Haider Ali and the First Mysore War

Haider Ali, 1722-82. Haider Ali was a ruler of Mysore who proved a formidable rival of the English towards the close of the 18th century. He was a man of great abilities and high talents. He was born in 1722 and was the son of a Faujdar in the Mysore army. He began his career as an ordinary soldier in the Mysore army but because of his exceptional qualities he rose to the position of its Commander-in-Chief. But an ambitious and a daring man like Haider Ali could not feel himself contented with this. He wanted to become the actual ruler. In 1766, when the Raja of Mysore died, Haider Ali usurped the throne thus fulfilling his heart's desire. The Anglo-French rivalry, the defeat of the Marathas at Panipat (in 1761) and impotency of the Nawab of Hyderabad, favoured the rise of Haider Ali who began to extend the frontiers of Mysore at a rapid speed.

Haider Ali

Haider Ali, like Ranjit Singh and Akbar, was illiterate but he was very intelligent. He possessed a marvellous memory and he never forget a thing which he happened to listen once. He did not believe in religious bigotry and distributed high offices only on the basis of merit. He dispensed justice impartially and while awarding punishment he never made any distinction between the high and the low, the poor and the rich. Even his own ministers and near kith and kin were afraid of his impartial and exemplary punishments. He spared no stone unturned in serving his people whole-heartedly.

Naturally, the English were afraid of such a spirited and energetic man. He fought with them two wars which are popularly known as the First and Second Mysore Wars. He had various plans in his mind to fight against the English when during the Second Mysore War (1780-84) he fell ill and died of cancer in 1782.

The First Mysore War, 1767-69 A.D. As discussed above this battle was fought between the English on the one side and Haider Ali, the Sultan of Mysore, on the other.

(1) *Causes.* The rise of a powerful state under Haider Ali proved a source of great anxiety to the neighbouring powers. The English made the best use of such a state of affairs and in 1766 they formed a coalition with the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad.

(2) *Events.* Haider Ali was a very clever diplomat. He very cleverly bribed the Marathas and also won over the Nizam to his side. Thus by skilful diplomacy he turned the table against the English. Then the combined forces of Haider Ali and the Nizam attacked the English but they were twice defeated by *Col. Smith* at Trinomali and Changama. In the meantime, some English forces entered the Nizam's territory and the latter finding himself alone deserted Haider Ali in 1768 and made peace with the English. Infuriated at this Haider Ali all alone attacked Carnatic and carried fire and sword wherever he went. With a lightning speed he appeared before Madras (March, 1769). The Madras Government was simply frightened and agreed to the terms dictated by Haider Ali.

(3) *Results.* By the *Treaty of Madras* (April, 1769) both the sides agreed to restore places conquered by each and to return the prisoners of war. Both sides also agreed to help each other in a defensive war. It was in this way that the First Mysore War ended in favour of Haider Ali whose prestige rose very much.

It will not be out of place to mention here that when the Marathas invaded Mysore in 1771 and Haider Ali asked for help, the English did not fulfil their promise. This breach of faith on the part of the English enraged Haider Ali so much that he became a dead enemy of the English and never spared them.