

CHAPTER VI.

Haidar's friendship with Basalat Jung—Acquisition of Doddaballapur, Chikballapur, Sira and other places—Conquest of Bednore.

After Haidar Ali became the supreme dictator of Mysore, he stopped at Seringapatam for sometime for the proper regulation of the affairs there. He appointed his brother-in-law Mukdum Sahib as Killedar of the fort and also entrusted to him the duties of the steward of the Raja's palace. He next proceeded to take charge of the treasury which contained gold and jewels of value, besides cash and the artillery and military stores. His next care was to increase and efficiently equip his army and for this purpose he attracted to his standard by his liberality men of capacity from all parts of India. In the language of Kirmani, the biographer of Haidar, "able men of various tribes and nations, artificers of all countries and soldiers who from want of employment had been hiding in corners like a sword in its sheath at length had the rust and dust rubbed off the face of their condition by the burnish of appreciation; and by the aid of their good fortune, like the spear, carried their heads high and presented themselves erect to Haidar who employed them in his service proportionate to their abilities and merits." His arrangements in Seringapatam having all been completed, Haidar marched to Bangalore with a body of troops and he there duly discharged the loan borrowed from the merchants of the place in the days of his adversity.

While at Bangalore, he received messages from Basalat Jung of Hyderabad who had the country around Adoni with his headquarters at that place soliciting Haidar's aid to capture the fort of Hoskote which was then in the possession of the Mahrattas. Basalat Jung's possessions had become limited to Adoni and its neighbourhood after Nizam Ali proclaimed himself the Subadar of the Deccan displacing his brother Salabat Jung whom he murdered in October 1761. Basalat Jung now wished to extend the territory in his possession and he was encouraged in this ambition by the fateful defeat of the Mahrattas at Panipat and by

chance thereby opened to him of incorporating the Subha of Sira with his possessions. He accordingly laid siege to Hoskote, but on account of the brave defence put up by Mukund Sripat the Mahratta Governor, was unable to capture the place and approached Haidar for aid. Haidar readily went with a body of troops to the aid of Basalat Jung and succeeded in capturing the place. In reward for this service Basalat Jung, though he had no authority to do so, invested Haidar with the title of Nawab and next accepting a Nuzzar or present of 3 lakhs of rupees transferred to him the government of Sira, although that place was at the time in the possession of the Mahrattas. The combined army then marched towards Doddaballapur and Abbas Kuli Khan in whose possession it was fearing Haidar's revenge on him for some disservice he had done him in his younger days fled to Madras leaving his family to their fate. On entering the fort of Doddaballapur without opposition, Haidar learnt of the flight of Abbas Kuli Khan and proceeded to visit his mother who was residing there. In a message full of gentleness he assured her of his gratitude for several acts of kindness done to him in his earlier days and continued to treat her and others of the family who had not offended him with distinction and generosity.

From Doddaballapur the confederate army marched to Sira and here Haidar commenced operations to capture the latter place from Triumbuck Krishna who was the Killedar of the fort on behalf of the Peshwa. This Killedar offered a spirited defence which however proving of no avail he surrendered the place to Haidar and departed from there. Haidar on entering the fort found a very large quantity of military stores and provisions which the Mahrattas had collected for the conquest of the country below the Ghauts and appropriated all these for his own use. Basalat Jung after formally presenting a sannad to Haidar conferring on him the revenues of the entire Subha of Sira with the Peishkush or tribute of the pategars dependent on it returned to Adoni about the beginning of the year 1762, as it became necessary for him to adopt measures of self-defence against his brother Nizam Ali. Haidar remained in the fort for about a fortnight and appointed one Mir Ismail Hussein as Killedar of the fort giving him instructions to

rèpair the fort and to assure the peasantry of their safety and to encourage them to return to their occupations.

Haidar now felt himself free to proceed to Chikballapur situated at a short distance from Doddaballapur in order to capture that place. In 1749 when Devanhalli was captured, the palegar of that place had been permitted to go to his relation the palegar of Chikballapur and ever after attempts were made by the two palegars to get possession of Devanhalli, though without success. Haidar now resolved to suppress the intrigues of these palegars and possess himself of Chikballapur. These palegars had the support of Morari Rao of Gutti whose possessions were situated immediately to the north-east of Haidar's new possessions and touched on the south the territory of the Chikballapur palegar.

The palegar of Chikballapur being a person of spirit and ability did not readily yield to Haidar and though the place had a weak citadel, he persisted vigorously to hold his own against the assaults of Haidar's army. Morari Rao also marched with a contingent for the help of the palegar, but Haidar obtaining information of this march unexpectedly fell upon his troops and inflicted a severe defeat and thereupon Morari Rao thought it prudent to return to Gutti. The Chikballapur palegar thus left without resources entered into negotiations with Haidar for peace, offering a sum of nine lakhs of rupees. Haidar accepted the terms but before the money could be collected, on account of the unhealthy condition of the place, he withdrew his army to a better place near Devanhalli. Immediately after, a body of Morari Rao's troops as had been secretly arranged entered Chikballapur and garrisoned the place, the palegar retiring to the hill-fort of Nandidoorg situated at a distance of three miles. Haidar was enraged at this deception and renewed his attacks on the town which fell into his hands in about ten days. He then entrusted the fort to the care of one Badru Zamaun Khan, an officer of repute, and leaving instructions to prevent supplies from reaching the palegar, extended his conquests in Morari Rao's territory towards Penukonda, Madakasira and other places. The palegars of Raya-doorg and Harapanhalli readily offered their submission but the

palegar of Chitaldrug was not so docile. Haidar then overran the Chitaldrug country with his cavalry and in a few days the palegar found it prudent to compromise for a fine of 2 lakhs of pagodas. He was then most graciously received at the court of his new Nawab and in the course of conversation, the palegar mentioned the arrival at his own camp of a visitor whose history opened to Haidar a new field of ambition.

The new visitor introduced to Haidar by the palegar of Chitaldrug was named Chennabasavaiah and his story was that he was the adopted son of Basavappa Naik, Raja of Bednore who died in 1755, that on account of an attempt made on his life by Veerammaji, the Raja's widow, he had left the place and that now he was seeking outside help to regain his patrimony. In some quarters this story was not believed and he was only regarded as a pretender. Anyhow Rani Veerammaji had become odious both to her subjects and to several of her leading officers on account of a second marriage she had contracted with one Nimbaiah. The marriage, though not opposed to the caste-customs of the Rani, was looked upon as opposed to the traditions of the reigning family and probably there was an element of jealousy on the part of the influential persons of the country at the good fortune of Nimbaiah. Before he met his new visitor, Haidar had been apprised through his spies of the political weakness of the Bednore Kingdom under the rule of an unpopular woman and it now suited his purpose to befriend the claim of Chennabasavaiah to be the Raja of Bednore.

This chieftdom was founded by two brothers under a sannad granted about the year 1560 by the Vijayanagar King at the time and was originally known as the territory of the Naiks of Keladi, now a petty village in the Sagar taluk of the Mysore State. The seat of government was subsequently moved to Ikkeri, 10 miles to the south of Keladi, and during the time of Venkatappa Naik about the year 1623 there arrived at the place an Italian traveller by name Petro Della Valle. This traveller was then in the suite of the Portugese envoy for whose amusement various entertainments were provided and Della Valle mentions a dance known as the Kolatam dance which is in vogue even now.

In 1640 the famous Sivappa Naik who was ruling at the time considered Ikkeri as unsafe on account of the unsettled political conditions of that period and transferred his capital to Bednore situated near the Western Ghauts, as it was not easily accessible to hostile forces. The town was also fortified by strong outposts extending to several miles with thick forests all around and undergrowth scarcely penetrable fostered by the heavy rains which fell there during a large part of the year. This principality not only included the mountainous range of the Western Ghauts but also extended to the west over the maritime province now known as Canara and to the east over a tract of more open country stretching to Sante Bennur and Holalkere within about twenty miles from Chitaldrug.

His ambition being roused by the accounts he had heard of Bednore, Haidar made a convenient pretext of Chennabasavaiah's story to invade the country and ultimately to appropriate it for himself. Accordingly in the beginning of 1763 he set out on this expedition distributing his troops into four columns and on crossing the borders of the Bednore territory issued a proclamation in the name of Chennabasavaiah inviting the inhabitants to return to their allegiance. At Shimoga which fell without much resistance, Haidar found a lakh of pagodas, about a third of which he distributed to the troops as a stimulus to their energies and hopes. At Kumsi he found one Linganna a minister of the late Raja who had been imprisoned by the Rani and released him. This individual undertook to give information respecting every branch of the resources of the country and to guide him through a secret path by which the city might be approached without encountering any of the outposts. In the meanwhile, the Rani made various attempts to buy off the enemy with offers of large sums of money, but Haidar's only answer was that if she surrendered the country, he would grant her a generous allowance and that she might fix her residence at Seringapatam. To the credit of the Rani it must be stated that she proudly rejected these proposals and resolved to defend her capital as best she could.

Haidar next reached Anantapur fifteen miles from Kumsi and from there reached the environs of Bednore in the beginning of

March 1763. Kirmani gives an interesting account of the fall of Bednore and of the capture of the Rani in the hill-fort of Kavale-doorg where she had taken shelter. The Rani is stated to have sent confidential ambassadors with costly presents and a supplicatory letter. These agents after paying their respects to Haidar presented various rarities and costly articles and stated that the Rani would pay a yearly sum of ten lakhs of pagodas and that she sought the country to be restored to her charge as a gift. To this Haidar returned for answer that if the Rani desired safety, immediate comfort, tranquillity of mind and the preservation of her honour, she should come without hesitation to his camp and from there proceed with every comfort and convenience to the fort of Seringapatam, where she might reside on a generous allowance to be granted by him. The Rani however proudly rejected the proposals sent to her and prepared to defend herself. It now also became necessary for the Rani to obtain outside help. She therefore sought the aid of Abdul Hakim Khan, Nawab of Savanoor, in return for a large sum of money. This Nawab agreed to her request and immediately despatched 2,000 horse and four thousand foot to her aid, also himself advancing with a large force and artillery and encamping at some distance.

As soon as this intelligence reached Haidar, he became violently incensed and moved forward towards Bednore and invested the place. The Rani's troops all along remained faithful to her, while the Rani also conducted herself with as much steadiness and courage as though she were a man. The siege was protracted for nearly a year and Haidar was much chagrined at the delay which had occurred in taking the place, especially as he feared that the approaching monsoon rains would upset his plans. He therefore gave orders to his troops to carry the place by assault, granting them full permission to retain all their plunders, all articles of gold and silver and likewise all handsome women who might be captured. The assault on the fort was so fierce that the Rani finding resistance hopeless set her palace on fire, burned most of her boxes of jewellery or reduced them to powder by pounding them in an iron mortar and accompanied by only a few attendants fled to the hill-fort of Kavale-doorg for refuge.

As soon as Haidar came to know that the Rani had escaped, he placed a garrison of his own in the fort of Bednore and following the Rani in her wake besieged the fort of Kavaleoorg. The Rani offered resistance for about a month but at length the defenders were subdued and the Rani herself was brought a prisoner to Haidar's presence. Haidar then returned to Bednore with his prisoner, from where he despatched her to the rock-fort of Madhugiri to spend her days in exile along with Nimbiah and the pretender Chennabasaviah.

Haidar then with the greatest pomp and display of force, according to Kirmani, made his entry into the fort. For fifteen days he held grand festivities enjoying the music and the abundance of good things provided for the feast. To his army officers who had done valiant deeds he gave costly presents and honorary dresses, gold bracelets, pearl necklaces, jewelled gorgets, splendid swords, as well as jahagirs according to their rank and capacity.

Haidar selected for the charge of the place an old servant of his by name Oojani, to whom he gave the name of Raja Ramchander, an able and intelligent man and ordered him to repair the fort and its defences. The available property of every description including money and jewels which he realised on this occasion was estimated to have amounted to the huge sum of twelve crores of rupees and subsequently through all the remaining years of his life Haidar is said to have regarded this vast wealth as the foundation of all his future greatness. At Ballalrayandoorg, forty miles from Bednore, Haidar's agents found vast property which consisted of "two or three boxes of pearls and diamonds, two boxes of jewellery, two elephant-housings richly embroidered and curiously wrought in gold and silver, a jewelled chain for the foot of an elephant, two sets of gold and silver bells for the necks of the royal elephants and two gold embroidered saddles."

Haidar established a mint in which he struck coins in his own name and also made preparations for establishing a dock-yard and a naval arsenal on the Western Coast for the construction of the ships

of war under the supervision of a military general Latif Ali Beg by name. Bednore received the name of Haidarnagar.

The rains commenced in June and malarial fever raged in his camp, Haidar also being one of the victims. The adherents of the displaced ruling family considered the time opportune to regain the country and accordingly formed a plot to assassinate Haidar. Some obscure suspicions were conveyed to Haidar, according to Wilks, by a trusty servant and he directed an investigation to be made in a commission. It happened however that there were included in the plot. At the time the report of the commission was read to him, Haidar was reclining on his couch shivering in a paroxysm of ague. But even in this state his keen perception is said to have penetrated the veil which the commission had attempted to throw over some of the facts. He dissembled however and detained the commissioners in feigned consultation. When the hot fit was succeeded by a slight remission, he arose and entering the hall of business re-examined the witnesses and discovered the whole plot. He ordered the commissioners to be instantly hanged in front of the hall of audience. The arrests of others followed with rapidity and before the close of the day, upwards of three hundred of the chief conspirators were hanged at the different public ways which issued from the city. Bednore was thenceforward the most tranquil and the most obedient of all the possessions of Haidar.