

CHAPTER LV.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar III—1811—1831.

Land Assessment and Sharat or Contract System.

During the early years of Krishnaraja Wodeyar's rule, matters progressed smoothly and not only were all the administrative charges met with ease but also all obligations imposed by the Subsidiary Treaty were discharged to the satisfaction of the Company's Government. The Land Revenue which was 60¼ lakhs of rupees in 1811 rose to Rs. 71¼ lakhs in 1815-16. In 1816-17, however, a drought prevailed throughout the State and a diminution in the annual land revenue began to show itself. As a consequence of this drought, the balance of 7,83,749 C. P. handed over by Purnaiya when he retired from service was also exhausted and it became necessary to seek some means to improve the resources of the State. A large amount of specie was imperatively needed every month not only to discharge the monthly instalment of the subsidy due to the Company's Government but also for the maintenance at all times of 4000 horse which according to the treaty of 1807 was incumbent on the part of the Mysore Government.

The average revenue in the decade between 1810-20 amounted to Rs. 86¼ lakhs per year and attempts were made to increase this income by improving the land revenue by a system of Sharat or contract. At the same time, as had been anticipated by Wilks the annual expenditure also showed an increase. In 1804 Wilks had written to the Madras Government that when the Raja assumed the direction of Government on reaching the age of majority, a contingency of that kind was to be expected. The Raja after his assumption of power had necessarily to incur larger expenditure on his household establishments than was required in Purnaiya's time. There was no fixed civil list at the time and as a consequence expenses connected with domestic or other functions in the palace were not differentiated from those relating to public matters. When the Mysore troops returned from the war in Hindusthan, presents had to be given to them and charges had to be

incurred till proper demobilisation could take place. The Raja had also made some land endowments and cash grants for various charitable purposes. But the total alienations so made did not amount to more than Rs. 4 lakhs a year.

Certain economic factors also began to operate in full force at this time to cause embarrassment. In the days of Haidar and Tippu large armies had been maintained with considerable bodies of camp followers for whose sustenance there used to be constant demand for very large quantities of grain and other articles and whatever unsettlement of peace there was in the country, there were no complaints of lack of employment nor was there much diminution in the expenditure of money which went to benefit all classes. Even during the days of Purnaiya there was a large British army maintained in small bodies in various parts of the State, together with considerable numbers of Mysore troops similarly distributed, and cultivators of land, manufacturers, artisans, traders and other classes found ready markets for their articles. By about 1810 however, the number of places in which British garrisons were stationed underwent a marked diminution and the number of British troops also was greatly reduced. As a result, there was a decline in the demand for produce and in the expenditure of money. Simultaneously with this diminished demand for articles, there was an extension of cultivation which brought into the market more grain than could be absorbed resulting in a fall of prices. This fall of prices was also understood to have to some extent been accelerated by the necessity of having to pay the monthly instalment of the annual subsidy in specie.

The Dewans and other functionaries of the period had all been brought up in the midst of military traditions and apparently were not able to diagnose the economic causes for the fall of revenue. The British Residents of the period do not also seem to have possessed sufficient knowledge of facts to understand in full the real causes of this fall of revenue. Throughout their one great anxiety was to watch that the Mysore Government was in a position capable of paying at regular intervals the Company's subsidy under the terms of the treaty. Of the heads of revenue Sayer, Excise and

Bajebab or miscellaneous revenue were equally affected by the diminution of trade, and recourse was necessarily had to the only source left, namely, land where alone there existed a possibility of increase and to obtain this increase a system called the Sharat system was recommended for adoption by the advisers of the Maharaja.

According to this system, generally an annual stipulation was made with each amildar that a certain amount of revenue would be realised for the State and that if the collections fell short of that amount, he was to be responsible for the deficiency. In the written engagements taken from the Sharat amildars certain safeguards were invariably inserted relating to the avoidance of harassment to the ryots in the shape of imposition of arbitrary or unauthorised taxes, or compulsion to purchase the grain which became the property of Government by division of crops, or the exaction of labour from them without payment of wages, or a demand of more than the fixed rent in cases where a money-rent was assessed on lands. It must be said that the Sharat system was not an invention of this period but existed even earlier to Purnaiya. Purnaiya used to adopt the Sharat system only in the case of those amildars in whose ability he did not at the outset place confidence. An agreement was taken from these new amildars before they were allowed to enter upon their office that they would extend the cultivation of land. But this was done merely as a sort of incentive to them. If however no increase of cultivation took place, no further demands were made upon the amildars. In case of complaints from ryots that the amildars were guilty of extortion, due enquiry was made and if the charge was proved, the excess amount was returned.

The Sharat system was on account of the depression that prevailed considered advantageous, because it was thought that the contractors undertaking to give an increased revenue would collect the customary revenue where the ryots had been giving less and would encourage and increase the Warum cultivation. Babu Rao is credited with having encouraged the Sharat system and was largely supported, it is said, in this respect by Venkatasubbiah, Anoo Rama Rao and Gangadhara Rao.