

## Splendours of Royal Mysore

*The Untold Story of the Wodeyars*

**Author:** Vikram Sampath

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**Price:** Rs 1500

**Genre:** Non Fiction

VIKAM SAMPATH, for a first time author, has tackled a really hefty topic: the history of the Wodeyars, the erstwhile Mysore royal family. And in the process has written a wrist-breaking tome of 730-pages. Once you get past the intimidating size of the book, and if you are a history buff, then it is quite an enjoyable and informative read.

The merit of the book lies in that it gives in one shot the whole story of the Wodeyar family starting with the folklore that traces their origins to Gujarat and ending with the merger of the Mysore kingdom into the Indian dominion.

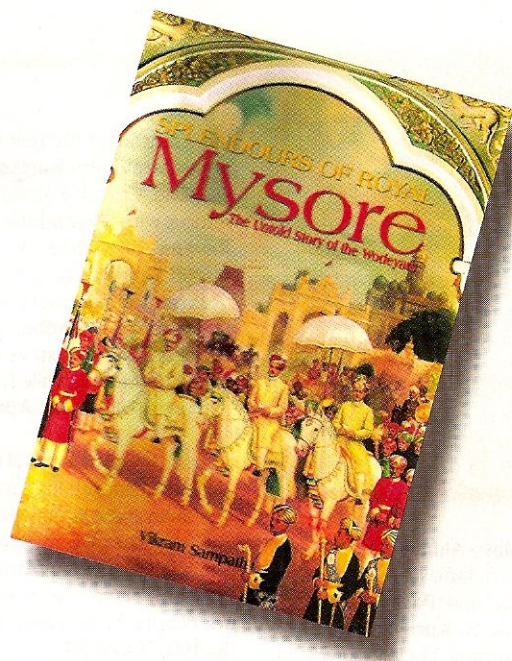
The book has a fabulous collection of pictures of the Mysore royal family.

The Dasara pictures from the times of Maharaja Nalwadi Krishnaraya Wodeyar are especially riveting. Sampath offers a refreshing insight into the famous curse of Queen Alamelamma (that the Mysore kings be childless and Talakad become a desert). He says that most probably the Wodeyar family itself helped propagate this myth to ensure that the royal family which suffered from lack of male heirs every other generation didn't fall prey to the British Doctrine of Lapse!

Mysore started life under the Wodeyars as a small agglomeration of villages owing allegiance to the Vijayanagara kings. It became a kingdom of some size and importance under rulers like Raja Wodeyar Ranadhira and later Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar in the 17th century. The succession of kings who followed proved to be worthless, letting their Dalavoyas (army generals) call the shots to the ruin of both the ruler and the kingdom. Circumstances that led to the rise of Haider Ali and later his famous son, Tipu Sultan.

Though this is the story of the Wodeyars, the chapters I found the most interesting were the ones which dealt with some 70 years under the father-son duo. Sampath, while noting the stupendous achievements of Ali and Tipu, struggles to define Tipu in socio-religious terms. Was he a secularist or not? Was he simply anti-British or anti-colonial? He says finally — rightly I think — that there are no black and white answers and judging people by the current mores is unjust to people who lived in a completely different milieu.

The Wodeyars who were re-instated to the Mysore throne proved to a better bunch of rulers than their predecessors, with Mysore attaining high status under the reign of Krishnaraya Wodeyar.



Sampath's writing is plain and simple. Don't expect great prose. The narrative, functional style while not taking away from the book doesn't add to it either. Also, after such an exhaustive story on the life and times of Wodeyars, the ending is very abrupt. A footnote says that technically the Wodeyar rule came to an end in 1950!

The author could have made the book shorter and hence more reader friendly if he had stuck to the royal story and not strayed into the state of the nation elsewhere, especially the Indian national movement. He must have felt that it was necessary to show the overall picture to place the evolution of Mysore in context. But it ends up adding to the text and generally repeats what most of us already know.

**Asha Rai**

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