

ROLE OF DEWANS IN TRAVANCORE ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

Travancore was one of the princely states situated in the southern part of India. The early history of Travancore traces its descent from the old Chera dynasty, one of the three great dynasties of the ancient Tamil country. The King of Travancore remained the source of all authority, judicial, administrative, and legislative. The government of the country was conducted in the name and under the control of His Highness the King. Dewans were appointed by the Maharaja remained the Prime Minister. The Dewan was assisted by a government secretariat. In 1857, Rama Rao was appointed Tahsildar of Kalkulam. Shankara Subaiyar's talents were spotted by the then Dewan, Sir T. Madhava Rao who appointed him Deputy Sheristadar of Police. Krishnaswamy Rao was an Indian civil servant, judge, and administrator who served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1898 to 1904. Madhava Rao was an Indian administrator and statesman who served as the Dewan of Mysore kingdom from 1906 to 1909 and Baroda from 1910 to 1913. In December 1896, Rajagopalachari was appointed Dewan by Maharaja Rama Varma of Cochin. Mannath Krishnan Nair served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1914 to 1920. Dewan Bahadur T. Raghavaiah was an Indian administrator who served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1920 to 1925. Subramanya Iyer was an Indian administrator who served as the Dewan of the princely state of Travancore from 1929 to 1932. Muhammad Habibullah was an Indian politician and administrator who served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1934 to 1936. P. G. N. Unnithan was the last Dewan (Prime Minister) of independent Travancore. He succeeded Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer on August 20th, 1947. The king was the center and source of all authority namely legislative, administrative and judicial. The administration was conducted in his name. The Dewan was the chief executive of the state. He regulated and exercised extensive authority over all the departments of the government.

Key Words: Travancore - administrative - government - Prime Minister - Tahsildar - Dewan - Dalit - upliftment - administrator - politician - princely state - regulated - departments

Introduction:

Travancore was one of the princely states situated in the southern part of India. It has different names in different periods. Generally, it is known as Kerala because this country is enriched with coconut groves. Once it was ruled by the Cheras and hence it is called Cheranadu or Vanchidesam. The early history of Travancore traces its descent from the old Chera dynasty, one of the three great dynasties of the ancient Tamil country. From the eleventh to the sixteenth century the Nambudiris ruled Travancore. The King of Travancore remained the source of all authority, judicial, administrative, and legislative. The government of the country was conducted in the name and under the control of His Highness the King. Dewans were appointed by the Maharaja remained the Prime Minister. The Dewan was assisted by a government secretariat. The administration was further carried out by the Departments. South Travancore remained a part of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore till 1947.

Rama Rao

Rama Rao was born in Trivandrum in the year 1831. Rama Rao had his schooling at the Rajah's Free School in Trivandrum and the L. M. S. Seminary at Nagercoil. On completion of his education, Rama Rao entered the Travancore civil service and worked as a clerk. When he did not receive the promotion, Rama Rao quit the job and accepted an offer as a translator in district and sessions court in Calicut. In 1857, Rama Rao was appointed Tahsildar of Kalkulam. Rama Rao was hailed by European missionaries for the character shown by him as a tahsildar. He was soon promoted as Deputy Sheristadar and as the First Sheristadar in the Huzur Cutcherry. He became Deputy Peishkar of the Quilon Division in 1862 and he served from 1862 to 1878 and Kottayam division from 1878 to 1887, when he was appointed Dewan of Travancore. Rama Rao died on June 5th, 1895.

Shankara Subaiyar

Shankara Subaiyar was born in 1836 in Travancore. His maternal grandfather was a pundit of the Appeal Court. Shankara Subaiyar had his schooling at the Rajah's Free School, Trivandrum. On completion of his schooling in 1853, Shankara Subaiyar joined the Travancore state service as a teacher on a monthly salary of Rs. 5. Shankara Subaiyar's talents were spotted by the then Dewan, Sir T. Madhava Rao who appointed him Deputy Sheristadar of Police. Shankara Subaiyar served as the Director of Vernacular education and as Boundary Commissioner, helped resolve a boundary dispute between the Travancore and Cochin states. In 1882, Shankara Subaiyar was appointed Settlement Dewan Peishkar of the Revenue Settlement by the then Dewan V. RamaIyangar. S Shankara Subaiyar performed his job well and completed the settlement of Najanad, Trivandrum, and Chirayinkil taluks. In 1888, Shankara Subaiyar was nominated to the Travancore Legislative Assembly.

Travancore was witnessing a movement for Dalit upliftment at the time Shankara Subaiyar became Dewan in 1892. There was no representation for the low-caste Hindu community Ezhavas in the Travancore Legislative Council, constituted in 1888. Hence, in 1895, the Ezhavas presented a memorial to the Dewan demanding more political representation. .However, the Ezhavas received no response. Shankara Subaiyar retired as Dewan in April 1898 on a monthly pension of Rs.800. The Government of British India recognized his services by making him a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire. Sir Arthur Havelock, the Governor of Madras appointed him a non-official member of the Madras Legislative Council. Shankara Subaiyar died in September 1904.

Dewan Bahadur K. Krishnaswamy Rao

Krishnaswamy Rao was an Indian civil servant, judge, and administrator who served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1898 to 1904. Krishnaswamy Rao was born in September 1845. He had his schooling and on completion of his matriculation at the age of sixteen, he entered government service. Krishnaswamy Rao began his career in October 1864 as a record-keeper in the Nellore district court at a salary of Rs. 20. In 1867, he was promoted as Sheristadar because of his superior abilities and became a District Munsiff in July 1870. In 1883, he was appointed sub-judge at Cocanada. In May 1894, he was made Chief Justice of Travancore by the then Maharaja and served from 1884 till his appointment as Dewan in 1898. Krishnaswamy Rao died in 1923.

Vishwanath Patankar Madhava Rao

Madhava Rao was born in February 1850 in a Deshastha Brahmin family of Kumbakonam, Madras Presidency. His ancestors were Thanjavur Marathas who had migrated to the Tanjore district during the rule of the Thanjavur Marathas. Madhava Rao was educated at Kumbakonam College by William Archer Porter. He completed his B. A. in 1869 and was appointed as a headmaster in a royal school in the Mysore kingdom. Madhava Rao entered the service of the Mysore kingdom in 1869 as a headmaster of the royal school. He was later appointed public prosecutor of Mysore and served in the Judicial and Revenue departments. He also served as Inspector General of Police, Plague Commissioner in the Mysore kingdom from 1898 to 1901, and Revenue Commissioner from 1902 to 1904 before being appointed Dewan in 1906.

Madhava Rao served as Dewan of the Mysore kingdom from June 30th, 1906 to March 31st, 1909. In 1906, a law was passed empowering members of the Mysore Legislative Assembly to pass laws. The new legislature was constituted on March 6th, 1907. The Land Revenue Code was amended to make the Revenue Commissioner the Chief Revenue authority and was also given charge of the treasury. A Department of Public Health was created and competitive exams for the Mysore Civil Service were revived. Taxes on areca nut were revoked. Kindergarten schools were introduced in the kingdom and primary education was made free. Several irrigation projects were undertaken. The Marikanite Works were completed in 1906-07 and the Cauvery Power Works at Belagola in 1907-08. The Government sanctioned a free grant of land to the Indian Institute of Science. Electric lighting was introduced in the civil and military station of Bangalore city on January 1, 1908, and for Mysore city on September 26, 1908. Dewan of Travancore in office 1904–1906, Monarch Moolam Thirunal.

Bahadur Sir Perungavur Rajagopalachari

Rajagopalachari also spelled in contemporary records as Sir P. Rajagopala Achariyar, was an Indian administrator. He was the Dewan of Cochin State from December 1896 to August 1901 and of Travancore from 1906 to 1914. Rajagopalachari was born in Madras and educated at Presidency College and Madras Law College. He joined the Judicial Department Indian Civil Service on 3rd May 1886 and was appointed deputy collector in December 1887. From 2nd May 1890 to December 1896, he served as an assistant collector and magistrate in Madras Province.

Dewan of Cochin:-

In December 1896, Rajagopalachari was appointed Dewan by Maharaja Rama Varma of Cochin. He served in his capacity from 1896 to 1901. During his tenure as Dewan, the Cochin Native Merchants Association was founded. This later became the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Cochin. In 1901, the Central Records of the Cochin State were established at Tripunithura. This later evolved into the Kerala State Archives Department.

Dewan of Travancore :

In 1901, he was appointed Registrar of Co-operative Credit Societies in the Madras Presidency and then served as Assistant Collector from March 1902 until 1906, when he was appointed Dewan of Travancore state. The Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham was established in 1907 by social reformer Ayyankali to campaign for education for Dalits. Rajagopalachari was supportive of the movement, and in 1907 the government of

Travancore passed an order for the admission of Dalit children in schools. However, the upper-caste landlords who owned most of the schools were obstinate in allowing Dalit children into their schools and openly defied the government order. A major strike erupted. Low caste agrarian workers refused to farm their fields. In 1910, Rajagopalachari and Mitchell, who headed the education department, made the order for admission of Dalit children public, thereby putting an end to the controversy. Rajagopalachari also brought forth reforms in the administration. Dalits, who were previously excluded from the administration, were made eligible for nomination to the State Assembly. Ayyankali became the first Dalit member to be nominated to the Travancore State Assembly. Rajagopalachari also donated 8 acres of land for the construction of an Islamic college by Sheikh Mohammad Hamadani Thangal.

In 1914, Rajagopalachari returned to Madras as Secretary of the Judicial Department, the first Indian to hold the post. In 1917, he was appointed to the Council of the Governor of Madras. When the Madras Legislative Council came into being, as per the provisions of the Government of India Act 1919, on 17th December 1920, Rajagopalachari was elected as the first President. It is believed that he was instrumental in formulating the no-confidence motion against the Justice Party Government of the Raja of Panagal. His tenure came to an end in 1923 and he was succeeded by L. D. Samikannu Pillai. In 1923, he was appointed to the Council of India in London, resigning in 1925 due to ill-health and returning to India. Rajagopalachari died on 1 December 1927

Dewan Bahadur Sir Mannath Krishnan Nair

Mannath Krishnan Nair was an Indian politician from the Indian National Congress and later, Justice Party who served as a member of the Madras Legislative Council and later, the executive council of the Governor of Madras. He also served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1914 to 1920. Krishnan Nair was born in 1870 in the Mannath family of landlords from the Malabar district of Madras Presidency. Krishnan Nair had his schooling in the Malabar district and higher education at the Government College, Calcutta, and Madras Christian College. Krishnan Nair studied law at the Madras Law College before enrolling as a lawyer. At a young age, he joined the Indian National Congress and participated in its meetings. He was elected to the Madras Legislative Council in 1904 and served as its member from 1904 to 1910. Krishnan Nair was appointed Dewan of Travancore in 1914 and he succeeded Sir P. Rajagopalachari. Krishnan Nair served as Dewan of Travancore from 1914 to 1920.

Dewan Bahadur T. Raghavaiah

Dewan Bahadur T. Raghavaiah was an Indian administrator who served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1920 to 1925. He was a favorite of the Maharaja Moolam Thirunal. His refusal to allow low-caste to enter Hindu temples is believed to have led to the Vaikom Satyagraha. Raghavaiah was born in a Telugu-speaking family from the northern part of the Madras Presidency. He had his education in Madras city and entered the provincial civil service. Raghavaiah was appointed Dewan of Travancore in 1920 replacing M. Krishnan Nair. Raghavaiah's administration is considered to be a mixture of progress as well as discontent. He is credited with having reformed the electoral system in Travancore. However, Raghavaiah's Dewanship is remembered as a period of turbulence and discontent. In 1920, he raised the tuition fees for students in government colleges. This was followed by protests all over the state. Untouchables had been prohibited

from entering the Vaikom temple since time immemorial. In the early 1920s, however, through the efforts of politician T. K. Madhavan, the Indian nationalist Indian National Congress resolved to put an end to the practice. Madhavan petitioned Raghavaiah, the then Dewan in 1924, to introduce legislation enabling untouchables to enter the Vaikom temple and other temples in the kingdom. But Raghavaiah being a staunch, orthodox, upper-caste Hindu, refused. This led to widespread agitations throughout and made the administration, highly unpopular.

V. Subramanya Iyer

Subramanya Iyer was an Indian administrator who served as the Dewan of the princely state of Travancore from 1929 to 1932. Subramanya Iyer was born on October 21st, 1877 to V. Subramania Iyer. He studied at St. Joseph's College and set up practice as an advocate in Travancore. He served as the Chief Justice of the High Court of Travancore before being appointed Dewan in 1929. Subramanya Iyer was appointed Dewan of Travancore in 1929 succeeding E. W. Watts. He served as Dewan till 1932 when he was succeeded by Muhammad Habibullah. In 1930, Venkatarama Iyer was appointed Commissioner of Travancore Devaswom. In 1931, Subramanya Iyer had to deal with a student's hartal in Travancore which followed the death of Motilal Nehru. Subramanya Iyer remained active in public life following his retirement as Dewan.

On November 25th, 1932, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, advisor to the Maharaja, appointed him President of the Committee to gauge public opinion before introducing the Temple Entry Proclamation. The other members of the Committee were Ulloor Parameswara Iyer, Mahadeva Iyer, and Nambi Nilakanta Sharma. The commission interviewed people who were for as well as against temple entry and submitted a report strongly discouraging temple entry. However, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer ignored the report and proceeded to introduce the landmark legislation. In 1934, Subramanya Iyer became the President of the Kerala Hindu Mission. On the death of Rabindranath Tagore in 1941, a Kerala Tagore Academy was formed with Subramanya Iyer as its President. Sir Thomas Austin was a British civil servant of the Indian civil service and administrator who served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1932 to 1934. Thomas Austin was born in 1887 to a British clergyman, Rev. T. Austin. He was educated at Plymouth College and Jesus College, Cambridge. Thomas Austin entered the Indian civil service in 1910 and served in various junior positions before being appointed District Collector of Nilgiris in 1929. He served as Collector of Nilgiris from 1929 to 1932 when he was appointed Dewan of Travancore on a two-year contract. In his later life, Austin also served as Chief Secretary of the Government of Madras. Austin was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire in 1945. Austin died in 1976 at the age of 89.

Nawab Khan Bahadur Sir Muhammad Habibullah

Muhammad Habibullah was an Indian politician and administrator who served as the Dewan of Travancore from 1934 to 1936. Habibullah was born in Madras to Aushukh Hussain Khan Saheb on September 22nd, 1869. He was a member of the Arcot royal family and closely related to the Nawabs of Arcot. He had his schooling at Zila High School, Saidapet, and graduated in law. He joined the bar at Vellore

in July 1888. Habibullah was involved in local board politics right from the early stages. In 1895, he was elected Non-Official Honorary Chairman of the Vellore Municipality.

Habibullah resigned his practice at the bar on being elected Official Secretary of the municipality in September 1901. He served as Secretary till September 1905 when he was elected Chairman. Habibullah served for 14 years (1905-19) as Chairman of the Vellore municipality. From July 1919 to January 1920, Habibullah acted as a member of the executive council of the Governor of Madras in the absence of P. Rajagopalachari who was on leave. Habibullah was India's delegate to the first session of the League of Nations in 1919. On 17th December 1920, he was appointed as the member for Revenue in the Governor's Executive Council for the Madras Presidency, a post he held till 27th December 1924. In 1925, Habibullah was appointed a member of the Executive Council of the Viceroy of India and served from 1925 to 1930. He was also the leader of India's delegation to South Africa in 1926-1927.

Dewan of Travancore:

Muhammad Habibullah was appointed Divan of Travancore by H.H. Maharaja Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma on the 15th of March, 1934. During the two years that he held the Dewanship of the state, many reforms and developments were implemented in the state, particularly in the electorates, the state forces (the Nair Brigade), and the civil services. Immediately after he assumed office, Muhammad Habibullah appointed a committee for Franchise and Delimitation to determine the question of adequate representation of the many communities of the state in the electorates and state assemblies. Specific numbers of seats were reserved for Christians, Ezhavas, and Muslims in the general constituencies. However owing to objections by the Nairs, the issue was reopened many years later in 1939 for resettlement. During 1935-36 the Dewan appointed a new Public Service Commissioner for the first time in Travancore for recruitment into the civil services of the state, without caste and religious prejudices. For positions in the government service that drew below Rs. 150 per mensem, preference was to be given to weaker sections of society, however, for positions above that scale, merit was made the only criterion.

Even so, owing to the need felt for communal representation, it was decided that for 60% of the appointments only efficiency based on the exams would be considered, whereas the remained 40% of appointments would be filled by efficient persons with a preference on a communal basis along with the exams. However, the military and the temple services were excluded from these principles. In 1935 the Pallivasal Hydroelectric Scheme was started for the production of electricity on a large and profitable scale in Travancore. The next important activity of Dewan Habibullah was concerning the Nair Brigade. In 1936 Travancore joined the Indian State Forces whereby the Nair Brigade and the Maharajah's Bodyguard came to be known as the Travancore State Forces. So far only Nairs, who were the military caste of Travancore were allowed to join the forces of the state but by new legislation, military service was thrown open to the other communities of the state as well. The Maharajah himself was the Colonel-in-Chief of the forces. Habibullah died in Travancore on May 16th, 1948.

P. G. N. Unnithan:

P. G. N. Unnithan was the last Dewan (Prime Minister) of independent Travancore. He succeeded Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer on August 20th, 1947 following the latter's resignation (after the attempt on Sir

CP's life at the Swathi Thirunal Music Academy on July 25th, 1947). He chaired the Travancore Constitutional Reforms Committee. He relinquished office on March 24th, 1948 when a people's government led by Sri Pattom Thanu Pillai as Prime Minister took over. PGN Unnithan hailed from the Edassery Pattaveetil Family of Mavelikkara which had a history of high military service to the Travancore Royal Family. His father Ittamar Koil Thampuran was from the Haripad Palace and nephew of Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran. He married Bhargavi Amma, the daughter of Sri P.G. Govinda Pillai (Government advocate at Alappuzha) of Pullampilla Pichanattu (Viruthiyathu) Family of Chengannur. His sister was married to the son of famed artist Raja Ravi Varma of the Royal Family of Mavelikkara. He had four children. He died on April 5th, 1965.

Conclusion:

The king was the center and source of all authority namely legislative, administrative and judicial. The administration was conducted in his name. The Dewan was the chief executive of the state. He regulated and exercised extensive authority over all the departments of the government. He was assisted by an organized secretariat under a chief secretary and the public services. It was based on the model of British administration. The Directors of the department were held responsible for the proper administration of matters entrusted to them. They addressed their proposal to the government and the Dewan examined them with the support of the officers of the secretariat. The Maharaja maintained his correspondence with the Dewan through a private secretary. The people had the privilege to initiate and pass laws on matters of local interest. The village assemblies maintained an intimate association with the day-to-day life of the people and regulated local administration.

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