



MAHARAJA SVATI-TIRUNAL

—A TRIBUTE—

BY

Vaidyasastranipuna

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MAHARAJA SVATI-TIRUNAL

MAHARAJA Svati-tirunal : the public knows him best as a great composer. He indeed was a great musician and a great composer : but this formed only one phase of his genius. He was great in many fields; he was great as a King, great as a poet, great as a true patron and student of Arts and Science, and above all, great as a *Bhakta*. He was a GENIUS.

Garbhasrīman

His Highness is often referred to as *Garbhasrīman* in recognition of the fact that he was a king even while in embryo. It is recorded that about the time he was born, it happened that an albino elephant was captured from the High Ranges. This was considered as a very rare and auspicious augury of the future greatness of the Maharaja. In passing, it may be mentioned that the only other occasion an albino elephant was caught in Travancore is during

the reign of the present Sovereign Sri Cittira-tirunal.

Musical Genius

It is the musical talent of Svati-tirunal that the public at large appear to appreciate and honour. As his compositions are mostly in Sanskrit, the average man may not be in a position to appreciate their literary merits. They are perfect *Kavyas*, fully comparable to the famous *Gita-Govindam* of Jayadeva. From both literary and musical points of view, many of Svati-tirunal's pieces outshine Jayadeva's. The poetic value of songs like "*Sa vama rusa*" is extraordinarily high. The maintenance of *Rasas* in chaste, unsullied forms and the wealth of both *Vrtha* and *Sabdalanakara* found in Svati-tirunal's compositions can stand comparison with the highest types met with in Sanskrit literature. Songs in Sanskrit rarely have *sabdalanakaras* as *Muhanas* and

Prasas of various types, as His Highness himself has stated in the introductory para to his monograph on the subject. Such *sabdalankaras* are essentially Dravidian. His Highness has incorporated them in almost every piece of his and that without the least effort. Witness the wealth of *Alankaras*, say, in "*Pahi mam sri vagisvari*", particularly in the *Caranas*. It will be noted that to keep up the *sabdalankaras* he has not sacrificed sense; nor has he brought in *Nirarthapadas* or needless words for the purpose. This is a feat in itself. His mastery of the Sanskrit language was such that he was able to utilise *svaravarnas* to build up his *Sahitya*. The same piece, *Savama rusa*, will well exemplify this. This is a wonderful achievement the like of which is rarely met with in the musical literature of any language.

The *Cittasvaras* of most of his *Varnas* are in *Sahitya* form and they often agree with the *Svaravarnas* required at the place. Compare the concord between, say, "*Manidappama*" and "*Manidha ppa ma*", a bit of *Sahitya* and its *Svara* from the same song. Another outstanding feature is that he has selected his words in such a manner that there is no need to elongate a short vowel, shorten a long one or break up a word, to meet the exigencies of singing. Such perfection in composing means consummate mastery over both language and music.

As most of his compositions are in highclass Sanskrit and as they are often heard only in badly mutilated forms in singing by musicians with little pretensions in literature, I am afraid the average public must miss to appreciate much of their literary excellence. To remedy this, a properly annotated edition of his works is the only means. The sole work of his that has an annotation is the

Campu, Syanandura pura varnana prabandham. Even here, as the annotation is in Sanskrit, its usefulness is limited. I wish that all his works are published with good Malayalam annotations; this will at once enrich Malayalam literature and bring to the notice of the average *Keraliya* the specific literary beauties of the compositions.

Master of Many Languages

Though the bulk of his works are in Sanskrit, he has also composed in Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and Malayalam. This means that he not only knew those languages but was a master in them. For, without perfect mastery over the medium it is not possible to produce poetical matter involving various limitations, in such excellent form. Besides the well-known musical compositions and the Monograph on Rhyming in music, there are six other works of importance to his credit. They are, *Bhaktimanjari*—a devotional composition, *Sripadmanabha-satakam*—hymns in praise of his Tutelary Deity, *Syanandura-pura-varnana-prabandham*—a descriptive *Campu-Kavya*, and *Ajamilopakhyanam*, *Kucelopakhyanam* and *Utsava-prabandham*, three pieces fit for *Harikatha* exposition, the first two in Sanskrit and the last in *Manipravalam*.

Patron of Art and Literature

Naturally, he was a great patron of music and literature. Vidvan Koiltampuran and Ravivarman Tampi were two of the eminent poets at his Court. He patronised both South Indian and North Indian music and had at his court North Indian musicians as Sulaiman Sahab and Allawardi. Among the many South Indian musicians at his Court there was at least one direct disciple of Tyagaraja in Kannayya.

He patronised both the Eastern and Western schools of painting; a European artist from Bombay and Ramasvami Naidu of Tanjur were at his Court. The Killimanur School of painting, afterwards popularised by Raja Ravi Varma, really originates at this time and at the inspiration of Svati-tirunal. Naturally, that School partook of the ideologies of both, the realism of the West and the Symbolism of the East.

To promote the interests of physical culture he patronised wrestlers and *Pail-wans* from even far off lands. He had at his Court savants of the Art from Nepal, Arabia, Malaya, China and even Japan.

Service to Education

To advance the interests of education in general and of English in particular His Highness established the First Free Government English school in Trivandrum. Soon after, several District English Schools were opened in different parts of the country. A printing press, the germ of the present Government Press, was started about this time and many books in Malayalam and Sanskrit were printed and published. Bailey's Anglo-Malayalam dictionary and Peet's Malayalam grammar were produced at this time and His Highness liberally rewarded the authors. A salary was settled on a certain Sastri who was giving free tuition in Sanskrit to children at the Natasala corridor of the Padmanabhasvami temple. This may be considered as the original seed of the present Sanskrit College. To cultivate the habit of reading, whereby alone one's horizon can be widened and culture in its real sense acquired, His Highness settled a grant on the English Library at Puthencantai. The present Public Library arose out of this.

His Highness had abiding interest in Sciences, particularly, Astronomy. An Ob-

servatory was soon opened at Trivandrum. It is said that His Highness himself used to take observations frequently.

These measures, it will be seen, were calculated for the cultural uplift of the country. The benefits of literacy and culture that we today enjoy are the fruits of the good seeds sown by Maharaja Svati-tirunal and protected and nurtured by his illustrious successors.

Many-sided Achievements

Till this time there was no provision for free medical aid, either Ayurvedic or Allopathic. Feeling the need for the measure and recognising the superior efficacy of the Western system, His Highness established the First Charity hospital in the State, at Taikkad. It is on this site that the present Women and Children's hospital stands. This is the beginning of the Medical Department in Travancore.

In the field of agriculture, the main economic factor in the country, His Highness devoted his careful attention. In those days the main cash crops were Cardamoms, Pepper, Ginger and a few straggling Coffee plantations. Of these, Coffee was the only one attempted on a plantation basis. His Highness subsidised the coffee plantations to attract enterprise and helped it in many ways, with the result that it assumed great economic importance and continued to do so till displaced by the more advantageous tea and rubber plantations. Wild animals such as tigers were a source of serious trouble to the planting industry as well as to commercial travellers in Kampam and Aryankavu routes. To overcome this menace, His Highness proclaimed a reward of thirty rupees per tiger killed, a sum equivalent in buying value to rupees three-hundred to-day. To further help commerce and industries, duties and taxes on many articles were reduced or abolished; duties

on no less than 165 articles were abolished on this count. The impetus of these measures on commerce and industries and the indirect gain therefrom to the Government and the country need no mention.

Great attention was paid on food crops as well. Nanjinad in South Travancore is one of the important rice producing areas in this country. This region, however, was subject to frequent draughts, making artificial irrigation imperative. To meet this need a Department of Agricultural Engineering, the first of its kind in Travancore, was established. Soon, a department of Civil Engineering on Western lines was also started. The bridge over the Karamana river was the first work undertaken by this new department.

A Firm though Kind Ruler

In the province of Governance, the primary function of kings, many wholesome improvements were promulgated by His Highness. On accession to the Throne, almost the first important action he took was to shift the Huzur offices and the Treasury from Quilon to Trivandrum to enable His Highness to have a live touch with the day-to-day activities of the Governmental machinery. His Highness was a firm though kind Ruler. He would not brook bribery or corruption in any officer or under any guise. Considerations of the status to the officers or even of personal attachment to His Highness never deflected him from awarding just punishments. He even suspended his Dewan, Mr. Subba Rao who was his tutor once and to whom he was much

attached, and caused an enquiry to be conducted on a charge of alleged bribery. When found guiltless by the committee, he was at once reinstated as the Dewan. This single instance is sufficient to proclaim the high and perfect sense of justice and fair-play His Highness had.

Far-Reaching Reforms

He turned his attention to the improvement of the Judiciary, both Civil and Criminal. Munsiff Courts were established for the first time to attend to Small-causes and Magisterial Courts to deal with Criminal offences. The jails too were improved and the prisoners were given a better and more humane treatment. To enable the reorganised Judiciary to function well new rules and regulations, on the pattern followed in British India, were framed, codified and promulgated. These form the First Regulation of Travancore.

To ensure equitable assessment in the matter of land taxes, a regular survey was ordered and carried out in 1012 M. E. This was the first complete and regular survey in Travancore. A census, the first in the country, was also carried out in 1011 and it was found that the population of Travancore was a little over 12.75 lakhs or about a fifth of what it is today.

The Army was also reorganised and brought on to a better standard of efficiency. Their equipments and uniforms were remodelled on the British Indian pattern and the Army was renamed The Nair

Brigade. Great improvements were made in the matter of their training also.

These measures were calculated to enhance the material welfare of the country. In fine, in the short period of less than 18 years, His Highness accomplished the work of almost a life-time. Every seed he sowed grew well and is still flourishing giving us the sweet fruits we are enjoying today. None of the seeds has failed: it is in this that we see the wonderful wisdom of His Highness.

The Great Bhakta

It is said that His Highness had some presentiments that his end was approaching and he therefore began preparations in the way of meditations to return to his Master Sri-Padmanabha as whose regent he served the country in the guise of a king.

The Glory of Maharaja Svati-tirunal still shines over the land of Vanci; May it shine for ever and forever.

(Broadcast Talk from Travancore Radio)