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The guns of Travancore or how much powder may a Maharaja blaze away?¹

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The main focus of this article is the chequered history of Travancore state's gun salutes. After the somewhat unexpected award of a prestigious dynastic salute in 1866, all later efforts to rise in the hierarchy of guns remained in vain. What were the grounds on which gun salutes were claimed by the rulers of Travancore, and granted or withheld by the British-Indian government? A related question is the paucity of documentary evidence that both parties had to cope with. What kind of knowledge did both parties actually possess when invoking the sanction of immemorial custom in support of their claims?

Introduction

After the suppression of the Indian Mutiny, Queen Victoria undertook in her famous proclamation of November 1858 to refrain from further territorial annexations in South Asia, and to respect the rights, dignity and honour of the princely rulers of the Indian states. This heralded the historic alliance between the colonial state and the semi-independent Indian princes, which was to last till Independence. The British thought that they could use the remaining influence of the princes to strengthen the stability of the empire. Or perhaps the alliance was

Acknowledgements: I gratefully acknowledge the research grant received from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NOW), The Hague, and the constructive comments made by John McLeod.

¹ The subtitle is derived from a letter from the dewan of Travancore to the British resident, Trivandrum, 3-8-1926, in Crown Representative Records (CRR), R/2/884/160, in Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC), London.

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in fact a compromise, which the colonial state was forced to accept in the face of the strong resistance by these Indian rulers.² In any case, at the Imperial Assemblage of 1877—which marked Queen Victoria’s assumption of the title of Empress of India—these princes were honoured with numerous distinctions, including resounding titles, armorial bearings, state receptions and, last but not least, gun salutes.

The Imperial Assemblage was intended to show that the Queen’s authority was placed upon the ancient throne of the Moguls, as viceroy Lord Lytton wrote home with great satisfaction. The last vestiges of the Mogul Empire were thus removed, but at the same time the British Queen was cast into the image of the Mogul emperor. As a result, the paraphernalia that surrounded official interactions between the colonial government and the Indian princes became a strange amalgamation of honours and distinctions derived from European court ceremonial and Indian *darbar* tradition.

In Europe, the practice of firing gun salutes was well established by the sixteenth century, and most probably stemmed from naval tradition. Firing all guns would leave a ship, fort or battery virtually defenceless, as guns could not be easily and quickly reloaded. Over time, the practice evolved from an act of submission and peaceful intentions into a mark of respect to honour and rank important guests.³ It was in this form that it reached India, where drums, umbrellas, elephants and jewelled weapons were prominent elements in the king’s ceremonial entourage.⁴ Barbara Ramusack notes that the beating of drums (an Indian insignia of sovereignty) and the firing of gun salutes (which was introduced by the British) used to accompany public announcements to largely non-literate audiences.⁵

Bernard Cohn has argued that the British rulers and their local representatives were inclined to view India in historical terms as a feudal society consisting of lords, chiefs and peasants, very much like their own, much earlier past. As part of that historical imagination, the Indian princes were seen as Queen Victoria’s most loyal Indian feudatories, honoured with gun salutes and coats of arms, and organised in an Indian *peerage*. The conferring upon them of these distinctions was based entirely on what the British conceived to have been European feudal history, marked by order, deference and hierarchy.⁶

John McLeod, however, rejects Cohn’s effort to fit gun salutes, knighthoods, etc., into Eric Hobsbawm’s concept of invented tradition. In his opinion, they better fit into David Cannadine’s concept of ornamentalism, indicating that the British were concerned less with the invention of traditions than with the construction of affinities on the presumption that society in India was the same as, or sometimes even superior to, society at home. They used to see their own society in the image of hierarchy, ‘and so it is scarcely surprising that that was how they saw their empire’. As British aristocrats and Indian princes were thought to share

² Singh, ‘Indian Princely States and the British Rule’.

³ Naval Historical Center Washington, internet homepage.

⁴ Gordon, *Robes of Honour*, p. 143.

⁵ Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, p. 133.

⁶ Cohn, ‘Representing Authority’.

a common heritage as warrior chiefs, many of the honours enjoyed by them, such as gun salutes, had military overtones, even if their recipients had no real connections with the army.⁷

In standard British narratives, the Indian princes were represented as being obsessed with rank, status and, in particular, the number of gun salutes they were accorded. Susceptibility to the influence of high-sounding phrases and empty symbols was thought to be part of the oriental mind. However, British colonial officers were similarly obsessed. As Lord Elgin observed, 'in the colonies, premiers and chief justices fight for stars and ribbons like little boys for toys, and scream at us if we stop them'. This was scarcely different from how things were in Britain, and that is precisely the point Cannadine, who was quoting Lord Elgin, wanted to make.⁸

For most princes, however, gun salutes were not hollow gestures. In pre-British times the Indian states were continuously involved in war and conflict. With the establishment of the *pax Britannica*, this originally dynamic political system was suppressed and the proud rulers of former kingdoms were deprived of their powers in foreign and military affairs. The hundreds of larger and small states, however, could not be frozen in a rigid and closed system. No longer free to fight one another on the battlefield, princes and chiefs 'now attempted to best each other in the world of symbols'.⁹ Lower states tried to rise within the princely order by arrogating the privileges and ceremonial distinctions pertaining to more dominant states.¹⁰ The honour of a return visit by the viceroy or governor, the allocation of seats at Government of India functions, or forms of address in official correspondence were important ranking mechanisms. Yet, the prime arena for status rivalry was the salute table established by the paramount power.¹¹

During and immediately after World War I, the colonial administration ended the political isolation of the princely states by bringing the ruling princes and chiefs together for joint consultations, most conspicuously so in the institution of a Chamber of Princes opened in 1921. As the number of guns largely determined membership of the Chamber, gun salutes became perhaps the most prestigious of all honours, especially so, as Edwin Montagu wrote, if the same were denied to other princes.¹² However, their increased importance also meant that it became more difficult to modify the salute table. In the 1930s the rivalry for salutes was further accentuated by schemes for the political federation of British Indian provinces and Indian states, which made the rulers feel uncertain about their mutual position in the prospective political constellation, and made

⁷ McLeod, *The New Mansabdars*, pp. 1–2; Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp. xix, 57, quotation p. 85.

⁸ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, p. 88.

⁹ Ramusack, *The Princes of India*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Kooiman, 'Hierarchy and Mobility'.

¹¹ Ramusack, *The Princes of India*, p. 74, and *The Indian Princes*, p. 90. See also McLeod, 'The English Honours System', pp. 244, 248.

¹² Letter from Mr Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India, 17-11-1921 London, to viceroy Lord Reading, in *European Manuscripts (Mss. Eur.) D 523*, in OIOC, London.

them more inclined to cling to the ceremonial as a way to stress their political importance.

The following sections focus on the Indian state of Travancore. This state, situated on the southwestern tip of the Indian peninsula, had emerged as the major single power in this region in the eighteenth century. In 1795 and 1805, the raja of Travancore was forced to recognise the British paramount power and promised to pay a substantial subsidy in exchange for military protection. Alarmed by repeated complaints of maladministration, the Madras government considered annexation, but the timely outbreak of the Mutiny proved a blessing in disguise and assured Travancore's semi-independent survival.

The main theme of the following discussion is the chequered history of Travancore state's gun salutes. After the somewhat unexpected award of a prestigious dynastic salute in 1866, all efforts after World War I to rise in the hierarchy of guns remained in vain. I shall investigate and try to explain the conditions under which this state and its ruling family were favoured by the British with the grant of gun salutes. Part of the investigation will be a discussion of the grounds on which gun salutes were claimed by the rulers of Travancore, and were granted or withheld by the paramount power.

In their correspondence on this subject, the British Government and the Travancore durbar attached extreme importance to precedent. However, when after 1858 Foreign Department officers¹³ looked for records to codify the precedents that reputedly guided British policies on the states, they found to their dismay only a few letters, surveys and memoranda. Therefore, political officers like Aitchison, Tupper and Lee Warner had to work very hard 'to bring system and uniformity into the disordered world of Indian feudatory policy'.¹⁴ In spite of that, both the resident and the dewan of Travancore made frequent reference to precedent, history and tradition from time immemorial. That raises the question of the evidence both parties used for their claims and the history to which they were appealing.

Gun Salutes: General

Prior to 1855, there was no fixed policy as regards the firing of gun salutes as a mark of honour. Indian rulers who entered into relations with the East India Company were generally accorded 21 guns, but officials like supreme court judges and the bishop of Madras were entitled to the same number. In 1855, governor-general Dalhousie addressed the local governments about revising and regulating salutes. As a result of these consultations, in April 1857 the Court of Directors agreed upon a first table of salutes, but it was never published.

¹³ In India the Foreign Department was responsible for relations with the princely states. As the burden of work increased, in 1914 a Political Department branch was created within the Foreign Department to take charge of the states. Only under the 1935 India Act did the Political Department become a separate and independent office.

¹⁴ Copland, *The British Raj*, p. 217. See also Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, pp. 93–94.

After the Mutiny, and influenced by its outcome, a new list was made and published. Discussions about this list show no attempt to compare in detail the respective claims of ruling princes in one part of India with those elsewhere. The Government of India was not in possession of all the evidence on which the original decisions were based; and in different provinces, different standards were applied. These early tables of salutes therefore defined a state's relation to the colonial government rather than its place in relation to other princely states in India. The table was revised in 1864, 1867, and at the time of the Imperial Assemblage.¹⁵

One of the major authorities on the ceremonial of salutes is, of course, Tupper, whose standard work *Indian Political Practice* (1895) explains the policy of the Government of India in its relations with Indian states, based on earlier cases. One of the principles mentioned by Tupper is that salutes were entirely confined to Indian princes, with the exception of four Arab chiefs near Aden. Another well-established principle was that salutes were granted only to ruling princes, the sole exception then being the Raja of Benares. Extensive possessions or an ancient family were insufficient to qualify for this honour. In Tupper's time, the question of precedence as between rulers was not yet affected by the number of guns, mainly because no complete list of precedence for all the princes and chiefs of India had been authoritatively settled. Yet, gun salutes soon became the principal determinant of precedence.

The table of salutes was framed in three parts. The first and most important was the dynastic or permanent salute, which, when Tupper wrote his book, was enjoyed by 107 princes. Next, there were personal salutes, conferred upon 10 ruling princes who were allowed as a strictly personal concession a greater number of guns than in their dynastic salute. Jodhpur, for instance, with a dynastic salute of 17 guns, was honoured with 21 guns when on a visit to the viceroy in Calcutta.¹⁶ An increase in personal salute did not imply any change in the dynastic salute. Finally, there were local salutes, at that time enjoyed only by four larger states (Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Kashmir), which were allowed salutes of 21 guns within their own territories. Although personal and local salutes were additional to dynastic salutes, their official coexistence was going to create a lot of confusion, in government records as well.

Personal salutes were meant for life and could not be transferred to a successor. However, they were fired in British territory also, whereas local salutes were territorially confined. In 1875, the Government of India, in answer to a question from Madras, laid down 'that native chiefs possessing artillery may fire guns in their own territory whenever, and as often, as they please'.¹⁷ Therefore, McLeod

¹⁵ 'Revision of Table of Salutes 1917', CRR, R/2/895/327, in OIOC. Tupper, *Indian Political Practice*, Vol. III, p. 234.

¹⁶ Dufferin, *Our Viceregal Life*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Government of India, Foreign Department, G.O. 543, 28-8-1875, in CRR, R/2/884/160, OIOC and quoted in R/2/880/50. Also in Tupper, *Indian Political Practice*, Vol. III, p. 236.

concludes that local salutes were pointless, as within his own state a prince could fire whatever salute for himself he wished.¹⁸ We will see, however, that the Government of India did not remain completely indifferent to the amount of powder blazed away by local rulers.

The publication of the salute list was meant to hierarchise the rather arbitrary grant of gun salutes in a linear order. States with the largest number of dynastic guns topped the list, and states with the same number were ranked alphabetically. Earlier, there had been salutes of seven guns, but in 1867 the lowest possible number of salutes, at least for Indian states, was increased to nine. The highest number of salutes—21 guns—was for three states only, namely Hyderabad, Baroda and Mysore; later, Gwalior and Kashmir were added to the list. There were eight states with 19 dynastic salutes, including Travancore, and the number of salute states increased further down the scale with the result that the salute table resembled a pyramid with a large number of nine-gun princes at its base. In view of that structure, one may surmise that the higher one's place on the list, the more difficult it was to make any further progress.

In the British Empire, 21 guns as the standard salute for royalty was adopted early in the nineteenth century. This maximum number may have been chosen for numerological reasons, 21 being a multiple of the sacred number seven. Another explanation is that the biggest British gun-bearing ship at the time this custom started had 21 guns, and that the number stuck. Even numbers were considered unlucky and therefore avoided.

In British India, a salute of 21 guns was observed for independent Asian and other foreign rulers. In 1876, Lord Lytton pointed out that the Queen-Empress enjoyed the same number, even though she was the sovereign. Therefore, in 1877 the secretary of state for India commanded that in India the salute of the sovereign be increased to 101 guns and that for the viceroy and royal flag to 31 guns.¹⁹ Interestingly, governors of the three presidencies were assigned 17 guns and British officers in the states received a salute only if they were entitled to a salute in British territory. Even stone could be saluted: in 1934, an 'economy-class' statue (one of limestone rather than the more usual, long-lasting marble) of Lord Irwin was unveiled in Great Place, just below the Secretariat Blocks in New Delhi, to the sound of 31 guns.²⁰

The power to deal with salutes rested with the Queen-Empress, although from 1875 the viceroy was empowered to provisionally increase, reduce or grant salutes. Yet his decisions remained invalid 'until Her Majesty's pleasure in regard to it [should] have been duly taken'.²¹ Though originally assigned on the basis of political importance and cooperation, the criteria governing the allocation of salutes

¹⁸ McLeod, *Sovereignty, Power, Control*, p. 249.

¹⁹ Despatch by Lytton, Oct. 1876, and decision by secretary of state, 8-2-1877, in Tupper, *Indian Political Practice*, Vol. III, p. 236.

²⁰ Hankins, *Hanklyn-Janklin*.

²¹ Tupper, *Indian Political Practice*, Vol. III, p. 235.

remained vague and inconsistently applied. As a result, there arose much confusion and mutual strife, and in 1922 viceroy Lord Reading called any attempt at revision the stirring up of a hornet's nest. Although the ruling princes complained that a rationalisation of the salutes was necessary to settle the issue of their precedence, the Political Department thought it better to maintain the status quo.²²

Gun Salutes: Travancore in the Nineteenth Century

Information on gun salutes in Travancore for the first half of the nineteenth century is extremely scarce. The standing orders of the Nayar Brigade (the local military force commanded by British officers) record the salutes fired by its artillery on different occasions, but not systematically and without noting the exact number—a matter which later was to assume such great importance. In 1821, for instance, the Brigade paid 'customary honours' on the raja's birthday, and in 1831, 21 guns were fired on the birthday of the ex-regent rani.²³ The installation of a new raja was another occasion for salutes, but the extensive report by resident Morison on the installation ceremony in 1829 mentioned the 'usual salute' and the 'royal salute' without providing further detail.²⁴

Official visits were also important events for gun salutes. In 1830, Mr Lushington was the first governor of Madras to visit Travancore, but the reports from Shungoony Menon and Nagam Aiya record no salutes. When in 1858 another governor of Madras—Lord Harris—visited Travancore, the raja received a 'royal salute' on arriving at and on leaving the residency after his visit to the governor. In the light of current practice, that might mean 21 guns. On his return visit to the ruler in durbar, the governor also received a royal salute, although when landing at Quilon in the neighbouring state of Cochin, only 19 guns were fired in his honour. In 1853, the ruler of Travancore officially opened a new bridge over the Karamanay river, and Shungoony Menon wrote that after the raja in his state car had been received with a royal salute, 'the further reverberation of 17 guns informed the people of the resident's joining the party'.²⁵ These fragments of information may suffice to show that the British were not very concerned with the amount of noise generated by the princely guns, and that the number of salutes was not really an issue. This indifference was soon to disappear.

The revised table of salutes of 1864 shows Travancore and Cochin as entitled to a dynastic salute of 17 guns. No mention is made of any local salute and no other recipients from Madras are listed, apart from the bibi of Cannanore with seven guns. Two years later, the Government of Madras, pleased with the modernising zeal of the new raja, Ayilliam Tirunal, and his dewan, Madhava

²² Ramusack, *The Princes of India*, pp. 74–75.

²³ 'Salutes to the Maharaja of Travancore, 1898', in CRR, R/2/892/274, OIOC.

²⁴ Enclosure in 'Investiture Maharaja of Travancore with Ruling Powers, 1931', in CRR, R/2/887/186, OIOC.

²⁵ Menon, *History of Kerala*, pp. 409, 495, 479. Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, p. 485. See also CRR, R/2/892/274, OIOC.

Rao, advised the Government of India to increase Travancore's dynastic salute to 19 guns. The viceroy, John Lawrence, adopted this advice and informed the ruler that 'in recognition of Your Highness' excellent administration of the Travancore state', he had directed that his dynastic salute be increased to 19 guns. Also, His Highness should henceforth be addressed by the title of maharaja in all communications from the British government. The revised table of 1867 lists Travancore as a 19-gun state, and no particular pressure seems to have been needed to obtain this increase.²⁶

The Imperial Assemblage of 1877 was a major occasion for grants of and additions to salutes. No fewer than 63 ruling princes made their appearance in Delhi, including Hyderabad and Baroda, and many of them had never met before. Although Travancore did not turn up at Delhi, Travancore, together with Gwalior and Kashmir, was granted a personal salute of 21 guns,²⁷ or, in the words of Tupper, two additional guns for life.²⁸ The maharaja died in 1880, but at state functions—such as the Queen-Empress's jubilees and public durbars—21 guns continued to be fired in honour of his successor, thus creating confusion about personal and local salute.

Governor Havelock's Visit to Travancore, 1897

The Travancore gun salute did not become a problem until 1895, when a new raja was installed in Cochin. *The Cochin Government Gazette*, describing the installation ceremony, reported that His Highness was saluted with 21 guns on his visit to the residency at Bolghotty. The Government of Madras immediately requested the resident 'to state under whose orders and by who salutes of 21 guns were fired'. The resident forwarded the question to the dewan, but a handwritten note on his letter of 4 December 1895 runs: 'When HH the Maharaja of Travancore left Trivandrum last Friday, 21 guns were likewise fired. Is this not also open to question? He is entitled to only 19 guns.'²⁹

The dewan of Cochin replied that the 21 guns had been fired as usual under his orders by His Highness' artillery stationed in Mattancheri. He argued in defence that the same salute was given on the occasion of state visits after recent installation ceremonies in Cochin (1888) and Travancore (1885).³⁰ A clerk in the resident's office scribbled in the margin of this letter: 'Sir, this is correct, but the Government of India orders are recent'. The clerk must have been referring to a note from the Foreign and Political Department, dated 23 August 1895, stating that any salute

²⁶ CRR, R/2/892/274, and 'Honours, the Title of Maharaja, 1866', in CRR, R/2/897/353, OIOC.

²⁷ Notification Government of India, 1-1-1877, in CRR, R/2/880/50, OIOC.

²⁸ Tupper, *Indian Political Practice*, Vol. III, p. 238.

²⁹ 'Salute Cochin Raja, 1896', in CRR, R/2/879/40, OIOC.

³⁰ The 21 guns at the installation in Travancore were mentioned in the *Travancore Government Gazette Extraordinary*, Trivandrum, 20-8-1885, but not in the report by resident J.C. Hannington as printed in 'Installation and Investiture Darbars in Native States', in CRR, R/2/894/315. When asked

fired during a ceremony of installation should be limited to the number of guns constituting the ruler's dynastic or personal salute.³¹

The resident forwarded the dewan's reply to the Government of Madras and the latter consulted the Foreign and Political Department in Calcutta. In March 1896, the resident was advised

to mention the matter informally to the Raja [of Cochin], or to his Dewan, and to point out that it was incorrect to fire a salute of 21 guns. His Highness' artillery can of course fire any number of guns they like, but it is obviously inappropriate, on an occasion such as that under notice, to fire a salute which is applicable to neither party to the ceremonial.

The resident acted accordingly and informed the dewan that the matter had been referred to the Government of India under orders that had just previously been issued.³²

The point had been made and now it was for Travancore to settle this problem. The matter came to a head in October 1897 when Sir Arthur Havelock, governor of Madras, visited Travancore. On the eve of this visit, the assistant-resident informed the resident that the dewan had ordered Dawson, commander of the Nayar Brigade, to take precedent of Lord Wenlock's visit in 1892, and to fire 21 salutes upon the arrival of the maharaja and 17 upon the arrival of the governor.³³ The resident was unable to dissuade the durbar from its intended programme and 21 guns seem to have been given.³⁴ The matter, however, was not passed over without comment.

When, many years later, another dewan was desperately searching his office for records, he was surprised to find three remarkable papers that throw an interesting light on this 1897 visit. One was a note from the then dewan Sangarasubba Aiyar, saying that when the Madras governor and his party sat down to dinner, the resident took him apart to discuss the question of salutes. The resident, J.D. Rees—a gifted linguist with a sincere hatred of reforms that might affect the character of the Indian states³⁵—told the dewan that the maharaja of Travancore could not have more guns than the governor during his presence. Dewan Aiyar is reported

about installation and investiture in Travancore, resident A.T. Forbes complained in a letter dated 10-9-1914 that 'I know of no book of reference, like Tod's Annals of Rajasthan, which gives an exhaustive account of the Travancore ceremonials', CRR, R/2/894/315, OIOC.

³¹ Tupper, *Addenda and Corrigenda*, p. 65.

³² Correspondence in 'Salute Cochin Raja', in CRR, R/2/879/40, OIOC.

³³ Telegram from assistant-resident Trivandrum to resident Ernaculam, 14-10-1897, in CRR, R/2/880/52. For the visit by Lord Wenlock, governor of Madras, in Oct. 1892, see standing orders Nayar Brigade in CRR, R/2/892/274, OIOC.

³⁴ *The Report on the Administration* for that year merely stated that the artillery fired the usual salute, without specification.

³⁵ See Rees, *The Real India*.

to have replied that Travancore's number of gun salutes was absolutely no innovation. A salute of 21 guns had been given to His Highness on the occasion of all earlier gubernatorial visits. Asking for documentary evidence, Rees was merely referred to the well-known Nayar Brigade orders. However, the dewan also produced a copy of the *Asylum Press Almanac* to show the local salute of 21 guns to which comparable states, such as Gwalior and Bhopal, were entitled. Travancore was not mentioned in the Almanac, but dewan Aiyar supposed that the Government of India was not familiar with usages in southern India and had information mainly about the north. Rees, the note concluded, was absolutely unaware of these facts and sympathised with Travancore's case. After consulting the governor, he returned, penned a D.O. and handed it to the dewan. The governor's order was that the resident should offer no advice.

Another note amongst these papers, apparently also from the dewan and of the same date, suggests that the dewan himself had an interview with the governor. According to the note, Rees told the dewan that he had acted his part 'admirably well'. Whatever the case, the third document that came to light in 1926 was the D.O. by Rees dated 17 October 1897. Concerning the local salute of 21 guns, which was to be given by the brigade the next morning, it stated that 'this is not a matter in regard to which His Excellency would direct the Resident to offer any advice'. The governor was pleased to observe that the question of salutes should be governed by the circumstances, and he would only inform the viceroy of the fact that during his presence in Travancore a salute of 21 guns had been fired.³⁶

Travancore's Local and Personal Salute

This was the beginning of a long and bitter fight over Travancore's gun salutes. Immediately after governor Havelock's departure, the dewan wrote an extensive letter requesting official recognition of the local salute of 21 guns, which, he argued, was invariably observed on all state occasions. In substantiation of his point, he referred once again to the Nayar Brigade orders (para. 11, p. 56), which had been published with the authority of the British resident, and stated that His Highness the maharaja was entitled to 21 guns and the resident to 13 guns. 'I had the Brigade's records examined and find this salute traceable to the remotest period for which they are available', wrote the dewan. But in fact, before 1880 a 21-gun salute was recorded only once or twice.

This local salute, the dewan went on, is not in contravention of the 1867 table of salutes, which prescribes 19 guns for his state. The table contains a note stating that the rulers of Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Kashmir—which along with Travancore are in the category of states receiving 19 dynastic guns—'receive salutes of 21 guns within limits of their respective territories'. It cannot be the intention of the Government of India, the dewan wrote, 'to place Travancore on a

³⁶ Three notes, attached to a letter from M.E. Watts, dewan of Travancore, to H.A.B. Vernon, agent to the governor-general, Trivandrum 19-10-1926, in CRR, R/2/884/160, OIOC.

different footing ... from those states declared as being of exactly the same position in the matter of salutes outside'. A reduction from 21 to 19 guns 'would be felt by His Highness as impairing the prestige and position alike of himself and the state in the estimation of the general public and his peers'. He concluded by saying that he was fully confident that His Excellency the governor would grant the 21 guns inside and, at some future time, also outside his state.³⁷

The resident, Mr Rees, forwarded this letter to the Government of Madras. He pointed out that Travancore's omission from the list of local salutes showed that hitherto no local salute of 21 guns had been recognised for that state. His accompanying letter was a fervent plea to favour Travancore with the honour it was seeking. In view of its population, area and revenue, Travancore was at least equal to the four states enjoying a local salute of 21 guns. It stood out, he concluded, as a prosperous and well-governed state, which was making an earnest endeavour to advance the cause of good government.³⁸

Groping for a solution, the Madras government had to cope with the perennial problem of lack of records. The Madras Political Department complained that they had no papers that could throw any light on the question of the Travancore salute. The main document was G.O. No. 32, dated 23 January 1879, which included the maharaja of Travancore on the list of rulers entitled to a personal and local salute of 21 guns. Unfortunately, that was not of great help, as the heading embraced both personal and local salute without making any distinction. From a quotation from Aitchison's *Collection of Treaties* it would appear that it was a local salute.³⁹ No further papers could be traced, apart from the above-mentioned note from the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India, dated 23 August 1895. The Government of Madras did not agree with everything brought forward by Travancore, but considered the matter as deserving of the most favourable consideration by the Government of India. Therefore, it submitted the case to the Foreign and Political Department with a recommendation to grant Travancore the honour of a local salute of 21 guns.⁴⁰

The Foreign and Political Department did not need much time to frame a reply. Referring to its earlier letter of August 1875, which laid down that Indian princes possessing artillery might fire guns in their own territory whenever and as often as they pleased, it ruled that the Government of India had

no desire to interfere with a practice, such as that noticed in your letter, whereby the artillery of a Darbar, acting under the orders of the Darbar only, accord to the chief within his own territory a salute differing from that which he is entitled to receive from British artillery or under the orders of a British officer.

³⁷ Letter from dewan to resident in Travancore, 6-11-1897, in 'Salutes to the Maharaja of Travancore', in CRR, R/2/892/274, OIOC.

³⁸ Letter from resident in Travancore to Government of Madras, 17-11-1897 in *ibid.* and in 'Salute Travancore Maharaja', in CRR, R/2/880/52, OIOC.

³⁹ Aitchison, *Collection of Treaties*, Vol. VIII.

⁴⁰ Handwritten note, Madras Political Department, 5-1-1898, and letter, Madras Political Department to Government of India, 11-1-1898, in CRR, R/2/892/274, OIOC.

It further explained that the orders, conveyed in the G.O. of 23 August 1895, applied only to salutes fired under the direction or with the approval of a British officer. The account of the good and able administration of the present maharaja had been read with much satisfaction, but the Government of India was not prepared to make any recommendation to Her Majesty's secretary of state for an increased local salute.⁴¹ Resident Rees, who like the Travancore government was anxious to get 'something official about the salute', was accordingly informed by the Government of Madras of this G.O. (No. 97) of 7 February 1898.⁴² What this seems to amount to is that although a local salute of 21 guns was not officially recognised, the government would refrain from interference in existing practice.

The maharaja, Sri Mulam Tirunal (1885–1924), the first prince to grant his state a legislative council, was not willing to leave it at that. In a letter written directly to the Government of Madras, he expressed his wish to be listed in the *Asylum Press Almanac*, along with Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Kashmir, as being entitled to 21 local guns, 'just to make matters clear'. The wording suggests that he had not yet received the decision of the Government of India not to recommend an increase in his local salute. As a result, the Government of Madras still felt uncertain as to whether His Highness was referring to his local or his personal salute.

In another letter, undated but most probably written in the summer of 1898, the maharaja made it clear that he had shifted ground and was now pleading for an increase in his personal salute. He asked permission to discuss his personal salute before the governor of Madras, Lord Havelock, was to leave. 'If I am not to get it when I have such kind friends as His Excellency the Governor + yourself [most probably Resident Rees who was to leave in August] to assist me, I am afraid I shall never have it'. His elder uncle had received two guns extra as personal salute at the Imperial Assemblage. Since then, the present ruler complained, two Jubilees (1887 and 1897) had been celebrated, but Travancore was still being ignored.⁴³

On New Year's Day 1899, the maharaja's wish was finally complied with. Two additional guns were granted as a personal distinction, thus increasing his personal salute to 21 guns. In 1911, the raja of Cochin also received two additional guns as a personal distinction, but his dynastic salute remained at 17 guns.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Letter from W.J. Cunningham, secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, Calcutta, 21-1-1898, to Government of Madras, in CRR, R/2/880/50. Also, in slightly different wording, in CRR, R/2/880/52 and R/2/884/160, OIOC.

⁴² Letter by resident Rees to Government of Madras, 11-2-1898, and reply Government of Madras, Political Department, 26-2-1898, in CRR, R/2/892/275. Handwritten draft of this last letter, 25-2-1898, in CRR, R/2/880/52, OIOC.

⁴³ Letter from maharaja of Travancore to Government of Madras, 25-2-1898, and all related correspondence in CRR, R/2/880/50, OIOC.

⁴⁴ 'Raising Salute Cochin Raja', in CRR, R/2/881/97, OIOC. The personal salutes of Gwalior and Kashmir were increased to 21 guns in 1915 and 1919 only.

After World War I

The Great War led to a new round of discussions about honours. As a number of princes fought in Europe and several others contributed men, money and material to the British war effort, the Government of India wanted to consider the question of war rewards. Therefore, even before the war had ended, provincial governments were asked if they had any suggestions for a revision of the table of salutes. Again, the criteria to be applied in determining the allotment of salutes could not be precisely defined, but the allotment should depend to some extent upon population, revenue, and services rendered to the Empire. It should also depend on other considerations, 'such as the relative antiquity of the various states, the nature of their early relations with the British Power and the prestige of their ruling families in the eyes of other Ruling Chiefs'.⁴⁵

Considering these criteria, the Government of Madras found several reasons to recommend that Travancore be given 21 dynastic guns. Travancore had a much larger population than Baroda, which had 21 dynastic guns. It was the fifth state in revenue, claimed an uninterrupted succession of sovereigns from remote antiquity, and had had quite satisfactory relations with the British since 1778. Their prestige among other princes was difficult to assess, as the princely families of Travancore and Cochin were said to have very little in common with those ruling other states. However, what tipped the balance was that Travancore had contributed very little towards the war effort considering the great wealth of the state. Therefore, a salute of 19 guns was considered commensurate with the position of the state, and the Government of Madras informed the Foreign and Political Department that they did not propose any changes in the salutes of the states within their political jurisdiction. They concluded, however, 'that any addition to the permanent salutes of Chiefs elsewhere tending to lower the comparative position of any of the Madras Chiefs would certainly render necessary a compensatory enhancement of their existing salutes'.⁴⁶

In 1924, maharaja Sri Mulam Tirunal died. Having no sisters, the late maharaja in accordance with matrilineal custom had adopted two children from a collateral branch as his nieces. The junior princess's son was installed as the new ruler, but as he was still a minor, the senior princess was to act as regent. At his installation, the question of gun salutes once again came up for discussion.

The late maharaja was accustomed to receiving 21 guns from the Nayar Brigade on arriving and leaving the capital, on his birthday and on other ceremonial occasions. At the installation durbar of the new maharaja, he too received a 21-gun salute. Mr C.W.E. Cotton, the British resident (1923–26), raised no objections, but when the new ruler came on a state visit to the residency the next day, he

⁴⁵ Letter, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, 6-2-1917, in 'Revision of Table of Salutes', in CRR, R/2/895/327, OIOC.

⁴⁶ Letter, Government of Madras to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, 12-4-1917, No. 158, in CRR, *ibid*.

directed the commander of the Nayar Brigade to give 19 guns only in residency grounds. This provoked adverse comments in the press, and the *Hindustan Times* (21-10-1924), defending the ruler's right to 21 guns within Travancore, criticised the resident for forcing the commander of the Nayar Brigade to fire only 19 guns within residency premises.⁴⁷

Fresh petitions to get the local salute of 21 guns officially recognised received the standard reply that government would not interfere with existing practice (G.O. of 1898). The matter reached a climax in 1926. The governor of Madras used to send a *kharita* (official letter) to Travancore and Cochin to announce the appointment of a new resident. In 1923, political responsibility for Travancore was transferred from the Government of Madras to the Government of India. As a result, uncertainty ensued as to whether the viceroy had to send a *kharita* on the appointment of the new resident, who was now called agent to the governor-general for the Madras states. Tupper's volumes were consulted, but provided no answer. The Political Department, which was unaware of this local practice, thought that no *kharita* was necessary, but preferred to leave future procedures to the discretion of the agent to the governor-general.⁴⁸

Travancore and Cochin were not very eager to have a *kharita* durbar on every new appointment, but Mr H.A.B. Vernon, the new agent to the governor-general, definitely was. In June 1926, he presented a *kharita* from the viceroy to the maharaja of Cochin at a durbar in Hill Palace. A similar durbar in Travancore proved more difficult. The dewan was very much opposed to it, but finally acquiesced in deference to the agent's wishes. Then, the agent protested against the programme for the *kharita* durbar, to be held in the public offices in Trivandrum on 5 August 1926. His main objection was the announcement in the programme of a salute of 21 guns on the arrival of the maharaja.

The dewan, Sir Maurice Watts, replied the same day. He admitted that formally the maharaja was not allowed more than 19 guns, but added that he assumed that the table of salutes applied only to British India. 'My belief was that within his own state a Ruler is at liberty to order his gunners to blaze away as much powder as he pleased'. He claimed that the present maharaja had enjoyed 21 guns from the date of his succession, and that the agent to the governor-general Cotton had never lodged any complaint against that practice.

The agent replied that he had no desire to delay the durbar he had so urgently been asking for. But he wrote that the orders of the Government of India were clear, and that a *kharita* durbar did not fall within the purview of the free category mentioned in the order of 1897 (he must have meant G.O. 97 of 1898). At a durbar attended by an official representative of the paramount power, the ruler should not receive more guns than the number the British Government had accorded him. 'The anomaly of a position at which at a public durbar attended by

⁴⁷ 'Travancore Affairs', in CRR, R/1/1/1532. 'Question of the Escort and Salute of HH the Maharani Regent', in R/1/4/40 and R/2/884/160, OIOC.

⁴⁸ Letter, Political Department of the Government of India, 8-6-1926, in CRR, R/2/884/160, OIOC.

the Viceroy or his representative His Highness can as he so desires give himself an unlimited number of guns is too obvious to require elaboration'.⁴⁹

Thereupon, the dewan took his time to search for documentary evidence in defence of a local salute of 21 guns. His findings, which were submitted to the agent to the governor-general on 19 October 1926, were poor. First of all, he referred to the well-known G.O. of August 1875, which gave Indian princes the freedom to fire guns in their own territory whenever and as often as they pleased. Then he showed copies of the correspondence and personal notes produced by dewan Sangarasubba Aiyar and resident Rees in 1897/8, which we discussed above. He argued that the order of 1898 applied very much to the last durbar, as it was based on correspondence relating to a visit by the governor of Madras, whom he saw as the representative of the Queen-Empress herself. The dewan referred also to the *Manual of the Administration of Madras Presidency* (1885 I, p. 37), which states: 'The Maharaja is entitled to 19 guns as a salute in British India and 21 in his own dominions, fired whenever he leaves or returns to the capital, or goes in state on public occasions, such as the Dusserah, his birthday, etc'. Finally, he quoted the *Memorandum for the Guidance of Political Officers* (section 12), which states that the details of installation in a princely state must be settled in each case 'with reference to precedence and local custom and feeling'.

Confident that the question of local salutes was definitely settled in 1897/8, Mr Watts—dewan of Travancore—asked the agent to move the Government of India to include the ruler of his state in their table of salutes as being in receipt of a salute of 21 guns within his own territory. The concluding sentences of his letter greatly irritated the agent, as he perceived them as conveying a barely concealed threat. The dewan wrote that those who knew the people of Travancore should realise that a loss of dignity by the present maharaja would profoundly stir 'the deep-seated loyalty of His Highness's subjects'.⁵⁰

The agent decided to submit the question to the Political Department. He informed the political secretary that he had protested against the 21 guns at the recent durbar and that the dewan's search for records had shown that 21 guns in His Highness's own territory dated back as far as 1885 and possibly further. Authorisation for these 21 guns was derived from the order of 1898 stating that the government had no desire to interfere with existing practices, but the agent was inclined to think that this order was not entirely free from ambiguity. The state artillery was under the orders of a British commander, an officer on the active list of the Army of India, selected for service in Travancore. And durbar programmes were always submitted for approval to the agent, which implied that the firing of salutes by the troops was not under the orders of the durbar only. The agent wanted to know whether the Government of India was willing to allow the existing practice to continue.

⁴⁹ Letters from Vernon, agent to the governor-general, 3-8-1926 and 4-8-1926, and Watts, dewan, 3-8-1926, in 'Procedure for the Presentation of Kharitas', in CRR, R/2/884/160, OIOC.

⁵⁰ Letters, dewan to agent Travancore, 12-9-1926 and 19-10-1926, in CRR, R/2/884/160, OIOC.

Since 1897/8, the matter of the Travancore salute had not been before the Political Department of the Government of India. In the department, Kenneth Fitze made the obvious understatement that the orders of 1898 were 'somewhat ambiguous' and had led to 'a quibble'. He agreed with the agent to the governor-general that the state artillery was under the orders of a British officer, even though he was a durbar servant for the time being. He also concurred that a durbar programme was always submitted in advance to the British representative, which seemed to invalidate the order of 1898. It would have been much better, Fitze thought, to have accorded to that practice 'the sanction of immemorial custom' and left it at that, the more so as it had been in force for more than 50 years and the government apparently had agreed to it. He observed, as an additional consideration, that since 1898 salutes had assumed considerable importance in the eyes of the various states.

Two months later, the Government of India instructed the agent that the order of 1898 was intended to apply even if a British official was present. The fact that the artillery was under the orders of a British-lent officer was, in the opinion of the Government of India, immaterial. They therefore did not wish to interfere with the durbar's practice of firing 21 guns for the maharaja on ceremonial occasions when a British official was present. However, the order of 1898 would not apply in the case of a viceregal visit, as on these occasions the Government of India was in charge of all ceremonial.⁵¹ Thus, after a protracted correspondence, the question of Travancore's local salute was finally settled. The dynastic or permanent salute, however, still stood at 19 guns.

New Moves to Increase the Dynastic Salute

After the installation of the young maharaja in 1924, the Travancore government started efforts to increase the dynastic salute to 21 guns. The Indian States Committee, which was instituted in 1929 to consider relations between the Government of India and the princely states, was seen as an appropriate platform to discuss this question. A memorandum submitted to this committee carefully listed all major considerations, such as the origin of the state as a sovereign power, the state's unbroken loyalty and good relationship with the British, its revenue and population, its progress in civilisation and culture, and the respect it commanded in trade and commerce. The Travancore government asked whether, tested by all these considerations, her ruler, and therefore the state, did not deserve a higher rank than they had come to occupy at that moment.⁵² These efforts yielded no result. The Government of India, though convinced that the standard of salutes was unsatisfactory, proved reluctant to make any revisions.

⁵¹ All correspondence, including decision, Government of India, 20-1-1927, in CRR, R/2/884/160, OIOC.

⁵² 'Question of Enhancement of the Salute of the Maharaja of Travancore, 1931', in CRR, R/1/4/96, OIOC.

A new opportunity presented itself in November 1931, when just before his nineteenth birthday the young maharaja was invested with full ruling powers. The Nayar Brigade paraded, the state elephants were drawn up, and the artillery, posted behind the public offices in Trivandrum, fired 21 guns on the arrival of the maharani regent and the maharaja, and 13 guns on arrival of the agent to the governor-general. After the usual brief conversation, the agent presented the *kharita* from the viceroy, which was read with the whole assembly standing. Then the troops presented arms, the band played God Save the King, and 31 guns were fired, as the viceroy was thought to be present in his official letter.⁵³ The 21 guns fired for the maharani and the maharaja were a local and not a dynastic salute. Hence, immediately after the installation durbar, the maharaja asked the agent, Lt Col. Pritchard, to forward to the Political Department in New Delhi a memorandum setting forth his claims for a dynastic salute of 21 guns.

The maharaja pointed out that Travancore, Gwalior and Kashmir used to have 21 personal guns, but that after World War I the 21 guns of Gwalior and Kashmir had been made into a dynastic salute. The maharaja submitted that in making this change and leaving out Travancore, the importance and status of his state had been unjustly ignored. Among the states bracketed with Travancore as being entitled to a salute of 19 guns were Bhopal (which had a fraction of the population and only a quarter of the revenue of Travancore), Indore (a quarter of the population and a little more than half of the revenue) and Kolhapur (a fifth of the population and a third of the revenue). He therefore reasoned that Travancore had a very strong case, and urgently requested that his state should be admitted into the select circle of states with 21 dynastic salutes.⁵⁴ Pritchard wholeheartedly supported this request, but ventilated a personal grievance. Since the early 1920s, the agents for the Madras states had been asking for a more prominent place for their chair at durbars, and he recommended that no final orders on the salutes should be passed until the durbar had agreed to comply with the wishes of the British representative.⁵⁵

The Political Department now had to take a decision on the dynastic salute. Its secretary, Charles Watson, reasoned that Gwalior and Kashmir had been elevated to 21 guns on account of their services in World War I. The Special Rewards Committee had recognised the magnificent contribution of the ruler of Gwalior to the war effort. In the case of Kashmir there was also, in addition to the services of its State Forces and the number of its recruits for the Indian Army, a strategic consideration. Kashmir was a bulwark between British India and foreign territory, and Watson thought it extremely important to preserve these frontiers against foreign penetration. Travancore, however—and here the department followed earlier reasoning—did not figure on the huge lists of honours and rewards granted

⁵³ 'Investiture Maharaja of Travancore with Ruling Powers', in CRR, R/2/887/186, OIOC.

⁵⁴ 'Memorandum Maharaja of Travancore', 11-11-1931, with accompanying letter Lt Col. Pritchard, agent, in CRR, R/1/4/96, OIOC.

⁵⁵ For the question of the agent's seat at durbars, see Kooiman, 'Meeting at the Threshold', pp. 324ff.

in connection with important services rendered during the war, and therefore it had no strong case for a rise in the hierarchy of salutes.⁵⁶

Another consideration was that an increased dynastic gun salute for Travancore would be apt to displease the five members of the circle of 21-gun states, and would make it extremely difficult to refuse similar honours to other 19-gun rulers like Bhopal and Udaipur. Bhopal, which had got wind of Travancore's ambition, had already made it known that if Travancore were granted 21 guns, it would advance a similar claim. A final argument put forward by Watson was that the young maharaja of Travancore had only recently been invested with full powers and should first get an opportunity to demonstrate the quality of his rule.⁵⁷

Thus, the Political Department replied to the agent to the governor-general that His Excellency the viceroy, after carefully examining the claim urged by the maharaja of Travancore, 'feels that there is little hope at present of any increase in the dynastic salute and considers that His Highness must wait a little longer or until some special occasion arises when the Table of Salutes can be brought under general revision'.⁵⁸ That special occasion never arose and Travancore remained a 19-gun state until its accession to the Dominion of India and merger into the United State of Travancore-Cochin (1949).

The maharaja was honoured in another way: in 1935 he was made a Grand Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire (GCIE) and in 1946 was elevated to Grand Commander of the Order of the Star of India (GCSI). These orders did not cause as much jealousy between states as salutes did, and—as John McLeod has pointed out—they were often used to pacify rulers who deserved higher salutes but could not be granted them.⁵⁹ To encourage Travancore's support for the war effort, in 1943 the maharaja also received an honorary commission as Major in the Indian Army. He was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in 1944 and to Major-General immediately after the war.⁶⁰

Concluding Observations

The first table of salutes showed Travancore as entitled to a dynastic salute of 17 guns, which was increased to 19 guns in 1866. This enhanced honour seems to have been the result of a one-sided initiative on the part of the government in consideration of the admirable manner in which the then raja conducted the administration of his state. Later, persistent efforts by Travancore to get it further

⁵⁶ Nor did Travancore or Cochin maintain any State Forces to assist the Indian Army in case of need; see list in CRR, R/1/4/118, OIOC.

⁵⁷ Internal notes by Charles Watson, secretary to the Political Department, 18-1-1932 and 27-3-1932, in 'Question of Enhancement of the Salute of HH the Maharaja of Travancore', in CRR, R/1/4/96, OIOC.

⁵⁸ Letter from Watson, Political Department, 11-4-1932, to Pritchard, agent for the Madras states, in *ibid.*

⁵⁹ McLeod, 'The English Honours System', pp. 245, 248.

⁶⁰ McLeod, 'The New Mansabdars', p. 12.

increased to 21 guns were in vain, mainly because the government deemed the state's support to the Great War to have been inadequate in view of its economic potential. In this way, the grant or withholding of salutes proved to be a political instrument in the hands of the government and could be used as a mark of its favour or displeasure.

The pyramid structure of the salute list did not allow for much mobility at the higher levels. In 1895, Tupper's standard work listed 107 princes as enjoying a dynastic salute, and in 1929 the number had risen to 119. The few new entrants got stuck at the base of the pyramid and there was not much movement towards the top, except for Gwalior and Kashmir, which, thanks to their war contributions, reached the capstone, namely 21 dynastic guns. The five states with the maximum number of salutes converted their lack of promotion opportunities into a strong determination to keep their privilege severely restricted. Then, at the end of the 1920s, British interests in the ceremonial of gun salutes began to wane.

The 21 guns granted to Travancore at the Imperial Assemblage were a personal salute, and thus not transferable. Nevertheless, after the maharaja's death in 1880, 21 guns were still fired on official occasions and were taken to be a local salute. This practice was going to create a great deal of confusion in both British and Travancorean government quarters. The extant records did not list Travancore as a state entitled to a local salute, and the much-quoted Order 97 of 1898 refused to include the state on the list. Yet, the same order declared that the British government would not interfere with the local salute as long as no British officers were involved, and that was to remain British policy. However, the 1898 order was indeed 'a quibble', as British officers in Travancore commanded the state artillery and durbar programmes had to be approved by the local British representative. Travancore was never to be put on the list of local salutes, but in 1899 its ruler was compensated with the grant of a personal salute, and after 1935 with the knighthoods and honorary commissions in the Indian Army.

Political manipulation by the British and mutual rivalry among the Indian princes provides the background necessary to understand the importance of gun salutes in princely India. However, they are not sufficient explanations for the growing passion of Travancore's ruling family for this ceremonial distinction. Another important consideration was the threatening prospect of a withdrawal of British support, leaving Travancore and other states at the mercy of a large and powerful Indian republic. Also, beginning in the 1920s, several movements within the state started fighting for a share of political power. Even though nobody openly questioned the position of the ruler, the institutions upholding the princely family were weakening and the Travancore dynasty was becoming increasingly irrelevant. In this situation of uncertainty, gun salutes that were earlier treated with indifference assumed a new and different meaning. They became even more important when the distribution of the 100 state seats in the prospective Upper House under the 1935 India Act was to be based on the ranking of the states 'as indicated by dynastic salute and other factors'.⁶¹ The power of the ceremonial,

⁶¹ White Paper, *Proposals*, p. 6.

which earlier had been introduced by the British to mark the feudal subordination of Travancore and other princes, was now invoked by the same princes to strengthen their sense of security and ensure their state a place on the future political map of India. The British, however, entangled in a complicated process of transfer of power, had lost their former interest in these ceremonial distinctions. By now they sincerely doubted the wisdom of encouraging tendencies of royalty and autonomy among the princes to which they could give no place in the independent India to come.

The confusion over the matter of local gun salutes highlights the more general problem of the paucity of documentary evidence that both British and Travancorean authorities had to cope with, especially for the earlier period. With great difficulty, the governments in Madras and New Delhi could cobble together fragments of evidence, but the Travancorean side fared even worse, being thrown back mainly on a few English sources. For the period after 1900 more records become available, but the increasing princely concern with such honours as gun salutes is not just a function of better documentation. It represents a larger trend also to be noted in Travancore's attempts to get its armorial bearings officially registered in the 1930s. In the nineteenth century the government had presented a large number of somewhat embarrassed princes with arms and banners. Therefore, it could not refuse requests for registration of these arms that started coming in in the late 1930s. Several princes, however, were ordered to remove an arched crown or a crest, resembling a crown, from their coat of arms, as these symbols were seen as undue claims to the status of royalty.⁶²

Yet, even in the 1930s it remained difficult to base claims for honours on historical precedent, as shown by the ex-regent's claim for gun salutes. In these efforts she had to face strong opposition from the junior maharani, who was assisted by her personal advisor, Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. This shrewd gentleman told the agent to the governor-general, Lt Col. Pritchard, that the Travancore government was ready to grant the ex-regent all the privileges 'that could be proved to have been granted according to precedent'. But the agent was perfectly aware that the ex-regent 'has had some years in which to ransack the state records for precedents and I know she has done so and all that has emerged are the Brigade orders and Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer knows this'.⁶³

An important advantage Travancore dewans had in their dealings with British officers was their greater continuity in office. There were frequent transfers in the Political Department, and after the middle of the nineteenth century residents or agents in Travancore served on an average for only two or three years. To a large extent these local officers were free to follow their own course, as governments in Madras or New Delhi were apt to leave matters to local discretion or practice. Some residents were inclined to let things drift, while others, like Vernon and

⁶² Kooiman, 'Invention of Tradition'.

⁶³ All correspondence in 'Question of the Grant of a Personal Salute to HH the Maharani Regent, 1931', in CRR, R/1/1/2164, OIOC.

Pritchard, 'took to ceremony at court with gusto',⁶⁴ and pursued personal prominence at state durbars. When Travancore entered into direct political relations with the Government of India in 1923, the Political Department possessed hardly any knowledge about local ceremonial practices. When speaking about gun salutes, both parties were invoking the sanction of immemorial custom, although more often than not they were groping in the dark.

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⁶⁴ Waghorne, *The Raja's Magic Clothes*, p. 35.

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