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TRAVANCORE YEARS OF C.P.RAMASWAMI AIYAR OF TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT :

The period of the Travancore years holds great significance in the political and administrative journey of C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar. During his tenure as the Diwan of Travancore State from 1936 to 1947, he not only championed social reforms but also displayed visionary economic thinking. C.P. engaged in a wide range of activities within the state of Travancore. His actions were driven by a strong personal conviction and courage, undeterred by any threats. He often described himself as a Brahmin by birth but a Kshatriya by temperament. One notable example of his intellectual foresight was the Temple Entry Movement, which he initiated despite knowing that it would provoke anger and resentment among the upper castes. Nevertheless, he introduced the movement, leading to a significant level of bitterness. In fact, when C.P.R.'s granddaughter fell ill, a large crowd gathered around the vehicle he was traveling in, cursing that she should die. To those who truly understood C.P.R., he was one of the most misunderstood public figures. He was renowned for his broad-mindedness and his actions were revolutionary in nature. The Temple Entry Movement, in particular, showcased his philanthropic spirit and stood as one of the noblest achievements in the realm of reform activities. The controversy surrounding the issue of Travancore State's accession eventually reached a boiling point, resulting in an assassination attempt on C.P.R.'s life. His diwanship came to an end due to it. After retiring from public life, C.P. R. settled in Ooty but was frequently absent in response to various demands. As the administrator of Travancore State, he achieved numerous milestones. Firstly, he allowed untouchables to enter temples, abolished the death penalty, introduced adult suffrage, inaugurated a mosque in Quilon, appointed Anna Chandy as the first female District Judge who later became the first Indian woman High Court Judge after the formation of Kerala, appointed Poonen Lukose as the first female Surgeon General of Travancore, implemented mid-day meals for underprivileged students, established Travancore University in Trivandrum, constructed the first cement concrete highway in India between Trivandrum and Cape Comorin, and nationalized road transport in Travancore. He successfully industrialized the entire state of Travancore.



KEY WORDS: C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar, Diwan, Travancore , Trivandrum, Travancore University, Sri Chitra Tirunal, Temple Entry, Industry.

INTRODUCTION:

In the life of C.P, the Dewanship of the Princely state of Travancore was a significant honor bestowed upon him by the Royal family of Travancore, specifically, King Chitra Tirunal and his mother

Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bai. He served in this position from 1936 to 1947, during which he wielded power at its peak.

Prior to India gaining independence from British rule in 1947, the country was divided into British India and numerous independent Princely States, totaling over 500. British India comprised major presidencies such as Bombay, West Bengal, and Madras, each with a vast territorial expanse. The governance of these presidencies was overseen by a Governor, typically an Englishman. On the other hand, the Princely States were under the rule of princely families who regarded their kingdoms as personal estates. Many of these rulers led extravagant lifestyles, often traveling abroad and living luxuriously, with little regard for the welfare of the public. However, there were exceptions like Travancore and Mysore, where the Royal Families were more progressive and displayed concern for the well-being of their subjects. In major Princely States, the British maintained a Resident representative to safeguard their interests.

Travancore was renowned as the abode of the Presiding Deity Lord Padmanabha, and its rulers were devout and pious. They viewed themselves as the Lord's representatives entrusted with governing the land. Unlike numerous other princely families, they embraced a modest way of life and identified themselves with the star that governed their birth, such as Swathi Tirunal, Mulam Tirunal, and Chitra Tirunal.

The throne of Travancore followed a matrilineal system, where the son of the ruling king did not inherit the throne upon his father's death. Instead, the kingship was assumed by the son of the deceased king's sister. In cases where there were no male heirs, girls were adopted into the royal family, and their sons would then become the king. This is how Sri Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma, the son of Junior Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bai, was installed as the king after the death of Sri Mulam Tirunal in 1924, as he had no heirs. Since the new king was only twelve years old, Senior Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931) was appointed as the Regent.¹ Both the Junior and Senior Maharanis were the daughters of two cousin sisters who were adopted into the royal family. However, there was a strained relationship between them, leading to a lack of harmony between the Junior and Senior Maharanis.

Upon the declaration of the Regency, the Senior Maharani acquired a newfound authority and utilized it to torment and degrade the Junior Maharani, Sethu Parvathi Bai. This mistreatment deeply angered the Junior Maharani as her son held the title of king, yet the Regent wielded all the king's powers. In her search for assistance, she turned to C.P.R., who ultimately provided the support she sought.

C.P.R. was already familiar with the Travancore Royal family during this period. Previously, Mulam Tirunal had sought C.P.R.'s assistance in handling certain legal matters in the Travancore court. Additionally, the younger Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bai had been meeting with C.P.R. in Ooty, seeking his advice on ensuring her son Chitra Tirunal's ascension to the throne of Travancore and also on bringing an end to the Regency of the Senior Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai in the state. C.P.R. was gradually becoming involved in the politics of Travancore, and this involvement was not without purpose.

C.P.R. initiated the submission of petitions to both the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India in London, requesting the formal appointment of King Chitra Tirunal to the Travancore throne, thereby bringing an end to the Regency of the Senior Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bai.

The senior Maharani utilized her husband, Rama Verma Valiya Koil Thampuram, to lobby in political circles in the state, seeking sympathy and support to extend her Regency and hinder the young king from assuming full rulership. Speculations circulated in elite circles that the young king might have physical disabilities preventing him from ruling independently even after reaching adulthood, necessitating prolonged Regency. The Thampuram enjoyed favor with the local British Resident in Trivandrum and maintained close relationships with affluent Christian and British planters.

The year 1931 saw Lord Willingdon becoming the Viceroy in Delhi. C.P.R. managed to persuade the Viceroy that the king was fully capable of ruling Travancore, despite ongoing rumours. A meeting between the young king and the Viceroy took place in Simla. Following the meeting, the Viceroy supported the idea of legitimizing the king's reign and putting an end to the Regency. However, he made it a condition that C.P.R. should serve as the king's Constitutional Advisor.²

However, C.P.'s family, particularly his mother, did not support C.P.R. travelling to Trivandrum. C.P.R. had no choice but to obey the Viceroy's instructions, as failing to do so could potentially jeopardize the young king's claim to the throne.

C.P.R. faced constant opposition and criticism despite his good intentions and efforts to improve the welfare of the people. The population of Travancore, in particular, was critical of him due to his outsider status as a Tamil Brahmin.³ However, he disregarded caste differences and treated everyone equally. His compassionate nature was evident when he admitted a scheduled caste youth, Sivaraj, into his law chamber and treated him no differently than his other juniors.⁴ C.P.R. was not only a renowned lawyer but also a skilled administrator, as demonstrated during his four-year tenure in the Governor's council in Madras State. The successful implementation of the Pykara, Mettur, and lower Bhavani schemes attested to his ability to overcome opposition and achieve positive outcomes.

C.P.R. assumed the position of Dewan of Travancore state on 8th October 1936. Right from the beginning, C.P.R. worked diligently towards the progress of the state.⁵ In just five weeks of taking office as Dewan, C.P.R. advised the Maharajah to issue a the Temple Entry Proclamation on 12th November 1936 to allow Harijans, specifically the Ezhava community, entry into all temples in the state and put an end to untouchability.⁶ Travancore became the first state in India to implement temple entry for the Harijans, with minimal opposition from other communities. The majority of the population in Travancore celebrated this historic decision. Both the Maharajah and C.P.R. received praise for their commendable actions, with numerous leaders sending congratulatory messages.⁷

The state Assembly of the neighboring Madras state, under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari, passed a resolution of congratulations. Gandhi, during his visit to Trivandrum, delivered speeches at numerous gatherings in the state, expressing immense joy regarding the actions taken by the Maharaja, his mother, and the capable Dewan. In order to commemorate this event, Gandhi instructed his disciple Mahadev Desai to write a book, which was titled '*Travancore Epic*' as suggested by Sarojini Naidu.

The king, his mother, and the Dewan C.P.R shared a strong understanding, with the royal family having complete trust in their Dewan's commitment to the welfare of the state.

C.P.R.'s allegiance to the king was beyond doubt, just as his commitment to implementing welfare measures in such a setting. Consistently, he ensured that all his proposals were documented and granted approval by the monarchy, leaving no room for ambiguity or misunderstanding at any point.

An additional significant advancement occurred within the realm of education. He implemented free and mandatory primary education for all individuals. Travancore became the pioneer state to initiate a mid-day meal programme for underprivileged school children with the Vanchi Poor Fund.⁸ This initiative was later expanded to include individuals with disabilities. At his own cost, he constructed a hall known as the Seethalakshmi Ammal Annadana Bhavan to facilitate this cause.⁹

The school system underwent a comprehensive transformation under his leadership, with courses being restructured and a strong emphasis placed on promoting general education through the inclusion of handicrafts, music, and physical training. Additionally, he took measures to address the mismanagement of funds in privately operated schools and safeguarded the rightful salaries of the teaching staff.

He established the groundwork for a new university in Trivandrum, marking a significant development in higher education. Previously, the colleges in the region were affiliated with Madras University. However, C.P.R. believed that comprehensive higher education was essential for the progress of the state. The proposal for a new university faced strong opposition from Madras University, as they were concerned about losing revenue from the colleges that would no longer be under their jurisdiction.¹⁰ Through C.P.R.'s efforts, the University of Travancore was established on 1st November 1937, under the Travancore University Act. The Maharaja assumed the role of chancellor, his mother became the Pro-Chancellor, and C.P.R. himself became the Vice-Chancellor.¹¹

Trivandrum's Flaghouse, which was previously owned by the Travancore State forces, was obtained for the university and transformed into its headquarters. A central library was established for the university and experienced rapid growth with the addition of valuable books and manuscripts. By

the time C.P.R. departed from Travancore, the library boasted a collection of over 20,000 precious palm leaf manuscripts. In order to attract talented individuals, the university offered appealing salary packages to professors and teachers. The University of Travancore bestowed its founder Vice Chancellor, C.P.R., with the first honorary doctorate.

C.P.R. incentivized private organizations such as the Nair Service Society and the Sree Narayana Trusts to establish colleges under their affiliation. C.P.R., serving as a part-time Vice Chancellor, dedicated one hour daily to the university. Additionally, he generously contributed Rs. 50,000, a substantial amount during that era.

During the reign of C.P.R.'s leadership, the state of Travancore made significant progress in the areas of power production and industrial growth. C.P.R. possessed the foresight and passion to motivate business owners to initiate a diverse range of industries. He also contributed 52% of the capital required for these joint ventures from the government's end. Certain sectors were designated for government-led development, while others were open for private entrepreneurs. The sectors allocated for government involvement included road transport, ceramics, insurance, and telecommunications. At every step, the government avoided taking loans for the investment in these projects. Meanwhile, the expanding industries were boosting the state's income. Although the initial investment in these industries was modest in comparison to today's standards, they were still substantial at the time and played a crucial role in expanding the economy and creating additional job opportunities for both educated individuals and others. Travancore became a benchmark for other states, with no other state matching the level of industrialization that Travancore achieved during that period.

The British Regents in India were not truly committed to fostering Indian industries. Conversely, they hindered existing industries to compel the nation to seek imports from overseas, primarily from England.

C.P.R. understood that the essential requirement for operating the factories was electric power. Consequently, the Pallivasal project, a hydroelectric initiative, was initiated, providing plentiful energy. This allowed numerous cities in the state to be electrified, and a significant amount of power was utilized by the Indian Aluminium Co. at Alwaye.

The establishment of the first fertilizer factory in India took place in Travancore, with the state government providing 52% of the capital. However, C.P.R. faced significant challenges in importing machinery and technology from abroad, as well as obtaining foreign exchange for these expenses. Surprisingly, even the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow strongly opposed the creation of FACT (Fertilizers and Chemicals of Travancore Ltd.). This opposition stemmed from the fear that the factory would become a competitor to the Imperial Chemical Industries in the U.K., where he was expected to assume the role of Chairman after stepping down as Viceroy.

C.P.R.'s strategy of promoting collaborative projects across sectors played a pivotal role in establishing a range of industries, including:

1. The Travancore Rubber Works
2. The Aluminium Industries
3. Lakshmi Starch factory
4. Travancore Charcoals Ltd.
5. The Travancore Enamels Ltd.
6. Plywood Industries Ltd.
7. Travancore Steam Navigation Co Ltd.
8. Titanium Oxide Plant
9. Cement Factory at Kottayam
10. Ogale Glass Factory.¹²

Upon the establishment of FACT, a significant challenge arose as there was a lack of fuel to operate the plant, including both oil and coal. However, an alternative solution was discovered in the form of utilizing wood as a fuel source, which produced gas when burned. This gas effectively served the dual purpose of providing lighting and powering the plant. Additionally, FACT was allocated specific forest land to cultivate the necessary wood and utilize it for gas production.

Indeed, FACT served as a platform for engineers to receive training in the field of fertilizer production technology. These skilled engineers proved to be valuable assets as they went on to manage additional fertilizer factories across various regions within the country.¹³

Despite the tireless efforts of C.P.R. to advance the Travancore State, his service went unrecognized by both the press and the public. The Dewan wholeheartedly aligned himself with Travancore, but the people of Travancore did not reciprocate this sentiment. On 11th June 1947, C.P.R. made an announcement that Travancore would establish itself as an Independent State once the British withdrew from India. Travancore experienced a political struggle as a result of the bitter controversy sparked by this action both within and outside the state. In response, the Government resorted to a series of repressive measures to address the situation. One notable event during the struggle was the firing at Pettah, Trivandrum, which resulted in the death of three individuals. A few days later, an unsuccessful attempt was made on C.P.R.'s life while he was attending a function at the Swathi Tirunal Academy of Music on 25th July 1947. The people even celebrated this incident.¹⁴ C.P.R. resigned the office on 19th August 1947.¹⁵ Nevertheless, he dedicated himself to serving the Travancore State and the Maharaja until his final day in Travancore.

Travancore, despite being primarily an agricultural and plantation state, faced challenges in achieving self-sufficiency in food grains due to limited land area for cultivation. The state had to rely on importing rice from neighboring Madras and even from foreign countries to meet its needs. Historical famines and starvation deaths, such as the Bengal famine in British India, highlighted the vulnerability of the region. In addition, food supplies were despatched directed to the war front region to support the war efforts. Recognizing these risks, C.P.R. took proactive measures to secure and stockpile food resources in advance, ensuring that the state could overcome any short-term difficulties. Under C.P.R.'s leadership, Travancore became the first state to implement large-scale government procurement of food grains.

C.P.R. implemented measures to expand the scope of food production. The introduction of new agricultural products such as soya bean, tobacco, sugarcane, and cloves played a significant role in this endeavor. Additionally, extensive areas of land were dedicated to tapioca cultivation. Intensive farming techniques were highly encouraged by C.P.R. and he also extended his support for the development of the fishing industry. Despite these efforts, Travancore did not achieve complete self-sufficiency in food production. Nevertheless, there was a noticeable increase in the overall volume of food produced. C.P.R. specifically focused on developing the Kanyakumari District as the primary rice-producing region of Travancore, which was then a part of the former princely state.

The construction of the initial cement concrete highway in India took place between Trivandrum and Kanyakumari, spanning approximately 80 kilometers, and was completed within a remarkable time-frame of fifteen months. This road was widely regarded as one of the finest in the country for a considerable period. Besides, C.P.R. played a significant role in the development of Kanyakumari by establishing guest houses and taking the necessary measures to commence the construction of the Vivekananda Memorial.¹⁶

C.P.R. showed a positive response to JRD Tata's request for constructing airports in different states in order to expand local air services. In Trivandrum, due to his effort, an airport was founded. C.P.R. played a crucial role in initiating the establishment of the Periar Game Sanctuary.¹⁷

When the Swathi Tirunal Academy was established, he extended an invitation to Muthiah Bagavathar to serve as the Honorary Principal of the Academy, bringing Swathi Tirunal's compositions to life. After Muthiah Bagavathar, the position was taken by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer who served with great distinction.

C.P.R. was completely engrossed in managing every aspect of state administration and overall advancements. As a gesture of gratitude for his contributions, the King granted him the title 'Sachivothama', which translates to Prime Minister. Similar to Hanuman being the 'Sachivotama' of Rama in the *Ramayana*, C.P.R. served as the 'Sachivotama' for the King in the Travancore State.¹⁸ To conclude, C.P.R.'s name has been surrounded by controversy and criticism, primarily due to his role as the Diwan of Travancore from 1936 to 1947. Both friends and foes alike praised C.P.R.'s exceptional

talents and abilities. Not only was he an erudite lawyer and a gifted advocate, but he also possessed innate administrative skills. In addition to his political prowess, C.P.R. showed his keen interest in the arts which included literature and Carnatic music. His clarity of thought, precise expression, sense of humor, and quick wit further enhanced his remarkable personality. As a forceful orator, he commanded admiration from most, respect from many, and fear from some, although a significant number remained skeptical of him. C.P.R. faced accusations of being an autocrat and suppressing his opponents. On one hand, he received accolades and praise for his administrative measures and the introduction of various schemes that put Travancore on the world map. Even today, people credit him for implementing an excellent drainage system in the region during his tenure as the Diwan. Modern Kerala owes much to his visionary ideas and enthusiasm. On the other hand, there are allegations that he exhibited an overbearing attitude and authoritarian mindset, particularly in matters of state accession, reflecting a feudalistic approach.

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