

Raja Ravi Varma

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Raja Ravi Varma

Varma in 1890s

Born 29 April 1848^[1]^[2]

Kilimanoor, Travancore (present-day Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala)

Died 2 October 1906 (aged 58)

Attingal, Travancore, British Raj

Other names Koil Thampuran of Kilimanoor, Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran

Alma mater University College Thiruvananthapuram

Occupation(s) painter, artist

Notable work

Shakuntala

Shakuntala Patra-lekhan

Nair Lady Adorning Her Hair

There Comes Papa

Galaxy of Musicians

Spouse Pooruruttathi Thirunal Bhageerthi Thampuratti

Awards Kaisar-i-Hind Gold Medal

Signature

Raja Ravi Varma (Malayalam: [raja: ravi varma(:)e]) (29 April 1848 – 2 October 1906[3][4]) was an Indian painter. His works are one of the best examples of the fusion of European academic art with a purely Indian sensibility and iconography. He greatly enhanced his reach and influence as a painter and public figure by making affordable lithographs of his paintings available to the public. His lithographs increased the involvement of common people with fine arts and defined artistic tastes. Furthermore, his religious depictions of Hindu deities and works from Indian epic poetry and Puranas have received critical acclaim. He was part of the royal family of Parappanad, Malappuram district.

Raja Ravi Varma was closely related to the royal family of Travancore of present-day Kerala state in India. Later in his life, two of his granddaughters were adopted into the royal family.[5]

Personal life

Varma was born on 29 April 1848, as M. R. Ry. Ravi Varma, Koil Thampuran of Kilimanoor at Kilimanoor palace in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore (present-day Kerala)[6] into an aristocratic family that for over 200 years produced consorts for the princesses of the matrilineal Travancore royal family. The title Raja was conferred as a personal title by the Viceroy and Governor-General of India Lord Curzon.[6]

There comes Papa (1893), depicting Varma's daughter Mahaprabha with one of her sons

Varma's sister-in-law, Bharani Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi, Senior Rani of Attingal (or Travancore), who adopted Varma's granddaughters in 1900

Ravi Varma was the son of Ezhumavil Neelakanthan Bhattatiripad and Uma Ambabayi Thampuratti. His mother Uma Ambabayi Thampuratty belonged to the baronial family which ruled the Kilimanoor feudal estate within the kingdom of Travancore. She was a poet and writer, and her work *Parvati Swayamvaram* was published by Varma after her death. Ravi Varma's father was a scholar of Sanskrit and Ayurveda and hailed from the Ernakulam district in Kerala. Ravi Varma had two siblings, a sister named Mangala Bayi and a brother named Raja Varma (born 1860). The last-named was also a painter and worked closely with Ravi Varma all his life.[citation needed]

In 1866, at age 18, Varma was married to 12-year-old Bhageerthi Bayi (known formally as Pooruruttati Nal Bhageerathi Bayi Thampuratty) of the royal house of Mavelikkara, another major fief of Travancore kingdom. Notably, the house of Mavellikara was a branch of the Royal House of Travancore. Bhageerthi was the youngest of three sisters; her two elder siblings were adopted into the royal family of Travancore in 1857 to perpetuate the lineage. Designated the Senior and Junior Rani of Attingal, their descendants were vested with the succession to the throne of Travancore. Therefore, Ravi Varma's connection to the royal family became very close due to his marriage with Bhageerthi. His children would be royal by birth, since they belonged to their mother's family. The marriage, which was arranged by the parents in the proper Indian manner, was considered successful. The couple had five children, two sons, and three daughters. Their elder son, Kerala Varma (b.1876) was of an excessively spiritual temperament. He never married and eventually renounced the world, leaving home for good in 1912. The younger son,

Rama Varma (born 1879), inherited his father's artistic talent and studied at the JJ School of Arts, Mumbai. He was married to Gowri Kunjamma, sister of Dewan PGN Unnithan, and became the father of seven children.[citation needed]

The three daughters of Ravi Varma and Bhageerthi Bayi were Mahaprabha Amma (who features in two of Varma's most famous paintings), Uma Amma (named after Varma's mother) and Cheria Kochamma. In 1900 CE, the Royal House of Travancore once again faced a succession crisis. Bhageerthi's two elder sisters, who had been adopted in order to carry forward the lineage, had failed to produce the desired heirs. They had six children between them, but only two of those survived, and both were boys (who also, incidentally, later died childless). According to the matrilineal Marumakkathayam system, the succession to the throne could only progress through females, and therefore it was necessary to make an adoption. Tradition dictated that two girls belonging to branches of the Royal Family be adopted together. They would be designated the Senior and Junior Rani of Attingal, and the succession to the throne of Travancore would be vested in their progeny, in accordance with the unusual and unique Marumakkathayam system of succession.[citation needed]

Two of Varma's granddaughters were marked by destiny to receive this honour, the main reason being that they were the nearest matrilineal (cognatic) kin to the incumbent Rani of Attingal. In August 1900, Mahaprabha's eldest daughter Lakshmi Bayi (aged 5 years) and Uma's eldest daughter Parvati Bayi (aged 4 years) were adopted into the Royal family of Travancore. It was Bharani Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi, their surviving grand-aunt, who formally adopted them. She died within one year of doing this, and the two girls were then installed as the Senior and Junior Ranis of Attingal respectively. They were married while yet in their early teens to two gentlemen from suitable aristocratic families. It was the Junior Rani, Sethu Parvathi Bayi, who gave birth to the much-awaited heir in 1912, exactly a day after her sixteenth birthday. Incidentally, her husband was a grand-nephew of Raja Ravi Varma and belonged to Kilimanoor. The newborn child was the future Maharaja Chithira Thirunal, the last ruling Maharaja of Travancore. He was followed by a brother (the future Maharaja Marthanda Varma III) and a sister Lakshmi Bayi, the mother of Maharaja Rama Varma VII who is presently on the throne (since 2013). Meanwhile, the Senior Rani (Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, daughter of Mahaprabha Amma, and Regent from 1924 to 1931) also gave birth to two daughters later in life (in 1923 and 1926).[citation needed]

In this way, the entire present (existing) royal family of Travancore is descended from Raja Ravi Varma. Well known among his royal descendants are the writers Aswathi Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bayi and Shreekumar Varma, the artist Rukmini Varma and the classical musician Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma.[citation needed]

Around Ravi Varma's 57th birthday he announced his decision to accept Sanyasa, and retire from all worldly life when he turned 60. In his final years he suffered from grief for the death of Raja Raja Varma, and also from diabetes, which contributed to his death on 2 October 1906.[citation needed]