

CHAPTER XV.

Chamaraja Wodeyar X—1881—1894.

Irrigation.

As regards extension and improvement of irrigation, it was found in the early years of Chamaraja Wodeyar's rule that the irrigable area was only 15 per cent of the area under cultivation. Of this small area the greater portion was dependent upon tank irrigation. These tanks were fed by rain which at times failed when most needed. The Government was also under no illusion as regards the damage done to irrigation by allowing tanks in the State generally to deteriorate.

So far back as 1866 Bowring who was then Commissioner of Mysore had found that the ryots had silently ignored their obligation and that the whole duty and cost of repairing the tanks both in regard to the requisite labour and material had fallen on the Government. At the same time he had also realised that it was manifestly impossible for Government to undertake the petty annual repairs of this large number of tanks scattered in all parts of the State. The ryots' liability was re-emphasised in 1873 by the Chief Commissioner of those days. Owing, however, to the decline of communal spirit, the absenteeism of the land-lords and the absence of any penalty for non-performance, it was found in the early years of the Maharaja's rule that nothing substantial had been achieved. There existed 38,000 tanks, both large and small, and it was found that these required regular attention both towards their restoration as well as towards their maintenance.

In 1884 the Dewan said at the Representative Assembly meeting of that year that they could not conceal from themselves the fact that a large number of the tanks were in complete ruin, that the failure of the system of tank management was due to the non-recognition of the important fact that the ryot was jointly interested with the Government for the upkeep of the tanks and that when Government found that with its costly agency it could not undertake with any prospect of profit the full management of

these tanks it became necessary to call upon the ryots to once more come forward with their co-operation. It was true that the ryots had to a large extent lost all traditions of combination for works of public utility, nor were the civil officers in a position to enforce the ryots' liabilities in an efficient manner. The various inams and privileges attached to the upkeep by ryots had been withdrawn and cesses had been imposed on the understanding that the work was to be done by Government. Thus by emphasising at different times the responsibility of the one or the other of the two bodies interested in the tanks and by neglecting the interests of the other the tanks on the preservation of which so much depended had been allowed to deteriorate. The Dewan concluded this portion of his address with these words which are as true now as they were then: "Any reform in our tank system must start with a clear recognition of the fact that it was beyond the ability of any Government to undertake the repair and maintenance of all the tanks in the State with any ultimate benefit to its revenues, nor would it be equitable to throw the burden on the ryots after the village system or what little remained of it had been disorganised and after the ryot had tacitly been relieved of his responsibilities by the imposition of special cesses for the repair of tanks."

In these circumstances it became necessary for the Maharaja's Government to evolve a new policy. To start with, it was considered necessary to draw a distinction between tanks which Government was to reserve for its direct management through the Public Works Department and tanks that could be left to the ryots under the supervision of the Revenue Department. It was true that from long disuse there was not the same skill available in villagers for the purpose intended as in the earlier days, but it was considered that under the sympathetic guidance of the Revenue and the Public Works Departments the old spirit could be revived and that thereby the ryots would rise to the occasion and utilise to their advantage the opportunities created. Accordingly the proposal now took the shape of reserving all tanks yielding more than Rs. 500 revenue under the direct control of the Public Works Department, the number of such tanks being 790. From the large revenue these tanks yielded, from the heaviness of

the cost of their repair, and from the risk involved in their breach, it was regarded as advisable that they should be managed by the skilled agency under Government. Tanks yielding less than Rs. 500 were proposed to be handed over to the management of the villagers concerned subject to the responsible control of the revenue officer but without any hard and fast rules irksome to the ryots. This system, it was hoped, would be sufficiently elastic to admit of its easy application to the varying conditions of the Maidan and the Malnad or of places where capital and intelligence were forthcoming and places where ryots were too poor and ignorant to do anything without State-aid.

In return for the responsibility to be transferred to the ryot it was proposed to relieve him of the payment of the irrigation cess of one anna per rupee of assessment. In the case of works other than maintenance whole or partial remissions of wet kandayam for one or more years were also to be granted according to circumstances in order to enable the ryots immediately to carry them out. If motives of self-interest failed to have the desired effect, the next step was to throw open the tanks to private capital and enterprise under the 'Chouthayi' system or remission of one-fourth of the land assessment. In the case of tanks requiring an exceptionally heavy outlay for their repair or restoration concessions even more liberal were to be granted. Under the existing system when a tank breached it was many years before it was repaired and in partial relief half the wet assessment was remitted. The ryots paid half assessment for some years and when the prospect of the tank being repaired became more and more remote, they often resigned their holdings to the loss of the entire assessment to the Government. When these proposals were discussed in the Representative Assembly in October 1884 they were found to be beset with many difficulties and there were also differences of opinion on the subject as to the limit to be fixed in regard to the relative responsibilities of the Public Works Department and the ryots. The settlement of the question one way or the other was however imperative and the Government were in favour of testing the scheme by introducing it tentatively in seven selected taluks.

As regards the general irrigation policy of the Government, the Dewan explained in 1886 that it was to be a settled policy of the Government to assign for the general improvement of irrigation as large an allotment as was compatible with other demands on the finances of the State. The Durbar was conscious, said the Dewan, that a great deal remained to be done either in the shape of general improvements or the reconstruction of ruined or abandoned tanks likely to be remunerative or the restoration and where practicable the extension of channels drawn from the Kaveri and other rivers. Though the magnitude of these works in the aggregate was very large, still the Government accepted it as a settled principle that their annual operations on them were to be limited only by the extent of the resources at their disposal for the time being. In the case of the tank maintenance scheme already described the Rs. 500 limit was lowered to one of Rs. 300 and put into operation in eight selected taluks, one in each district instead of only seven. A new Public Works Division was formed and to it was entrusted all improvements of irrigation and the restoration and extension of channels drawn from the rivers Kaveri, Hemavathi, Kapini and Lakshmanathirtha.

After the minor tank restoration scheme entrusted to the ryots was in operation for some time, the Dewan in his speech to the Representative Assembly of 1887 gave a hopeful indication of the success of the scheme. The scheme, he said, was an earnest effort to revive a custom which though formerly well recognised had unfortunately been allowed to fall into disuse in later times. On the whole, a fair measure of success having been achieved the scheme continued to be extended to other taluks. The Dewan in concluding his speech relating to this part of the subject again emphasised on the obligation that rested on the ryots in these earnest words: "I need scarcely remind you, gentlemen, that the principle that the villagers must do the earthwork required for the proper maintenance of their tanks and appeal to the Government only when stonework or masonry work is required is an ancient custom of the land as old as the tanks themselves. Successive Chief Commissioners took advantage of every opportunity to impress this principle upon the executive officers of the Government,

When the irrigation cess was imposed, the Government restricted the appropriation of the funds thereby raised to the repair and improvement of tanks as distinguished from mere 'maintenance' which was expressly declared to continue as an obligation on the part of the ryots. So lately as October 1873 the Chief Commissioner in the Public Works Department laid down elaborate rules for the enforcement of this obligation. The practical enforcement, however, of the ryots' obligation as regards the tanks whether brought up to standard by the Public Works Department or not varied very much with each district officer's appreciation of the importance of this part of his duty. To add to this unsatisfactory condition of things the famine intervened and completely disorganised the administrative machinery, and the different opinions from time to time expressed as to the future tank policy of the Government contributed not a little to unsettle people's minds. Under such circumstances His Highness the Maharaja's Government deem it of paramount importance to declare and enforce a definite policy on the question and hence the scheme now promulgated which aims at the re-establishment of a formerly fully recognised custom—a scheme moreover which is essential for the well being of the State, for it is possible in no other way to cope with the work of maintaining in perfect safety the enormous number of tanks, large and small, scattered all over the State. When once this end is attained,—and it is possible to attain it only by the ryot making good the deficiencies due to his past neglect—the annual work required of him for proper future maintenance will indeed be very slight and the Government will always undertake all work of improvement, all stone and masonry work and also repair all damages done by breaches and other inevitable accidents beyond the power of the ryot to avert.”

The Government also by this time had become fully aware that the improvement and extension of the river channels in Mysore and Hassan districts were of equal importance with that of the upkeep of tanks. Accordingly the enlargement and extension of the Jodi Rampur channel was taken in hand as well as the extension of the Ramasamudra channel to a distance of 10 miles beyond its former limit. The Rajaparameswari channel was also

improved. It was calculated that on the full completion of the extension of these channels an additional area of nearly 30,000 acres could be brought under wet cultivation in about five years. A forecast programme for the next five years was prepared in 1889 including all projects costing over Rs. 20,000. In this programme were included the great Marikanave dam, a project for the construction of a new anecut across the Kaveri to be called after the name of Chamaraja Wodeyar and the permanent improvement of the old Chikkadevarajasagar, Virjanadi and Devaraya systems. The Dewan invited the representatives to make any suggestions on the programme by way either of alterations or additions from their intimate knowledge of local wants and local interests and several of the suggestions so made were accepted.

In 1890 it was found that several works included in the irrigation programme would be materially affected by the rights claimed by the Madras people to the drainages of Mysore hitherto passed unchecked or but partially checked across the Mysore boundaries and it became therefore necessary to place some reasonable limit to the extent of the claims put forward by the Madras ryots. As this was a general question and had a most important bearing on the future irrigation policy of the State, a representation was made to the Government of India for a fair adjudication.

In 1891 His Highness' Government became impressed with the need of giving encouragement to irrigation from wells which for protective value in times of drought and local prosperity in ordinary times were considered far superior to ordinary works of tank irrigation. In the famine of 1876-1877 the only oases amidst the general desolate appearance of the country were besides the tracts watered by the river channels those special regions favoured with well irrigation. The disappearance of surface springs in localities where they formerly existed and a general lowering of the spring level which had taken place in the northern and north-eastern taluks of the State indicated the need for exceptional activity in the construction of new irrigation works on a large scale. Want of capital and almost the usurious interest at which

alone money could be had in the market had been the cause of the ryot's inability to provide himself with irrigation wells even when all other conditions were favourable. The Durbar, therefore, now resolved to make advances for the sinking of wells at a nominal rate of interest repayable in easy instalments in a long number of years and the procedure under which such advances were obtainable was made exceedingly simple. No further security was demanded from the ryot than the well and the land it irrigated and exemption from enhanced assessment was also guaranteed to the holders of lands and the risk of any failure in finding water was undertaken by Government. A special officer was appointed to give the advances on the spot without the delay of circuitous correspondence through the usual official channel. The ryots were somewhat mistrustful of this scheme in the beginning but subsequently they evinced an eager desire to avail themselves of its benefits and in the districts of Kolar, Tumkur, Chitaldrug and Bangalore loans were taken within a short time for 917 kapile and 530 yatam wells calculated to irrigate 5252 acres.

Another important class of works for which Government loans were given was the construction and repair of Saguvalikattes or small reservoirs for impounding water generally. The restriction placed upon the construction and improvement of these kattes by an order of 1873 had been felt as a great hardship, especially in the Chitaldrug district where much of the dry cultivation depended upon the retention of moisture under these kattes. That order was accordingly withdrawn and special encouragement was afforded for the construction and improvement of these most useful private works by a system of Government loans.