



# LIFE OF GODAVARMA RAJA AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SPORTS DEVELOPMENTS IN KERALA

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## ABSTRACT

Col. Godavarmaraja is one of the greatest figures in the state of Kerala. He gave immense contribution to the development of sports and games in Kerala. He initiated to set up the Travancore university labour corps, Trivandrum tennis club, Travancore-Kochi football association, Trivandrum golf club, The Trivandrum boat club, Kerala flying club, etc. Col. Raja's love for the sports motivated him to set up a separate organisation for development and promotion of various games in the state. Through his various activities of Kerala became one of the sports giants in India.

**KEYWORDS:** football, tennis club, sports council, golf club, flying club,

## INTRODUCTION

The name of one of the prominent personalities that is etched in golden letters in the history of Kerala for development of sports and games and placed the state in the world map of tourism is that of Col. Godavarma Raja [known fondly as Col. G.V. Raja].

Born on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1908 at Koikkal, the hill palace of Poonjar royal family. After preliminary school studies at Poonjar, high school at Kottayam, College at Madurai American college and Madras presidency college, joined the Madras medical college for M.B.B. However, he was forced to abandon his ambition to become the first doctor of the family in the third year of the course following his marriage to the 1<sup>st</sup> princess of Travancore, Karthika Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1934. He was forced to confine himself within the Kowdiar palace premises initially. Since all along the earlier years he had been of a very active, enthusiastic and adventurous nature, he was forced to break the old tradition and barriers and came out of the palace to mingle with the public. He was fond of all kinds of sports activities especially football and tennis. Along with his elder brother P.R. Ramavarmaraja and other relations he used to go for trekking in the nearby hills and forests of Poonjar. He travelled, explored and climbed all important peaks in the forests of Meenachil and Peerumadetaluks. He learned Kalarippayattu at the palace Kalari and used to swim in the nearby Meenachil river when it is fully swollen in the rainy seasons. His parents never discouraged such adventurous activities of the youngsters.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

When the Travancore University was established in 1937 Col. Raja was appointed as the president of the board of physical education. He initiated to set up the Travancore university labour corps and was its commandant. The university stadium of Thiruvananthapuram was built with the efforts of the cadets of labour corps and Col. Raja physically joined them with equipment like pickaxe, shovel etc. and also persuaded the vice chancellor of other universities who had come for a conference [which include Sarvepally Radakrishnan -later president of India to join him in the manual labour. The formation of labour core was revolutionary activity from G. V for the development of modern concept of sports. In the first training session of LC more than 350 students participated and G.V was the commandant. The concept of one day for drill and sports in a week was the contribution of LC project.

Lawn tennis had spread in Kerala at the beginning of the twentieth century itself. The game of tennis began at Ramavarma club Ernakulam and Banerjee club Thrissur during the period 1910. However the game is not yet popular in Travancore. During his early days in Trivandrum Col. Raja used to play tennis at kanakakunnupalace, his early friends there are also keen on this racket game.

When former Wimbledon and French Champions, William Tilden (USA), Henry Crochet (France), A. Burke and Rammilon (UK) visited India Col. Raja negotiated with these great champions to play exhibition matches in the specially built Tennis Court in the premises of the then Travancore University on 30-01-1938 subsequently, Col. Raja along with his younger brother R.V Raja set up the Trivandrum Tennis Club at premises of Capt. V.P. Thampy (brother-in-law of R.V Raja) at Rathapurakunnu, Sasthamngalam with 3 Tennis Courts on 01-02-1938. The club was later shifted to the present premises at Kowdiar, on the land allotted by the State Government during 1950-51, which was ably supported by the Chief Secretary of the state late K. G Menon, on completion of the club building on 31-03-1953. Apart from the members, the club is also providing professional coaching to a large number of youngsters including ball picker boys who are provided with necessary equipment's free. Many International Tennis Champions participated in the various tournaments conducted by the club. Former Indian international tennis champion Ramanathan Krishnan won his first Junior championship at the club. Travancore tennis association which came in to existence in 1940 with Col. Raja as president. Later it became Thiru-kochi lawn tennis association in 1950 and after the six years with the birth of Kerala it grew in to the Kerala lawn tennis association. In 1940 itself G.V. Raja had brought the official coach of the all-India lawn tennis association Rambirsingh to Trivandrum in order to mould the new generation of tennis players. The tennis coaching program that G.V. Raja initiated at Trivandrum tennis club served as the model later for the Rajkumari amrithkaur sports instruction programme, which became a milestone in Indian sports history. A good player himself, G. V. Raja spotted and brought up stars like tankappan, maniyar, and B. Krishnan etc. G.V. Raja organised many championships under the Trivandrum tennis club including Sri Chithira Thirunal tennis tournament, K.G. Menon memorial tournament, and E. G. John memorial challenge trophy, etc.

Col. Raja became the president of the All-India Tennis Association during 1965-66 and India reached the final of the Davis Cup Championship for the first time and played against Australia in the final challenge round. Even though India lost in the final it motivated many youngsters to play the game of Tennis, which subsequently produced great champions in India like Premjithlal, Jaydeep Mukerjee, the three Amrita Raj brothers, Ramesh Krishnan, etc. In the subsequent year 1967 he lost in the election for president to the Union Minister Fakrudeen Ali Ahamed by a vote.

Football was the most favourite game of Col. Raja. While he was studying in the Madurai College, he used to play football and was a member of the college football team. In 1942 he formed Travancore-Cochin football association. In four years' time, while struggling with the initial difficulties, the association got recognition from the all India federation. The role that he played in founding the Kerala football association after the formation of the Kerala state has been recorded in the annals of history. It was none other than G.V. Raja who had organised the Asian cup football at Ernakulam with teams from Israel, Iran, Pakistan. It was co. Raja who was behind the formation of the first university football team in 1941. In 1942 the Travancore varsity became eligible for the all-India intervarsity football championship, but due to unfavourable climatic conditions they could not go to Lahore. The previous sports minister of the state Sri.

T.V.Thomas who was very close to him. Col. Raja Recommended to the minister to start the “May Day sports” in the state instead of confining the May Day Celebrations to processions and demonstrations of the labour forces. This was readily accepted by Sri. T.V.Thomas who inaugurated it by kicking a football in a match and various categories of sports & games used to be played every year.

Col. Raja’s love for the sports motivated him to set up a separate organisation for development and promotion of various games in the state. He represented to the State Government that sporting activities and recreations are essential for physical fitness, promotion of emotional growth, development of human personality, communication skill, general behaviour etc. which all ultimately may be useful for productive lines by the youngsters. He managed to obtain the approval of the State Govt. to constitute the Kerala sports council in 1954, the first of its kind in the whole of India. He also took efforts to form separate sports Association for the different types of sports & games to be got approved by the sports council and provide financial grant to them from the Govt. He was president of the Kerala sports council from its formation until his demise. The activities of the sports council have in due course of time helped to produce international class sports persons in various athletics and categories of games, who have secured gold and silver medals for India in Asian and other international championships.

Col. Raja frequently visited many foreign countries to witness and study the various sports and games as well as facilities provided for promotion of tourism to develop the same all over India. On a visit to Czechoslovakia at the mountaineering Institute in the Tatras Mountains he was able to climb the hills using the ropeways with ease with his experience as a youngster in his early years at Poonjar. On his return to India, he joined with the great mountaineer, Tensing Norgé to set up the mountaineering institute at Darjeeling. Later he initiated the formation of the Kerala Mountaineering Association and secured the service of two sherpa instructors from Nepal to give coaching to the youngsters at the Neyyar Dam mountaineering Institute premises for which grant from the State Govt. through the Kerala sports council also was provided.

His enthusiasm and interest for development of the Airport at Thiruvananthapuram motivated him to set up a Flying Club and the Kerala Flying Club was formed. He persuaded Capt. K.S Krishnan, one of the seniors most Instructors at DGCA Flying Institute, Allahabad, who also used to train the Air Force Pilots, to join the club at Thiruvananthapuram as the chief instructor he persuaded many youngsters to learn flying and he himself became a trainee and forced certain senior members of the club to learn flying. Col. Raja also flew “solo” in the pushback aircraft for 15 minutes, but he was not able to obtain the pilot licence since he could not spare enough time to study the technical subjects on flying and pass the written examination, which was compulsory.

Col. Raja organised and participated in sea swimming competition from Shangumughom to Kovalam and the Kattamaram race as part of the adventure sports activity. The Trivandrum boat club at Veli was set up by him with the approval of the state Govt. as also the recreation facilities at the Neyyar dam premises and at Shangumughom beach.

The Trivandrum Golf club was formed on the personal submission of Col. Raja to the prime minister Sri P. Pattomthan Pillai, after the state integration of Travancore and Cochin states requesting for permission to form a golf club to play the game of golf and permission of the Govt. to use the palace of golf links, originally set up by former Maharaja Sri. Mulamthirunal between the years 1890 to 1900 as one of the oldest in the whole of Asia, which was surrendered to the government by the Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal Ramavarma following integration of states after independence. States after independence. Col. Raja in his submission pointed out that our state is much blessed by nature and there is large potential for promotion and development of tourism and the game of golf is much essential for the purpose. Sri. Pattomthan Pillai accepted the request and granted permission to use the golf course. The Trivandrum golf was constituted and majority of members of the executive committee was to be state Govt officials including the chief secretary as suggested by Col. Raja himself. Many foreign tourists and other visitors have appreciated the facilities provided by the club and are enjoying the facilities even now.

## CONCLUSION

Col.G.V.Raja went to Patiala to participate in the conference of all India sports council in April 1971. He made an unscheduled visit to the kuluvalley in the small private aircraft. The aircraft suddenly crashed on take-off on return and all the occupants got killed in the crash. KeralaUniversity, which has really recognised the contribution and service of Col.G.V.Raja to the university and development of sports in the state have named after him the sports pavilion constructed at the university stadium on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Govt of Kerala has also declared 13<sup>th</sup> October as a sports day in Kerala. There are great patronages, who, by their own efforts and constant striving, had enriched mankind. Such persons are seen in all fields of human activities, and in the field of sports, colonel G.V.Raja stands supreme.

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