

## THE SULTANS OF MYSORE AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE CHIEFTAINS OF SOUTH KANARA

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This paper makes an attempt to examine the relationship that Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan had with the native chiefs of South Kanara like the *Rajas* of Kumbala, Nileshwar and Vittal and analyse the impact of their relations. Haidar Ali had antagonised these chieftains because of his high revenue exaction from them. Tipu not only inherited this hostile relationship, but by following the footsteps of his father, promoted it. Their hostile relations helped the British to woo the support of these *Rajas* in their attempt to annex this region. They did prefer and collaborate with a stronger alien power to that of their own native suzerain. However, the British did not reward them for their help, for, soon after they acquired South Kanara the native chieftains were put down.

The preoccupation of Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan with the British and the enormous expenditure the Anglo-Mysore wars involved in, greatly influenced their revenue policies. These wars had drained the treasury of Mysore. They could realise more revenue for the state only by increasing the land revenue, which they really resorted to, for, it constituted the major source of income for the state. Nevertheless, the granting of *jagirs* was introduced about the beginning of 1798<sup>1</sup>.

Sir Thomas Munro, who was appointed as the first

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Collector of Kanara in 1799, rightly explained the position of the native *Rajas* : "Most of the petty chiefs that in ancient times existed in Kanara have long since been deprived of all authority and confounded with the mass of the people, but there are still three who from their long connection with the Bombay Government deserve a particular classification. These three are the *Rajas* of Kumbha, of Vittal and Nileshwar"<sup>2</sup>. During the Mysore rule, these chieftains had lost much of their political powers. However, they continued to enjoy their age-old feudatory status and wielded considerable social and economic influence in their localities.

Soon after the acquisition of South Kanara in 1763, Haidar Ali deprived of the Vittal Raja his land and status. However, Haidar relented soon after, and restored them to him (1764) when the Heggade, Mariapparasu, consented to embrace Islam along with his four brothers.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that Mariapparasu and his brothers must have come back to Hindu fold in about 1769, when they took shelter under the British at Tellicherry. The total amount of revenue allowed to the *Raja* as his share was evidently meagre, notwithstanding his title, he had been reduced, even in the early years of Haidar's rule, to the position of a rent collecting agent. P. Gururaja Bhat is of opinion that the Heggades of Vittal were actual *Rajas* with all regal signs.<sup>4</sup> However, this cannot be extended beyond the regal signs, social status and influence as the political power they commanded was very limited.

In 1765, Haidar increased the rent which the *Raja* of Vittal had been paying to the Ikkeri rulers, by 50% and had it transferred to himself.<sup>5</sup> This merely provoked the intransigence of the chief of Vittal in 1768. In the First Anglo-Mysore war, Achuta Heggade of Vittal assisted the British. As soon as the war ended, Haidar forced the *Raja* of Vittal to vacate his place. The fugitive chieftain took shelter under

the English at Tellicherry, as a pensioner of the Company, and drew an yearly grant of Rupees 100.

The Raja of Kumbala was not happy under the suzerainty of Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan as they had enhanced the revenue of Kanara.<sup>6</sup> It came in the way of the advantageous tenure which the Kumbala *Raja* held during the reign of the Keladi rulers.<sup>7</sup> One of the recalcitrant chiefs of Kumbala, by name Oodepah (Udupa ?) was hanged as early as 1763.<sup>8</sup> We do not know the exact date of the enhancement in the revenue of Kanara by Haidar. But it is possible that Oodepah must have resented and resisted the enhancement of his revenue by Haidar Ali. His younger brother Ramantarasu was permitted to reside on his own lands as a private individual. But he supported the British in their first siege of Mangalore, for which Ramantarasu was captured and hanged by Haidar in 1768.<sup>9</sup> He was succeeded by his nephew as the *Raja* of Kumbala.

In 1763, Haidar expelled the ruling *Raja* of Nileshwar, had raised his rent to 3,800 Bahadury Pagodas<sup>10</sup> (Rupees 15,200). Later, Haidar executed a *Kaul* with the deposed *Raja*, according to which he was reinstated in the charge of his territory in 1767 on condition of paying the full rent after deducting an allowance for himself. According to Haidar's *Sanad*, the allowance amounted to 636 Bahadury Pagodas (Rupees 2544). The whole of this sum ought in fact to be considered as his own private pension and for the expense of the peons was always defrayed by the country. The above agreement amounted to an increase in the revenue which the *Raja* of Nileshwar had to pay to Haidar. The dissatisfied *Raja* revolted against Haidar in 1769. But he was soon captured and hanged.<sup>11</sup> His nephew was acknowledged as the ruler and was placed on the former's pension.

The total revenue collected by the state in Kanara swelled

to Pagodas 5,33,202 (Rupees 18,66,207) in the early 1780's (the amount increased was Pagodas 2,19,195, for, it was only Pagodas 3,14,007 during 1762-63). A similar course was pursued by Tipu Sultan and the total government demand from the whole province of Kanara during his period amounted to Pagodas 8,68,678 (Rupees 30,40,373). But the government failed to realise the whole amount and this arrears generally amounted to Pagodas 2,52,589 (Rupees 8,84,061-50). Thus, the net annual revenue of the state during the reign of Tipu was Pagodas 6,16,089<sup>12</sup> (Rupees 21,56,311-50). This total amount was described as *Shamil* in South Kanara.

The enhancement of land revenue during the period of the Mysore government was uneven in character. It must be recognised that the administration of Haidar and Tipu in their own territories was not harsh. In fact important authorities like Wellesley and Sir Thomas Munro have borne witness to the prosperity of the Mysore dominions at the time of its conquest by the British. But the position in respect of Kerala was unfortunately very different.<sup>13</sup> There it resulted in the impoverishment of agriculture due to heavy taxation. South Kanara too had an experience similar to that of Malabar. In 1801, Francis H. Buchanan<sup>14</sup> gave a vivid description of the grim picture of agriculture and the impoverishment of the peasants in the District.

The enhancement of revenue was the main reason which made the chieftains of Kumbala and Vittal to support the British in the Anglo-Mysore wars, against Haidar and Tipu. Sir Thomas Munro also gives a very bleak picture of the condition of South Kanara in 1799-1800. Munro said: "had such an assessment as that introduced by Haidar and Tipu existed in ancient times Kanara would long ago have been converted into a desert."<sup>15</sup> The rulers of Mysore did not follow uniform policies of administration throughout their Kingdom. In the field of revenue administration South Kanara

along with Malabar was almost treated like 'internal colonies.' Their double standards can be noticed in other aspects of administration such as justice and religion.

Tipu Sultan was not unaware of the fact that the ryots were the backbone of his kingdom and he is said to have remarked that, 'agriculture is the life and blood of the nation.'<sup>16</sup> He declared further that, 'the newly cultivated land shall belong to the cultivator and his descendants.... and no one shall dispossess him.' Cultivation of waste land was encouraged by him and he enjoined his revenue collectors not to realise even a single pie by way of revenue from the newly cultivated land in the first year. One-quarter of the usual revenue was charged on this rent-free land in the second year and full thereafter. In many cases if it was found that the land did not yield sizeable profit no state rent was charged for about three consecutive years to come.<sup>17</sup>

To bring the *Amildars* more firmly under state control, Tipu issued a set of regulations at the beginning of his reign. He laid down rules for the task of surveying his kingdom to ascertain the annual increase or decrease of agriculture and population. Tipu envisaged a number of measures for the promotion of agriculture in his kingdom. In spite of these measures, Tipu could not safeguard the interest of peasants. For, the problem of revenue collection was ultimately that of enforcing the state claims on the vested interests of a long-standing officialdom, largely dominated by the Brahmins.<sup>18</sup> In his later days, Tipu tried to destroy the Brahmin stronghold by appointing Muslims to the office of *Amildar*. But the Muslim *Asofs*, who had no experience of gathering the necessary information for pursuing the requirements of office, showed the same inclination to profit at the expense of the state as those whom they had displaced. Thus, the revenue officials at once cheated the government and exploited the peasants. However, it is not possible to determine exactly the amount

of over assessment by the state in the time of Tipu both because of the lack of data and of their unreliable nature, when available. What baffled Tipu and British administration in South India, at least in the earlier stages, was the extent of authority and influence exercised by local officials. They worked as R.E.Frykenberg states, like white ants on a wooden structure, making a 'hollow mockery' of the administrative framework.<sup>19</sup> Thus during the rule of both Haidar and Tipu, the problem was not solely due to over-assessment necessitated by the wars, but the misuse of their powers by the revenue officials, who stood between the government and the peasants.

From 1769 to 1784 the *Raja* of Kumbala (the successor of Ramantarasu) lived in exile. In January 1793, when General Mathews from Bombay landed at Kundapura, the *Raja* returned and took possession of his district but was seized and hanged by Tipu in 1784.<sup>20</sup> After this the members of the Kumbala royal family took shelter under the British at Telli-cherry and were placed on a pension of Rupees 200 per month.<sup>21</sup>

The *Raja* of Vittal Achutha Heggade, as pointed out earlier, had already assisted the British in the First Anglo-Mysore war. As a reward to his help, in 1780, the *Raja* was admitted to pensions by the Company, and the Bombay Government settled on him a monthly pension of Rupees 200.<sup>22</sup> This he received from 1st May 1792. Though a refugee under the English, he made occasional incursions into his hereditary provinces. On one such occasion in 1784, Tipu Sultan captured him at Vittal and beheaded him, and set fire to the main palace.<sup>23</sup> Achutha Heggade was succeeded by Ravivarma Narasimha Domba Heggade at Tellicherry.

The *Raja* of Nileshwar, who succeeded after the murder of his uncle by Haidar (1769), did not like Haidar, but he never openly resisted him in the 1770's. The *Raja* of Nileshwar

too made an abortive bid to resist the authority of Tipu in 1783.<sup>24</sup>

Article VII of the treaty of Mangalore stipulated the grant of a general amnesty by Tipu to those *Rajas* and *Zamin-dars* on the Malabar coast who had favoured the English in the last war. The treaty of Mangalore (1784) imposed the British will upon Tipu to such an extent that he was not in a position to subdue his own recalcitrant chieftains like the *Raja* of Kumbla.

At the commencement of the third Anglo-Mysore war (1790-92), the *Raja* of Kumbla had received assurances from the British of being reinstated in his ancient district should it be taken from Tipu.<sup>25</sup> This attempt of the British bears testimony to their interference in the politics of the region and their attempt to weaken the power of Tipu in his own land. During these years, the *Raja* of Vittal, Ravivarma Narasimha Domba Heggade took shelter at Tellicherry. The *Raja* of Nileshwar made these attempts (in 1785, in 1787 and again in 1789)<sup>26</sup> to defy the authority of Tipu, but never did he rise in open revolt. Two of the *Rajas* of Nileshwar were hanged in 1787 by Tipu's commandant of Bekal under the supervision of the Governor of Bekal, Budruz Zaman Khan. But their successor, Rama Varma, came to terms with Tipu and took possession of his territory immediately.<sup>27</sup> Thus, during the third Mysore war, the *Rajas* of Kumbla and Vittal took a pro-British stances.

The treaty of Srirangapattana (18th March, 1792) also included provisions to safeguard these local chieftains and to protect them from the molestation of Tipu.

The chieftains of Kumbla and Vittal, who had already sided the British, continued the same policy until the outbreak of the last Mysore war. In 1799, Commissioner of Malabar

made the *Raja* of Kumbha believe that in the event of their victory against Tipu, he would be entitled to something more than his usual pension.<sup>28</sup> Though the British tried to win over the *Raja* of Kumbha, the latter seemed to be in great hurry to recover his hereditary possession and soon became hostile to the British. When the war broke out in 1799, the *Raja* returned from Tellicherry and began his activities to regain his territories.<sup>29</sup> When the *Raja* became apprehensive of the defeat of Tipu, he suddenly turned hostile to the British. So, the Pro-British attitude which he followed was just to save himself from the authority and control of the rulers of Mysore.

As soon as the last Anglo-Mysore war broke out, Ravi-varma Narasimha Domba Heggade, the *Raja* of Vittal, moved to his capital and worked to regain his possessions. However, the *Raja* leaned towards the British from the 1760's to 1799, and these years marked the first phase of his collaboration with them. The British also seemed to be interested in his support, for, the *Raja* though a fugitive, had a hereditary social standing. His moral support meant the support of a large number of natives who stood for them. The phase of collaboration, however, ended in 1799 when Tipu Sultan was overthrown by the British.

During the last Mysore War, the *Raja* of Nileshwar was Rama Varma and he was in enjoyment of an income of 800 to 900 Bahadry Pagodas drawn partly from his own lands and partly from the land revenue paid by the inhabitants.<sup>30</sup> The strained relationship between the Mysore rulers and the Nileshwar *Raja* was primarily due to the imposition of a high share of *Sirkar* rent. It was an indirect impact of the British political interference in the affairs of Mysore. The Anglo-Mysore wars had drained the treasury of the Mysore Government, and they sought to find additional resources by making additional demands on the chiefs like the Nileshwar *Raja*.



The Nileshtar *Rajas*, unlike their counterparts at Vittal and Kumbala, never allied themselves with the British. It is in this sense that as subordinates they were more loyal to the rulers of Mysore than the *Rajas* of Kumbala and Vittal. However, the Nileshtar chiefs did show their resentment to the high revenue collected from them both by Haidar and Tipu. On such occasions they were put down or hanged. On the other hand, when the Nileshtar *Rajas* were not turbulent, they were allowed a certain amount of freedom and were shown some consideration. The rulers of Mysore entered into *Kauls* with the Nileshtar ruling family, granted them pensions and allowed them to rule. In other words, they never expelled them from their possessions. The Mysore rulers tried not to alienate the Nileshtar *Rajas*, as far as possible, for Nileshtar was looked upon as a necessary cushion between Malabar and the possessions of the Mysore rulers in South Kanara. The Nileshtar *Rajas* did not ally themselves with the British, as they had known the dangerous abilities of the British to interfere in the native affairs. The *Raja* of Nileshtar was the next door neighbour of the British in Malabar and hence knew the British from close quarters. In fact, during the interim period of the Third and Fourth Anglo-Mysore wars (1792-1799), the British at Tellicherry had interfered in the territories of the Nileshtar *Raja*. As per the Treaty of Srirangapattana (1792), Tipu had ceded Malabar to the British. But they tried to wield influence over the north of Malabar, that is in the territories of the Nileshtar *Raja*, situated to the north of the river Kavai.<sup>31</sup> They divided the territories of the Nileshtar *Palegar* into four maganes.<sup>32</sup> This interference of the British must have earned them the displeasure of the Nileshtar chief. However, the British had allowed the chief to continue his nominal authority over Nileshtar, for, in 1800, Sir Thomas Munro wrote: "I found him (Nileshtar *Raja*) in possession of his District not depending on the Company like the *Rajas* of Kumbala and Vittal."<sup>33</sup>

Soon after the last Mysore war, the *Raja* of Nileshwar, just like the *Rajas* of Kumbla and Vittal resisted the British. However, the point of difference lies in the fact that while the *Rajas* of Vittal and Kumbla openly supported the British in the Anglo-Mysore wars, the *Raja* of Nileshwar never did so. Further, the year 1799 saw an immediate reversal of policy on the part of the *Rajas* of Vittal and Kumbla towards the British. The initial resistance movements of these three local chieftains (1799-1800) against the British acquisition of the region could not succeed. Just like their erstwhile suzerain, Tipu Sultan, these local *Palegars* also became victims of British colonial aggrandisement.

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