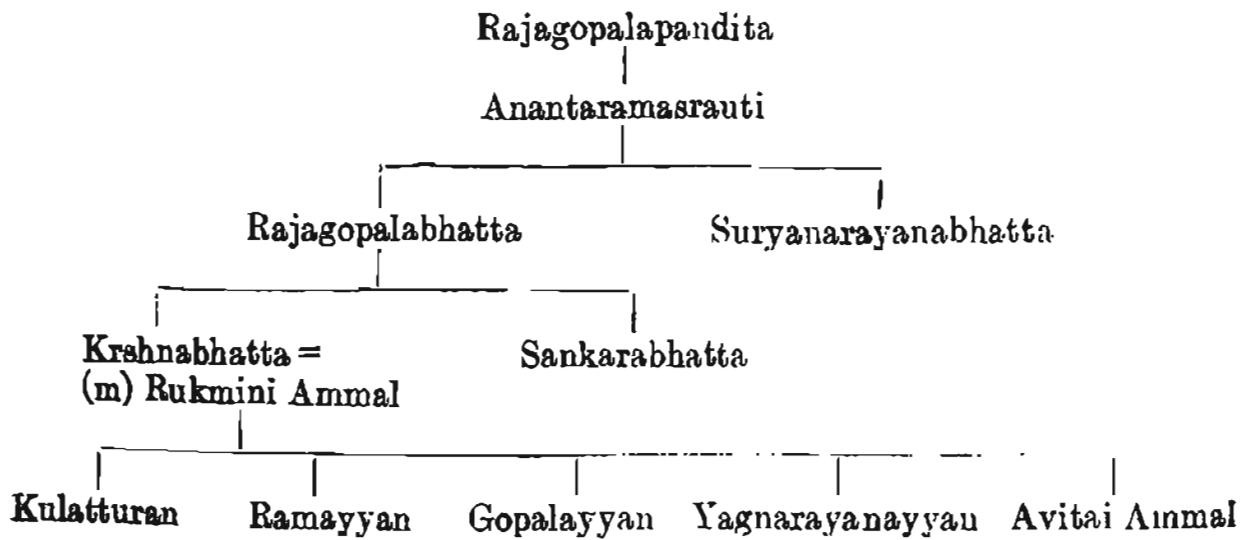
RAMAYYAN DALAVA AS REPRESENTED IN AN
OLD DRAWING.

are so well-known to every reader of the annals of this country. Suffice it to quote the eloquent tribute paid by Visakham Tirunal Sir Rama Varma, the penultimate Maharaja to

his greatness as a soldier and statesman. That Maharaja has recorded: "He, (Martanda Varma) was served by one of the ablest of ministers. Sully did not serve Henry IV of France more nobly and faithfully than Ramayyan did Martanda Varma, Ramayyan was unrelenting, unsparing and often unscrupulous to his master's enemies; but his self was merged completely in that of his master. He was as fearless in the council-room as he was in the battle field. With such a minister as his right hand, and with a strong will, abiding patience and indomitable courage, the Raja not only won back what his predecessors had lost, but subjugated one after another the neighbouring chiefs who were a perpetual source of trouble."*

This paper is contributed with the specific object of pointing out that some of the events concerning the early life of Ramayyan, recorded by historians, are not correct and that certain new facts in that connection have recently come to light mainly as the result of the painstaking research of Mr. T. K. Subrahmanya Ayyar of the Travancore Archaeological Department.

Ramayyan was a Tamil Smarta Brahmin of the Sanketi sect. He was a follower of the Kausikagotra and Apastambasutra. The original home of his family was Irukanti, a small hamlet near Rajamannarkovil on the banks of the Tamravarni river in the Tirunelveli District. The following genealogical table of that family will be found interesting.



Suryanarayanabhata was a court-pandit of Travancore. Rajagopalabhata migrated to Ervati, a village three miles to the north of Valliyur which was then part of Travancore. Here, Ramayyan was born in c. 1713.

Sankarabhata lived with his father-in-law at Aruvikara, near Tiruvattar, and Krishnabhata with his whole family moved to that place and settled down there, when Valliyur and the adjoining villages were devastated by floods in 1722. It is the fashion to speak of Ramayyan as a destitute

* Calcutta Review, April, 1884.

orphan in his early days; this is wrong. There are records to prove that Krishnabhata had purchased landed properties in south Travancore even so early in 1718. Ramayyan was introduced to Maharaja Rama Varma, the maternal uncle and predecessor of Martanda Varma, by the father-in-law of Sankarabhata who was one of his court-pandits, and that Maharaja, pleased with his precocious intelligence, gifted a house at Padmanabhapuram in his favour on the occasion of a lunar eclipse in 1726. Martanda Varma settled other properties on him in 1734. This great minister renovated the temple of Aruvikara in 1745. Ramayyan died at the comparatively young age of 43 at Mavelikkara on the Suklaturdasi day in the month of Dhanu, 931 M. E. (1755-56). The room in which he breathed his last is still preserved intact, and until recently the ladies of the leading Kshatriya family of Mavelikkara used to occupy it for delivery in the firm belief that the minister was their guardian angel.

Gopalayyan, the younger brother of Ramayyan, also worked his way up to the post of Dalava and held it from 1768-1776.

In Catakasandesa, a Sanskrit poem, written about 1785, the mountain-like fort built by Ramayyan at Quilon, after subduing the enemies of his master, is described as the very incarnation of his valour.

“प्रख्यातस्य प्रथमनृपतः प्रत्यनीकं विहन्तुम्
प्रायुक्तस्य स्वयमपि चिरं याभवज्जन्यभूमिः
प्राप्तस्यापि त्रिदशानिलयं विक्रमशैलमूर्त्यो
यत्राद्यापि प्रतिवसति तन्मन्त्रिणो रामान्नाः”

(Continued from p. 19.)

be thus stated: 'There is no inconsistency in the Hindu mind between the monotheism of Mahommed, the apparent dualism of Zoroaster, the Christian developments of the doctrine of Trinity—a variant of the Trimurti of the Hindus—or the pantheism that thinks of nature and all its manifestations as an emanation from Godhead.'

Plato demanded of a statesman that he should also be a philosopher. It is refreshing to meet with this rare combination in the author of this book.

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