

The renovation of temples and the resuscitation of religious life also led to the encouragement of such arts as the *Koothu*, *Padakam*, *Kathakali* and *Thullal*. Thus the period of Marthanda Varma witnessed not only the territorial expansion and political consolidation of Travancore, but also vigorous administrative activity and religious and cultural progress. In spite of some of the shortcomings in his character and policy, when the balance is struck we have every reason to regard Marthanda Varma as "the greatest ruler of the Travancore line".

Dharma Raja

Marthanda Varma passed away in 1758 A.D. and was succeeded by his nephew, Rama Varma (1758-1798 A.D.) who is known in history as the Dharma Raja. It may be interesting in this connection to recall the last words of advice given by Marthanda Varma to his nephew. "No deviation whatever should be made in regard to the dedication of the kingdom to Sri Padmanabhaswamy and all further territorial acquisitions should be made over to the Devaswom. Not a hair's breadth of alteration or deviation should be made in the established charities and the institutions connected with the same. No family dissension or quarrel should be allowed in the Royal House. No expenses of the State should be allowed to exceed the income. No palace expenditure should be met except from the profits of the commercial Department. Above all, friendship existing between the English East India Company and Travancore should be maintained at any risk and full confidence should always be placed in the support and aid of the honourable association"¹. Rama Varma faithfully carried out the advice of his uncle. He was an extremely pious and kind hearted ruler. Himself a scholar and a man of letters, the Maharaja was a liberal patron of poets and scholars. He also possessed administrative ability of a very high order. His reign began under very good auspices with Ayyappan Marthanda Pillai as the Dalawa or chief minister. The Maharaja and the Dalawa exerted themselves from the beginning to improve the efficiency of the administration. If Marthanda Varma's main work was conquest, that of Rama Varma was consolidation.

1. *History of Travancore*, P. Shangoonny Menon, pages 174-175.