CHAPTER VI

THE COMMERCIAL REFORMS AND RAJA KESAVA DAS

Raja Kesava Dhas acted as Dewan under Maharaja Rama Varma till his death. Kesavadas was certainly a very able and enlightened statesman and he set himself to the task of piloting the state not merely to safety but to glory as well. He found that he had a two-fold duty to perform to raise the country and he was looked upon as the only man fit to take up the reins of administration at the critical time. The greatest achievements was his commercial reforms during his period.

The Maha Raja Rama Varma first sent his Dewan Kasava Pillay to Cochin to consult and arrange with the Dutch Governor M’Van Angelbic for the further fortification of the frontier. The Dutch forts of Aycottah and Cranganore were situated at the very northern frontier of Travancore. After the construction of the barrier works and the connecting fortifications, these forts were regarded as the best defence against the
approach of an army to the frontier, and consequently the Maha Raja had been treating with the Dutch Government for the purchase of these two forts. By the arrangements lately entered into with the Madras Government, it had been settled that the British force posted in Travancore would only be available for the protection of Travancore territory, and so, if those forts belonged to the Dutch and Tipu Sultan’s army captured them and entered Travancore by that road, the Maha Raja could not expect any assistance from the Honorable Company’s regiments stationed at the northern frontier. Moreover, the Maha Raja now heard that Tipu himself was thinking of purchasing these forts.

The Maha Rajah at once authorized Dewan Kasava Pillay to enter into immediate negotiations with the Dutch Governor for the purchase of these two forts. By this measure, His Highness thought that he would station the two English regiments in those forts and thus protect the frontiers. As the Dutch had already sold many of their minor possessions to Travancore, and as the negotiations for the purchase of Monambam and all the northern Dutch possessions including the forts of Aycottah and Cranganore were now pending, the Dewan found no difficulty in coming to a speedy settlement.

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On the 3rd July 1789, the Dewan concluded the bargain. M’Van Angelbic executed the title deeds on the part of the Dutch, to Dewan Kasava Pillay, on the part of the Maha Raja. The Dutch possessions were sold three lacs of Rupees, to be paid in several instalments, and the property was to change hands after receipt of the first instalment, which was paid on the last day of the week in which the deed was executed, and according to the terms of the purchase deed, the Dutch Governor transferred the property to Kasava Pillay in the presence of George Powney, the British representative at the Travancore Court. This transaction of the Governor was subsequently ratified by the Batavian Government.

The Maha Rajah viewed the whole transaction with great satisfaction and apprised the Government of Madras of the same. His Highness observed in his letter that he hoped “the measure would prove a source of as much pleasure to that Government as it had been to himself”. But before this letter reached Madras, Mr. Powney had written to Governor John Holland, who succeeded Sir A. Campbell, on the subject. On the receipt of this letter, Mr. Holland addressed the Maha Rajah as follows on the 17th August 1789: “Mr. Powney has informed me that “you are on the

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3 Ibid.

4 Charles Ross, Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis of Cornwallis, Vol.I, p.464. (Refer also Beveridge – A Comprehensive History of India, Vol.III, p.584.)
point of concluding a negotiation with the Dutch for purchasing Aycottah and the fort of Cranganore which they hold under the Rajah of Cochin. Although I shall at all times be happy to hear of your increasing prosperity, yet, at the present juncture, I think any purchase of lands and forts from the Rajah of Cochin, who is a tributary to the chief of Mysore, will tend to irritate this chief against you, and may have the appearance of a collusive transaction. I have expressed these to Mr. Powney in answer to his letter, and I have desired him fully to state to you the serious consequences which may result from engaging, at this time, in any measures that may produce discussions between the chief of Mysore and yourself. I think it necessary to inform you that this Government will not support you in any contests you may engage yourself on, beyond the limits of your own possessions”.

The Maha Rajah received this letter only after the transaction was over. It has been already observed that the Maha Rajah had himself addressed a letter to the Governor at the close of the transaction. The Governor replied to His Highness on the 30th August. The letter ran thus: “My last letter to you was dated the 17th of the present month and was written in consequence of the notification which I had received from Mr. Powney of your being on the point of concluding a negotiation with the Dutch for purchasing Aycottah, &c. in the letter above mentioned I gave you my opinion fully upon the measure which you had in view and stated the

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5 Shungoonny Menon, P., op.cit., p.165.
impolicy of it. I told you also, in plain terms, that this Government would not support you in any contests in which you might engage yourself beyond the limits of your own possessions. Being thus furnished with my opinion and declarations respecting the negotiations, you cannot but expect that the news of your having concluded it and of your being in possession of Aycottah, and the fort of Cranganore is far from agreeable to me. Your letter therefore of the 10th instant, lately received, which you expected would give me pleasure, has had a different effect. I lament that you have taken the indiscreet step which may possibly involve you in much embarrassment, if Tippoo should be disposed to wrest from you these late acquisitions. I cannot approve of your having entered into a treaty with the Dutch for extension of territory without the consent of this Government. This very impolitic conduct makes you liable to a forfeiture of the Company’s protection, for you cannot expect that they will defend territory of which you were not possessed when their troops were sent into your country, and which have since been obtained without their assent. I therefore think it necessary you should immediately give back to the Dutch the places you have thus indiscreetly received from them, and thereby establish your affairs precisely upon their former footing. I again recommend to you the greatest caution in your conduct towards Tippoo”.

Thus was the transaction condemned by the Madras Government, and His

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Highness discouraged from adopting measures absolutely necessary for the protection of his kingdom. But the Maha Rajah, though disheartened at first, was encouraged by his firm belief that the Honorable East India Company would do him justice when the true bearings of the case were laid before them.

The Maha Rajah submitted his vindication to the Government of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, and showed them the propriety of his conduct in purchasing the forts. He pointed out that the forts of Cranganore and Aycottah were at first in the possession of the Portuguese, who at the time of their settlement in India obtained possession of Cochin by conquest, and made it their capital; that Cranganore and Aycottah were their dependencies and the forts were built by the Portuguese so far back as 1523; that the Dutch having conquered the Portuguese in the year 1663, they held uninterrupted possession of the same till the date of the transaction, a long period of 126 years; that the Dutch were therefore quite competent to sell and the Maha Rajah to purchase them, without reference to either the Cochin Rajah or the Sultan of Mysore; that the purchase was not, as was erroneously supposed, from the Rajah of Cochin, the Sultan’s tributary; that neither the Cochin Rajah nor any other prince had any right to the property in question that the Maha Rajah had not, as was also erroneously supposed, concluded the bargain without the knowledge of the Madras Government; that independent of the
circumstance of the sale having been conducted in the presence of Mr. Powney, Major Bannerman, whom Governor Campbell had delegated to Travancore as an adviser to the Maha Rajah, on the part of the English Government, had inspected the locality and the forts, and had suggested the advisability and stern necessity of the Maha Rajah’s purchasing the forts, to prevent the great danger that Travancore would be exposed to, in case those forts should fall, by force or purchase, into the possession of the Sultan, a danger which even the assistance of the English would find it difficult to avert; and that the late Government of Sir A. Campbell had concurred in the opinion of Major Bannerman, that the Maha Rajah’s object in purchasing the forts was not extension of territory or increase of revenue, but simply the security of his dominions. The Maha Rajah solicited the Bengal Government to do him the justice of appointing a Commission to enquire into these statements, as well as the points urged by him, adding that should he be required to surrender the forts he would do so to none but the English Government.\(^7\)

When the Sultan heard of the proceedings of the Madras Government, he thought that his was too good an opportunity to be lost. So he put forth his claims to the forts of Cranganore and Aycottah, alleging that they belonged to his tributary, the Cochin Rajah, and that therefore their purchase by Travancore was unlawful.

Although the arguments contained in Mr. Holland’s letter were fully answered seriatim, that gentleman was not satisfied with the defence put forth by the Maha Rajah. When Mr. Holland represented his one-sided views to Lord Cornwallis, his Lordship entirely disapproved of the transaction; but when his Lordship received the Maha Rajah’s defence, he suspended his judgement and proposed to send Commissioners to investigate the subject.\(^8\)

Mr., afterwards Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras, remarked thus on the argument of Mr. Holland. He said: “The distinction made between recent acquisition and ancient territory appears to be a subterfuge of Government to cloak their dread of war, under a pretended love of peace”. When these discussions were going on, His Highness was strengthening his defences to meet Tippoo. He concentrated all the forces and appointed Kasava Pillay the Commander-in-Chief. The two forts of Aycottah and Cranganore were fortified and the Travancore army was garrisoned in and about them.\(^9\)

Meanwhile, Tippoo started from Coimbatore with a large army, consisting of infantry, cavalry and artillery, with a detachment of pioneers numbering in all 30,000 men, 5,000 horse and 20 cannon. He sent one of his Sirdars to the Maha Rajah with a threatening letter, accompanied

\(^8\) *Ibid.*

with some presents. The Maha Rajah being then engaged with the celebration of the Dassara festival, he deputed Dewan Kasava Pillay to meet the Sirdar who had arrived at Paravoor.¹⁰

The Dewan met Tippoo Sahib’s Sirdar, and after the usual complimentary exchanges, the Sirdar was taken to Mavalikaray, and introduced to the Maha Rajah, who received Tippoo’s letter and presents with his usual grace. The purport of the letter was; (1) a requisition for the immediate surrender of all the chiefs of Malabar who had taken refuge in the Maha Rajah’s dominions; (2) that, as the Dutch had sold to him places to which they had no right, he should at once withdraw his troops from Cranganore; and (3), that he should demolish that part of his fortifications which crossed the territory of Cochin, because it belonged to the kingdom of Mysore.”¹¹

Though the Maha Rajah felt indignant at the unjust and menacing tone of the Sultan’s letter, and the haughty spirit of the envoy, he replied with great equanimity, and said (1), “that the Rajah’s against whose protection the Sultan complained, had obtained an asylum in his country several years back, because they were his relations; that no objection to their residence had ever been taken before, but to prove his amicable

disposition they would nevertheless be removed; and that no refractory subject of the Mysore Government had ever, with his knowledge, been protected in Travancore; (2) that the fort and territory which he had purchased from the Dutch belonged to the Dutch, and was in no respect the property of the dependant of Tippoo; and (3) that the ground on which he had erected his lines was ceded to him, in full sovereignty, by the Rajah of Cochin, before that Rajah became tributary, to the sovereign of Mysore, and that the lines existed at the time when he was included in the late treaty between the English and the Sultan and were sanctioned by the silence of that important deed".  

The envoy declared that the persistent refusal of the Travancore Sircar to be guided by the directions of the powerful Sultan, cannot but go much against the King, and a war with Travancore would be the result. He then left the place abruptly.

The Maha Rajah lost no time in transmitting a suitable reply to the Sultan laying before him strong arguments in support of the legality of His Highness purchase of the two forts, and expressing his extreme desire to maintain peace between them, which His Highness pointed out should be reciprocated under the treaty of 1784. The Maha Rajah also forwarded some valuable presents to the Sultan in return.

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12 Ibid.
Kasava Pillay, after leaving Paravoor, strengthened the garrison at every military station, both at the sea beach and at Arookutty and other places, erected stockades, at every backwater passage, fortified the line and batteries between Kumarakam and the Kundoor hills at Poonjar. All the responsible officers, both military and revenue, were posted at different places and the divisional revenue authorities were directed to remain at intermediate stations and raise irregular militia, armed with whatever descriptions of weapon the people could get at the moment, such as bows, arrows, swords, cudgels, & c. The Dewan then went to Trevandrum. He found the Maha Rajah, who was already advanced in years, in an extremely melancholy state of mind. His Highness, when he saw the Dewan exclaimed in a very low voice: “We have now lost everything. Our safety is in the hands of Providence. Padmanabha Swamy alone should protect us in this perilous predicament. It is now impossible to check Tippoo’s progress. We have trusted the English and placed every confidence in them. But now, it is our misfortune that the Sultan should be thus allowed to encroach upon our territory”. Dewan Kasava Pillay, though equally perplexed at the situation, consoled the Maha Rajah by the announcement that he had learnt from the Dutch as well as from his English friends, that the Bengal Government had taken the matter into their hands.

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14 Ibid., p.112.
and a war against Tippoo was at hand, and he added that by the mercy of Providence, the Maha Rajah would be soon relieved from all fears, as regards the Sultan. At the same time, the Dewan informed the Maha Rajah that Tippoo’s progress from Alwaye was totally impeded on account of the rain, that any attempt on his part to march with his army from Alwaye to up-country, must be thwarted by the natural defences of the country, that his cavalry as well as his infantry could not find road-way for a free march, that the backwater had been properly stockade at different places so much so that no canoes or boats could be taken from Alwaye, up the river to the south, without encountering the stockades and the backwater garrisons, and that the line between Kumarakam and Kundoor hills had been strongly barricaded while a regular militia lined the hills and the sea, so that till the opening of the rumoured English war, nothing would occur to Travancore.15

The Dewan’s assurances and representations encouraged the Maha Rajah a good deal, and the first order His Highness gave the Dewan was to go back to the north and adopt further measures for the increased protection and safety of the numerous families who had taken asylum in the Maha Rajah’s territories. His Highness displayed greater anxiety about these families than about the safety of his own kingdom and person.

Though throughout the greater part of the Maha Rajah’s reign the country was plunged in war, the improvement of the internal administration of the country was not in the least neglected. The first step taken was to improve all the seaports for the purpose of increasing traffic. The Dewan entertained extensive views in commercial affairs, and was convinced that the prosperity of Travancore depended in a great measure on its commercial resources and that there would be increased security to the kingdom by affording facilities for vessels to anchor at the various ports.

Dewan Kasava Pillay accordingly proceeded to visit the coasts and seaports from Cape Comorin to the north and after arranging for the introduction of certain improvements to the port of Colachel, he came to Poowar and thence to Velingium, in whose road-steads vessels could anchor in perfect safety. Being resolved to establish a port in the neighbourhood of Velingium, arrangements for building a large warehouse, a store godown and a spacious bungalow at Poonthoray were made. In the course of a few months, the beach at the latter place was dotted with various buildings, the property of private individuals and fishermen and several other classes of industrious people also began to inhabit the place, so that the prospects of the new port appeared bright.

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16 Here the English East Indian Company had a factory.
After the opening of this port, the Dewan continued his progress to the north and while at the port of Poracaud (where the Dutch had a factory), his enquiring and energetic mind was directed to the singular state of the sea at Alleppey, a few miles north of Poracaud.\textsuperscript{18} He ordered a survey of the sea by some experienced persons about him, and finding the existence of a good anchorage protected by a bank, he resolved to open a port there also.\textsuperscript{19}

This important resolve was communicated to His Highness, who was only too willing to approve of all such useful measures. The necessary sanction was at once accorded for undertaking the work, with the necessary outlay.

Dewan Kasava Pillay commenced by getting the beach cleared of jungle for it was thickly covered with wild thorny bushes, which were the habitation of jackals and other wild beasts. The beach was cleared in the course of two months and made fit for erecting buildings on.\textsuperscript{20} A warehouse and a few shops were built at the Sircar expense and merchants were invited from various places, in Travancore to establish themselves at the new port. The Dewan communicated with his friends at

\textsuperscript{18} Galletti, \textit{The Dutch Malabar}, p.118.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{20} Abraham, M.V., \textit{A Concise History of Travancore}, 1942, pp.27-28.
Bombay and induced a couple of rich and influential Cutch and Sind merchants from thence to come and settle at the new port.²¹

To effect the permanent settlement of Hindus at the place, a pagoda was built in the interior and Brahman cloth merchants who were invited from Tinnevelly and other commercial towns established themselves at Alleppey. All this while the Dewan remained at Alleppey, with his official establishment and as an additional proof, to the new settlers, of the Sircar’s intention to make the place one of some importance, the Dewan ordered the construction of a spacious building for the Huzzoor Cutcherry and a palace for the residence of the Maha Rajah, whenever His Highness visited the locality.²²

A Vijaripucar (manager), was appointed and all the hill produce was ordered to be brought to Alleppey and stored there, under the charge of the Vijaripucar. The timber grown in Malayattoor and other forests was given out on contract to an influential native Christian (Mathoo Tharagan), who was directed to bring his timber to Alleppey and sell it there. Thamby Naicken and other Vijaripucar were appointed and stationed in various parts of the forests, such as Combum, Goodaloor, & c., to collect and forward to Alleppey, all the hill produce, viz., cardamom,

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bees-wax, honey, ivory, stick lac, & c., and thus a system of forest conservancy was introduced for the first time in Travancore.\textsuperscript{23}

With the view of clearing the State-debt, which was still unpaid, the Dewan adopted another measure, viz., the building of ships for conveying the staple produces of the country to Bombay and Calcutta, and thus the Sircar embarked in trade and commercial speculations. Three ships were built and they carried to favourable markets such produce as were monopolised by the Sircar. In the course of two or three years a large amount of profit was realized, a circumstance which afforded additional satisfaction to the sovereign.\textsuperscript{24}

The Eighth clause comprised a contract for the supply of pepper for the Company’s investment. “The Company engage not to impede in any wise the course of the rule or of administration of the Rajah of Travancore’s Government “nor at all to possess themselves nor enter upon any part of what regards the management of the present Rajah’s or his successor’s country.” This treaty was duly ratified in 1797 A.D. (972 M.E) by the Court of Directors and the Governor General was exceedingly pleased with the Maha Rajah and the Dewan Kasava Pillay.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}
About this time, the English having conquered the Dutch and annexed Cochin, the Dutch connection with the Travancore kingdom ceased, and Tangacherry and other Dutch possessions passed into the hands of the English. The services of all the Europeans in the army, excepting the English, were dispensed with at this time.

Seringapatam, the Maha Rajah considered that the services of the two battalions of the Company’s forces stationed at Aycottah might be dispensed with. But on communicating this view to the Madras Government, Sir Charles Oakely observed that the military forces kept up by the Company extended to the protection of their allies, who should therefore take a share of the ordinary expense of this establishment, adding: “In estimating the advantage which your country derives from the Company’s protection I have recurred to the transaction which passed between your Excellency and this Government in 1788, at which time two battalions of our Sepoys were by your own desire stationed in your country. The expense of such a force I doubt not your Excellency will now be very willing to defray, upon the assurance that it shall be ready to move when required for your defence, and I propose to limit the contribution to the precise sum agreed to be paid by you in 1788 being star pagodas (42,768) forty-two thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight per annum.”

On the appointment of the Earl of Mornington as Governor-
General, the Maha Rajah opened a friendly correspondence with that August personage, who held the Maha Rajah in great regard and esteem. The Dewan Kasava Pillay had many European friends in the persons of the Governors of Madras and Bombay, as well as in most of the Members of Councils, and he was also well acquainted with several military officers in the army under the two presidencies. He was in the habit of corresponding with the Governor-General, who looked upon him as one of the first Statesman in India. In 970 M.E. (1795 A.D), the Governor-General proposed to the Maha Rajah a revised treaty on more liberal and detailed terms, and after a good deal of correspondence between the Dewan and the Indian Government, a new one was drawn out and submitted to the Maha Rajah. This treaty consisted of nine articles.

First:- “That the Company has renounced every claim to the three Travancore districts which Tippoo had ceded and which undoubtedly belonged to the Maha Rajah.”

Second:- “If any power or States, near or remote, by sea or land, shall without aggression on the part of the Rajah of Travancore, attempt or begin hostility and war upon the country of the said Rajah or of his successors; under such circumstances the expulsion of, and the protection of the country against such enemies rest with the Company’s Government.”
Third:- “In consideration of this stipulation the Maha Rajah bound himself and his successors to pay both in peace and war a sum equivalent to the expense of three battalions of the Company’s troops.”

Fourth:- “Should it so happen that the aforesaid force and the Rajah’s own army be at any time found unequal to cope with, and defend the country against, the superior force of the enemy, the expense of such further troops as it may be necessary and requisite for the Company to furnish in such instances, is to be altogether at the said Company’s cost; nor shall their Government anywise object to furnish such additional force, the expense of which shall in no respect be chargeable on the Raja or his successors; nor shall the Company ever apply for or demand any sum on that account nor possess any plea or claim to make any further requisition for pecuniary aid from the Rajah or his successors, by reason of any warfare or hostility that may hereafter eventually occur.”

The Fifth clause imposed upon the Maha Rajah the obligation to abstain from all aggression towards any other state whether Indian or European and that “in the event of the Rajah or his successors having any disputes of a political nature or tendency, it is necessary that the same shall be transmitted by the latter to the Honorable Company’s Government, who will determine thereon according to justice and policy and mutual concert.”

Sixth:- “The reigning Rajah of Travancore for the time being
shall not keep in his service, in any civil or military capacity nor allow to
remain within his dominions as merchants or under any other plea or
pretext, the subjects or citizens of any nation being at war with Great
Britain or with the East India Company; nor under any circumstances of
peace or war allow any European nation to obtain settlements (i.e.,
territories or places under his own authority) within the same, nor enter
into any new engagements with any Europeans or Indian States without the
previous concurrence of the British Government in India.”

Seventh:- “When the Company shall require of the Rajah of
Travancore any aid of his troops to assist them in war, it shall be
incumbent on the said reigning Rajah for the time being, to furnish such aid
to such extent and in such numbers as may be in his power, from his
regular infantry and cavalry exclusive of the native Nairs of his country,
which succours, thus furnishable by the Rajah as far as shall be consistent
with the safety of his own country, shall be liable to be employed as far by
the Company’s Government on either side of the Peninsula, as to Madura
and Calicut; and to be, during such service at the Company’s expense and
under their orders.”

The long reign of the Maharaja was a period of war or
preparation for war. The treasury had to meet a continuous drain. The pay
of Travancore while the contributions made to the British Government for

the maintenance of the auxiliary forces was a recurring item of expenditure. Large sums had to be expended on the performance of religious ceremonies which were sanctioned by custom and regarded by the public opinion of the time as indispensable to the prestige of royalty and the welfare of the state. The personal example of the Maharaja, the austere simplicity of his life and the regularity of financial administration enabled the Government to meet the continual demands. The levy of special war-taxes was sometimes resorted to, but the rates appear to have been equitable. The taxes were punctually collected, but the taxable margin was scrupulously respected. The Maharaja and the minister Kesava Pillai realized that the stability of the public revenue depended more than anything else upon the prosperity of the people. The policy inaugurated by Marthanda Varma and his ministers in developing agriculture and stimulating industries was continued. The claims of irrigation were always kept in view. Fresh lands were brought under cultivation. Loans were advanced to agriculturists and remissions allowed in all appropriate cases. A careful settlement was made to enable the Government to fix the rate of land-tax throughout the state. In 948 M.E. a comprehensive revenue survey was made which took in the whole area of the state as finally constituted. The tenures were classified.\textsuperscript{27} The revenue officers were

\textsuperscript{27} Velu Pillai, T.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p.438.
ordered to pay the most scrupulous regard to the provisions of the
*Chattavariyola* or rules issued from time to time.

Dewan Kesava Pillai’s acquaintance with the Dutch and the
English afforded him considerable opportunity of learning the conditions
of trade. When the nations of the west were fighting one another in the
remote corners of the globe for commercial advantages Kesava Pillai felt
that he would not be serving the people and the sovereign unless proper
arrangements were made to collect the natural produce of the country and
sell them at the highest possible price. Travancore was rich in her natural
produce, and her forests abounded in timbers, cardamom, honey, wax and
many other products. All these were running to waste. Arrangements were
therefore made to collect the produce of Travancore with due safeguards
against indifference and corruption.

Communications were opened to facilitate transport. Roads
and canals were widened, and the smaller streams and water-courses were
bridged. Facilities for export and import trade were provided. A survey of
the coast was conducted by competent persons under the personal
supervision of the Dewan. The existing ports were improved, while a new
one was opened at Alleppey, which was then “a sandy wilderness covered
with thorny herbs and infested by jackals and monkeys.”

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appreciated the natural advantages of the place which gave a safe anchor for ships in wintry weather. The port was soon opened and merchants, artisans and labourers were encouraged to reside there in large numbers. Traders from Bombay, Cutch and Sind were persuaded to start branches of their firms at Alleppey, the Government giving them every kind of assistance and encouragement. The erection of a Hindu temple in the heart of the town became a source of attraction to the Hindu settlers. In the south Colachel, Punthura and Vilinjam were improved and provided with warehouses and other buildings. Ships were built to help the growth of commerce. Transport of goods in foreign ships necessarily meant increased freightage besides delays and uncertainties incidental to their chartering. The teak trees in the forests were excellent for ship-building purposes and Kesava Pillai caused a few ships to be constructed which conveyed the products of the country to distant places.\(^{29}\) The venture was successful and brought in a considerable revenue to the state.

Gold coins called Anantharayan Fanam, China fanam and Ananthavarahan were coined in the Travancore mint in addition to a large quantity of silver bullion coined as chuckrams. A new contribution called Nilavar upon Sircar pattam lands was raised, which yielded a good round sum of money. Thus the Dewan succeeded in clearing away the greater

part of the state debt contracted in consequence of war and other emergencies.

Other improvements made by Kesava Pillai are thus narrated by Shungoony Menon. “The Dewan after accomplishing so much returned to Trivandrum and commenced his improvements there. The public road leading to the east from the eastern gate of the Trivandrum fort was further widened. Bazaars or shops were built on the side of the road at Chalay and a regular traffic and market established there. A bridge over the Killiar river and another over the Karamanai river with granite stone and several other public works were constructed, besides further irrigation works at Nanjenaud. The Dewan also introduced improvements into the town of Kottar by inviting a number of weavers, dyers, painters and other industrious workmen from Tinnevelly and Madura to settle there; and thus this town became a very rich and important one and formed the grand depot for the supply of cloths for the whole kingdom of Travancore. The great Pagoda of Trivandrum was repaired and the large flag-staff beautified and gilt. A golden vehicle for carrying the image of Sri Padmanabha Swamy, called Indra Vahanam, was made and an admirable granite work called Kulasekhara Mandapam, as well as several other valuable works were constructed.”

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All the fortifications were improved, a few more were newly constructed; and the manufacture of guns, shots and other warlike stores at Udayagiri was pushed on with great vigour. Palaces were built in different parts of the country and the official buildings at Mavelikkara received much attention. The Pagoda tower at Trivandrum was successfully completed. The temples throughout the country were repaired or improved. The work of administration was eminently successful. Kesava Pillai attributed the success of his measures to the inspiration and guidance of his royal master. “The creatures born on the Maha Meru cannot but have at least in a slight degree a reflection of its greatness; so born as I am, though humble and poor in Your Highness’ glory and supported as I am, by Your Highness’ glory cannot but reflect on myself by Your Highness’ merciful countenance in whatever clime I may be; like the sun’s rays to which I shall compare Your Highness’ kindness.”

This language may appear to be high-flown and euphuistic to prosaic tastes. But Kesava Pillai expressed no sentiment which he did not feel, feel in the heart and feel along the blood. Born in a poor family Kesava Pillai rose to prominence and fame through dint of steady exertion and uncommon intelligence. The Maharaja picked him up a beardless boy, a merchant’s clerk. His service in the palace under the inspiration of a great ruler opened to him vistas of honourable ambition. It gave him facilities to cultivate the acquaintance of

\[31 \text{Ibid.}\]
Dutch merchants and the officers of the English East India Company. He rose step by step in the ladder of public service. As Valiya Sarvadhikaryakkar he controlled the strings of administration to the entire satisfaction of the Maharaja. Dewan Kesava Pillai lived and moved and had his being in an atmosphere of loyalty to his king and devotion to the interests of his country. Whatever money he received from the treasury was spent with rigid economy eschewing luxuries and even comforts, the balance if any, being paid back with scrupulous attention. The Maharaja wished to grant him a *desam* which the minister politely declined. The Earl of Mornington conferred upon him the title of ‘Raja’ in recognition of his proved service and in sincere appreciation of his “ability and prudence” as well as “his attachment to the interests of the Company”.  

Raja Kesava Das is known to this day as the *Valiya Dewanji*, the great Dewan.

The meritorious commercial services rendered by Dewan Kesava Pillai may be summed up in a few sentences. He promoted the foreign trade of Travancore by opening the two new ports at Alleppey and Vilingnam and by building three coasting vessels. He developed the commerce and industries of the country by making Kottar the centre of cloth industry, by opening the Chalai Bazar and by constructing several roads. The needs of agriculture did not escape his attention. Large areas of

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32 Letter from Lord Wellesley to the Madras Government, dated 17th December 1804.
fresh lands were brought under cultivating and loans were advanced to agriculture. A comprehensive revenue survey of the state was made and taxes were fixed. A Chattavariola or a book of rules was issued to govern the collection of taxes by the officers. The remissions were given whenever there was a failure of crops. The Killiur and the Karamana river were bridged.