

CHAPTER XVI.

Nature of Haidar's dictatorship—The usual Dasara processions—Haidar values alliance with the English—Captain Munro's estimate of Haidar's character and abilities—Extent, revenue and other matters relating to the Mysore Kingdom.

During the whole of the period when all power had fallen into his hands, Haidar Ali never made any attempt to assume the external signs of royalty nor did he at any time formally deny the claim of the old Hindu Royal family to the sovereignty of Mysore. Even during the height of Haidar's power, the Hindu Raja continued to sit on his ancestral throne and the Dasara festivities were celebrated with the same pomp and glory as in the days of his ancestors. Haidar himself always attended the Dasara durbars and offered the presents and obeisances usual on such occasions. On the tenth or Vijayadasami day when the Raja proceeded to the Banni Mantap, Haidar mounted on an elephant was always found among the grand retinue that accompanied the Raja. The grandeur of this procession may be understood from some of the accounts available to us of the time. The advance body consisted of many regiments of cavalry in which there used to be many Europeans. Then followed five hundred men mounted on camels. The State elephants then followed with richly embroidered trappings. Behind the elephants came two regiments of Abyssinian horse wearing plumes of red-black ostrich feathers and carrying steel-headed lances. Next came the infantry wearing large silk scarfs with drawers reaching to the thigh and armed with lances to which small bells were attached. The noblemen and high officers gorgeously dressed and some of them covered with chain armour and mounted on splendid horses followed behind the infantry. Then came Haidar's own horses richly decorated and led by grooms. To these succeeded a troop of running footmen and then the principal officers of the household with chains of gold hanging down their breasts. The rear consisted of a large number of elephants, five of which carried special royal insignia and after them two more regiments of Abyssinian cavalry and a crowd of foot soldiers of the same nation

who closed the procession. On each side of the line of march moved a body of infantry, clothed in white silk, with long black lances plated with silver and adorned with small red streamers at the tip.

Haidar was entirely illiterate, though his natural ability and shrewdness enabled him to transact all his business with care and scrutiny. With difficulty, it is said, he learned to write the first letter of his name 'Hai', which he affixed in an inverted form whenever any paper required his signature.

Haidar always correctly appreciated the value to himself of an alliance with the English. One day he is stated to have assembled all the important officers of the army and consulted them about the possibility of putting down the English. Haidar is reported to have said to them that it was impossible to put down the British Power in India by any ordinary means, for they had various places to draw upon—Madras, Bombay, Calcutta and above all England. Wilks has also stated as having heard from Furnaiya a confirmation of this view of Haidar. Haidar is reported to have tersely said: "The defeat of many Baillies and Braithwaites will not destroy them. I can ruin their resources by land, but I cannot dry up the sea."

Captain Innes Munro who took part in the operations of the Second Mysore War from 1780 till the conclusion of peace in 1784 has left on record an interesting estimate of Haidar from which a few extracts may be given:—

"Haidar Ali first placed himself at the head of the Mysore army entirely by his military prowess. A great part of that kingdom borders upon the Mahratta States which occasions constant enmity betwixt the two powers. The Mahrattas being in former times the most powerful warriors were always making unlawful encroachments upon the Mysore territories. But when Haidar Ali came to head the troops of that nation against its enemies, he soon convinced the Mahrattas that his countrymen only wanted a proper leader to make ample retaliation. For by his prudence and conduct in the art of war, he not only drove them

back to their own country but considerably extended the Mysore Kingdom by acquisitions from the Mahratta frontiers, which all the efforts of the latter were ineffectual to retrieve.

“As all great acquisitions in this country are made by force of arms, the first object of Haidar Ali was to establish a good army and experience taught him in the course of his conflicts with the English that European discipline was absolutely essential to that end. He therefore endeavoured by every possible means to allure to his standard military adventurers of all nations and tribes, but particularly the European artificers and sepoys that had been trained up in the Company's service to whom he held out the most tempting rewards; nor did he want emissaries for this purpose in every battalion in the Company's service. By this means he soon brought his established forces to perfection in European discipline never before known amongst the native powers in India and his progress in tactics was a matter of astonishment and terror to all those who have ventured to encounter him in the field, but what at once showed the extended ideas and ambitions of this Prince are his surprising endeavours to become formidable at sea. No art has been left untried to entice into his pay our ship-carpenters and dockyard men from Bombay and other places; and in this attempt the French and other European powers have been induced to assist him, so that the progress which he has already made in constructing docks and equipping a naval force is almost incredible.

“He is not only sublime in his views but capable of seeing them minutely executed. His ends are always great, his means prudent and his generosity unbounded whenever proper objects offer; nor can any one be more watchful over the intrigues of his enemies, both abroad and at home, by which means he knows well where to anticipate hostile designs and where to take advantage.”

The territory in the possession of the Hindu Royal family before the dictatorship of Haidar began consisted of the major part of the present districts of Mysore, Hassan, Kadur, Tumkur, Bangalore, Salem, Coimbatore and Madura as far as Dindigul. At the time of Haidar's death, the extent of the Mysore Kingdom

was about eighty thousand square miles and in this large area were included not only the extensive table-land of Mysore proper but also the rich districts of Baramahal, Salem, Namacal, Dindigul, Sankaridoorg, Erode, Caroor, Dharapuram, Coimbatore, Palaghat, Calicut, Bednore, Soonda, Harapanhalli, Dharwar, Savanoor, Gutti, Kadapa, Rayadoorg and Chitaldrug and many other valuable tracts wrested from the Mahrattas and others. From this vast kingdom extending up to the banks of the river Krishna, Haidar was getting an income of one crore and ten lakhs of varahas, one varaha being equivalent to three rupees. Prior to the assumption by Haidar of supreme powers, the revenue amounted to 43 lakhs of varahas.

In the country depending upon Seringapatam, Haidar retained the old system of weights and measures which prevailed from the time of Chikka Devaraja Wodeyar. In Bednore however, he introduced a new coinage known as Bahaduri varahas, retaining the Saiva figure on the obverse which appeared on the gold coins of Sivappa Naik. A new trading centre was established on the island of Seringapatam and named Shahar Ganjam. The inam lands, villages and agraharas were allowed to continue in peace as in former times. A regular pay system was instituted in the case of the Arasu families according to their rank, and their status was zealously guarded during the life-time of Haidar. Royal retreats like the Lal Bagh and Daria Dowlat were constructed both at Seringapatam as well as at Bangalore. These latter gardens were beautified with plants imported from several far off places like Delhi, Lahore, Multan. The population is stated to have consisted of six millions but the accuracy of this is open to question.

For the defence of the country, there was a well disciplined standing army of 1,80,000 men. In addition to this number, there were also troops numbering 1,62,500 under various denominations:—

1. Stable Horse.
2. Pindari Horse.
3. Silledars or men enlisted with their horses and arms.
4. Workmen as masons, bricklayers.

5. Barr or regular infantry.
6. Body-guard.
7. Garrisons and detachments in different parts of the country.
8. Africans.
9. Harkars, runners, spies.
10. Pioneers.
11. Servants of the household, tent lascars, chopdars.
12. Blacksmiths and carpenters in the arsenal.