

The Raja Behind Raja Ravi Varma

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I congratulate the author for the article on Raja Ravi Varma in the 'Eye' January 7, 2013 edition of The Indian Express. I have a few interesting points to add.

It is well-known that Raja Ravi Varma began his painting career in erstwhile Travancore state, now Thiruvananthapuram, in the mid-nineteenth century and that he was patronised by the Maharaja of Travancore.

The person responsible for bringing him to the court of the Maharaja was Raja Sir Thanjavur Madhava Rao (Sir TMR), the then Dewan of Travancore. He popularised Ravi Varma's paintings and later, when he was appointed the Dewan of Baroda, induced Ravi Varma to visit the court of Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III in Baroda.

Ravi Varma paintings were appreciated and he prospered in Baroda. He had a studio next to the Maharajah Fateh Singh Museum. The studio though dilapidated now, still exists. The museum houses his paintings.

After Sir TMR retired as Dewan of Baroda, he asked Ravi Varma to relocate to the then Bombay where he found a place for him to carry on his work. Ravi Varma made many paintings including several masterpieces in this house and these reached the Royalty.

Later, when Ravi Varma was in his last days, a place in Malavli near Pune was found by Sir TMR for him to start his oleography press with German machines. He asked Raja Ravi Varma to move to Malavli. The rest is history which you have brought out in your article.

What I wanted to emphasise is that Ravi Varma's oleography had an interesting beginning and the person behind it was Raja Sir TMR. He was the force behind his art. This has been brought out very well in a book in Marathi by Ranjit Desai, which has some interesting interactions between Ravi Varma and Raja Sir TMR. I have English translations of these passages with me. There are other authors like Rupika Chawla who have mentioned Sir TMR's influence in the career of Ravi Varma.

I was immensely interested in your article as I happen to be the great grand-daughter of Sir TMR. It would be nice if you could take out a sequel to this by mentioning the earlier part of Ravi Varma's life.

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