
BRITISH ADMINISTRATION IN KARNATAKA AND KITTUR PRINCELY STATE

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Abstract:

The State of Kittur began its career under the patronage of the kings of Bijapur in the year 1585 and ended it by absorption in the territories of the East India Company. In the year 1624 for a short interval, it was subordinate to the Moghal Empire from 1586, when the Bijapur kingdom was conquered by Aurangzeb, until sometime after his death. During the period, unrest which followed subsequently till Karnataka was over-run by the Marathas in the regime of Bajirao-I, the state was probably independent and there after till the time of the Maratha war in 1818 it was subordinate to the Peshwas. According to the “Sanad” issued in this year by the East India Company it became a vassal state of the company until 1824.

Keywords; British Administration, princely state, kittur palace, socio-economic conditions.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Kittur passed through several hands before it came to be ruled by the Desais whose more prominent ruler was queen Channamma. We get the first mention of Kittur in an inscription about the close of the 12th century. By 1534, Kittur formed an estate of Yusuf Khan who was a Turkish nobleman and a follower of Asad Khan of Belgaum. By the close of the 17th century, there emerged the most important of the Karnataka Desais, Mudi Mallappa. He was a Lingayat Desai of Kittur and he also held Sampagaon and Bidi. In 1779 came Parashuram Bhau. He was a great soldier of the Peshwas. His seat of power was Tasgaon, near Sangli, and he was greatly instrumental in extending the power of Peshwas into Karnataka and beyond in the South. In 1779, he took over Kittur and took the Kittur Desai prisoner. But by 1785, Tippu, Haider Ali's son, seized Kittur, Nargund and Ramdurga and placed a strong detachment of his army at Kittur. The Desai's representative and the Desai were given a fixed sum for his support. This state of affairs continued until the turn of the century.

We see here that three parties were most powerful at this time and the affairs of Kittur were influenced according to who had supremacy at a particular time. These three parties were the English, Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan, and the Marathas or Peshwas. By 1800, Dhondopant Gokhale, of the Peshwas, was in control of Kittur region. But his fortunes came to be changed violently when a powerful free- boater, called Dhondia Wagh, came to Kittur and challenged the

power of Gokhale. In the ensuing fight, Gokhale lost his life. A little later, General Wellesley of the British was showing his keenness to control Kittur but his advance was slowed down by his having to cross by boat the Malaprabha River. The lot of Kittur had been to be attacked and looted by free-booters and political adventurers. The superior arms of the enemy, however, would never beat the people of Kittur into submission. Marathi record of 1809 gives evidence of the character of the Kittur Chiefs. "The Kittur Desai was a powerful rebel in Karnataka. Although the Peshwa tried for 40 years to subdue and control Kittur he did not succeed in his effort". The people and rulers of Kittur would never put up with insult and kicks from invaders. They would passionately fight to preserve or recover their independence.

In 1802, Mallasarja, the Desai of Kittur, held the region around Kittur. Here onwards the Kittur Desai had much to do with the Marathas (Peshwas) and after 1818 with the British. In 1809, the Kittur Desai was taken to Poona, after Peshwa's visit to Belgaum, and he entered into an agreement. "He agreed to pay the Peshwas a yearly tribute of Rs. 1,75,000/-, and the Samsthan continued to his children from generation to generation". In return, he received grants for his estate and the title "Prataprao". In honour of the title, the Kittur Desai constructed a fort near Nandgad called Pratapgad. At the same time, the Desai could not ignore his relationship with the other power, the British. He maintained some understanding with them too from time to time. Later in 1818, when the British were fighting with the last Peshwa, they laid a siege to the Belgaum fort and the Desai actively assisted him. With the end of the Peshwa rule in 1818, the Desais of Kittur were to deal with the British and in less than a decade the Desai rule at Kittur was to come to an end.

SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITION

Socio-Economic conditions in Kittur taluka around 1793 which had 285 villages comprising of 91 "inams" and 194 "Khalsa" villages mentioned that the taluka had a total income of Rs. 4,10,786 in 1793. The taluka had fertile lands watered by rains or rivers. The famine in August 1787 in the area due to failure of rains caused the price rise and jowar became very dear and was sold at 8-9 seers per rupee. The poor were starved to death. Kittur was also connected with important towns and cities. The amount of Rs. 6,618 collected with imports and exports indicates the increased traffic in goods. The fact that in Kittur, taxes were to be paid twice showed that it was a viable unit economically. Karnataka has been a land of freedom fighters from the earliest times. When the British power slowly spread over the whole of India in the last part of the 18th Century, the people of this area could not tolerate this alien rule. So they decided to wage a revolt. Thus the revolution started and we call it "Armed Insurrection". Venkatappa Naik of Surpur, Bheema Rao of Mundargi, Baba saheb of Nargund, Rani Channamma of Kittur, Rani Channamma of Keladi were a few notable brave men and women who struggled throughout against the British for the freedom of the country.

THE KITTUR PALACE

The entire palace is a masterpiece of planning. The relative positions of the sitting-cum-guest rooms, the assembly room, dining hall, store rooms, bath rooms, have all been so well

arranged that every part is independently approached without passing through the other parts, every room is provided with two entrances, each leading to a different room, and all these providing examples of meticulous planning. While a detailed description of the palace and its rooms is not necessary, there are, however, a few important features, which deserve to be noticed. The most impressive interior part of the palace is the assembly hall, which is not too large and which was meant for confidential meetings with sardars and other high officials. The hall is provided with backrests in the adjoining walls. The assembly hall is a very big dining hall meant for occasional dinners arranged in honors of the Royal guests. In the front portion of the palace, to the left side, is a room for a unique purpose. In the middle of the walls of this room is an obliquely fixed iron pipe of about one and half feet in diameter open to the sky and meant for viewing the pole star. In front of the pipe is a platform to sit on. More ingenious than all these is the excellent water supply system from one common source to the whole palace. In the center of the open back verandah, there is water well at the center. Water receiving bowls made of stone and water tankers on the sides and at two corners had also been kept. Adjoining the inside pack wall of the palace, water was poured from the well into these bowls from where it was carried to all the water tanks and to the well behind the kitchen by concealed copper pipes. Stone wash troughs had been provided at the right places in different parts of the dining hall, kitchen and other rooms.

Another interesting feature of the palace is the excellent garden provided with cisterns and fountain jets and so on. The bricks used for the floor in the garden are of very high quality and of different shapes and sizes. The walls, some of which in fact can be seen even today, are only 6 inches thick, but incredibly strong. The whole palace is of ashlar masonry built with hematite quartz, rubble and dressed stone and strong slaked lime mortar. The pillars are also constructed with circular discs, greenish schist stones, placed one on the other, using the same mortar as binding materials. The surface is plastered partly, such as the niches in the walls, the walls of the bathrooms and kitchen. The lower parts of the walls are dressed in rectangular slabs of schist stone. The windows and niches in the walls are so arranged as to provide light and air to the sidewalls and rooms. The ashlar masonry and arched niches clearly indicate the tradition of the Muslim, Maratha architecture in survival phase of the tradition and Kittur is one of the finest specimens of this type of architecture.

CONCLUSION

Hence in the Kittur dynasty 12 persons ruled, from 1585 to 1824, a period of 239 years. A study of the early history of Kittur reveals certain valuable traits. The people and rulers of Kittur were repeatedly tested and from those tests had imbibed political sagacity which helped them to keep the invader armies from their land. These women freedom fighters along with men fought for socio-economic values and to popularize democratic ideas. They struggled for the introduction of representative Government and also for the economic development of India and above all for the freedom of their motherland

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