

Mysore Representative Assembly (1881-1950)

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ABSTRACT

An attempt is made in this paper to trace the Mysore Representative Assembly 1881-1950. In 1853 Dewan C Rangacharlu became Dewan of princely Mysore. He was an able administrator during his administration he made the great achievements. Among the important progressive reforms of those days, the establishment of " People Representative Assembly" was significant. It helped the people in the administration. It was started on the advise of J.D.Gardon. In 1881 immediately after Dasara Celebration, the Assembly of this was convened at Mysore. In the first session 144 members were presented. From that day on words for the first time in India, the seeds of Democracy were sown in Mysore. The credit of this should go to the king Chamaraja Wodeyar and Dewan Rangacharlu besides Resident Gardon.

Key Words:

Rangacharlu, Representative Assembly, Chamaraja Wodeyar, Princely Mysore, Legislative Body, Executive Council.

1. INTRODUCTION

More than one hundred years ago, on 7th October, 1881, Mysore Representative Assembly “a sort of Panchayat of Panchayats” was brought into session by the great dewan C.V. Rangacharlu with the encouragement of the then Maharaja Chamaraja Wodeyar. It was unique in the sense that such an attempt was made in a princely state for the first time and it was a pioneering body as no such representative body existed anywhere in India. It was an experiment without precedent in those days. It played a significant role in rousing political consciousness among the people and acted as a link between the ruler and the ruled.

The Representative Assembly in later days became a forum to the Mysore Congress leaders to project their views and agitate for responsible government. It received statutory recognition in 1924 and remained an important representative body till 1950. It helped many Congressmen to emerge as leaders with experience in parliamentary affairs and they played a significant role in the history of modern Mysore.

Most of the Chief Ministers, Ministers and other important leaders of Karnataka like K. Chengalaraya Reddy, K. Hanumanthaiah, Kadidal Manjappa, S. Nijalingappa, D. Devaraje Urs, R. Chennigaramaiah, K.T. Bhashyam, M.V. Rao, T. Chennaiah, V. Venkatappa, T. Siddalingaiah, Mohammad Imam, Mohammad Sheriff, H. Siddaiah, H.M. Chennabasappa, M.V. Krishnappa, H.C. Dasappa, Malik Mariyappa and host of others made their debut in the Representative Assembly and gained parliamentary experience which helped them to play a vital role in the administration of the state later.

Dewan Rangacharlu advised the Maharaja for the formation of a Representative Assembly “so that the views and objectives of his Government should be better known and appreciated by the people for whose benefit the Government existed.” For that purpose, the Representative Assembly was authoritatively brought into existence not by a statute, but by

means of an executive order promulgated on August 25, 1881. It was to meet annually during Dasara, when the dewan placed the result of the previous year's administration and the programme for the next year which would convince the people "that the interests of Government are identical with those of the people." It was a forum of representatives with no powers, but only to listen to what the government had to say. It did not violate the articles of the Instrument of Transfer and enabled important people to sit with administrators and watch the working of the administration.¹

The first session of the Assembly which met on October 7, 1881 was attended by 144 members which included 2 cultivating land owners from each taluk and 4 leading merchants from each district. The official title of the Assembly was "the Assembly of representative formers and Merchants from all the taluks of the Mysore State." The dewan at the first meeting explained "the wish of the Maharaja to bring the administration into greater harmony with the wishes of the people and invited the members to make any observations and suggestions in the public interest."² The Assembly began its career as a nominated body, and it composed of persons nominated by the government on the recommendations of Deputy Commissioners. This method of selection by Deputy Commissioners was continued till 1891 when the principle of election was introduced. Thus, what was merely a consultative nominated body in the initial stage became truly Representative Assembly was summoned regularly and it discussed public affairs freely. It was to bring to the notice of government, the wants and grievances of the people, for watching and criticizing the work of the administration. The main object of the Assembly was to afford to the people "an opportunity to represent their wants and grievances and not to give them control over the administration." Opening its session in 1903, the Maharaja hoped "that it would prove a valuable adjunct to the administration and help to promote the contentment and well

being of the people.”³ Unlike the tendency of the present legislators who are always anxious to increase their salary and allowances, the members of the Representative Assembly unanimously decided to surrender their daily batta granted to them for attending the Assembly session.⁴

The Representative Assembly did not make law, “but had for its characteristic function the representation of the wants and grievances of the masses, with powers of initiative and reference. Mysore was the pioneer among the princely states in evolving such an organization, “a sort of panchayat of panchayats.” The Assembly was a regional product which served informally and rudimentally the purposes of a referendum and an initiative.⁵

The Representative Assembly had become manifest and as Dewan Sheshadri Iyer said “that it was in the power of the representatives to contribute..... To the good government and prosperity of the country by carefully watching the working of the administration in all its branches, by unhesitatingly pointing out all shortcomings that might strike them and by affording practical suggestions for improving the condition of all classes of His Highness’s subjects.”⁶

The members were not intended to be more passive auditors of the Dewan’s speech and he advised the members “to familiarize themselves with the wants of the people, and to educate themselves in the matter of administration and expressed the hope that, by subordinating private to public interest, they would assist the government in the difficult work of administration by bringing forward all real grievances of the people to the notice of the government and helping to remove them.”⁷

Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV in opening the Assembly for the first time in person in 1903 referred to “the consolidation of a sense of common interest between the Government and the people” as “one of the conspicuous results of this Assembly.” The Maharaja appreciated the work of the Assembly by enlarging its sphere. In October, 1916, the Maharaja decided to hold a

second session of the Assembly every year. While approving the second session, the Maharaja held that the Assembly had “more than fulfilled the expectations which were formed at the time of its institution.” The Birth day session was devoted to the consideration of the Budget estimates of the state. The procedure of investigation the questions by means of committees was also adopted.⁸

1.1 Statutory Recognition to the Assembly

The Assembly was placed on a statutory basis by the constitutional changes introduced in 1923 defining its constitution, powers and functions. It was given a definite place in the Mysore Constitution, and “Its position as a popular body placing before the Government the wants and wishes of the people and voicing its public opinion in respect of legislation, taxation, finance and administrative measures generally has been recognized by statute.” It was to be consulted on all proposals for the levy of new taxes and on the general principles of all measures of legislation and it was “to have the right of passing resolutions on matters relating to public administration and on the general principles and policy underlying the annual State Budget.” The strength was fixed at 250 members and out of that not less than 150 members were to be representatives of rural areas.⁹ The dewan was the ex-officio President of the Assembly presiding at all its meetings.

At the reconstituted Mysore legislature, on March 12, 1924 when the two houses had met in their new and reformed grab, the Maharaja called upon the members “to use their new powers to strengthen all the beneficial activities in the country.” He told them to keep “in close touch with the Government and the people and to interpret the one to the other, and hoped that the long silence of the depressed and the humble would be broken and full responsibility for their well being shouldered by the educated and the well to do classes.”¹⁰ The Maharaja observed that “it

has been deemed necessary to maintain the character of the Representative Assembly as essentially a body for consultation and reference as well as representation, directly voicing the needs of the people, and with a constitution sufficiently flexible to expand with the expanding political consciousness of the people.”¹¹ The Assembly emerged out of its old form into a stronger, well defined constitutional body, which is in harmony with the sentiments and traditions of the country and the genius of our people. It took a definite and important place in the body politic of the state not only because of its statutory recognition but also because of its increased functions, powers and responsibilities.¹² The Assembly exercised influence on the administration and “by bringing representatives in direct communication with Government, helped to spread correct ideas amongst the people and roused them to a sense of their true interests and importance.”¹³

1.2 Important issues in the Assembly

There was no opposition to the government in the Assembly till 1920 and the situation changed after 1920 when the backward class people raised the question of equitable distribution of high offices among all the castes. That issue dominated the proceedings of the Assembly during the twenties of the present century. As an impact of political reforms in British India, the agitation for responsible government and the emergence of Congress in Mysore were other important developments which figured prominently in the Assembly during the next two decades.¹⁴

1.3 Walkouts in Assembly

In June 1928, for the first time in its history, D.S. Mallappa staged a walkout as he was not satisfied with the answers given by the dewan president Mirza. The Press hailed it as a historic incident, as it clearly vindicated the right of the people’s representatives to get proper

answer from the authorities.¹⁵ In October 1937, the Congress emerged stronger with the merger of Samyukta Prajapaksha. Protesting against the midnight arrest of K.T. Bhashyam, Congress members of the Assembly led by H.K. Veeranna Gowda walked out of the Assembly. While walking out of the Assembly, Rangaramaiah shouted the slogans, Gandhiji ki Jai, Congress ki Jai and Bharathmatha ki Jai. The dewan who was unprepared for such a development was stunned at the shouting of slogans and the walk-out by the Congress members.¹⁶

1.4 Reference to Gandhi and the British unhappiness

At the opening of the Dasara session of the Representative Assembly in September 1933, dewan Mirza made a reference to Gandhiji as an “ardent patriot and the true friend of Britain.” The Government of India took objection to Mirza’s interference in British Indian politics. The Viceroy expressed “considerable surprise at some of the passages of the dewan’s address to the Assembly,” with reference to Gandhiji.¹⁷

1.5 Nehru’s visit to the Assembly

During his visit to Mysore in June 1931, Jawaharlal Nehru with his wife and daughter (present Prime Minister) attended the Mysore Representative Assembly session, when D.S. Mallappa and Mohammed Imam welcomed Nehru as a great son of India.

The Assembly after 1924 was consulted on all important legislative measures though the opinion was not binding and the scope of the Assembly was limited “to expressions of opinion on the general principles of bills, and on amendments to such principles.” It was also consulted on new taxes.¹⁸ Even though the Assembly got the privilege of passing resolutions on the budget, Gundappa Gowda cryptically commented, that it could not get “even one figure in the budget altered as a result of that power” and the resolution had no effect on the government and their representations had been a cry in the wilderness. He wanted nonofficial presidents to the

legislative bodies.¹⁹ In fact, it alone gave a true expression to the people's "instinctive experience, as well as an unsophisticated verdict on laws and measures as judged in the light of social values and social postulates."²⁰

Members of the Assembly pleaded with the authorities "that a political awakening of an unprecedented nature had come all over India and naturally also over Mysore." They appealed for a proper and sympathetic understanding of the general awakening that had come over the state as also of the legitimate aspirations of the people in respect of securing a share in the administration.²¹

When the constitutional reforms were about to be published, the members of the Assembly pleaded with the government to place the reform proposals to the legislative bodies to ascertain their views.²² But the government for obvious reasons did not place the proposals to the legislative bodies. Instead, the Maharaja in a proclamation announced the reforms in 1939, which provided for the grant of enlarged powers with a wide electorate. An important reform designed to influence the executive was the inclusion of not less than two non-official members from among the elected representatives in the Executive Council.²³ The Assembly was abolished in December 1949, just before the new Indian Constitution was inaugurated in January 1950.

Thus, the Mysore Representative assembly started more than hundred years ago (October 7, 1881), played a significant role in rousing political consciousness among the people of the state. It served as a link between the ruler and the ruled. The Congress leaders used it as a forum to project their views and put forward their demands. The Assembly gave a pride of place to the state and made Mysore progressive among the princely states. It was through this body, that the movement for responsible government was carried on successfully by the Mysore Congress. The

memories of discussions and debates that took place in the Assembly sessions are cherished even now by a large number of people.

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