



Chapter 2

● Dewan Purnaiah



Purnaiah (1746–1812), who was appointed as the Dewan of Mysore in 1799, earlier had served under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan; and later under the British and Mumtaz Ali Krishna Raja Wodeyar. He was well known for his skill with accounts, prodigious memory, proficiency in several languages and sheer hard work. His story is a classic example of a rags-to-riches story, achieved through hard work, honesty and his in-born genius.

Purnaiah was born in 1746 in a Marathi speaking family of Tirukambur village in Kulitalai taluk of the former Coimbatore District, Tamilnadu State. His father who was the village priest, was a Sanskrit scholar, well-versed in Vedanta and Madhava philosophy. He taught Purnaiah and his younger brother Venkata Rao to read, write and the basics of Mathematics. Unfortunately his father passed away when Purnaiah was only 11 years old. His mother, Lakshmi Bai, took care of her two sons by doing domestic chores in Brahmin households. Some relatives offered help but it was still a struggle to make both ends meet.

In 1760, Purnaiah's mother decided to shift the residence to Sathyamangalam, which had developed into a commercial town, having commercial connections with the capital towns viz., Srirangapatna and Mysore. This move proved to be a boon for Purnaiah. When he was just 15 years old, Ranga Setty, a wholesale grain merchant, recognized Purnaiah's ability and appointed him as an accountant. Purnaiah quickly grasped the intricacies of business transactions, and his employer, noticing his acumen, gave him independent charge of many transactions.

Ranga Setty, who used to visit Srirangapatna frequently, often took Purnaiah with him, as most of his transactions were with a local merchant, Annadana Setty. On one occasion there was some confusion about the finances, and Purnaiah managed to clear the matter. Annadana Setty was so impressed by the boy's capability that he requested Ranga Setty to allow Purnaiah to assist and help him in his business. As a result, at the tender age of 18, Purnaiah was employed by Annadana Setty in Srirangapatna. This was the seat of power at that time and Sultan Hyder Ali's base. Annadana Setty had huge transactions with Hyder Ali's *darbar* and executed large orders required by the Sultan's army.



Hyder Ali

As Purnaiah was married, his wife, mother and other members of the family shifted to Srirangapatna. Very often, Purnaiah was required to go to the *Toshikhana*¹ of the palace to settle accounts. On one occasion, there was a problem in balancing the accounts. Since it was a large order, Hyder Ali personally sought an explanation for the discrepancy. Purnaiah had blank sheets in his hand, but pretended to read and turn them over to give his explanation. He did so with such conviction that Hyder Ali immediately appointed him as assistant to Venkataramiah, clerk in the *Toshikhana*. On the later's death, Purnaiah was appointed in his place and in due course, Hyder made him additional Head (Sheristedar) of the *Toshikhana* with the same powers discharged by the other head, Krishna Rao. Since it was a 'double *daftar*', Purnaiah kept the accounts in Kannada, whereas Krishna Rao managed it in Marathi. Purnaiah was also given the responsibility to place orders for merchandize required in the royal godown. The manner in which he handled administrative and political affairs was so impressive that he was soon elevated to the status of close advisor of the king along with minister ship. Hyder Ali also granted him a *Jagir* of Maralahalli, a village in Mysore taluk. From then on many of the Sultan's decisions including political ones were influenced by Purnaiah's opinions.

As Commissariat and Minister

Purnaiah secured full knowledge of Hyder's kingdom, army, number of forts, the size of the contingent in each fort and revenue matters. He learnt the art of warfare and planning war strategies and was put in charge of the Commissariat. Purnaiah's role in the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-84) and his loyal service to both Hyder and Tipu is unique in history.

With a force of 90,000 men "unequaled in strength and efficiency by any native army that had ever been assembled in South India, Hyder descended the Eastern Ghats in July 1780, with a view to reach Chennai and humiliate the British at Fort St. George. The able French officers guided the operations

1. Treasury.

and the Commissariat was under the management of Purnaiah, one of the ministers of finance.”²

Purnaiah’s leadership and advice made him one of the closest persons to Hyder. However, in the course of the war, Hyder fell sick, having developed cancer on his back³. War was being fought on the West Coast in the Canara and Malabar area. The British in the North had made peace with the Marathas between October 1781 and May 1782. News came that the Marathas and the English would join hands and take all the territories to the north of the Tungabhadra. “Hyder now faced a critical situation. He was beaten at all points by Sir Eyre Coote; he had not received adequate assistance from the French; the West Coast was lost, Malabar, Coorg and Balam were in rebellion. The defeat of Colonel Braithwaite at this time, had no permanent effect in improving his prospects”⁴.

Meanwhile, Purnaiah had become a close confidant of Hyder. Col. Wilks quotes a statement of Purnaiah, where Hyder Ali told Purnaiah in confidence. “I have committed a great error. I have purchased a draught of *sendi*⁵ at a price of a lakh of Pagodas. I shall pay dearly for my arrogance; between me and the English there were mutual grounds of dissatisfaction, but not sufficient cause of war, and I might have made them my friends inspite of Muhammad Ali (of Arcot), the most treacherous of men. The defeat of Bailies and Braithwaites will not destroy them. I can ruin their resources by land, but I cannot dry up the sea. I must be the first to be weary of a war, in which I can do nothing by fighting.” This indicates the extent of Hyder’s confidence that Purnaiah enjoyed because Hyder unfolded his defeatist thoughts to him, at a time when war was progressing. Hyder camped in June 1782 at Timri (12 miles from Amri), for the rainy season, but war continued in other fronts, when Tipu was busy in Malabar.

Hyder’s Death

By November, Hyder’s health deteriorated and the abscess on the back i.e., that is the ‘royal boil’, became worse. “The united efforts of Hindu, Muhammadan and French physicians did no good and on 7 December 1782, Hyder Ali breathed his last at Narasingarayapet near Chittoor at the age of 60.”



Hyder Ali & Family Members Tomb
Srirangapattana

Purnaiah sagaciously planned that the news of Hyder’s death should be concealed until the arrival of Tipu. “It is a high testimony to the order and discipline of the army and

2. Rice pg 393.

3. This is described as *bennuphani* in Kannada.

4. Ibid.

5. Spirit.

Jewels of Administration

influence and ability of Purnaiah that this was successfully carried out.”⁶ Hyder’s body, placed in a large chest filled with aromatic material, was sent to Kolar under heavy escort, creating an impression that it was highly valuable plundered goods. Business at the camp went on as usual and Purnaiah even called all army commanders and told them that Hyder was better, but was very weak.



Meanwhile, plans to imprison all the ministers, the treasury and power in the name of Hyder’s son Abdul Karim were boiling. The concerned officer had a command of 4,000 horses. When the plot was discovered, Purnaiah had him captured and sent away in chains.

Purnaiah sent a messenger with the news of Hyder’s death to Tipu. Travelling at a speed of 100 miles a day, the news was conveyed to Tipu on the afternoon of 11th December 1792 at Paniani. Tipu immediately ordered the army to march eastward, reached Kolar, performed the final rites,

and joined the army at Arni and Vellore on 2nd January 1793. “The most ample acknowledgements were made to all public affairs during the critical period, and Tipu Sultan took peaceful possession of an army of 88,000 men and a treasury containing three crores of rupees in cash, besides an immense amount of jewels and valuables.”⁷

The Second Anglo-Mysore War ended in 1784 and the Treaty of Mangalore was signed in 1785. The role of Purnaiah at the most critical moment of Hyder’s death, his loyalty, his ready wit, and perseverant



Tipu Sultan

6. Hayavadana Rao. CH p. 2345.

7. Hayavadana Rao. Ibid.,

effort with tact to transfer power to Tipu were unique examples of his strategic insights in times of crisis. The immense treasure was also carefully guarded and handed over to its true master with utmost allegiance and care.

Purnaiah as Minister

Under Tipu, Purnaiah continued as the Minister of Finance and was one of the strongest advisors, despite being the only Hindu in the Advisory Council. There were orders from Tipu advising his officers not to allow any non-Muslims in their secret consultations, with the exception of Purnaiah.



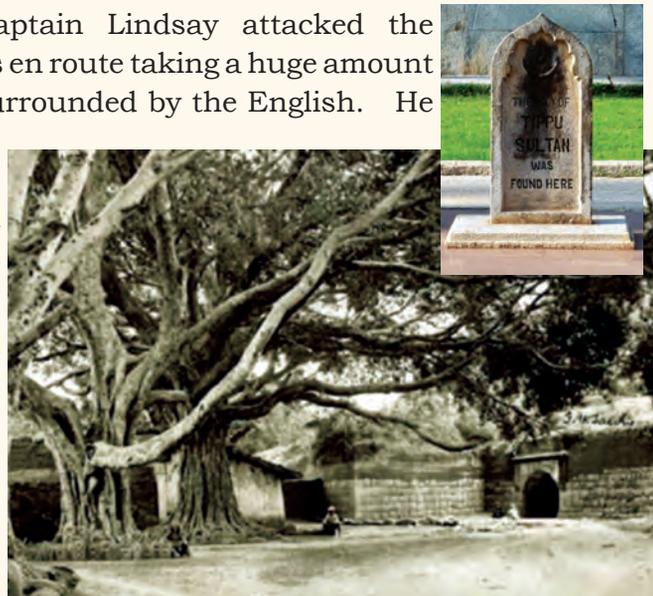
Daria Daulat Palace - 1860 photo



Daria Daulat Palace at Present

During the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1789-1792), Tipu with 40,000 men proceeded to Gejjalahatti near Satyamangalam. Purnaiah accompanied him more as a supplier of materials rather than as commander. On 9th September 1790, Tipu handed over some valuable and costly items to Purnaiah who took them to the capital. Purnaiah also advised Tipu not to rely on Frenchman Ripaud, and reminded him of Hyder's advice not to rely on the French.

On 6th February 1782, Captain Lindsay attacked the Bangalore region. Purnaiah was en route taking a huge amount of supplies to Tipu who was surrounded by the English. He realised that it was not possible to reach Tipu and took all the material and supplies back to Srirangapatna with great courage and ingenuity, despite the attack of the English army. Wilks has praised Purnaiah for his exigency plans and manoeuvres. During the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War (1799), when Gen. Harris was trying to reach Srirangapatna, Purnaiah was deputed by Tipu together with



Tipu's Death Spot, Srirangapattana

Syed Saheb to check Gen. Harris in case he crossed the Cauvery by marching via Kanakapura (Kanakanahalli). Due to lack of proper intelligence support, Purnaiah could not land near Karighatta to prevent the British from entering the capital from the South. The British entered Srirangapatna and defeated and killed Tipu on 4 May 1799.

As Dewan

Purnaiah as Dewan, was not without rivals. “But it was the unanimous opinion of all those who weighed that no better selection could be made for Dewanship, especially when the Dewan had to combine in himself, on account of the minority of the Raja Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar, more or less the functions of the Regent also.”⁸

Purnaiah, in fact proved himself highly useful not only to Mysore, but to the East India Company as well, especially in times of their wars and military confrontation. “A remarkable instance of Purnaiah’s perfect calm of mind even in the midst of extreme danger was during the campaign of Cornwallis in 1780, when the British army marched from French Rocks (Pandavapura) to attack Srirangapatna. In the midst of the campaign, Purnaiah stealthily managed to send out several camels laden with cash from the north bank of the river to the south part through a small ford. This money was required to be paid to the troops as salary. Purnaiah, at that time, had been wounded by a canon shot and was bleeding.”⁹

During his period as the Dewan, Purnaiah worked closely with five Residents – Barry Close, Joisah Webb, John Malcolm, Mark Wilks¹⁰ and A.H. Cole and had very cordial relations. Col. Arthur Wellesley, the Civil and Military Governor of Srirangapatna was his another close British Officer during this period.

Though the Resident functioned as an appellate authority over the Dewan, Purnaiah was very watchful on all the moves of Resident A.H. Cole. He ensured that the subsidy was regularly received as well as kept a watch on the expenses of the palace. He tried to inculcate the habit of economy to the palace managers. Even on the issue of alienation of land for religious institutions or religious professionals, the Resident was advised to be careful and not to create embarrassment to the royal household. Through this, Purnaiah maintained constant and friendly contact with the Resident. Whenever there were complaints, mostly deliberate, against the Dewan with the Resident, Purnaiah was ready with his explanation without taking offence. Wilks has recorded Purnaiah’s readiness to redress such grievances without any excuses or lame explanations, in his letter addressed to the Governor-General. “Beyond advice from the Resident, little interference was called for during the administration of Purnaiah which continued till 1811.”¹¹

8. Shama Rao, Modern Mysore II, p.327.

9. Ibid.

10. Both Malcolm and Wilks were famous historians of the period.

11. Rice, p 420.

Administrative Organization

The territorial division of the State, demarcation of departments and administration of their duties and functions were the Dewan's primary tasks. Territorial division was such a hard task, as Rice points out. "On the establishment of the present government, there were, accordingly few districts that did not furnish at least one claimant, possessing or pretending to the hereditary jurisdiction. The mischief was not confined to the revival of former pretensions; in some cases Patels and in others the police officers, emulating the Palegar character, and copying their history sought to obtain independent rule for their respective villages and the privilege of encroaching were generally successful in procuring a false entry in the books of the District, of the quantity of land for which they paid a rent."

Claims and counter claims created several problems in deciding the jurisdiction and authority of the State and the officials. Purnaiah's task in this area was Herculean. His administration proclaimed unqualified remission of balances of revenue and restoration of the ancient Hindu rate of assessment on the agricultural lands.

In 1799, Purnaiah divided the State into three divisions, i.e. Patna Ashtagrama (Srirangapatna), Chitradurga and Nagar (Bidanur) on the issue of the fixation of the boundaries of the State. The total area of the State was 29,000 square miles and the population was 22 Lakh. Each division was looked after by a *subedar*,¹² stationed at Bangalore, Chitradurga and Bidanur respectively. Under each division, there were 110 to 120 sub-divisions which were put under an Amildar's control. There were instances when the local Palegars, real or pretentious, killed some newly appointed Amildars.



Bengaluru Fort



Chitradurga Fort



Bidanuru (Nagar) Fort

Purnaiah, with an iron hand suppressed such unruly elements. Unqualified remission of all balances of revenue and restoration of the ancient Hindu assessment of lands removed the unnecessary alarm in the minds of the people to obey the new government. This concession pleased all.

The civil government had three departments – i.e. Finance, Revenue and Miscellaneous. The Military establishment was placed separately with two sections-Cavalry and Infantry, while the Police Department had a separate establishment called *Kandachar*. It participated in both civil and military functions and was also connected with the postal service and the army.

12. Governor.

The Dewan was the head of each department. Revenue was collected from four sources – Land revenue, Sayar, toddy and liquor and tobacco. Land revenue included not only land assessment and house tax, but also plough tax. The house tax and plough tax were both one *Kanthirayi pana*¹³. Gardens and plantations in Sakleshpur, Bidanur etc. paid an annual fixed rent. In dry lands, one-third of the yield was levied as tax. The Amildar supervised the agriculturists' efforts. As the Amildars had limited territory under their jurisdiction, they could assess the dues from every land holder by frequent and regular supervision. Hyder had earlier appointed two Brahmin Waktars in each taluk to inform him directly about the condition of the crops etc. Purnaiah continued the system.

The Amildar was also authorised to disburse *Takavi* loans to the farmers to improve their holdings and acquire equipment. In rice lands, tax could be paid in cash. However, if the price fixed for the grain was not accepted by the farmer, he could pay in kind too. *Sayar* or transit toll (*dari sunka*) was levied on articles of internal trade. Though Resident Close had advised the abolition of *Sayar* on grains, loss of revenue was huge, and it was reintroduced. In some taluks, it was given on contract farming, and in others, it was directly collected by government agents (*amani*).

Toddy drawn from wild date (*bagani*) trees was subject to a tax called *Sendi*. Similarly arrack extracted by distillation of *byala* bark was also taxed. Tobacco was also subject to tax. Collection on these items was generally given on contract (*gutta*). Betel leaf was taxed in Chitradurga area (though it was an ancient tax) and collected as a part of tobacco tax. Drawing of toddy from coconut trees was prohibited as it damaged the quality of the coconut.

The gross revenue which was 21.13 lakh *Kantirayi Pagodas* in 1799-1800 increased steadily and reached 25.47 lakh in 1801-02 and to 25.81 lakh *Kanthirayi Pagodas* in 1803-04.

The Finance Department functioned on a simple model. Every taluk had a Golla who had the key of the treasury in his custody. The Sheristedar¹⁴, in the Amildar's office maintained accounts. The Shroff or the Assayist examined the coins and affixed his seal to the bags in which money was deposited. The treasury was opened and closed in the presence of the three officials - Golla, Sheristedar and Shroff – when the Amildar had to attest his seal to the treasury. At the capital, the Huzur Treasury was also operated under a similar system, and the Dewan had to be present at the time of disbursement or withdrawal of cash.



13. One pana is equal to 1/10 of the Pagoda.

14. Head clerk.