



## **THE RELATIONS BETWEEN DEWAN PURNAIAH AND MARK WILKS – A REVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

We can see two important administrative posts in the Mysore Princely State after the IV Anglo-Mysore war of 1799 which brought the State under the indirect rule of the victorious East India Company. They were the post of Dewan and that of the Resident of the Company. After reinstating the power in the hands of the Wodeyar dynasty by coronation of minor Prince Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, the Company, along with giving the administrative responsibility to the Regent and the post of Dewan to Purnaiah, appointed its officer as the Resident in order to closely examine the complete details of administration and report the same to it. The Dewan started the administration of the state with the guidance, advice and instructions of the Resident who acted as a link between the Company and the administration of the Mysore state. Hence, as long as he was Dewan, Purnaiah maintained good relationship all the Residents appointed by the Company. The Residents maintained good relationship with the Dewan only in order to strengthen the colonial rule. Purnaiah was completely loyal to the Residents appointed by the Company which had given him power, and his good relationship with the Residents made him a very influential person in the state administration. The present article discusses the relationship Dewan Purnaiah had with Mark Wilks, the Resident of the Company at Mysore state in this background.

### **Introduction**

The personality of Dewan Purnaiah was the most influential and attractive one in the political circle of the Colonial Mysore state that was founded after the death of Tipu. One special character of Purnaiah was this that he would show his extraordinary intelligence and commitment through his work to those who had assigned him work. In this way he would impress his master and thereby would increase his influence too. We can see that he did the same even during the rules of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and strengthened his position. The Queen Lakshmi Ammanni had agreed to make Purnaiah the Dewan of Mysore only because she had seen his commitment and loyalty towards his masters<sup>1</sup>, and had also known that he was praised to be a loyal servant even by Hyder Ali who seldom had full faith in anybody. Purnaiah knew very well how he could use intelligence, talent and experience, and grew strong by maintaining good relationship with all his masters, be it Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan or the East India company.

After the fall of Srirangapattana the Company carefully divided the Mysore State and gave one portion of it to the Wodeyar dynasty. It decided that the heir of the state would be the minor Prince Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and appointed Purnaiah as the regent and also the Dewan of the state. It instructed that the administration must be carried on according to the guidance of the Resident appointed by the Company. Sir Barry Close became the first British Resident of the Mysore State. After him J. H. Peile served as the Resident followed by Joseph Webb. Later when John Malcolm was serving as the Resident he was called to take part in the Anglo-Maratha war and Colonel Mark Wilks who had vast experience serving as a higher official in the administration of the Company was appointed as the Resident of Mysore in November 1804.

Colonel Mark Wilks had a very talented personality. He is seen in history as a multi-talented person with his experiences as a military officer, administrator and a historian. Mark Wilks who came to India in 1782 as an officer of the East India Company had also took part in the IV Anglo-Mysore war in 1799. Later he served as the Resident of East India Company at Mysore from 1804 to 1808. During this time he took up the task of writing down the detailed history of Mysore right from the beginning of the Wodeyar dynasty till the death of Tipu.

He took the generous help of Dewan Purnaiah in the work of information gathering related to two volumes with the lengthy title “Historical Sketches of the South India in an attempt to trace the History of Mysore from the origin of the Hindoo Government of that State to the extinction of the Mohammanan Dynasty in 1799”. From this work of his Wilks is credited to be the first historian of the modern Karnataka. The present writing discusses about the historical importance of the relationship between Dewan Purnaiah who served during the beginning stages of the Colonial Mysore State and Colonel Mark Wilks who served as the Resident of East India Company at the Mysore State. Wilks also tells that Purnaiah was assigned along with Tipu’s son Fateh at Karighatta to stop the British from besieging the fort from the north in the IV Anglo – Mysore war<sup>2</sup>. The heavy rains on the evening of the day of Tipu’s death and the next day flooded the Lokapavani and the Cauvery Rivers and stopped Fateh Hyder and Purnaiah from entering Srirangapattana. He says that they entered Srirangapattana and surrendered to the British on 14 May, 1799<sup>3</sup>.



After the death of Tipu the East India Company did not know what to do with the Mysore State. When Purnaiah was asked for his advice he argued that the eldest son of Tipu must be made the Sultan of Mysore. He had opined that it was necessary to give the state to the heirs of Tipu in order to maintain peace in the state as the capital had a large Muslim population<sup>4</sup>. The same Purnaiah who had argued that the state must be returned to the family of Tipu who was a staunch enemy of the company can be seen as a loyal servant of the Company after he was made the Dewan of the State. By a detailed study of this issue an analysis of the political history of Purnaiah is made here in the background of the relations between the Dewan and the Residents appointed by the Company.

Dewan Purnaiah had the knack of wooing anyone who gave him power. He had good friendly relationship with officers of the Company like Sir Barry Close, Joseph Webb and others. He constructed a residential extension in memory of Sir Barry Close near Ramanagara and named it Closepet. He erected a pillar in Srirangapattana in memory of his friendship with Joseph who was the Resident in 1803. He named the bridge built across river Cauvery in Srirangapattana as Wellesley Bridge. In this way by securing his position by maintaining faithful relations with the British he started growing to be an influential person in the Mysore State. His relationship with the British made him a very powerful person in the administration of Mysore State.

We can know about the relationship Mark Wilks had with Purnaiah when we study his work and his reports. He gives several details about Purnaiah in his work. He opines that the people were happy after the power over the state came into the hands of Wodeyar dynasty from the hands of the Company. The coronation of the new king Krishnaraja Wodeyar III was held on July 30, 1799. General Harris on behalf of the British and Mir Alam on behalf of the Nizam of Hyderabad attended the ceremony. Providing information about the ceremony, Wilks says that there great numbers of Hindus in the ceremony and it was visible that they were happy that they had become free from the harsh rule of Mohammedans. Everyone was relieved that the government had got the able assistance of Purnaiah. According to Wilks, General Harris stressed on the point that Dewan Purnaiah had to safeguard the good of the State and the King until the King would come of age and take up the administration himself<sup>5</sup>. He opines that the people were happy that the East India Company had freed them from the Mohammedan cruelty rampant during the reign of Tipu. At the same time when we keenly examine the statements made by Wilks it can be clearly seen that the Company had craft fully used Purnaiah to firmly establish the colonial rule. That is why Wilks tries to say that the people were happy because Purnaiah's dedication was complimented and his service was sought for the good of the State. In this way he has tried to increase the political charisma of the Company. Wilks had a soft corner for Purnaiah and liked the way he administered the state. He has opined that Purnaiah established peace and order in the state during his administration. He says, "There was a widespread state of anarchy prior to the rule of Purnaiah. The state was in the hands of kidnapers for a long period of thirty years. There was a continuous clash between the religion of the rulers and that of the people of the state. There was almost a riot like situation. Everyone was waiting for an opportunity to exploit the other. This situation came under control under the Dewanship of Purnaiah and peace order was established in the state. Some minor rulers who had lost their provinces to Hyder and Tipu tried to take back their territories<sup>6</sup>. Purnaiah acted immediately and curbed all such rebellions. He arranged for the rehabilitation of Tipu's army. Unwanted army was dissolved and the soldiers were distributed across the state in order to prevent any anti-state activity. Strict measures were taken to control activities of loot and dacoit in the capital.

The capital was secured by giving death penalty to rogues and miscreants. The revenue deficits of the farmers were declared to be waived in order to help the people. The Hindu land revenue system which was in vogue during the earlier rule of the Wodeyars was implemented again. This relieved people from the despotism of officials like Mir Sadik and others. The farmers who had run away abandoning their lands and homes again returned for agriculture." By giving these details Wilks appreciates and speaks for the dedicated administration of Purnaiah. He also gives information about the land revenue system during Purnaiah's rule. House revenue and plough tax were started to be collected along with land revenue. Generally plough tax and house revenue were collected together as 'panam revenue'<sup>7</sup>. Even though some land revenue discounts were given during Purnaiah's time only a few farmers got these facilities. Wilks states in his report that the land revenues on gifted and inam lands which were being collected since generations were increased<sup>8</sup>. Purnaiah had implemented a revenue system which served the economic principles of the colonial rule. Statistics say that the revenues collected in 1804 were far higher than those of 1860<sup>9</sup>. This shows the weight of the burden of revenue suffered by the farmers in those days.

During his tenure as the Resident of Mysore, Mark Wilks would give proper suggestions for the development of the state. It was he who advised Purnaiah to use the vaccination treatment for the smallpox outbreak in the Mysore state in 1806. Abse Dubois had introduced the use of vaccination treatment for smallpox in Mysore state in 1806<sup>10</sup>. During the time of the marriage of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III the bride of the prince contracted smallpox. Mark Wilks advised Purnaiah to get her vaccination treatment, and she was cured of the disease from the treatment. Seeing this Purnaiah implanted the treatment all over the state<sup>11</sup>.



Irrigation sector was given great importance during the time of Purnaiah. Construction and repair works of lakes, tanks, wells and canals were taken up and accomplished based on preference in order to facilitate the farmers. One important point to be noted here is that some farmers of the Madras province objected the irrigational development activities taken up by Purnaiah. It can be seen that discussions regarding sharing Cauvery river water began during the time of Mark Wilks itself. Some farmers from the Madras province complained that they are getting very little Cauvery water while the farmers of Mysore state are using too much of the river water for irrigation. But the British officers inspected on the issue and reported that the allegations made by the farmers of Tanjavoor are far from truth and that there is no objection for Mysore state use Cauvery water<sup>12</sup>.

One of the ambitious plans of Purnaiah was the construction of barrage to river Cauvery. It was planned to bring 1300 acres of land under irrigation and secure an annual income of Rs.7200/- from this project. It was also planned to serve as the supplier of drinking water for Mysore city<sup>13</sup>, but this could not happen because of the lack of technical expertise to materialise the plan in those days. After the barrage was constructed the farmers from Tanjavoor started complaining that the Mysore government is using the Cauvery water excessively<sup>14</sup>. They used the renovation and repair works of the old irrigation systems in the state in support of their allegations. On the request of the Collector of Tanjavoor the chief secretary of the Madras Provincial Government wrote a letter to Mark Wilks on 14 February 1807 instructing him to conduct an enquiry on the adverse effects faced by the Madras province because of the certain specific river water irrigational projects taken up in the Mysore State. In reply to this letter Wilks wrote “these irrigation works were greatly neglected during the latter half of Tipu Sultan’s rule. The Dewan, now, has renovated these works as much as possible as per the population wise requirement of the concerned districts.” He also took the opinion of Colonel Colin Mackenzie, who was doing the survey of the Mysore state and wrote to the Governor of Madras on 27 March 1807 that “As observed since the last seven years, after the month of November, the river Cauvery turns into a small rivulet near Srirangapattana and therefore is unable to supply what it does not have to the people of Tanjavoor. The water flow at the same time will be better down the catchment valley. At the same time the population of Mysore city has increased demanding for more water.” This project was called the Purna Prasanna Canal in the future. Along with this Purnaiah took up the repair and renovation of many other tanks and canals and helped the increase of agricultural production. He got the Moti Lake near Thonnur repaired. The statistics of expenditure made by Purnaiah for repairing the lakes during the first five years of his administration according to Wilks is as follows<sup>15</sup>:

1799-1800	1,32,918/-
1800-1801	1,54,325/-
1801-1802	95,650/-
1802-1803	74,856/-
1803-1804	65,600/-

The expenditure on irrigation made by Purnaiah on irrigation according to the Resident of Madras Province is as follows:

1799-1800	94,186/-
1800-1801	1,09,436/-
1801-1802	57,347/-
1802-1803	26,922/-
1803-1804	60,386/-

In this way both the lists show different statistics of expenditure. While the statistics of the Resident show the actual money spent on the projects, the statistics of Wilks show the budget allocation for the projects.

Wilks praises the administration of Purnaiah who followed administrative principles that favoured the political and economic interests of the colonists. He opines that the administrative principles of Purnaiah were decisive in the history of the state, and brought name and fame to the state among the Princely states of India<sup>16</sup>.

In his eagerness to praise the pro-colonial administration of Purnaiah, Wilks harshly criticises the anti-colonial administration of Tipu. He gives some information in support of his criticism and tries to portray Tipu’s anti-colonial reign as a haven for dacoits and robbers. He has written in his reports that Mir Sadik, the minister of Tipu Sultan, looted the rich merchants, kept some of the bounty for himself and gave the rest to the Sultan. And that during the last years of Tipu’s rule the merchants and the rich were looted of their money and properties. He adds that he discussed about the issue with Purnaiah when he was Resident and found that the Dewan did not much about these things<sup>17</sup>. It seems that by writing this he wants to convey that Purnaiah was completely unaware of and had no connection with the despotism of Tipu’s rule. He also writes that Tipu had forced Purnaiah to convert to Islam<sup>18</sup>. Purnaiah got a building constructed in Mysore in 1805 to facilitate the Resident. This



building is called The Government House today and Mark Wilks lived in this building when he was the Resident of Mysore. A unique friendship developed between Wilks and Purnaiah.

In his report given to the Company government on December 05 1804, Wilks praises the personal honesty of Purnaiah and says that any complaints against him are unworthy and false. The relationship of Wilks and Purnaiah was so strong that it even prompted Wilks to argue with his higher officers in favour of the latter. After enquiring all the complaints that came to him, Wilks gives his opinion to the Governor General in the following words, "I would like to say that the regulations of the Subsidiary Alliance have succeeded respectably in fulfilling our principle objectives of providing the people with security to utilise the fundamental rights and in the functioning of judiciary. There is no doubt that these facilities will continue without any obstacles, other than by the corruption and lethargy of the Resident and the Dewan, as long as the Constitutional Officials retain the faith of their higher officers... By requesting Your Highness not to consider that I have the intention to present Purnaiah as a man from a fictitious land who has every trait in his character that sets him apart from and at a height from others, that he is a person who has given up all the habits of his earlier life and has the ability to cast the same spell on others, I hereby certify the public appreciation of him through my humble witness.<sup>19</sup>" This is how Wilks reports about the efficiency of Purnaiah who was obedient to the colonial administration to his higher officers. He describes the attitude of faithfulness of Purnaiah to the King Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and to his duty in the following way. He writes in one of his reports to the Governor of Madras in 1805 as follows, "Purnaiah behaves with the King in a very suitable manner that would not affect the tradition." But some scholars are of the opinion that Purnaiah sometimes refused to show some important letters to the King, and that he sometimes even abused the King refusing to answer about the accounts of his expenditure<sup>20</sup>.

Purnaiah had the right to receive one percent of commission on the gross income of Mysore State. Resident Wilks, who was always cautious, had observed that Purnaiah would falter in calculating his commission in way that he himself would suffer loss<sup>21</sup>. Purnaiah had shared many of his experiences during the rules of Hyder and Tipu with Wilks who was writing the history of Mysore. When Hyder Ali was in war in Tamil Nadu in 1782 with Purnaiah as his chief companion, he suffered depression because of failing health and other impending dangers. Purnaiah personally gave the accounts of what Hyder confided to him during a period of such depression<sup>22</sup>.

### Conclusion

The good relationships that Purnaiah had with the officials of the East India Company paved way for him to grow as a powerful administrator. A close examination of the writings of Mark Wilks shows that Purnaiah was a person who favoured the interests of the colonists. It becomes evident that that was why Wilks and other officials had a soft corner for him. To conclude, it can be said that it is very important to study about the relationship between Purnaiah and Mark Wilks in order to understand the administrative matters of the first decade of Colonial Mysore.

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