

CHAPTER XLVI.

Establishment of internal tranquillity—Dhondoji Wagh— Venkatadri Naik, Palegar of Aigoor.

We have seen how Colonel Arthur Wellesley by the drastic steps he took effectually suppressed the disorders that arose in the island of Seringapatam immediately after its capture by the British troops. These disorders were not however confined only to this limited area. There arose in all parts of the country palegars and pseudo-palegars who laid claim to almost every part of the State. Even patels and police officers and ryots who could pay bribes by various devices procured entries of lands in the village accounts though not belonging to them and where an unfortunate Amildar made any attempt to check such lawless conduct, he was secretly assassinated. The turbulent character of several of the lower classes of people also added to the difficulties of evolving order out of the chaos that had ensued. In these circumstances, it was of primary importance to establish tranquillity in the country. Purnaiya who in addition to a vigorous mind possessed an intimate knowledge of the country rose to the occasion and devised suitable measures to meet the embarrassing situations that arose from time to time. Colonel Close the British Resident though he had powers of unlimited interference in all the internal concerns of the State was sagacious enough to perceive that where limited authority was not upheld by influence of public opinion such authority was likely to fall into disrepute by frequent interference on his part and therefore maintained a discreet forbearance, allowing Purnaiya generally a free hand in the execution of the administrative measures he deemed necessary to adopt. It may also be added that Arthur Wellesley who had now become Major-General deemed it prudent to guard with parental care the authority of the Mysore Government.

The first act of Purnaiya on his assumption of the administration for suppressing the unruly characters who were disturbing the peace of the country was to issue a proclamation remitting all uncollected balances and restoring old Hindu rates of assessment.

This measure had the effect of bringing back most of the landholders who had fled from the country unable to withstand the tyrannical exactions of Mir Sadak and enabled them to settle in their old places and to pursue peacefully their avocations. The next step taken by Purnaiya was to restore all the old inam lands and cash allowances to temples, mutts and dargas and other places of religious worship or institutions of charity which had been appropriated in the later days of Tippu. This measure also had a conciliating effect on the minds of the people in general. For the maintenance of public authority a small but select body of cavalry, infantry and peons were collected from the remnants of Tippu's army and also a large body of Kandachar peons was enlisted to secure tranquillity in the rural and outlying parts. Haidar had employed large numbers of these Kandachar men in his armies and garrisons, while Tippu had increased his regular infantry by reducing the Kandachars. The effect of such reduction was that private depredations by the Kandachars aided by other restless men became frequent in the country and the ryots were forced to the necessity of saving themselves from plunder by paying a portion of their crops as the price of non-interference with them. Purnaiya ordered the re-enlistment of one member at least from every Kandachar or other military family and gave adequate remuneration for their services according to old usages. When the Kandachar force was properly organised, the country became relieved from marauding gangs and these Kandachars also became readily available for all police work as well as for the suppression of local outbreaks. The Dewan and the Resident frequently made tours in the State with a small body of troops and readily gave redress to the grievances of the people, thereby tending also to restore quiet. On the 26th May 1801 General Wellesley went so far as to record in a letter to the Private Secretary to the Governor-General that the Raja's Government was in a most prosperous state, the country had become a garden where it was inhabited and that the inhabitants were returning fast to those parts which they had been forced to quit. In a letter to Colonel Close in December previous the Governor-General had borne testimony to the wisdom of Purnaiya's administration in these words—"The Dewan seems to

pursue the wisest and the most benevolent course for the promotion of industry and opulence, the protection of property and the maintenance of internal tranquillity and order in Mysore."

Notwithstanding the vigorous enforcement of suitable measures to maintain tranquillity, it became necessary to start military operations against some of the free-booters and palegars who infested the country. Of the free-booters the most noted was Dhondoji Wagh, a native of Chennagiri in the present Shimoga District and a Mahratta by caste. This insurgent chief, it must however be said to his credit, was a gifted leader of men and he was only overcome by superior force ending in his death. He had a strong hold on the minds of the men of his generation and even now a formidable-looking, double-edged sword preserved in the temple of Hutcharaya Swami at Shikarpur is shown to visitors as a relic belonging to him and bears testimony to his great bodily strength.

In 1780 Dhondoji enlisted himself as a horseman in Haidar's army. During the campaign of Lord Cornwallis he deserted and went to Dharwar with a few followers and with as much booty as he could gather and he lived there by plunder till 1794. He was then induced to go to Seringapatam with the prospect of being re-employed in Tippu's service with his followers of 200 horsemen. There on his refusing to embrace Islam, he was forcibly converted and thrust into prison. Tippu however was not unmindful of his military qualities and by the payment of 10 fanams a day and by employing a teacher to instruct him in the Mahomedan customs and religion tried to conciliate him. At first he was named Sheik Ahmed but later at his own request he came to be called Mallik Jehan Khan. On the day of the capture of Seringapatam he was found chained to the wall of his prison like a wild beast and was released by a British soldier.

Dhondoji thereupon escaped from Seringapatam and assembling a number of men began to commit depredations in various parts and possessed himself of Shimoga and parts of the Bednore country. A detachment of the British army was

immediately sent to Hassan in order to check any possible incursion into that part of the country from the Bednore side. Another detachment under Colonel Dalrymple marched towards Chitaldrug and after taking possession of that fort on the 14th July 1799 came upon a party of Dhondoji's men who were found plundering the country about 20 miles from Chitaldrug. They were immediately attacked, defeated and dispersed. As the marauders were guilty of many atrocities, of the 40 prisoners taken 39 were hanged and one man was released after he had witnessed the execution of his comrades to create fear in the country by relating the terrible fate that had overtaken some of Dhondoji's men. On the 8th of August 1799 Shimoga and Honnali which were in Dhondoji's hands were attacked and taken possession of by two other detachments of British troops.

Colonel Dalrymple pursuing Dhondoji found him at Shikarpur with 1200 horse and 200 infantry. On receiving news of Colonel Dalrymple's approach, Dhondoji formed his infantry and cavalry in battle order behind the small stream named Kumudvathi which swelled by the rains had become unfordable on account of the depth and rapidity of the current. Dhondoji's horse steadily withstood for some time the attacks of the cavalry belonging to the British army but were ultimately forced to cross the river, leaving 600 men and horses killed or drowned. Colonel Dalrymple's infantry assaulted and took the fort of Shikarpur by storm and the killedar was seized and hanged on the walls in sight of his troops who in consequence fled in disorder.

Dhondoji was pursued as far as the frontier of the Mahratta country, which he reached on the 20th August 1799. On the very night that Dhondoji crossed the Mysore frontier into the Mahratta country his camp was attacked by the Mahratta commander Dhondoji Punt Gokhla who dispersed his remaining followers and captured his elephants, camels, bullocks and guns. Dhondoji however soon collected most of his followers and was also reinforced by a large number of disaffected persons from Hyderabad and Kadapa. He obtained possession of several places in the southern Mahratta country and threatened to re-enter Mysore. In 180

Colonel Wellesley was ordered to collect a field force and to pursue Dhondoji either in the Mahratta country or elsewhere. A body of Nizam's troops as well as a body of the Peshwa's troops co-operated with the British troops and Dhondoji now became a fugitive and fled from place to place eluding the pursuit of his enemies and avoiding a pitched battle. On the 30th June 1800 Dhondoji Punt Gokhla the Mahratta Commander with 10000 horse, 5000 foot and 8 guns was suddenly attacked by Dhondoji in the vicinity of Kittor, defeated and slain. It is said that Dhondoji in fulfilment of a vow of revenge taken after his defeat by that chief in the previous year dyed his moustaches in the heart-blood of his enemy. Colonel Arthur Wellesley steadily pursued Dhondoji and at last overtook him on the 10th September 1800 at a place called Konagal in the Nizam's territories. Dhondoji had at the time a force of 5000 cavalry and though taken by surprise he withstood the charge of the British troops with coolness and courage but was defeated and slain. His troops then broke up and dispersed themselves in small bodies all over the face of the country.

Next coming to the pategars. Before relating the measures taken to bring them under control, a short explanation may be given of their origin. In the palmy days of the Vijayanagar kings it was usual with them to make grants of large tracts of waste lands to their adherents who had rendered faithful service to them, in order to increase the wealth of the country by attracting people to settle in those tracts and thereby bring more lands under cultivation. The people who received such grants formed what were called Palayams and Palepats and came to be known as Pategars. They more or less corresponded to the feudal barons of England and in course of time whenever the central authority showed signs of weakness they defied the authority of their overlords, waged wars on their own account and behaved as independent chiefs. Abbe Dubois who was an eye witness to the ravages committed by these pategars has some interesting remarks on them. "The pategars in many respects resemble the European barons of the Middle Ages who from their strongholds ventured boldly to defy the royal authority. They were fairly numerous in the various districts of the Peninsula and much more numerous before the great European

Power extended its dominions over the territories in which they were established and subdued the greater number of them. These petty despots waged incessant war against one another. Safely ensconced in deep jungles or on inaccessible mountain-tops, they were able to defy the princes whose territories surrounded them, and the latter unable to suppress these turbulent vassals for fear that they would pillage and devastate their own States tried to live amicably with them.

“These palegars or self-styled princes made war according to methods of their own. The use of cannon was unknown to them, their only arms being arrows, pikes and flint-locks. They never risked a pitched battle. They rarely possessed any cavalry, the smallness of their revenue and the character of the country they inhabited rendering it almost impossible to maintain this branch of the military service. When attacked by a superior force, they took refuge in the jungles or on hill-tops. Their object mainly was to surprise the advancing enemy in defile. Lying in ambush behind tress or thick brushwood, they poured well-directed volleys upon their opponents forcing them to retire in disorder with considerable loss.”

When Haidar Ali subjugated several of the palegars, he restored some of them to their old places on condition of their paying a tribute to him and rendering military service when called on. Tippu made it a point to annex all the Palepats belonging to these petty chiefs but the Palayams though shown in the Government accounts as belonging to the Sircar continued really in the hands of their former possessors by collusion with the Amils whose lives were in danger otherwise. On the occasion of the march of British troops to Seringapatam in 1799 many of these palegars were encouraged to make common cause with the British against Tippu and as a consequence on the fall of Seringapatam all these palegars as well as many pretenders put forward their claims for restoration to them of their estates or palepats. Lord Mornington fully aware of the conduct of these men strictly enjoined that none of them were to be placed in possession of the country they laid claim to, whatever other concessions in the form of pensions or otherwise

might be made to them. On the establishment of the new Government under Krishnaraja Wodeyar III a few of the palegars retired to other parts of the country preferring chances of future commotion. A small number who were of a refractory character were imprisoned, while the greater portion of them who were willing to accept reconciliation were granted suitable State pensions or were appointed to civil offices or military commands. It was made a condition that all palegars receiving pensions should invariably reside at Mysore and whenever the Dewan was on tour they were to accompany him. Purnaiya took particular care at all times to respect their feelings by treating them with kindness and courtsey.

Among the refractory palegars against whom military operations now became necessary was the palegar of Aigoor or Manjarabad or Ballum Raja as he was variously called. On the capture of Bednore by Haidar, Ballum was allowed to remain in the hands of its chiefs for an annual payment of 5000 pagodas. Krishnappa Naik who was ruling this part of the country in 1792 joined Parasuram Bhow who was marching with an army to join Lord Cornwallis in his operations against Tippu. On the conclusion of peace however, Krishnappa Naik fearing the wrath of Tippu fled to Coorg but the latter invited him back and gave him the government of Aigoor in the south of Ballum yielding an annual revenue of 5000 pagodas. The country all round was generally mountainous. Tippu also annexed the rest of the Ballum country and built a fort on a central height naming it Manjarabad.

At the time of the fall of Seringapatam in 1799 Venkatadri Naik the son of Krishnappa Naik was in possession of this Aigoor and attempted to extend his authority towards the north showing a spirit of defiance towards the new Government of Mysore. At the distance of about 4 miles from Manjarabad at a place called Arakere situated in the midst of a thick forest Venkatadri Naik fortified himself and resisted all efforts made to dislodge him. In 1800 Lt.-Col. Montessor succeeded in destroying Arakere, which however was later occupied by the Aigoor palegar. He then began to impede considerably, though not successfully, the attempts made

by the Mysore troops for the provisioning of the Manjarabad fort. After the death of Dhondoji Wagh in September 1801, the pursuit of the Aigoor palegar was continued vigorously by both the Mysore and British troops under Colonel Arthur Wellesley, so much so that many of his relatives and principal people fell into the hands of the pursuing army, while Venkatadri Naik himself with a few followers was forced to take refuge in the jungles. To pursue in these jungles was considered profitless and accordingly small bodies of the Mysore troops were dispersed in these jungles as well as in the villages bordering on them, where it was likely that provisions were procured. On the 9th February 1802 the palegar sent some of his men to obtain supplies from a village which had been occupied by some of the Mysore horsemen. Receiving intelligence of the palegar's whereabouts, these horsemen went to the spot and captured him and his men. On the 10th he was executed with six of his men, some of whom had violated the terms of the pardon granted by Purnaiya by helping the palegar with provisions. At the same time it was found that every village in the country was strongly fortified and accordingly steps were taken to destroy such fortifications. Besides, Purnaiya detained three hundred families as hostages consisting of those who had been principally concerned in the rebellion and suffered none to depart till they had delivered up all their arms and paid all arrears of revenue. The amildars were also particularly instructed not to allow trees and hedges once destroyed to grow again and once more furnish strength to the villages. These measures permanently established peace in the country without any further disturbances.