

# Cultural and Historical Significance of Wadiyar of Mysore

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to study The **Wadiyar** dynasty a noble family in the Indian subcontinent that ruled the Kingdom of **Mysore** from 1399 to 1950 and made significant **cultural and historical contribution**. The Kingdom of Mysore was a realm in southern India, traditionally believed to have been founded in 1399 in the vicinity of the modern city of Mysore. From 1799 until 1950, it was a princely state, until 1947 in a subsidiary alliance with British India. It then became Mysore State (later enlarged and renamed to Karnataka) with its ruler remaining as Rajapramukh until 1956, when he became the first Governor of the reformed state.

The kingdom, which was founded and ruled for most part by the Hindu Wodeyar family, initially served as a vassal state of the Vijayanagara Empire. The 17th century saw a steady expansion of its territory and during the rule of Narasaraja Wodeyar I and Chikka Devaraja Wodeyar, the kingdom annexed large expanses of what is now southern Karnataka and parts of Tamil Nadu to become a powerful state in the southern Deccan. During a brief Muslim rule, the kingdom shifted to a Sultanate style of administration. During this time, it came into conflict with the Marathas, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Kingdom of Travancore and the British, which culminated in the four Anglo-Mysore Wars. Success in the first Anglo-Mysore war and a stalemate in the second was followed by defeat in the third and the fourth. Following Tipu's death in the fourth war in the siege of Seringapatam (1799), large parts of his kingdom were annexed by the British, which signalled the end of a period of Mysorean hegemony over South India. The British restored the Wodeyars to their throne by way of a subsidiary alliance and the diminished Mysore was transformed into a princely state. The Wodeyars continued to rule the state until Indian independence in 1947, when Mysore acceded to the Union of India. Even as a princely state, Mysore came to be counted among the more developed and urbanised regions of India. This period (1799–1947) also saw Mysore emerge as one of the important centres of art and culture in India. The Mysore kings were not only accomplished exponents of the fine arts and men of letters, they were enthusiastic patrons as well, and their legacies continue to influence rocket science, music, and art even today.

*Key words: significance, India, Mysore, social, cultural, Wodeyar*

## Introduction

Following Tipu's fall, a part of the kingdom of Mysore was annexed and divided between the Madras Presidency and the Nizam. The remaining territory was transformed into a Princely State; the five-year-old scion of the Wodeyar family, Krishnaraja III, was installed on the throne with chief minister (Diwan) Purnaiah, who had earlier served under Tipu, handling the reins as regent and Lt. Col. Barry Close taking charge as the British Resident. The British then took control of Mysore's foreign policy and also exacted an annual tribute and a subsidy for maintaining a standing British army at Mysore. As Diwan, Purnaiah distinguished himself with his progressive and innovative administration until he retired from service in 1811 (and died shortly thereafter) following the 16th birthday of the boy king.

The years that followed witnessed cordial relations between Mysore and the British until things began to sour in the 1820s. Even though the Governor of Madras, Thomas Munro, determined after a personal investigation in 1825 that there was no substance to the allegations of financial impropriety made by A. H. Cole, the incumbent Resident of Mysore, the Nagar revolt (a civil insurrection) which broke out towards the end of the decade changed things considerably. In 1831, close on the heels of the insurrection and citing mal-administration, the British took direct control of the princely state. For the next fifty years, Mysore passed under the rule of successive British Commissioners; Sir Mark Cubbon, renowned for his statesmanship, served from 1834 until 1861 and put into place an efficient and successful administrative system which left Mysore a well-developed state.

In 1876–77, however, towards the end of the period of direct British rule, Mysore was struck by a devastating famine with estimated mortality figures ranging between 700,000 and 1,100,000, or nearly a fifth of the population. Shortly thereafter, Maharaja Chamaraja X, educated in the British system, took over the rule of Mysore in 1881, following the success of a lobby set up by the Wodeyar dynasty that was in favour of rendition. Accordingly, a resident British officer was appointed at the Mysore court and a Diwan to handle the Maharaja's administration. From then onwards, until Indian independence in 1947, Mysore remained a Princely State within the British Indian Empire, with the Wodeyars continuing their rule.

After the demise of Maharaja Chamaraja X, Krishnaraja IV, still a boy of eleven, ascended the throne in 1895. His mother Maharani Kemparajammanniyavaru ruled as regent until Krishnaraja took over the reins on 8 February 1902. Under his rule, with Sir M. Vishweshwariah as his Diwan, the Maharaja set about transforming Mysore into a progressive and modern state, particularly in industry, education, agriculture and art. Such were the strides that Mysore made that Mahatma Gandhi called the Maharaja a "saintly king" (Rajarishi). Paul Brunton, the British philosopher and orientalist, John Gunther, the American author, and British statesman Lord

Samuel praised the ruler's efforts. Much of the pioneering work in educational infrastructure that took place during this period would serve Karnataka invaluable in the coming decades. The Maharaja was an accomplished musician, and like his predecessors, avidly patronised the development of the fine arts. He was followed by his nephew Jayachamarajendra whose rule continued for some years after he signed the instrument of accession and Mysore joined the Indian Union on 9 August 1947. Jayachamarajendra continued to rule as Rajapramukh of Mysore until 1956, when as a result of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, his position was converted into Governor of Mysore State. From 1963 until 1966 he was the first Governor of Madras State.

There are no records relating to the administration of the Mysore territory during the Vijayanagara Empire's reign (1399–1565). Signs of a well-organised and independent administration appear from the time of Raja Wodeyar I who is believed to have been sympathetic towards peasants (raiya) who were exempted from any increases in taxation during his time. The first sign that the kingdom had established itself in the area was the issuing of gold coins (Kanthirayi phanam) resembling those of the erstwhile Vijayanagara Empire during Narasara Wodeyar's rule.

The rule of Chikka Devaraja saw several reforms were effected. Internal administration was remodelled to suit the kingdom's growing needs and became more efficient. A postal system came into being. Far reaching financial reforms were also introduced. A number of petty taxes were imposed in place of direct taxes, as a result of which the peasants were compelled to pay more by way of land tax. The king is said to have taken a personal interest in the regular collection of revenues the treasury burgeoned to 90,000,000 Pagoda (a unit of currency) – earning him the epithet "Nine crore Narayana" (Navakoti Narayana). In 1700, he sent an embassy to Aurangzeb's court who bestowed upon him the title Jug Deo Raja and awarded permission to sit on the ivory throne. Following this, he founded the district offices (Attara Kacheri), the central secretariat comprising eighteen departments, and his administration was modelled on Mughal lines.

When the princely state came under direct British rule in 1831, early commissioners Lushington, Briggs and Morrison were followed by Mark Cubbon, who took charge in 1834. He made Bangalore the capital and divided the princely state into four divisions, each under a British superintendent. The state was further divided into 120 taluks with 85 taluk courts, with all lower level administration in the Kannada language. The office of the commissioner had eight departments; revenue, post, police, cavalry, public works, medical, animal husbandry, judiciary and education. The judiciary was hierarchical with the commissioners' court at the apex, followed by the Huzur Adalat, four superintending courts and eight Sadar Munsiff courts at the lowest level. Lewin Bowring became the chief commissioner in 1862 and held the position until 1870. During his tenure, the property

"Registration Act", the "Indian Penal code" and "Code of Criminal Procedure" came into effect and the judiciary was separated from the executive branch of the administration. The state was divided into eight districts – Bangalore, Chitraldroog, Hassan, Kadur, Kolar, Mysore, Shimoga, and Tumkur.

### **Objective:**

This paper intends to explore and analyze **Muslim political participation in India** both in terms of electoral politics and civil society initiatives. Also it discusses what is unique about political participation in Muslim communities

### **Founding of Mysore**

According to traditional accounts, the kingdom originated as a small state based in the modern city of Mysore and was founded by two brothers, Yaduraya (also known as Vijaya) and Krishnaraya. Their origins are mired in legend and are still a matter of debate; while some historians posit a northern origin at Dwarka, others locate it in Karnataka. Yaduraya is said to have married Chikkadevarasi, the local princess and assumed the feudal title "Wodeyar" (lit, "Lord"), which the ensuing dynasty retained. The first unambiguous mention of the Wodeyar family is in 16th century Kannada literature from the reign of the Vijayanagara king Achyuta Deva Raya (1529–1542); the earliest available inscription, issued by the Wodeyars themselves, dates to the rule of the petty chief Timmaraja II in 1551.

### **Autonomy: advances and reversals**

The kings who followed ruled as vassals of the Vijayanagara empire until the decline of the latter in 1565. By this time, the kingdom had expanded to thirty-three villages protected by a force of 300 soldiers. King Timmaraja II conquered some surrounding chiefdoms, and King Bola Chamaraja IV (lit, "Bald"), the first ruler of any political significance among them, withheld tribute to the nominal Vijayanagara monarch Aravidu Ramaraya. After the death of Aravidu Aliya Rama Raya, the Wodeyars began to assert themselves further and King Raja Wodeyar I wrested control of Srirangapatna from the Vijayanagara governor (Mahamandaleshvara) Aravidu Tirumalla – a development which elicited, if only ex post facto, the tacit approval of Venkatapati Raya, the incumbent king of the diminished Vijayanagar empire ruling from Chandragiri. Raja Wodeyar I's reign also saw territorial expansion with the annexation of Channapatna to the north from Jaggadeva Raya – a development which made Mysore a regional political factor to reckon with.

Consequently, by 1612–13, the Wodeyars exercised a great deal of autonomy and even though they acknowledged the nominal overlordship of the Aravidu dynasty, tributes and transfers of revenue to Chandragiri stopped. This was in marked contrast to other major chiefs Nayaks of Tamil country who continued to pay off Chandragiri emperors well into the 1630s. Chamaraja VI and Kanthirava Narasaraja I attempted to expand further northward but were thwarted by the Bijapur Sultanate and its Maratha subordinates, though the Bijapur armies under Ranadullah Khan were effectively repelled in their 1638 siege of Srirangapatna. Expansionist ambitions then turned southward into Tamil country where Narasaraja Wodeyar acquired Satyamangalam (in modern northern Erode district) while his successor Dodda Devaraja Wodeyar expanded further to capture western Tamil regions of Erode and Dharmapuri, after successfully repulsing the chiefs of Madurai. The invasion of the Keladi Nayakas of Malnad was also dealt with successfully. This period was followed by one of complex geo-political changes, when in the 1670s, the Marathas and the Mughals pressed into the Deccan.

Chikka Devaraja (r. 1672–1704), the most notable of Mysore's early kings, who ruled during much of this period, managed to not only survive the exigencies but further expanded territory. He achieved this by forging strategic alliances with the Marathas and the Mughals. The kingdom soon grew to include Salem and Bangalore to the east, Hassan to the west, Chikkamagaluru and Tumkur to the north and the rest of Coimbatore to the south. Despite this expansion, the kingdom, which now accounted for a fair share of land in the southern Indian heartland, extending from the Western Ghats to the western boundaries of the Coromandel plain, remained landlocked without direct coastal access. Chikka Devaraja's attempts to remedy this brought Mysore into conflict with the Nayaka chiefs of Ikkeri and the kings (Rajas) of Kodagu (modern Coorg); who between them controlled the Kanara coast (coastal areas of modern Karnataka) and the intervening hill region respectively. The conflict brought mixed results with Mysore annexing Periyapatna but suffering a reversal at Palupare.

### **Kanthirava Narasaraja II : Mysore kingdom**

Nevertheless, from around 1704, when the kingdom passed on to "Muteking" (Mukarasu) Kanthirava Narasaraja II, the survival and expansion of the kingdom was achieved by playing a delicate game of alliance, negotiation, subordination on occasion, and annexation of territory in all directions. According to historians Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Sethu Madhava Rao, Mysore was now formally a tributary of the Mughal empire. Mughul records claim a regular tribute (peshkash) was paid by Mysore. However, historian Suryanath U. Kamath feels the Mughals may have considered Mysore an ally, a situation brought about by Mughal–Maratha competition for supremacy in southern India. By the 1720s, with the Mughal empire in decline, further complications arose with the Mughal residents at both Arcot and Sira claiming tribute. The years that followed saw Krishnaraja Wodeyar I tread cautiously on the matter while keeping the Kodagu chiefs and the Marathas at bay. He was followed by Chamaraja Wodeyar VII during whose reign power fell into the hands of prime minister (Dalwai or Dalavoy) Nanjarajiah (or Nanjaraja) and chief minister (Sarvadhikari) Devarajiah (or Devaraja), the influential

brothers from Kalale town near Nanjangud who would rule for the next three decades with the Wodeyars relegated to being the titular heads. The latter part of the rule of Krishnaraja II saw the Deccan Sultanates being eclipsed by the Mughals and in the confusion that ensued, Haider Ali, a captain in the army, rose to prominence.

The early kings of the Wodeyar dynasty worshipped the Hindu god Shiva. The later kings, starting from the 17th century, took to Vaishnavism, the worship of the Hindu god Vishnu. According to musicologist Meera Rajaram Pranesh, King Raja Wodeyar I was a devotee of the god Vishnu, King Dodda Devaraja was honoured with the title "Protector of Brahmins" (Deva Brahmana Paripalaka) for his support to Brahmins, and Maharaja Krishnaraja III was devoted to the goddess Chamundeshwari (a form of Hindu goddess Durga). Wilks ("History of Mysore", 1800) wrote about a Jangama (Veerashaiva saint-devotee of Shiva) uprising, related to excessive taxation, which was put down firmly by Chikka Devaraja. Historian D.R. Nagaraj claims that four hundred Jangamas were murdered in the process but clarifies that Veerashaiva literature itself is silent about the issue. Historian Suryanath Kamath claims King Chikka Devaraja was a Srivaishnava (follower of Sri Vaishnavism, a sect of Vaishnavism) but was not anti-Veerashaiva. Historian Aiyangar concurs that some of the kings including the celebrated Narasaraja I and Chikka Devaraja were Vaishnavas, but suggests this may not have been the case with all Wodeyar rulers. The rise of the modern day Mysore city as a centre of south Indian culture has been traced from the period of their sovereignty. Raja Wodeyar I initiated the celebration of the Dasara festival in Mysore, a proud tradition of the erstwhile Vijayanagara royal family.

### **Cultural Contrutions**

Jainism, though in decline during the late medieval period, also enjoyed the patronage of the Mysore kings, who made munificent endowments to the Jain monastic order at the town of Shravanabelagola. Records indicate that some Wodeyar kings not only presided over the Mahamastakabhisheka ceremony, an important Jain religious event at Shravanabelagola, but also personally offered prayers (puja) during the years 1659, 1677, 1800, 1825, 1910, 1925, 1940, and 1953. The contact between South India and Islam goes back to the 7th century, when trade between Hindu kingdoms and Islamic caliphates thrived. These Muslim traders settled on the Malabar Coast and married local Hindu women, and their descendants came to be known as Mappillas. By the 14th century, Muslims had become a significant minority in the south, though the advent of Portuguese missionaries checked their growth. Haider Ali, though a devout Muslim, did not allow his faith to interfere with the administration of the predominantly Hindu kingdom. Historians are, however, divided on the intentions of Haider Ali's son, Tipu Sultan. It has been claimed that Tipu raised Hindus to prominent positions in his administration, made generous grants to Hindu temples and brahmins, and generally respected other faiths, and that any religious conversions that Tipu undertook were as punishment to those who rebelled against his authority. However, this has been countered by other historians who claim that Tipu Sultan treated the non-Muslims of Mysore far better than those of the Malabar, Raichur and Kodagu regions. They opine that Tipu was responsible for mass

conversions of Christians and Hindus in these regions, either by force or by offering them tax incentives and revenue benefits to convert.

## Society

Prior to the 18th century, the society of the kingdom followed age-old and deeply established norms of social interaction between people. Accounts by contemporaneous travellers indicate the widespread practice of the Hindu caste system and of animal sacrifices during the nine-day celebrations (called Mahanavami). Later, fundamental changes occurred due to the struggle between native and foreign powers. Though wars between the Hindu kingdoms and the Sultanates continued, the battles between native rulers (including Muslims) and the newly arrived British took centre stage. The spread of English education, the introduction of the printing press and the criticism of the prevailing social system by Christian missionaries helped make the society more open and flexible. The rise of modern nationalism throughout India also affected Mysore.

With the advent of British power, English education gained prominence in addition to traditional education in local languages. These changes were orchestrated by Lord Elphinstone, the governor of the Madras Presidency. His plan became the constitution of the central collegiate institution or University Board in 1841. Accordingly, a high school department of the university was established. For imparting education in the interior regions, schools were raised in principal towns which eventually were elevated to college level, with each college becoming central to many local schools (zilla schools). The earliest English-medium schools appeared in 1833 in Mysore and spread across the region. In 1858, the department of education was founded in Mysore and by 1881, there were an estimated 2,087 English-medium schools in the state of Mysore. Higher education became available with the formation of Bangalore Central College in Bangalore (1870), Maharaja's College (1879), Maharani's College (1901) and the Mysore University (1916) in Mysore and the St. Agnes College in Mangalore (1921).

Social reforms aimed at removing practices such as sati and social discrimination based upon untouchability, as well as demands for the emancipation of the lower classes, swept across India and influenced Mysore territory. In 1894, the kingdom passed laws to abolish the marriage of girls below the age of eight. Remarriage of widowed women and marriage of destitute women was encouraged, and in 1923, some women were granted the permission to exercise their franchise in elections. There were, however, uprisings against British authority in the Mysore territory, notably the Kodagu uprising in 1835 (after the British dethroned the local ruler Chikkaviraraja) and the Kanara uprising of 1837. The era of printing heralded by Christian missionaries, notably Hermann Mögling, resulted in the founding of printing presses across the kingdom. The publication of ancient and contemporary Kannada books (such as the Pampa Bharata and the Jaimini Bharata), a Kannada-language Bible, a bilingual

dictionary and a Kannada newspaper called Kannada Samachara began in the early 19th century. Aluru Venkata Rao published a consolidated Kannada history glorifying the achievements of Kannadigas in his book Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava.

Classical English and Sanskrit drama, and native Yakshagana musical theatre influenced the Kannada stage and produced famous dramatists like Gubbi Veeranna. The public began to enjoy Carnatic music through its broadcast via public address systems set up on the palace grounds. Mysore paintings, which were inspired by the Bengal Renaissance, were created by artists such as Sundarayya, Ala Singarayya, and B. Venkatappa.

## Conclusion

The Wodeyars, the rulers of Mysuru kingdom, have a long history, from the time the kingdom was founded in 1399. From great wealth to magnificent palaces, exquisite artwork, musical instruments, and even a 400-year-old curse, the Mysore Wodeyar royal family has it all. They have seen the dynasty through the times of the British, Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan. The illustrious family is also the only royal family in India who has reigned for over five centuries from 1399 to about the 19th century (although there is no monarchy in India now, they still maintain their royal status).

The rulers of the Wodeyar dynasty may have lost their privy purses and titles, but they still live on in the hearts of the Kannadigas. Their contribution to the development of social and cultural spheres, as well as science and technology, is immeasurable. Their dedication towards the development of their kingdom can be seen in their pro-people policies and prompt action in times of necessity.

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