

CHAPTER XIX.

Chamaraja Wodeyar X—1881—1894.

The Representative Assembly and its growth.

In October 1883 in his address to the Representative Assembly Sir Seshadri Iyer assured the members that the Maharaja took great interest in the success of the annual meeting of the representatives and entertained the hope that the Assembly would become, year after year, more and more useful to the country. It had become manifest that it was in the power of the representatives to contribute in some measure to the good government and prosperity of the country by carefully watching the working of the administration in all its branches, by unhesitatingly pointing out all shortcomings that might strike them and by affording practical suggestions for improving the condition of all classes of His Highness' subjects. Again in October 1885 Sir Seshadri Iyer assured the representatives that the Maharaja had become fully convinced that the opportunities given for the representation of public wants and for the suggestion of measures calculated to better the condition of the people was appreciated as a valuable privilege in all parts of the State. The continued interest the representatives evinced and the practical common sense which characterised their discussions had disproved the misgivings of the earlier period whether the establishment of an institution of the kind was not premature. Strengthened by this assurance, His Highness' Government now took a step forward in widening the privileges of the members by investing the Local Boards with power to nominate their representatives to the Assembly from among their members.

Prior to 1887, in order to represent the landed interests the Deputy Commissioners had been required to select from each taluk one or two cultivating land-holders possessed of general influence and information. Similarly it had been left to the same officers to select three or four leading merchants for each district generally to represent the interests of trade. In August 1887 a property qualification was introduced, the numbers for each district were

fixed and the names of the members were published in the official Gazette. Recognised public Associations were also allowed to depute representatives. The Dewan in his speech to the Assembly that met in October following referring to these changes said that His Highness the Maharaja's earnest desire to take the people into his confidence more and more in the adoption of various measures for their advancement had been very fairly realised and that the success attained in the past six years afforded an encouragement to his Government to persevere in their endeavours to make the Assembly of still greater help for the good administration of the State. The Dewan also explained that the changes newly introduced were intended to secure in the Assembly as full a representation as possible of every interest in the country and thereby to procure the most complete information regarding the wants and wishes of every class of His Highness' subjects. In fixing a property qualification in an agricultural country like Mysore the first place was naturally accorded to the land-holders and each of the sixty-six taluks that then existed was authorised to send five of its largest land-holders. In the provision which enabled the Local Boards and Municipalities to nominate members for the Assembly there was a fair guarantee for the representation of all other classes and localities, while the privilege given to the important Associations to depute members afforded the means of securing the views of the more advanced section of the community.

Before 1887 there existed no rules of any kind to regulate the proceedings of the Assembly. The course generally followed was that at the termination of the Dewan's address the members individually made such observations and representations as suggested themselves to them at the time. Generally one or two of the representatives of each district acted as spokesmen except when any particular member stood forward to give expression to any particular statement. In 1887 it was prescribed that the members of the several districts were to meet together at Mysore and choose in concert the subjects for discussion and to nominate persons to speak on the subjects chosen. The object of these measures was to render the discussions more useful and to give to the observations of such members the authority and weight which

the opinions of individuals could not by themselves be expected to possess.

Satisfactory as the working of the Assembly on the above lines proved itself to be, the subject of further improving the constitution of the Assembly again engaged the attention of Government in 1890. At the meeting of the Assembly of that year, Sir Seshadri Iyer complimented the members on the moderation, the intelligence and the practical good sense which had in the past characterised their discussions and on the material help they had given in the discussion of important questions and on the sustained interest they had evinced in public affairs. The Maharaja was now convinced that the time had arrived when the wealthier and more enlightened classes could with safety be entrusted with the privilege of choosing the members to the Assembly. A set of draft rules was accordingly placed before the Assembly for discussion and in these rules the property qualification was so fixed as to include the largest land-holders and the leading merchants and traders in each taluk, besides high education being made a qualification by itself for a voter to exercise the privilege of election. The property qualification proposed was the payment of a land revenue of from Rs. 100 to Rs. 300 or of a Mohatarfa tax of from Rs. 13 or more, or the ownership of one or more inam villages with a total assessment of Rs. 500. These property qualifications were expected to give not less than 50 qualified persons on an average for each of the 66 taluks. All persons so qualified by property or by education were to meet and elect from among themselves 2, 3 or 4 persons according to a fixed scale as members of the Assembly for their respective taluks as well as for the cities of Bangalore and Mysore. In addition to the members thus elected, the various Local Fund Boards, Municipality and Public Associations were also to depute members to the Assembly from among themselves. The maximum number of members of the Assembly thus constituted was expected to be about 351. The Dewan closed this subject at the meeting of the Assembly in 1890 with these earnest and significant words:—"Let me add that it is His Highness' sincere hope that the privilege he has now been pleased to grant will be exercised to the fullest extent and in the most beneficial manner possible and that it will be so appreciated

by all as to enable His Highness gradually to enlarge the circle of electors, so as to give wider effect to the principle of representation in the constitution of this Assembly." The new rules were brought into effect in the following year and the Assembly which met in the Dasara of 1891 was elected under these rules.

At a meeting of the Assembly on the 15th October 1891, the Dewan communicated to the representatives the gratification of the Maharaja that all misgivings naturally entertained as to how the experiment of obtaining representatives for the Assembly by election would succeed, had been dispelled and that though unused to the system the electoral body had been able in the very first year of its existence to exercise the privilege with so much judgment and sense of responsibility and to send to the Assembly men in every way qualified to speak on its behalf. The Dewan further said that the fact that men representing the capital, the industry and the intellect of the country should have so early taken so much interest in the scheme augured well for the future of the institution. He also conveyed a message from His Highness acknowledging the expressions of warm gratitude which had reached him from all sides for the privilege of election granted. In 1893 a further reform was introduced by which the system of annual election was replaced by one of triennial election which the representatives had been urging on the attention of Government. The Dewan in referring to this subject stated that it had given the Maharaja great pleasure to extend the duration of the Assembly from one to three years, especially as His Highness hoped that the concession granted would enhance the interest of the members in the subjects brought forward by them and would afford them the opportunity for continuous action from year to year, adding thereby largely to the further practical usefulness of the Assembly.

It need hardly be stated that the scope of this book does not allow of any exhaustive summary being given of the proceedings of the Assembly. To satisfy, however, the curiosity of our readers as to the lines on which the proceedings were conducted, a short summary of the exchange of views between the Government and the members of the Assembly relating to some of the important

subjects discussed in the earlier years may be given. The discussions of the Assembly extended to every department in the State and related to a variety of subjects. 'To merge their individual grievances in those of the community in general and by a due attention to public interests to qualify themselves for higher privileges'—these words had formed the text of an exhortation by Rangacharlu to the representatives assembled for the first time in 1881. There was little need, however, for this appeal to the representatives not to confound, in Tennyson's language, the rustic cackle of their burgh with the murmur of the world. They quite understood that the great object of the new institution was the promotion of the public interests in general, and that if they looked to securing any personal advantages or obtaining redress for any personal grievances, they would be disappointed. Accordingly a Hindu member Tangali Seshappa and a Mahomedan member Syed Amir Ali Sahib assured Rangacharlu of their abiding sense of gratefulness for the privilege granted to them and of their resolve to offer their co-operation in a disinterested manner. The succeeding years showed that these assurances were no mere idle words but had a ring of sincerity in them.

From the keen interest the representatives evinced from the very beginning in the proceedings of the Assembly, His Highness' advisers evidently felt encouraged to take them more and more into their confidence. The local or individual grievances to which Rangacharlu made reference were very few in number, a lamp-post at Kolar, a midwife at Chikballapur, a chattram or free-feeding house at Arasikere, and even here it may be observed that though the subjects were local they were not personal. In expressing their loyalty and attachment to the person and the family of the Maharaja as well as in expressing their gratefulness for the benefits conferred on the country by the Paramount Power, the representatives were ever to the front. In 1884 on the occasion of the birth of a son and heir to the Maharaja, Ganesh Rao a coffee-planter from Kadur read an address in which the great honour of the title of G. C. S. I. conferred on His Highness by the Queen-Empress and the birth of a

prince as heir to the throne were referred to as joyful events for which they all returned thanks to Providence. In 1885 the representatives obtained the permission of His Highness' Government to present an address of thanks to the Imperial Government for the postponment of the enhanced Subsidy for a period of ten years. In December 1886 when Lord Dufferin visited Mysore, the representatives took occasion to assemble at the capital and in an address presented to the Viceroy, repeated on behalf of the people of Mysore their deep gratitude for the lasting benefits which the half-century of British rule had conferred on them. Lord Dufferin in his reply stated that it was always a fortunate circumstance when a Viceroy found himself in the midst of a community who were able to bring to his notice such proofs of their general prosperity as to which the members had referred, and still more so, when in the language with which he was approached, he saw evidence of an equally wide-spread contentment with the administration under which they lived. He finally complimented them by saying that he was glad that the Maharaja had called to his counsels men of such intelligence and influence. In November 1892 when Lord Lansdowne visited Mysore, the members of the Assembly presented an address to him also and a few sentences quoted from his reply will show what keen interest he felt in the success of the experiment which had been inaugurated by the Maharaja. "The inquiries which I have made from those who are best able to judge," said the Viceroy, "have satisfied me that your proceedings have served a most useful purpose and have brought His Highness' Government into touch with all classes of the community. I have heard with much pleasure that your discussions have been conducted in a thoroughly practical spirit and that on the one hand, the members have not hesitated to bring forward grievances where they existed, while on the other the Dewan had dealt in the frankest possible manner with the suggestions which have been made. You are quite right in supposing that this remarkable experiment has a special interest in my eyes, because the Government of India is at this moment engaged in introducing considerable changes in the constitution and functions of the British Indian Legislative Councils."

The functions of the representatives, it may be noted, were not confined to mere thanksgiving or to mere presentation of addresses but they also pressed their claims for more substantial privileges. The progress of the Assembly was due as much to the earnest importunity of the members as to the sympathetic interest of the Government in its improvement. Whenever the occasion demanded it, the representatives did not hold back from giving fearless expression to their demands. At the same time, they kept themselves aloof generally from what could be regarded as discourteous or obnoxious criticism. The Government of the time amply appreciated this attitude on the part of the members and hardly on any occasion was the cordiality subsisting between the Government and the members disturbed. In 1883 the representatives raised the question of the Famine Debt of nearly a crore of rupees due to the Government of India and sought for information concerning the arrangements made for its liquidation. They wished to know whether the Government had any idea of fresh taxation in the shape of general land customs or general house-tax; and they were satisfied only when they were assured by the Dewan that a way had been devised to reduce the famine loan without imposing any new charge on the country and that the Government of India had very considerately consented to receive the loan in annual instalments of four lakhs each. In the same year a request was made that all the proceedings of the Government might be in Kannda also. The Government considered this request a reasonable one. Having called the representative men of the country to the counsels of the State, it was regarded as both right as well as expedient that their desire to keep themselves informed of the measures of the Government needed to be satisfied.

In 1884 the representatives urged that the Revenue Code might be referred to them for opinion and that it might be passed only after their views were obtained. In a subsequent year they suggested that a meeting for the nomination of the members might be held one month before the Dasara, and that the names of the representatives chosen together with the subjects to be discussed might be published in the official Gazette. They also sought

permission for access to any Government records they needed for information before they came to the Assembly. Two other suggestions which they made although they proved to be not feasible in the then existing state of things, still bore testimony to their anxiety for securing due and prompt attention to such matters as could not be disposed of at the Dasara meeting itself. One suggestion was that a Standing Committee should be appointed to attend to all subjects the settlement of which was put off for reference to heads of departments, and the other was to see that no delay occurred in early consideration being given to the subjects postponed. Finding that sometimes the orders issued by the Government were based on an imperfect acquaintance of the wants of the people, the representatives made a bold suggestion in 1888 that all circulars issued by the Government might as a rule, be previously discussed by the Assembly. The suggestion was however found impracticable as it necessitated the continuance of the sitting of the Assembly during the entire year. But they so far succeeded as to obtain a promise from the Dewan that the orders of each year or for that matter any order of Government might be discussed during the annual meetings freely and that the Government would gladly consider their opinions and accept all reasonable amendments proposed. In the same year the members from Kadur proposed that a proposition recommended by a majority of the representatives might be at once passed. The Dewan in reply regretted that though in theory it was a fair proposal, still he could not see his way as matters stood then to grant their wishes as some of the proposals might affect Imperial policy or sanctioned principles of administration. But he assured them that every deference possible would be paid to their wishes. Prior to 1887 the Amildar used to send a written order from the taluk office to each representative directing him to attend the Assembly at Mysore. But the representatives now considered that an order from the Amildar was inconsistent with their dignity as members of the Representative Assembly. It was thenceforth prescribed that the members should be invited by means of letters from the Deputy Commissioners instead of by Takeeds or orders from Amildars.

An objection taken by the representatives in 1889 affords an explanation as to why salaried officers of Government were subsequently declared ineligible either to vote for or sit in the Representative Assembly. Raghavachar, Sheristadar of the Bangalore Deputy Commissioner's office and a municipal councillor for the city of Bangalore, was chosen as a delegate to the Representative Assembly on behalf of the Bangalore Municipality and the opinion was now expressed that it was unlikely that a Government servant could do justice to his position as a member of the Assembly while remaining as a salaried officer of Government. The Dewan could not interfere with the discretion of the Municipality at the time. But subsequently an order was issued excluding Government servants from seeking nomination to the Assembly. It was represented that the annual address did not contain the details of receipts and disbursements and the Dewan agreed to supply the members with the detailed budget for their information.

The Survey and Settlement introduced into some taluks was regarded by the representatives as tending to the impoverishment of the ryot and to the general deterioration of the country and strong protests were made. The persistence which they showed in agitating for a reduction of the assessment of arecanut gardens in the Malnad parts of the State led to an acknowledgment on the part of the Government of the justice of their agitation and to the appointment of a special officer for purposes of investigation. A simpler procedure was desired to be prescribed for the grant of loans under the Land Improvement Regulation and the Regulation passed in 1890 satisfied the wishes of the representatives in this respect. The representatives also brought to light many of the anomalies which existed in the administration. It was an anomaly, for instance, that the assessment on lands under some of the rain-fed tanks were higher than on lands irrigated from river channels. In the matter of Darkhasths and Razeenamas, *i.e.*, applications for lands and for their relinquishment, it was pointed out that the ryots were required by the taluk authorities to get all applications for new lands written by the Shanbogues of the village

in which the lands happened to be and also to get all relinquishments certified by him. The Dewan regretted that that practice should have been still adhered to by the taluk officials and issued instructions to at once discontinue the same.

There were several other matters also which were brought forward by the members for the consideration of Government. The taluk authorities, it was stated, directed criminal prosecution for felling trees of the unreserved kind standing on the margin of a ryot's field and belonging to him. One of the forest rules directed the ryot not to cut for manure such branches of the jungle trees as were thicker than an inch in girth. But when inadvertently they did so, where accurate measurements were not possible, they were exposed to criminal prosecution. Regarding trees that could be felled for fuel, the Inspector-General of Forests had published a list enumerating 33 kinds of trees, all conserved against felling and the ryots could only fell trees other than those enumerated. The jungles in some places contained no other trees fit for fuel and the restriction had practically closed the jungles against obtaining any fuel supply. A kind of duty known as Kan-Khist was continued to be paid by the ryots of Koppa, although its abolition had been notified by Bowring when he was Chief Commissioner. In matters relating to the police and to judicial courts, the representatives were very explicit and expressed the opinion that the cost of civil litigation was very heavy and that the delay that generally took place in the disposal of suits was unusually long. The conveniences that were likely to be created by the establishment of Village Panchayet Courts or arbitration tribunals as well as the introduction of the Jury System were also suggested. The anomaly of combining police, magisterial and revenue functions in one and the same officer did not escape the notice of the Assembly. Loud complaints were made against the Arms Act, especially by the representatives of the Malnad where wild animals abounded. The depredations caused by these animals were very damaging and in the harvest season when the arms were most needed, they were seized by the police and taken away to taluk office and not returned till a renewed licence was obtained

and that meant considerable delay. The prohibition of the slaughter of cows, the improvement of industries, the amelioration of the condition of Lambanias, Korachars and other wandering gangs, the improvement of primary education, the introduction of technical instruction, the extension of female education, the encouragement of Mahomedan youths by means of scholarships to seek collegiate education, the institution of vernacular examinations—these and numerous other subjects engaged the attention of the representatives and were placed before Government at their annual meetings.

The members of the Assembly were proud of the offer by the Maharaja of a military contingent for Imperial defence and were thankful to the Government of India for its acceptance.