



# TOWARDS A MODERN SOCIETY: SRI CHITHIRA THIRUNAL BALARAMA VARMA AND HIS INITIATIVES

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The modernization of Travancore was one of the greatest achievement of Sri ChithiraThirunal and the state became a role model to another princely state in India in many aspects of development. Travancore was modernized on western lines under Balarama Varma and his Dewan Sir CP. One of the important proclamation done by Sri ChithiraThirunal was the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 which became a historical proclamation and the state witnessed numerous progressive measures which were capable for the development of society. Numerous legislations were passed during this period for the welfare of women, low caste people and for the progress of education and culture. Several modern industries were introduced during this period and transport and communication go to new dimensions under SriChithiraThirunal and it contributed major share in the economic progress of the state. The reforms made by Balarama Varma led to the progress of socio economic political and cultural life of the natives of Travancore.*

**Keywords:** *Assembly, Factories, Franchise, Industries, Legislation, Proclamation, University*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The entire socio-cultural life of world countries witnessed an all-round change in the twentieth century. The growth of science and technology in the 18th and 19th centuries reached its zenith and it made reflections in the societies all over the world. Many of the colonies in Asia and Africa liberated from the clutches of European occupation and became democratic countries. The changes that took place in different of areas of human life in world wide directly or indirectly affected the people of India. The spread of western ideas of rationalism and scientific thinking challenged the existing social order in the whole India concern. Travancore, one of the prosperous state in the British India was not free from the spread of these western ideas and knowledge. Comparing to other princely states in British India, the state of Travancore achieved many firsts in different fields of development and it was due to the liberal and the progressive measures adopted by different rulers in different period. From Marthandavarma, the Maker of Modern Travancore to Sri ChithiraThirunal Balarama Varma, the last ruler of Travancore, many rulers came into the powerin Travancore and ruled the kingdom in a benevolent manner.



The princely state of Travancore was a Hindu state and it was based on the traditions and beliefs of Hinduism. As part of Hinduistic beliefs, the social evils like caste system was existed in the state like the other parts of India.<sup>1</sup> Brahmins and *Nairs* were the upper castes and enjoyed all social freedom and the low caste people comprising *Ezhavas*, *Parayas*, *Pulayas*, *Kauravas* etc., faced great difficulties in the society. The condition of women in the state was too miserable. The low castes people were denied civic rights and were marginalized from the mainstreams of the society. They were denied right to education, using public roads, hospitals, wells, forced to do menial service to upper castes without remuneration, denied from entering and worshipping the idols in the temples etc. The downtrodden people were the victims of heavy taxation and other feudal practices. The progressive and liberal minded rulers of Travancore in the 19th century was succeeded in abolishing many of the social evils and anarchies and elevating the social status of the low caste people in Travancore. Many of them faced stiff opposition from the feudal lords in abolishing the evils in the society like the *Oozhiyam*, *Viruthi* etc.<sup>2</sup> One of the remarkable event in the history of Travancore was the establishment of a Legislative Assembly in 1888 by Sri MulamThirunal and it remained an inspiration for his successors to implement new policies which are helpful for the progress of the socio-economic political and cultural life of the state.

Sri ChithiraThirunal Balarama Varma ascended the throne of Travancore in 1924 due to the demise of his uncle Sri MulamThirunal. Though he was a minor at the time, a Regent was appointed in Travancore to look after the administration of the state until the young Maharaja became mature to annex the throne of the state. Sri ChithiraThirunal officially take over the rule of Travancore in 1931 from the Regent and it marked the beginning of a great era in the history of Travancore.

## **II. SRI CHITHIRA THIRUNAL & TRAVANCORE**

The young Maharaja was trained in European model by the tutors from inside and outside India and it give him a new insight in the worldly affairs. He visited various places including foreign countries and it led him to understand modern ideas which are applicable to the state of Travancore. Sir CP was appointed as the Legal and Constitutional Advisor to the Maharaja with the advice of the Viceroy from 1931 to 1936 and later the Dewan of Travancore from 1936 to 1937. Like the Maharaja Sir CP was a great visionary and Sri ChithiraThirunal got a good companion and advisor in his future plans for the development of the state.

The first important administrative reform introduced by Sri ChithiraThirunal was the Constitutional Reform Act of 1932. Balarama Varma wanted to give more powers to the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, the existing legislative body and restructure it.<sup>3</sup> As part of this initiatives the Travancore Legislative Reforms Regulation was introduced and it was published in an extraordinary issue of the *Government Gazette* on 29th October 1932.<sup>4</sup> The act paved the way for the establishment of a bicameral legislature in Travancore and it placed Sri Chithra State Council and Sri Mulam Popular Assembly on statutory basis as part of the Bicameral Legislature. Sri Chithra State Council became the Upper House and the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly became the Lower House of the Legislature. Though the act made the Popular Assembly into a statutory body from a

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petitioning body, certain subjects like Royal Family, Relation with the British government and foreign powers, military and Devaswam were kept aloof from the ambit of Legislature.<sup>5</sup>

The act of 1932 changed the composition of the members in the two councils and the Sri Chithra State Council became a body of 37 members in which 22 were elected and the rest were nominated. The total number of members in the Sri Mulam Assembly was expanded to 72 in which 48 were elected and 24 were nominated. The act made Dewan as the ex-officio president of the Legislature and he was entrusted to appoint chairman to the Council to proceed it and the Assembly can elect a deputy president from its members to preside it in the absence of the president. Legislative Reforms Act of 1932 modified the qualifications for voting right. Those men and women who resided in Travancore and who paid an amount of Rs.5 per year as land tax, or who paid income tax to the government or one who pay Rs.1 as municipal tax, graduates from reputed universities and retired or pensioned army officers where eligible to vote.<sup>6</sup> There were created special constituencies for planters, *Jemmies* and for commerce and industries in Travancore.<sup>7</sup> The government of Travancore rejected the plea for reserved seats with a view to avoid communal segregation in the society and to promote cooperation and cordiality among the natives.<sup>8</sup> The Constitutional Reform Act of 1932 as a role model to other princely states in India to introduce such legislative reforms and Sir CP who served as the Legal and Constitutional Advisor to the Maharaja played a crucial role in drafting the act of 1932.<sup>9</sup>

The appointment of a Public Service Recruitment Committee was another significant work done by Sri ChithiraThirunal for the welfare of his subjects. The Maharaja constituted the recruitment committee to reorganize state civil services by giving emphasis on merit and eligibility and to provide equal opportunity for all the classes of the society to serve their state irrespective of caste or creed.<sup>10</sup> As per the recommendations, the state civil service was classified into three divisions and recruitment to government services was done through competitive examinations. The government appointed a high-ranking officer as Public Service Commissioner for a period of 3 years to look after the recruitments procedures.

The greatest among the reforms introduced by Sri ChithiraThirunal and which made him an unforgettable hero in the history of Kerala as well as the history of India was the famous Temple Entry Proclamation. The demand for temple entry to all Hindus was strengthen day by day from the beginning of 1930's and the government formed a Temple Entry Enquiry Committee to study about the matter in detail under V.S. SubramanyaAiyar and the committee submits its report on 11 January 1934. The committee made a detailed study and conducted questionnaire surveys among the *savarnas* and others to know about the public opinion. The committee recommended a partial temple entry and the ruler can modify the temple entry law which prohibits the *avarnas* from the entry into the temple and it is should be determined by the Maharaja on the advice of a Parishat.<sup>11</sup> By considering all the matters, Sri ChithiraThirunal issued the legendary Temple Entry Proclamation on 12 November 1936 by which all the Hindus by birth and belief, irrespective of their caste distinctions, were allowed to entry and worship in the temple under the control of the government.<sup>12</sup> It received nationwide appreciation and the political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, C Rajagopalachari, Subhash Chandra Bose were congratulated the Maharaja, the Dewan and the Maharani for issuing the historical proclamation.



In a conversation on the matter of Temple entry proclamation the Maharaja observed that “he merely meet the wishes of his people in issuing that proclamation”.<sup>13</sup> In a speech delivered at the public meeting organized by All Kerala Temple Entry Celebration Committee on 13 January 1937 to thank the Maharaja for the Temple Entry Proclamation, Sir CP, the Dewan states that “the dream that came to His Highness has been, unlike many dreams, translated into practice and action”.<sup>14</sup> The historians like George Woodcock opined that the Temple Entry Proclamation was a magnificent work of Sir CP Ramaswamy Iyer.<sup>15</sup> It is to be true that the draft of the proclamation was prepared according to the advice of Sir CP, the Dewan of Travancore and it made his name a memorable one in the history of Travancore.

Sri ChithiraThirunal was a great ruler who think beyond the boundaries of casteism and he was always irritated to the caste based social hierarchy in the state. Temple entry was a great reform which comes from the idea that all are equal before the God. During the occasion of his sister’s marriage celebrations, all are invited irrespective of caste or religion and he reformed the Travancore army, the Nair brigade-reserved only to Nairs, to Travancore State Forces by giving equal opportunity to all capable men of the state to serve in it.<sup>16</sup>

A Sound educational system is needed for the all-round development of a society as well as a state and Sri ChithiraThirunal was one of the eminent personalities who understand the relevance of education. When he came to power in Travancore, the entire educational system was in chaos and he determined to restructure it according to the demands of the society as well as the state. A committee was constituted by Sri ChithiraThirunal under R.M. Stathem to study about the educational problems in Travancore. The establishment of university in Travancore was one of the age-old demands of the academic community in the state. When Sir CP was appointed as Dewan in Travancore the industrialization of Travancore got new momentum and CP realizes that a shift in the existing university level educational system was inevitable for the growth of industries and he also stood for the establishment of a university in Travancore which give importance to scientific research in technological growth.<sup>17</sup> A number of University committees were appointed prior to 1931 to study about the matter and there was no action was taken to made it into practical. Sri ChithiraThirunal nominate Dr. C.V. Chandrasekharan as Special Officer to prepare a memorandum related to the structure, apparatuses and the functioning of the proposed university.<sup>18</sup>

Numerous oppositions were aroused from different corners relating to the establishment of a separate university for Travancore. The Christian managements feared Hindu domination over there colleges and they opposed the proposal and the Madras government and Madras University opposed it due to the potential loss of revenue from the colleges in Travancore under its hegemony.<sup>19</sup> But the Maharaja and his Dewan overcome those criticisms and as per the recommendations in the memorandum submitted by Dr. C.V Chandrasekharan, the Travancore University, first university in Kerala, was established and incorporated on 1 November 1937 under the Travancore University Act 1 of ME 1113 (1937) issued as a royal proclamation.<sup>20</sup> Sri ChithiraThirunal visited the various departments in the Travancore University in several times to know about the progress achieved by the university in different fields.<sup>21</sup>



Primary level education in Travancore achieved considerable progress under Sri ChithiraThirunal. The number of schools directly controlled by the government was increased during this period. The total number of schools which were functioned as Departmental Schools under the Government of Travancore was increased to 1043.<sup>22</sup> A total of 767879 students were studied in different educational institutions in the state and the government spend 20 percentage of its revenue, equal to 5 million rupees for the development of education in every year.<sup>23</sup> Educational policies implemented by the government resulted in the improvement of literacy rate in Travancore and between 1944-45 the literacy rate among the male population in the state was raised to 58.1% and female was 36%.<sup>24</sup>

The government conducted a survey among the students in Government schools to find out the students who stood in need for food and made necessary arrangements for feed the needy.<sup>25</sup> Mid-day meal scheme was initiated in Travancore on the model of European countries like England and Russia and later the funds were allotted from Vanchi Poor Fund for the proper working of the scheme.<sup>26</sup> The Maharaja issued a proclamation on 12 September 1945 promulgating free and compulsory primary education in Travancore by which government assumed the control and management of primary education in the state and the Director of Public Instruction was instructed to formulate a detailed proposal on the basis of a 10 year program for implements the proclamation.<sup>27</sup>

The government under Sri ChithiraThirunal was active in elevating the downtrodden sections of the society. Numerous beggar relief centers and poor homes where founded by the government to give asylum for the destitutes. In 1934, the government established Sri Chithra Poor Home for the Destitute and the Infim with an attached orphanage which can accommodate 50 children and it was placed under a Resident Matron.<sup>28</sup> On the cause of the upliftment of the depressed classes the Maharaja implemented several other programs. Government allotted huge amount of money in annual budget for the welfare measures and the children belonged to these communities were given scholarships for their educational progress.<sup>29</sup> With a progressive outlook, the government dropped the term 'depressed classes' used to denote the backward people and the substitute with a new term 'backward communities' in official records and other proceedings. As part of the distress relief the government undertook relief activities in famine affected areas in the state and a State Famine Relief Fund was formulated to overcome the hurdles of famine in future. Rationing and price control was introduced in Travancore to overcome the difficulties caused by the Second World War by step by step, first at Thiruvananthapuram and then to other towns.<sup>30</sup>

Public health was given due consideration by the government and hospitals were established in many parts of the state. One of the important among them was the present SAT Hospital at Thiruvananthapuram. During the reign of Sri ChithiraThirunal there started preliminary discussions for the establishment of a Medical College in Thiruvananthapuram. Opium smoking was prohibited by the government on 2 February 1946 with public interest. In concern to the public health and morality the government passed Travancore Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act in 1941.



The government under Balarama Varma passed several legislations with a view to the progress of society and culture. One of the such legislation which got worldwide appreciation was the abolition of capital punishment in 1944. Brahmins and women were exempted from the death penalty in Travancore and the Dewan urged this inequality to the Maharaja and he issued the proclamation prohibiting capital punishment on the model of European countries and America where the death penalty was abolished.<sup>31</sup>

The Legislative Assembly in Travancore formulated several reformative resolutions with a view to enhance the status of women in the society. The Hindu Law of Inheritance Amendment Bill was passed in 1935 by which a widow can inherit her husband's property with her children.<sup>32</sup> Another bill was passed into act in 1937 to ensure the property rights of a Hindu widow was the Travancore Hindu Women's Right to Property Act. Travancore Hindu Widow Remarriage Regulation was introduced in 1938 by which the marriage of a widow should not be declared invalid and it made the provisions to avoid the customs and ceremonies of a normal marriage in the widow remarriage.<sup>33</sup> A significant legislation which introduced with modern ideologies was the Travancore Special Marriage and Succession Act of 1943. This act legalized the inter caste or inter-community marriages and children born to the inter-married couples were given the right to inherit property.<sup>34</sup> The government formed a Labor Department and enacted Trade Union Act and Factory Act for the welfare of the proletariat.<sup>35</sup> According to the provisions of the above-mentioned acts, no factories in the state could employ women or child workers before 7 o'clock in the morning or after 5 o'clock in the evening.<sup>36</sup>

The period between 1931 to 1947 was a period of economic growth in the state. Several progressive reforms were introduced for the wellbeing of the people. The establishment of a Land Mortgage Bank, which facilitate the agriculturalists to take loan on their lands was on of the meaningful reform undertaken by the government.<sup>37</sup> The Maharaja realized the importance of industries in the economic progress of the state and with a view to create employment opportunities for the natives in Travancore, numerous industries were established in the state. The industrial policy enacted by Sri ChithiraThirunal give equal importance to public, private and joint sectors and many industries were established in the state.<sup>38</sup> Many of them were new in the state as well as in India. As many as fifteen large scale industries were established and Travancore during this period like Trivandrum Rubber Works, Fertilizers and Chemicals, Travancore Ltd. (FACT), Aluminium Industries, Plywood Factory, Sugar Factory, Glass Factory, Cement Factory, Forest Industries etc.<sup>39</sup> Many of these industries were established by the state in partnership with private entrepreneurs and it helped the state to self reliant in industrial production on certain extent.

Transport and communication received special attention from the ruler and Travancore was the first state nationalized the road transport in India.<sup>40</sup> The first concrete road with a length of 88 km connecting Thiruvananthapuram with Kanyakumari was constructed during this period. Coastal transport and air transport was also encouraged by the government and the air transport was first introduced in Travancore in 1935. An aerodrome was constructed at Shankumugham with an aim to operate high powered and heavy aircrafts. Telephone system was introduced in 1931 in Travancore and in 1940 Thiruvananthapuram exchange was connected with all India exchange. The development of transport and communication give a boost to the economic progress and it benefited all the people in one way or other.



Universal adult franchise was introduced in Travancore in 1946 was a glorious reform made by Sri ChithiraThirunal. The press communique issued in 1946 declared that “His Highness has now decided that the time pass ripe for the introduction of large-scale constitutional reforms, involving among other features, the adoption of universal adult suffrage.<sup>41</sup>The Maharaja repealed the Legislative Reform Act of 1932 on 7 April 1947 by issuing the Travancore Reform Proclamation Act II, by which the power was given to a Legislative Assembly formed by the members elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage and all the subjects of the state who completed an age of 21 irrespective of their financial status, caste or gender, were eligible to vote in the election to the Assembly.<sup>42</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

The regnal years of Sri ChithiraThirunal was a period of all round development in socio-economic-political and cultural life of Travancore. A modern society was based on the great ideas like liberty, equality and fraternity. The young Maharaja aimed to modernize the Travancore society from the clutches of casteism and age old traditional beliefs and customs that hinders the development of the society, which deep rooted in the mindset of the natives. With a view to achieve the desired aim of progressive society, Sri ChithiraThirunal Balarama Varma initiated countless reformatory measures and those were successful on certain extent. Later, when India independent from the British colonization in 1947, Sri ChithiraThirunal was ready to abdicate the kingship of Travancore and he joined the state with the Indian Union. He assumed the office of Rajapramukh of the state of Thiru-Kochi and continued up to the formation of the State of Kerala in 1956. He admitted the importance of democracy and continued rest of his life as a common citizen of India. Sri ChithiraThirunal was one of the princes who gone through three positions in his life, a king, Rajapramukh and a common man.

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