

## CHAPTER XIV.

### Chamaraja Wodeyar X—1881—1894.

#### Famine Policy:—Railways.

There have been droughts and famines in India from the remotest times arising out of the climatic conditions of the country and references to deficiency of rains, failure of crops and consequent distresses caused to the people exist both in the Sanskrit and vernacular literatures of India. There are also references to various kinds of measures put in operation to carry relief to the suffering people. There were however, it must be admitted, no systematised attempts to mitigate the horrors arising out of these visitations. Irrigation as testified by the numerous tanks and river canals found all over the country was one means of combating this failure of rain. But on account of want of facilities of communication it was not possible to carry food easily and rapidly from where it was in plenty to parts where its lack was sorely felt.

In 1769-70 there was a terrible famine in Bengal and the records of the period showed that about a third of the population perished from starvation. Even under the British rule for a long number of years the principles and methods of famine relief were unsettled. It was in connection with the Orissa famine of 1886 that a policy of famine relief was for the first time inaugurated. After the great famine of 1876-78, a Commission was appointed by Lord Lytton to enquire into the whole subject of famines in India and to advise the Government on the measures to be taken for their prevention and relief. Their report for the first time reduced to system the administration of famine relief. The labours of this Commission resulted in formulating general principles for the proper treatment of famines and in suggesting particular measures of a preventive or protective character. In Mysore at the time of the famine of 1876-78 the means of communication in the shape of roads had been admirably developed during the regime of the British Commission, but there was no easy and rapid transport

except carts drawn by bullocks to carry the food to the stricken parts. As a consequence, in spite of the large sums spent to provide food for the distressed people and in spite of the strenuous efforts made by the officers of the British Commission to mitigate the distress caused, the loss of life and property was appalling. Prudence now directed that the Government of Mysore should always be prepared to meet contingencies of deficiency or failure of rainfall causing scarcity, if not famine.

In 1885 the rains held off for a time in some parts of the State and there was fear of a drought occurring. In October of the same year in his speech to the Representative Assembly the Dewan while accepting the British Indian mode of famine relief, indicated a few lines of departure from it. The system of relief, said the Dewan, was almost to be the same as that which was prescribed for all the British Provinces. There was, however, one point connected with the administration of relief upon the importance of which His Highness' Government laid special stress. In their opinion, it was essential that a scheme of relief in order to be efficient should begin with works in the vicinity of villages inhabited by the agricultural population. The main object of the relief was to be the prevention of the dispersion of families in quest of distant works. Near every inhabited village it was therefore considered advisable to provide suitable work such as the improvement of tanks, the digging of wells and the formation of village roads, the improvement of existing local sanitary arrangements, construction of Saguvalikattes and other similar works. The employment of the people on such works, it was believed, would enable them to return to their homes at the end of each day's work and thus it would be possible to preserve the mutually helpful bonds of village society. The early commencement of such works was to be regarded as of paramount importance. Experience showed, according to the Dewan, that in the earlier stages of distress the ryots preferred to cling to their homes upon unwholesome or insufficient food rather than seek employment on distant works. It was only when even such food failed and emaciation set in that they left their homes in quest of work or food and entered upon that career of aimless wandering which was so fruitful a source of suffering in the famine of 1876-77.

A programme was accordingly arranged for some of the most affected parts of Tumkur and Chitaldrug on the principle of leaving no inhabited village without suitable work within a radius of 3 miles. At the same time, to meet the contingency of a drought deepening into a famine of some intensity involving landless classes on a large scale arrangements were also made for undertaking when required a system of works under the professional control of the Public Works Department and intended chiefly for persons who generally resorted to such works for employment. The scheme of relief under the management of the Department of Public Works comprised the restoration or repair of a large number of tanks and the formation of a few useful new roads and the improvement of existing ones, the works being so situated that the labouring and even the agricultural classes could reach them without losing touch of their village homes. It was at the same time realised that when a desolating famine like that of 1876-78 occurred, resort must necessarily be had to the larger projects of railways and irrigation.

Again in 1891-92 a severe drought occurred which affected the whole State except the Malnad taluks. In the Maidan parts of the Mysore and Hassan districts the south-west monsoon was so scanty and precarious that the early dry crops were completely lost except in a few scattered places. The northern and eastern districts did not get any of the early rains and had in consequence to defer the preparation of land for cultivation much beyond the usual season. A few showers which came later permitted the sowing of nearly the usual extent of land with the ordinary crops in most taluks. These soon began to fade from insufficient moisture. The rain which fell towards the end of September raised hopes of a favourable change in the season. But by November it was evident that the north-east monsoon also was disappointing and that the general outturn of dry crops would not be much above a four anna average in most taluks. The tanks received no water and wet cultivation under them could not be attempted. The failure of fodder was widespread and altogether there was every indication of an impending distress of a very aggravated type and towards the end of November the price of food grains began to rise

rapidly owing to the local failure of crops as well as large exports to the neighbouring Madras districts.

In these circumstances the chief aim of Government, said the the Dewan to the Representative Assembly in October 1892, was to put into operation the policy sketched in 1885 and to provide work to the affected people as far as possible near their own homes. Accordingly, minor tanks conveniently situated were first selected whether yielding any revenue or not. To meet the rare cases where minor tanks were not available as also to provide work near villages after completion of the tanks taken up, a programme of work of a supplementary character was kept ready. These works were also of special local utility being such as those relating to village sanitation, planting of topes in villages and round the fringe of the waterspread of the bigger tanks. The execution of these works was entrusted to the hereditary village patels as it was deemed safer to rely upon the autonomy of the village than upon any paid agency from outside. A system of periodical inspection and general control by the local revenue authorities was established and wide discretion given to district officers as regards the details of execution with due regard to local circumstances. Later, Government bore testimony to the fact that the entire official agency from the patels to the district officers had shown itself fully equal to the high responsibility placed upon it and to the scheme of relief planned being carried out with complete success in every affected part.

Besides placing the means of earning wages within the ready reach of the general population, several other measures were also adopted for the relief of special classes. The most important and the largest among these classes was the class of weavers, the demand for whose articles had been very much reduced owing to the high prices of food grains that prevailed. After much consideration of alternative measures, the Government eventually adopted a system of purchase, according to which advances of money were made to local merchants of standing for purchasing on behalf of Government the entire produce of the looms at the market-value to be re-sold when the demand became re-established. The merchants

were paid a small commission and in return they guaranteed the full recoupment of the advances made. The scheme was in operation in a number of weaving centres and afforded relief to considerable bodies of weavers who generally were the first to suffer on every occasion of widespread scarcity and high prices. In the Bangalore City the relief given extended to so many as 4000 looms and 10,000 weavers.

The Maharaja's Government were not content with merely starting famine relief works when actually the need for them arose. It was regarded that the opening out of the State by means of railways was a necessary preliminary not only to meet droughts and famines but also for the development of the material resources of the State. The first line of railway from Bangalore to Mysore was, as has been already stated, commenced by the British Commission and was opened for through traffic in February 1882 and proved to be a great boon to the country even from the beginning. The railway line from Bangalore to Tumkur constructed from funds obtained by the railway loan of Rs. 20 lakhs was opened for through traffic on the 11th August 1884. Further, this line was carried as far as Gubbi, an important centre of trade at a distance of 11 miles from Tumkur, by using surplus stores and by a cash outlay of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lakhs of rupees from the current revenues. The whole system of railway from Mysore to Gubbi was 141 miles in length. The survey of the line from Gubbi to Tiptur had already been finished. At this stage the Durbar agreed in 1885 to the proposal made by the Government of India for the construction of the line from Gubbi to Harihar by means of foreign capital.

The Secretary of State on behalf of Mysore negotiated, as we have seen, a loan of £ 1,200,000 at 4 per cent per annum with the Southern Mahratta Railway Company. The proceeds of the loan raised by the Company amounted to £ 1,224,000 including a premium of 2 per cent and was equivalent in Indian currency to Rs. 1,63,82,801. Out of this amount, the Durbar reimbursed itself the amount spent on the railway constructed by it, viz., Rs. 68,60,508 and out of the remaining amount the cost of the

construction of the line from Tiptur to Harihar by the Southern Mahratta Railway Company was defrayed.

It was agreed that the entire railway from Mysore to Harihar was to be worked by the Company from 1st July 1886 as a separate system distinct from their railways in British India and the cost of management was to be apportioned between the two systems in the proportion of their respective gross earnings. Out of the net earnings of the Mysore system the Company were to retain for themselves a quarter-share, the remaining three-quarters being handed over to the Mysore State. The loan raised by the Company was not redeemable before 1st March 1936 but was redeemable after that date upon a year's previous notice being given. The contract with the Company regarding the management of the line was to be in force for a period of 46 years from the 30th June 1886 to 30th June 1932. The railway from Gubbi to Harihar was completed by the Company in 1889 and on the 5th August of the same year the lines from Mysore to Tiptur and from Harihar to Tiptur were finally linked together and the through line declared open by Chamaraja Wodeyar.

The ambition of the Durbar grew with this success to secure to the State a system of railway communications as complete and perfect as was possible. In his address to the Representative Assembly in 1891 the Dewan assured the members that if the financial conditions continued to improve as they had done in the past, there would be no pause in the construction of more railways which had been already mapped out and the State would thereby become intersected by lines which in the decade preceding the Rendition were only thought of as remote possibilities. The railways completed during the reign of Chamaraja Wodeyar besides the Bangalore-Harihar line were the extension from Mysore to Nanjangud  $15\frac{1}{4}$  miles in length, the line from Bangalore to Hindupur  $51\frac{1}{2}$  miles and the Kolar Gold Field railway  $10\frac{1}{4}$  miles. This last line was entrusted to the Madras Railway Company and the remaining ones to the Southern Mahratta Railway Company for management for fixed periods. The results of the survey to

carry the line from Nanjangud to Gudaloor were found discouraging and the Governments of Madras and Mysore concurred that this project should give way to that proposed to connect Nanjangud with Erode. The line from Bangalore to Guntakal was expected to advance the commercial prosperity of Mysore by connecting it with Bellary, Secunderabad and other important places to the north-east and to give a special impetus to the traffic in cotton and grain. The Kolar Gold Field Railway was expected to give an impetus to the Gold Mining industry.