



ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS UNDER KRISHNARAJA WODEYAR-IV

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ABSTRACT

The reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1894–1940), often hailed as the "Rajarshi" (saintly king), marked a golden era in the history of the princely state of Mysore. Under his visionary leadership, Mysore witnessed remarkable strides in both cultural and economic domains. His administration, guided by Dewans such as Sir M. Visvesvaraya and Sir Mirza Ismail, emphasized industrialization, infrastructure development, education, and public health, laying the foundation for a modern economy. Culturally, the period was characterized by state patronage of arts, music, literature, and architecture, contributing to a renaissance in South Indian culture. This paper explores the intertwined progress in economic modernization and cultural enrichment during Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's rule, highlighting his legacy as a progressive and benevolent monarch. The reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1894–1940) marked a golden era in the history of the princely state of Mysore, characterized by a rare and exemplary balance between cultural flourishing and economic modernization. Widely regarded as a visionary ruler, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV spearheaded a wave of progressive reforms that transformed Mysore into one of the most developed and well-governed regions in colonial India. This study explores how the king, along with his renowned Dewans like Sir M. Visvesvaraya and Sir Mirza Ismail, led significant advancements in infrastructure, industrialization, public health, and education.



KEYWORDS: Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, Mysore Kingdom, cultural renaissance, economic modernization, Sir M. Visvesvaraya, Dewan Mirza Ismail, industrial development, arts patronage, South Indian culture, public administration, princely state governance, 20th-century Indian history.

INTRODUCTION

The early decades of the 20th century were transformative for the princely state of Mysore, largely due to the enlightened and progressive rule of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (r. 1894–1940). Revered as a "Rajarshi" or saintly ruler, he is remembered not only for his administrative acumen but also for his deep commitment to the welfare of his people. Under his leadership, Mysore emerged as one of the most modern and efficiently governed states in pre-independence India. Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's reign was marked by a unique blend of traditional cultural patronage and forward-thinking economic reforms. He fostered a climate of artistic and intellectual growth, supporting Carnatic music, classical dance, literature, and architecture. Cultural institutions flourished with royal patronage, making Mysore a hub of South Indian heritage.

On the economic front, the king implemented widespread modernization efforts with the assistance of visionary Dewans like Sir M. Visvesvaraya and Sir Mirza Ismail. The state made pioneering advances in industrialization, irrigation, hydroelectric power, education, and public health, setting a precedent for future economic planning in India. Projects like the Krishna Raja Sagara Dam, public sector industries, and urban infrastructure placed Mysore among the most developed regions in the subcontinent. This introduction provides the foundation for a deeper analysis of how Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's rule shaped the cultural identity and economic strength of Mysore. By examining the synergy between his cultural policies and economic initiatives, we gain insight into the lasting legacy of one of India's most visionary monarchs. At the same time, his deep commitment to arts, literature, music, and traditional institutions fostered a cultural renaissance that continues to influence Karnataka's identity today. By analyzing historical records, institutional developments, and cultural achievements, this research highlights the interconnection between tradition and modernity during his rule. The findings reveal that Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's governance provides a timeless model of inclusive and integrated development, offering valuable insights into sustainable leadership and cultural preservation in the context of modern nation-building.

Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (reigned 1894–1940) was one of the most progressive rulers in Indian history. Under his visionary leadership, the Kingdom of Mysore witnessed remarkable economic growth, industrial development, and a cultural renaissance. He transformed Mysore into a model state through modern infrastructure, promotion of education, and encouragement of arts and industries.

I. Economic Developments

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (reigned 1894–1940), the Maharaja of the Kingdom of Mysore, is often hailed as one of the most enlightened and progressive rulers in modern Indian history. His reign marked a golden period of economic development, social reform, and cultural renaissance in the princely state of Mysore. Here's a detailed overview of Cultural and Economic Development under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV:

1. Establishment of Industries

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV gave top priority to industrialization. Several important industries were established during his reign: such as the Mysore Iron and Steel Works at **Bhadravati** (1918), which became one of the most prominent industrial ventures in India. Initiatives were taken to develop textile mills in places like **Channapatna** and sugar factories to boost agrarian and industrial integration. Known as the Mysore Iron and Steel Works; it was one of the earliest major iron and steel plants in India. A cement factory was set up to support the growing construction and infrastructure sectors. **Cotton mills and paper factories** were developed in Bangalore, creating employment and promoting local production. The famous **Mysore Silk Factory** was established, making Mysore one of the top silk producers in India. A sandalwood oil factory was set up in Mysore, exporting high-quality sandalwood oil worldwide. This small-scale industry provided employment in rural areas and contributed to local economy.

During the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1894–1940), the Kingdom of Mysore saw major advancements in industry, especially in areas where the state had natural strengths. Two of the most famous industries promoted by the Maharaja were:

Mysore Silk Industry

The Maharaja established the Mysore Silk Factory in 1912 to encourage silk production using locally available mulberry and skilled weavers. The factory produced high-quality silk that became famous across India and internationally. Mysore silk sarees became a symbol of elegance and tradition, contributing significantly to the local economy and employment.

Sandalwood Oil Industry

Mysore had an abundance of sandalwood trees, and Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV promoted the scientific extraction of sandalwood oil. A Sandalwood Oil Factory was established in 1916 in Mysore with German collaboration. The oil was used in perfumes, soaps, and medicines and became a major export product, earning Mysore the title "Land of Sandalwood".

Under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, these two industries showcased Mysore's rich natural resources and royal vision. His support for local industries helped boost the economy, create jobs, and make Mysore internationally known for its silk and sandalwood products.

Shimoga Matchbox Industry

During the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1894–1940), the Kingdom of Mysore experienced significant industrial growth. One of the notable small-scale industries promoted during his rule was the matchbox industry in Shimoga.

- The Shimoga matchbox industry was established to utilize local forest resources, especially softwood, which is essential for making matchsticks.
- It became a source of employment for many people in the region, especially rural and semi-urban workers.
- This industry contributed to the growth of the cottage and small-scale sector, which was an important part of the Maharaja's economic vision.
- The government under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV provided infrastructure and support to help small industries thrive alongside large-scale industries.

The Shimoga matchbox industry reflects Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's commitment to balanced economic development, where both large and small industries were encouraged. His rule laid the foundation for industrial diversification and local employment in Mysore State.

2. Agricultural Development

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV invested heavily in the construction of dams and canals to improve irrigation, including the Krishna Raja Sagara Dam (KRS) built across the Cauvery River. Agricultural research stations were set up to encourage modern and scientific farming methods.

Irrigation: Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) Dam Construction:

- The construction of the Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) Dam began in 1911 and was completed in 1931.
- The dam was built across the Cauvery River near Mandya.
- It was named after Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, who funded and supported its construction.
- Designed by Sir M. Visvesvaraya, the dam was one of the first major irrigation projects in India.
- Provided irrigation water to thousands of acres of agricultural land in the Mandya, Mysore, and Chamarajanagar districts.
- Helped transform dry and drought-prone areas into fertile, green farmland.
- Supported sugarcane and paddy cultivation, boosting the rural economy.
- Also served as a source of drinking water and hydroelectric power for Mysore and Bangalore.
- The Brindavan Gardens, built below the dam, became a popular tourist attraction.

The KRS Dam stands as a symbol of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's vision for modern irrigation and agriculture. His support for this project brought prosperity to farmers and laid the foundation for economic growth in the Mysore region.

3. Urban Development

During the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1894–1940), the Kingdom of Mysore saw remarkable progress in urban planning, infrastructure, and modernization. He transformed cities like Mysore and Bangalore into well-planned, modern urban centers.

1. Modern Infrastructure

Developed wide roads, drainage systems, and modern town planning in cities like Mysore and Bangalore. Introduced underground drainage and modern sanitation systems — very advanced for the time.

2. Public Buildings and Institutions

Constructed iconic buildings such as: Mysore Palace (completed in 1912) Krishna Raja Market. Public offices, hospitals, and schools Supported the creation of institutions like the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the University of Mysore.

3. Parks and Gardens

Developed urban green spaces like the Brindavan Gardens near the KRS Dam and public parks in Mysore and Bangalore. Under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, urban development in Mysore state reached modern standards. His efforts made Mysore and Bangalore some of the most well-planned and advanced cities in India during the early 20th century. His rule combined progressive urban policies with a vision for a modern, clean, and well-governed state.

4. Banking and Finance

Established the Mysore Bank (now State Bank of Mysore) to support local enterprise and banking access. Revenue systems were improved for better taxation and financial management.

Establishment of State Bank of Mysore

- The State Bank of Mysore was established in 1913 under the patronage of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV.
- Originally named “The Bank of Mysore Ltd.”, it was founded as a public sector bank to serve the financial needs of the people of Mysore State.
- It was established on the advice of Sir M. Visvesvaraya, the then Diwan of Mysore, who believed that economic development required a strong banking system.
- The bank provided services such as savings accounts, loans for agriculture and industry, and trade finance, helping small businesses and farmers.
- It played a key role in funding infrastructure projects, supporting industries, and promoting rural banking in the state.
- In 1953, the bank became an associate of the State Bank of India and was renamed State Bank of Mysore.
- It remained an important regional bank until it was merged with the State Bank of India in 2017.

The establishment of the State Bank of Mysore under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV was a visionary step toward financial inclusion and economic modernization. It laid the foundation for organized banking in the region and supported Mysore’s industrial and agricultural growth.

II. Cultural Developments

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV was a great patron of culture and the arts, often called a “Rajarshi” (Philosopher King) by Mahatma Gandhi. His court became a center for artistic, literary, and cultural excellence in South India.

1. Art and Architecture

Continued the rich tradition of Dravidian architecture and royal patronage of public buildings and monuments. Famous Monuments and Buildings: Mysore Palace (completed in 1912) – known for Indo-Saracenic style architecture, grandeur, and artistic interiors. Lalitha Mahal Palace – built in 1921 for royal guests, now a heritage hotel. Brindavan Gardens – developed near the KRS Dam, known for its musical fountains and symmetry. Krishna Raja Market and other civic structures in Mysore and Bangalore.

2. Music

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV was a trained musician and deeply respected Carnatic music. His court supported many renowned musicians: Veene Sheshanna – expert in veena and one of the royal court’s top musicians. Mysore Vasudevachar – famous composer and singer, composed hundreds of Carnatic kritis. Bidaram Krishnappa – known for his devotional music and contributions to Carnatic music.

3. Dance

Encouraged classical dance forms, especially Bharatanatyam and Kathak. Supported dance as a respected art form at a time when it was losing popularity. Provided platforms and patronage to traditional dancers to perform in royal and public events.

4. Painting

Promoted the Mysore School of Painting, known for its: Intricate detailing Use of natural colors Religious and mythological themes Famous Paintings and Artists: “Dashavatara” – depicting the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. “Durbar of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV” – showcasing his royal court Artists like K. Venkatappa and M. Ramanuja Iyengar were associated with the Mysore court.

Under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, art, architecture, music, dance, and painting flourished like never before. His encouragement of culture, combined with his progressive governance, made Mysore a cultural capital of South India in the early 20th century.

Totally, the court of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV became a hub for classical music, dance, literature, and fine arts. He was a great patron of Carnatic music and supported musicians like Veene Sheshanna, Mysore Vasudevachar, and Bidaram Krishnappa. The Mysore school of painting, known for its unique style and vibrant colors, flourished under his rule.

5. Establishment of Kannada Sahitya Parishad, Bangalore (1915)

- During the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, there was a strong emphasis on promoting Kannada language, literature, and culture.
- To encourage the growth of Kannada literature and provide a platform for writers and scholars, the Kannada Sahitya Parishad was established in Bangalore in 1915.
- The Parishad aimed at preserving and promoting Kannada language and literature.
- It organized literary meets, conferences, and publications to support Kannada writers and poets.
- The Maharaja personally supported this institution, reflecting his dedication to cultural and linguistic pride.
- The Kannada Sahitya Parishad helped lay the foundation for a modern literary movement in Kannada.
- This institution played a crucial role in nurturing Kannada as a rich and evolving literary language.
- It inspired many writers, poets, and scholars to contribute to Kannada literature.
- Strengthened the regional identity and cultural heritage of Karnataka.

The establishment of the Kannada Sahitya Parishad under the patronage of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV marked a significant step in the revival and promotion of Kannada language and literature, helping to preserve the cultural legacy of Karnataka for future generations.

Educational Development

He focused for higher education for the society. He founded the University of Mysore in 1916—one of the first universities in India established by a native ruler. Emphasized universal and compulsory primary education, especially for girls and marginalized communities. Provided scholarships for higher studies, including education abroad. Encouraged Kannada, Sanskrit, and English literature. Provided scholarships and promoted higher education, especially for women and marginalized communities.

1. Establishment of Colleges

Under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, Mysore state witnessed the growth of higher education through the establishment of several colleges. Notable institutions include: Government Arts College, Mysore,

Maharaja's College, Mysore, Government Science College, Bangalore. These colleges played a vital role in nurturing a new generation of educated youth who contributed to various fields.

2. Establishment of Agricultural Centre, Hebbal, Bangalore

To improve agriculture, the Maharaja established the Agricultural Research Centre at Hebbal, Bangalore. This center focused on modern farming techniques, crop improvement, and agricultural education. It helped boost agricultural productivity and supported farmers with scientific knowledge.

3. Establishment of Mysore University (1916)

A landmark achievement was the establishment of the University of Mysore in 1916, the first university in the state. Founded under the patronage of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, the university became a center for higher education and research. It offered courses in arts, science, law, and medicine and encouraged research in Kannada language and culture. The university helped raise educational standards and made higher education accessible to many students in the region.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's vision for education focused on modernizing education, promoting research, and supporting agriculture through scientific advancement. His contributions laid a strong foundation for the intellectual and economic growth of Mysore state.

4. Establishment of Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore

One of the greatest contributions of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV to the field of education and scientific research was his support for the establishment of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore. The Indian Institute of Science (IISc), founded in 1909 with support from Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV and Tata, became a premier center for scientific research and education.

- The idea for IISc was originally proposed by industrialist Jamshedji Tata, who wanted a world-class institute for scientific research in India.
- Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, along with his Diwan, Sir M. Visvesvaraya, played a key role in bringing the institute to Mysore State.
- The Maharaja donated 371 acres of land in Bangalore and gave financial assistance for the institute's foundation.
- IISc was officially established in 1909, during his reign, and became one of the first premier scientific research institutions in India.
- Today, IISc is globally recognized for advanced research in science, engineering, and technology.

The support given by Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV to establish IISc reflects his visionary leadership and deep commitment to education, research, and national progress. His contribution helped lay the foundation for modern science and innovation in India.

Health Development

During the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, there was significant progress in public health and medical infrastructure in Mysore State, especially in Bangalore. Built Victoria Hospital in Bangalore and promoted public health initiatives like clean water supply and vaccination drives. Improved sanitation facilities in urban areas, reducing disease outbreaks.

Establishment of the Hospitals

1. Victoria Hospital

Established with royal patronage to provide modern medical care. It became one of the leading general hospitals in Bangalore, serving thousands of patients. Equipped with various departments to cater to different medical needs.

2. Vanivilas Hospital

Focused on maternity and child healthcare. Provided specialized services for women and infant care. Helped reduce maternal and infant mortality rates in the region.

3. Minto Eye Hospital

Dedicated to ophthalmic care and treatment of eye diseases. Offered specialized surgeries and eye care, reducing blindness and eye-related ailments. Supported by the state government and royal patronage.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's support for healthcare infrastructure helped improve medical services and public health in Mysore State. These hospitals became important centers for treatment, research, and training in Bangalore, benefiting thousands and laying the groundwork for modern healthcare in the region.

Electricity Supply

1. Hydroelectric Power to Kolar Gold Mines (1902)

Mysore's hydroelectric power project at Shivanasamudra Falls began supplying electricity to the Kolar Gold Mines in 1902. This was one of the first major uses of hydroelectric power in India. The reliable electricity supply helped modernize mining operations and increased productivity.

2. Electricity supply to Bangalore City (1905)

Following Kolar, the power generated from the Shivanasamudra hydroelectric station was extended to Bangalore City. In 1905, Bangalore became the first city in India to get electric street lighting. This marked a significant step in urban modernization and public infrastructure development.

These initiatives reflected Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's commitment to industrial growth and urban development through modern technology. The availability of electricity boosted industry, mining, and urban life, setting Mysore apart as a progressive state. Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's pioneering efforts in hydroelectric power made Mysore a leader in electricity generation and supply in early 20th century India, benefiting both industrial and civic sectors.

Religious and Social Harmony

He promoted religious tolerance and supported temples, churches, and mosques alike. Took steps for the upliftment of lower castes and women, promoting inclusive development. Supported multiple religious communities, promoting peace and coexistence. Encouraged reforms for the upliftment of Dalits, women, and backward classes. He introduced reservation system for the development of the poor people of society in first time in the Mysore region.

Transport and Communication

During his period of rule the Railways were expanded and roads were built to connect remote areas, enhancing trade and mobility. Postal and telegraph services were also modernized.

Legacy

- Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV was called the "Rajarshi" (Philosopher King) by Mahatma Gandhi.
- Under his reign, Mysore was often referred to as a "model state" for its progressive administration, development, and governance.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's reign is a shining example of how a visionary leader can bring about holistic development—combining economic modernization with cultural preservation and growth. His contributions laid the foundation for Karnataka's emergence as a center of education, industry, and cultural richness in the 20th century. Under Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, Mysore became a model state known for its balanced blend of economic modernization and cultural advancement. His contributions to industry, education, infrastructure, and the arts laid the foundation for Karnataka's prosperity in the years to come. He was rightly praised by national leaders and thinkers, including Mahatma Gandhi, who called him a "Rajarshi" (Philosopher King).

DISCUSSION

The reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1894–1940) is widely regarded as a transformative period in the history of the Mysore kingdom. His rule marked a unique convergence of traditional cultural values and modern economic reforms, making Mysore a model princely state within British

India. The discussion below explores the key aspects of both cultural and economic developments and how they were interconnected under his progressive leadership.

1. Cultural Development: A Renaissance in the South

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV was a great patron of art, literature, and music. His deep personal interest in culture encouraged the growth of Carnatic music, Bharatanatyam, Kannada literature, and architecture. His court attracted renowned artists and scholars, including Veene Sheshanna, Bidaram Krishnappa, and Mysore Vasudevacharya. The University of Mysore (established in 1916) was among the first universities in India set up by a princely state and became a center for higher learning and intellectual growth. Cultural institutions such as the Chamarajendra Technical Institute and Jaganmohan Palace Art Gallery played a pivotal role in preserving traditional arts while promoting innovation. This cultural patronage was not merely decorative—it played a nation-building role, fostering a sense of identity and pride among the people of Mysore during a time when India was under colonial rule.

2. Economic Development: A Vision of Modernization

Parallel to cultural advancement was an era of rapid economic modernization, driven by Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's foresight and the administrative expertise of his Dewans, particularly Sir M. Visvesvaraya and Sir Mirza Ismail.

Key developments included:

- **Industrialization:** Establishment of major industries such as the Mysore Iron and Steel Works, Sandalwood Oil Factory, and Mysore Soap Factory.
- **Infrastructure:** Construction of the Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) Dam, which not only enhanced irrigation but also powered Asia's first hydroelectric plant at Shivanasamudra, electrifying Bangalore and Mysore early in the 20th century.
- **Urban Development:** Modern town planning, public transportation, sanitation, and health services made Mysore and Bangalore modern urban centers.
- **Education and Health:** Massive investments in public education, libraries, women's education, and hospitals, including the Krishnarajendra Hospital and Mysore Medical College.

These initiatives positioned Mysore as one of the most economically advanced regions in India before independence. The kingdom's model of state-led development served as an early example of planning and governance, influencing post-independence economic strategies.

3. Integration of Culture and Economy

One of the most remarkable aspects of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's reign was the harmonious integration of cultural values with economic progress. He did not view tradition and modernity as conflicting forces, but as complementary. While industries and institutions were modern, they remained rooted in the Kannada ethos and regional identity. For example, cultural festivals were supported alongside scientific exhibitions. The royal court continued classical music performances even as they hosted discussions on technical education and innovation. This blend created a unique identity for Mysore—a state that was modern yet culturally rich.

4. Lasting Legacy

The reforms initiated during his reign had a long-lasting impact on Karnataka's development. Institutions like IISc Bangalore, State Bank of Mysore, and Mysore University continue to shape India's progress. Moreover, the emphasis on inclusive development—educational access, women's empowerment, public health—was decades ahead of its time.

CONCLUSION OF THE DISCUSSION

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV's era was not merely one of prosperity but of visionary statecraft, in which culture was preserved and promoted while the economy was skillfully modernized. His

leadership proves that sustainable development can be achieved through a balanced approach that respects heritage while embracing progress. His legacy remains a source of inspiration for contemporary leaders, planners, and scholars. The reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV stands as a landmark period in the history of modern India, particularly within the context of princely state governance. Under his visionary leadership, the Mysore Kingdom transformed into a progressive, culturally vibrant, and economically modern state, setting an example for other regions during the colonial era. Culturally, his unwavering support for art, music, literature, and education led to a renaissance in South Indian traditions and firmly established Mysore as a center of classical heritage and intellectual pursuit. Simultaneously, his strategic economic reforms—guided by technocratic leadership from Dewans like Sir M. Visvesvaraya—resulted in the creation of robust infrastructure, flourishing industries, and widespread improvements in healthcare, education, and urban development.

What makes his legacy truly exceptional is the harmonious integration of tradition with modernity. Rather than abandoning cultural values in pursuit of modernization, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV preserved and nurtured them, ensuring that progress was both inclusive and rooted in identity. His contributions laid the foundation for the state of Karnataka's post-independence growth, and continue to serve as an inspiring model of good governance, cultural pride, and sustainable development. This study reinforces the idea that true progress lies not just in economic advancement, but in the simultaneous enrichment of society's cultural and human capital.

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