INTRODUCTION

Raja Kesava Das, the Dewan of Travancore, rendered signal service to Travancore for a period of ten years i.e., from 1789-1799. The period in which he served was of great turmoil and confusion. It was his drive and initiative that enable to check the Mysorean in roads and Tippu Sultan. In order to secure the friendship of English East India company, the Dewan arranged a treaty of perpetual friendship, alliance and subsidy in 1795. He proved himself as a gifted organizer, able general, a prudent diplomat and a successful statesman and this thesis unravels his achievements and reforms during his regime as Dewan of Travancore.

Travancore was the most southern of the Indian states. It occupied the south-west portion of the Indian Peninsula. It was bounded on the north by the state of Cochin and the British Indian district of Coimbatore and on the east by the Western Ghats and the districts of Madurai, Ramnad and Tinnevelly. The Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea formed the southern and western boundaries respectively.
‘Travancore’ is an anglicised form of the term ‘Tiruvithamkur’. The state was also known as ‘Venad’, ‘Vanchi Desam’ and ‘Tiru Adi Desam’. After the destruction of the ancient Chera Kingdom, the state of Travancore was formed. It formed an irregular triangle between 5°4’ and 10°22’ north latitude and between 76°13’ and 77°38’ east longitude on the west coast of Peninsular India. It had an area of 7,621 square miles. The state had a coastline of 180 miles in length and was the largest maritime state in British India. The mountains, passes, rivers and forests added beauty to the state.

When compared with other native states, Travancore was about one twelfth of the size of Hyderabad, one-fourth of Mysore, seven-eighth of Baroda, two-sevenths of Quwaior and more than five times of the size of Cochin and six times of that of Pudukottai. Travancore is not in existence at present. On the 1st of November 1956, the state of Kerala was constituted by combining Malabar, Cochin and Travancore excluding the five Tamil taluks of Thovala, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam, Vilavancode and Shencotta.

Political Condition

The early history of Travancore was shrouded in legends and tradition. The Maharaja was the representative of the Chera dynasty, one of the three great Tamil dynasties which exercised sovereignty in South
India of the ancient period. However its authentic history began with Maharaja Martanda Varma (1729-1758). He consolidated the royal authority and reorganized the administration. He crushed the ‘Ettuveetil Pillamars’. They were the feudal chieftains of neighbouring provinces. They revolted against the power of the Rajas for a long time. He also appointed a Chief Minister called as Dewan and he improved the agriculture, irrigation and public works.

After the death of Martanda Varma, Karthika Tirunal Rama Varma, better known as Dharma Raja (1758-1798) became the ruler. He divided the state into three revenue divisions ‘Tekkemukham’, ‘Vadakkemukham’ and ‘Pandinjaremukham’ which means southern, northern and western divisions respectively. This was placed under an officer known as Sarvadikaryakar.

By 1798 Balarama Varma succeeded Dharma Raja. He was very weak in administration. He appointed unpopular and important ministers like Jayantan Sankaran Namboodiri, Sankara Narayana Chetti and Mathu Tharakan who exploited the situation. Hence the Maharaja dismissed them and appointed Velu Thampi, the ‘Karyakar’ of Talakkulam in South Travancore, as Chief Minister. He was also called Dalawa.

Rani Lekshmi Bai (1810-1818) ascended the throne after the death of Balarama Varma. The Rani appointed the British Resident Col.
Munro as Dewan. He effected improvements in the working of the Husur office at Trivandrum and the departments of finance, revenue, judiciary, police and military. After that regent, Gouri Parvathi Bai (1815-1829) ruled the country. She abolished custom duties and introduced free trade within the state. Her administration witnessed social progress and supported the Christian missionaries for propagating their faith.

The region of Swati Tirunal (1829-1847) represented a period of enlightenment. He framed a code of regulation and reformed judiciary. His period witnessed the introduction of education in Travancore, and started a revenue survey in 1837. His successor Ayilyam Tirunal (1860-1880) who reduced land tax and opened the schools, hospitals and irrigation projects. The next ruler, Visakam Tirunal (1880-1885) separated the functions of judiciary and police force. The reign of Sri Mulam Tirunal (1885-1924) witnessed many sided progress in the departments of agriculture, education, communication and medical services. In 1904, he inaugurated Sri Mulam popular Assembly.

The last ruler of the dynasty was Sri Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma. While he was a boy of twelve, Sri Mulam Tirunal died. Hence Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931) was proclaimed as Regent. After her regency, Balarama Varma (1931-1948) succeeded to the throne. The salutary reforms of his administration were the constitutional reform
and the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936. During his reign India got independence and Travancore obtained Responsible Government.

**Administrative System**

Travancore was one of the native states of India. It had retained its ancient Hindu tradition and character almost unimpaired. Before the formation of a legislative body in the state, the sovereigns pursued the Dharmasastras. However the kings satisfied themselves mainly with the protection of the kingdom from external aggressions and the maintenance of law and order. The state was bifurcated into a number of nadus or provinces. Each nadu was under naduvali or chief. A group of officers called desavalis managed the civil government of the particular localities.

The king was the centre and sources of all authority namely legislative, administrative and judicial. The administration was conducted in his name. The Dewan was the chief executive of the state. He regulated and exercised extensive authority over all the departments of the government. He was assisted by an organized secretariat under a chief secretary and the public services. It was based on the model of British administration. The Directors of department were held responsible for the proper administration of matters entrusted to them. They addressed their
proposal to the government and the Dewan examined them with the support of the officers of the secretariat.

The Maharaja maintained his correspondence with the Dewan through a private secretary. For the execution of his legislative authority, the king promulgated regulations and proclamations under the designation of chattavariolas. The people had the privilege to initiate and pass laws on matters of local interest. The village assemblies maintained intimate association with day-to-day life of the people and regulated local administration. Besides these local bodies there functioned institutions like ‘Five Hundred’, ‘Six Hundred’ and ‘Five Thousand’. But it was organized and controlled by particular communities and had no effective authority. After the unification of the state under Martanda Varma, the state experienced a steady process of centralization. No wonder, the people professed a deep and abiding loyalty to the Maharaja and the ruling house. Nevertheless, the Dewan served as the principal administrator but he was accountable only to the ruler. The people possessed no recognized rights and privileges in the state. Of the many Dewans who adorned the court of Travancore, Dewan Austin played an important role in shaping the administration of Travancore during the early years of the reign of Maharaja Balarama Varma Sri Chitra Tirunal.
Socio-Economic Condition

In the early years, the society in Travancore was feudal and casteridden. The population of the state was composed mainly of Brahmins, Nayars, Ilavas, Panikkars, Chetties, Namboodiris, Mudaliars, Nadars, parayas and Pulayas. Hinduism was the religion of the ruling house and the majority of the subjects of the state. One-third of the people were the followers of Christianity. Islam and a small body of European and American residents formed the rest of the population. According to the state census of 1931, the population was 50,95,973.

Travancore was noted for its religious tolerance. When Christian missionaries and Muslim Mullahs came and preached their faiths, the Hindu ruler never objected to their coming and in no instance was human bloodshed in this “Land of Charity”. The people spoke Tamil, Malayalam and Sanskrit. Rice was the staple food of the people. The Brahmins, The Nayars and Ilavas were not vegetarians. Today was considered both a food and an intoxicant by the lower classes. Both men and women were ornaments. The young men amused themselves with games like football, kuttiam kolam, chelkali, Kalichikali, Kampithayam, Chess, Cards and dice.

As far as economic life was concerned agriculture was the main occupation. The people depended upon monsoons for agriculture.
The climatic variations as in any other part of India were also experienced in Travancore. The average rainfall was eighty-nine inches per annum. It received maximum rainfall in the month of June and minimum in the month of January. The soil and climate of the state favoured the production of a great variety of crops as paddy, pepper, tea, coffee, gin gel, tapioca, areca nuts, rubber, timber, turmeric, coconuts, cardamom, etc.

In Travancore, the existing important land tenures in the first half of the nineteenth century were Jenmies and Sircar. Besides these jenmam lands were held by Brahmanwom, Devaswom and Mandampimarvaka. The sircar held lands like poramboke, tharisu, thanathu chitta ana kanippat lands. Land revenue was the main source of income but additional taxes were levied on various pretexts. Sometimes the tenants and ryots suffered very much due to famine and drought ad excessive rainfall. The revenue collectors harassed the agricultural classes in the time of revenue collection.

Despite these, trade and commerce flourished. The internal trade was profoundly restricted by a number of customs houses. However the government regulated and exercised sea customs regulations with a view to prevent smuggling. The important articles of export were cotton, coir, salt, sugar-cane, state spirits, tobacco, indigo, etc. The import articles were spices liquors, glass ware and dyed cloth. To develop trade and
commerce, the state maintained commercial residences at Colachel, Alleppey, Awaye and Trivandrum.

Shipments were made to the ports of Cochin, Calicut, Bombay, Karachi, Colombo and Patna. Quilon was a commercial and industrial centre of tiles and cashew nut factories, spinning and weaving mills, technical industries, textile and engineering workshops enriched with marketing facilities. Cape Comorin, Suchindrum, Varkala, Thiruvattar and Ettumanur were the famous places of pilgrimage.

With regard to the state of education, efforts were made by the government of promoting education only in the twentieth century. But the various missionary institutions paid much attention to develop education through vernacular languages. They started girls’ and boys’ schools, boarding and training schools and educational institutions of various kinds to give training to the natives. Female education was encouraged among the Brahmins, Nayars, Ilavas, Muslims, Christians, Pulayas and Parayas. In short the government as well as the private agencies worked for the education of the youth in the state. As compared with British India and other Indian states, Travancore occupied foremost position in education.

**Scheme of the Study**

Any research topic in History is fundamentally based on a
functional design. This is what is called the scheme of study. It deals with the different components of the study. They are the importance of the topic, purpose, area, period, scope and limitation of the study, hypothesis, sources and chapterisation.

**Importance of the Topic**

The present study on the topic “Raja Kesava Das and His Right against Tippu Sultan” is a historical study. As the first Dewan of Travancore, Raja Kesava Das played a vital role of defending the Travancore state against the aggression of Tippu Sultan. He also played an important role in social change and justice. In consideration of his multifarious services to the elevation of the people of Travancore, the present topic is selected for a systematic study.

**Purpose of the Study**

1. To study the rise of Raja Kesava Das in Travancore.

2. To estimate the role played by him during the invasion of Tippu Sultan of Travancore.

3. To study his services to the people of Travancore in general.

**Area of the Study**

Raja Kesava Das served as Rayasom, Head of the Commercial Department, Sarvadhikariyakar, and Dewan in Travancore.
According to the area, the study is confined to Travancore. His activities helped particularly the development of the people of the erstwhile state of Travancore.

**Period of Study**

Raja Kesava Das was active in his service from 1788 to 1798. In order to make a comparative analysis of the different phases in the life history of Raja Kesava Das, the early life of him is also included.

**Limitation of the Study**

This study has certain minor limitations from the viewpoint of the sources. One limitation is the lack of original sources. Yet an attempt was made to set right the limitation by collecting data from various sources available in the Kerala Archives.

**Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is restricted to one aspect of his career and achievements. It is an elaborate study which covers only his military activities during the attack of Tippu Sultan, the Mysore ruler, on Travancore.

**Hypothesis**

1. The tireless efforts and selfless services of Raja Kesava Das made him a greatest Dewan.
2. The hazardous task of defending the State of Travancore against the aggression of Tippu Sultan reflected his deep love and affection towards his State.

3. He used his military power to drive out the Mysoreans from the Borders.

**Organisation of the Study**

The thesis is organized in seven chapters including introduction and conclusion. The introduction of the thesis deals with the selection and importance of study of Raja Kesava Das and His Reforms in Travancore from 1789 to 1799 A.D.

The first chapter deals with the background of Travancore in the period of Raja Kesava Das and his activities helped particularly the development of the people of the erstwhile State of Travancore.

The second chapter provides an overview of a vivid topography and brief history of Travancore. It commands and variety of scenery. It is famous for its stretches of coconut groves, rich forests, sea shores and mineral sands. It has a well ordered system of natural drainage and extensive system of lakes and tanks. These aspects attracted the ambition of several conquerors from early time. The Ay kings later made it a part and parcel of their kingdom. Subsequently it fell under the influence of the Pandyas and the Cholas.
The third chapter titled ‘Achievements of Raja Kesava Das’ with his fight against the mighty arms of Tippu Sultan. Tippu was threatening the very gates of Travancore when Kesava Das assumed office as Dewan. He sent the Travancore troops to fight against him in all possible battle fronts – in Palghat, Coimbatore and Dindugal to crrible him forever. The treaty of perpetual Alliance with the company, in another proof of his practical statesmanship, as such an alliance saved Travancore from external enemies for all time.

The fourth chapter deals with the ‘Commercial Reforms of Raja Kesava Das’. He improved the economic condition of the people by encouraging trade. The ports at Colachel, Punthura and Vizhingam were improved with warehouses. A new port was opened at Alleppey which was till then a sandy wilderness and merchants from Sind and Dutch were brought to colonise it and carry on large scale trade. Forest produce like timber, cardamom, honey and wax collected in a central depot at Allepey and sold at the highest procurable price. Canals and roads were constructed to facilitate the flow of goods to the ports and ships were built to carry them to the distant markets of India. Several gold coins were minted to increase foreign trade.

The needs of agriculture too did not escape his attention and hence the fifth chapter is about the agricultural reforms of the Dewan. The reforms introduced by him are (1) Large areas of fresh lands were brought
under cultivation and loans were advanced to agriculturists. (2) A comprehensive revenue survey of the state was made in 1772 and taxes were fixed. (3) A chattavariola or a book of rules was issued to govern the collection of taxes by the officers. (4) The remissions were given whenever there was a failure of crops.

The sixth chapter titled ‘Public Works’ gives an account of the various works carried out in and around Trivandrum during his regime. The Trivandrum town, the capital of the state, was improved and beautified by him. The Padmanabhaswamy Temple was repaired; its tower was completed, flag – staff was built and a new structure called the Kulasekharamandapam was erected. The public road leading to the temple was widened and the Chalai Bazar was opened at close quarters. The Killiyar and the Karamana river were bridged.

The Military Reforms of Raja Kesava Das are explained in the seventh chapter of the thesis. Of his military reforms, the most noteworthy are the repair of the old forts and the construction of many new roes. Guns and shorts were speedily manufactured in the arsenal at Udayagiri.

The chapter eight i.e. conclusion is nothing but a summary of the previous chapters. In it the observation, findings and how the series of reforms introduced by Raja Kesava Das helped in accelerating the pace and economic progress of the state are discussed.