

# RESHAPING TRAVANCORE AS NATIVE MODEL STATE; ROLE OF DEWAN T MADHAVA RAO

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## Abstract

*Travancore, southernmost native state of British India is richly endowed with natural resources. Spice pockets and timber resources added fame and glory to this region even from the remote past. With the coming of the British Travancore, became a Subsidiary Ally and Travancore obtained the benefits of the Colonial rule. Madhava Rao, one among the line of Dewans who ruled Travancore make it as a Model Native State of India. By his vigorous and tactful policies Travancore attained a lot of modern amenities in various spheres.*

Erstwhile Travancore was the southernmost Indian native State, occupies the southwest portion of Indian Peninsula. It is bounded on the north by the State of Cochin and the British district of Coimbatore. Travancore is the abbreviated English form of *Tiru-Vithan-Kodu*, once the capital of the kingdom and the residence of the court. It is probably a corruption of *Sree-Vazhum-Kodu* or a place where the Goddess of Prosperity dwells. The total area of Travancore is 709 square miles. Travancore is richly endowed by nature with unlimited resources. Indian poets of eminence have described the beauty of Travancore, its forest and rivers, the abundance of its spice pockets and the wealth of its coconuts.

Modern State of Travancore was established by Marthanda Varma, who is called the maker of modern Travancore in 1729 A D. The rulers of Travancore trace their decedence from the great dynasty of Cheras. The ideals of kingship in Travancore were based on the laws of *Dharma* as expounded in the *Dharmashastras*, *Upanishads*, *Ithihasas* and *Puranas*. Travancore was ruled by a long line of illustrious rulers like Marthanda Varma, Dharmaraja, Sreemoolam Thirunal, Sree Chithra Thirunal etc. In handling the

affairs of the state, Travancore kings were assisted by Prime Ministers called *Dewan*. Among the chain of *Dewans*, the name of T Madhava Rao deserves special mention.

By his rigorous and efficient administration of the State, Madhava Rao raised Travancore to the unique and proud position of *Model Native State of India*. The services rendered by him to the State have immortalized his name. In the eloquent words of Uthram Thirunal, Ruler of Travancore, what Pericles did for Athens, what Cromwell did for England that Madhava Rao did for Travancore. Madhava Rao, son of acting Dewan Ranga Rao appointed as tutor to the Prince in August 1849 AD. He continued to discharge his duties for four and a half years till 1853. When Krishna Rao the *Dewan* of Travancore fell ill and died in December 1857, Uthram Thirunal in consultation with his nephew Prince Ayillyum Thirunal decided to appoint Madhava Rao as the new *Dewan*. He was appointed as acting *Dewan* in January 1858 AD. He was only 30 when he was appointed to the *Dewan* post. The Resident Lieutenant General Cullen reported the appointment of Madhava Rao to Madras Government in 25<sup>th</sup> January 1858 by stating that Madhava Rao, though a junior one, is a man of correct principles, his character for intelligence, energy and perfect knowledge of English and considerable experience in administration of laws of Travancore together with a well grounded knowledge of Company regulations, all point him fit for the office.

Madhava Rao first directed his attention to the improvement of the internal affairs of the country. He strengthened the relation between Travancore and Madras Government. The first few years of his administration was devoted to fiscal reforms. Madras Government was satisfied with the new turn with the assumption of office by T Madhava Rao.

In September 1858, Maharaja invited Lord Harris, Governor of Madras to honor him, with a visit. Grand preparations were made to give the Governor and his suite a fitting reception. The eastern gate at the capital, which was rebuilding was completed expeditiously and fort walls in either sides of the gate were newly constructed. The southern side of the Durbar Hall was converted into a spacious *maidan* and streets were improved. Madhava Rao received Governor and his attendance at Quilon and took them to Trivandrum. His Excellency and party left Trivandrum and embarked on board the steamer, Feroze at Valiathura Port. The visit to Trivandrum left a very favourable

impression in the mind of Lord Harris regarding the able administration of the State under the new *Dewan*. Later the Madras Government discussed the same matter with the Court of Directors. Since the appointment of Madhava Rao the petitions from Travancore have abated both in number and tone affording good grounds to the hope that the administration is safe in his hands.

The presents of the Travancore King to the London Exhibition of 1851 was of an ivory throne, it was heartily received at England. His Majesty Queen Victoria promised in return for His Highness contribution for the London Exhibition. Gift of the queen reached the British Resident towards the end of April 1860. A public Durbar accordingly was arranged to receive the presents. In commemoration of this memorable event, Public Works Department was organized with Mr. Collins as first Chief Engineer. The announcement of the excavation of a new canal from Trivandrum to Cape Comerin was made in that occasion. Its work was commenced in May 1860 and designated as Anantha Victoria Marthandan Canal. Madhava Rao was the brain behind this initiation. It was his special interest that prompts the Maharaja to declare such a novel venture. In the meantime Uthram Thirunal fell ill and died on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1860. Ayilyam Thirunal ascended the throne in 7<sup>th</sup> September 1860. He had received a liberal education in English under T Madhava Rao, who now had the honor of serving him as *Dewan*.

Madhava Rao introduced several useful reforms for the better conduct of work in the Judicial Department. In 1861, the British Civil and Criminal Procedure Code were introduced into the Travancore Courts. The name of the chief court or appeal court was changed to Sadar Court, besides this three Sessions Court and the five Jilla courts were abolished and in their place four District Courts were established with civil and criminal powers. In 1864, Regulation was passed for the appointment of duly qualified *Vakils* to plead in the courts. The salaries of the Judges were increased considerably.

In 1861, the *Sarkar Anchal Department* (Post Office) was thrown open to the public and arrangements were made for the conveyance of private letters at rates framed on the British Indian model. *Dewan* also turned his attention to the general system of taxation prevalent in the country. The export and import duties were largely cut down. In one heavily taxed, Nanchinad District, the land tax was also reduced. To remedy the evils in the taxation and revenue His Highness was pleased to issue a notification in June 1865

declaring all Pattam lands to be private, heritable and sale-able property. This was followed by another beneficent notification, under date 8<sup>th</sup> May 1867, ensuring fixity of tenure and unrestricted continuity of enjoyment of land holding to the agricultural riots.

The cause of education was dear to Sir Madhava Rao and to made rapid strides during his administration. A fully equipped Arts College at Trivandrum, English and Vernacular schools all over the country, Girls school and a book committee for the preparation of necessary textbook are so many beacon lights that mark his career in Travancore. Hand in hand with education, medical dispensation also progressed very satisfactorily. A large civil hospital was founded attached to lying-in-hospital and a Lunatic Asylum in Trivandrum was notable achievements. Ten district hospitals besides jail and other dispensaries were functioning in the state at that time.

Another severe problem successfully tackled by Madhava Rao was the *Shannar* disturbances of South Travancore. The *Shannar* converts who were looked down upon by the high caste Hindus relying on the support of the Missionaries caused great annoyance to them. They took the liberty of appearing in public not only with the *Kuppayam* already sanctioned, but with additional cloth or scarf over the shoulders as worn by women of higher castes. In December 1858 AD the two communities had assumed hostile positions against each other and troubles of a serious nature broke out.

Dewan Madhava Rao grappled with the situation with his characteristic energy and thoroughness of the matter. In this venture he was cordially aided by Deputy Peshkar Shangoonny Menon, an officer of considerable experience. The *Dewan* inspected the disaffected parts of the country and impressed on all the necessity for implicit obedience to the authority of the State. Madhava Rao sent a report on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1859 in which he gave a clear and concise account of the origin, development and suppression of the disturbances. The report testify the impress of a mastermind more than that it was written half a century ago by a young, untied official barely 30 years old. This document may rank among the First Class State papers on record.

General Cullen died at Alleppy in 1862, and Mr. Maltby succeeded him as Resident. He was a very capable officer and hardly took up the task of improving the country in cooperation with the *Dewan*. Madhava Rao with the support of the new Resident donea lot of welfare measures in the State. He has the due credit of establishing the Public Works

Department in Travancore. He fostered it and developed it with the resources of the country. Construction of AV M canal was his dream project, but with lack of attention from British he was forced to drop the project and turned to other ones. Among the works newly begun, was that of Varkala Tunnels. The work of the Varkala Barrier Canal was very costly. By opening the cliffs, direct navigation from Trivandrum to Shornur became possible. The Travancore-Shornur Canal is the main backwater route of the State about 148 miles in length and it involves *two tunnels at Varkala*, with a length of 722 and 350 meters. First tunnel is at Sivagiri and second tunnel is at Chelakoor, its width-4.87m, bed level-0.8m below MSL and height-50m from the bed level. Tunnel No.1 was opened to traffic on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1877 by a proclamation of the Travancore Maharaja. And its content is to allow the people to travel through Varkala Canal. The second Tunnel was opened in 1880 and estimated cost of the work was the then more than 17 lakhs.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> January 1867 Ayilyum Thirunal visited Madras and Madhava Rao was presented with the Insignia of the Order of Knighthood of the State of India. By his vigorous and efficient administration of the State to the unique and proud position of Model native State of India. The services rendered by him to the State have immortalized his name. It may be truly said of him without fear of contradiction that the benefits of good government which Travancore then enjoy were more or less due to his wonderful energy, sagacity and wise statesmanship. But in spite of his good intentions and good work he was not able to return to the confidence of the King to the last. The King's mind was poisoned against the *Dewan* by a number of circumstances and misunderstandings soon rising between Rao and his royal master. He had to retire from his service in 1872 and the Maharaja recognized his good services and granted him a handsome pension of Rs. 1000 per month which he enjoyed for 19 years. He wished to spend the remaining years of his reign at Madras. But later he accepted the invitation of Maharaja of Indore to work in his service. He was only 46 years old at that time and he remained in the post for two years. Later he joined the service of The King of Baroda for seven years from 1875 to 1852. He died on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1891. In honor of Madhava Rao, a bronze statue standing in the main road on the western side of the Secretariat, Trivandrum was erected.



Sir T Madhava Rao was an arduous and incessant labour for the whole life time having giant strengths, clear headed and industrious, being an indefinable worker, he did a lot. In politics he was cautious and conservative as he was in religious and social questions. Above all he was honest, earnest and God fearing. When he came to Travancore he found it in lowest stage of degradation in political organization but left it as a Model native State.

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