

Mysore, Kingdom of

BARRY LEWIS

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

The roots of the Mysore kingdom rest in the ashes of the Vijayanagara emperor's defeat in battle with the Deccan Sultanates in 1565. The battle cost Vijayanagara its ruler, who was killed, and its capital, which was thoroughly sacked. It also set the stage for several centuries of political instability across South India during which lesser kings and chiefs, the Wodeyars among them, sought their independence from the remnants of Vijayanagara's rule. These small polities tried to expand their status and territories at the expense of their neighbors and they fought each other incessantly, often for only temporary gains. The Marathas, the Mughals, and, later, the Nizam also tried to dominate South India or, failing that, to gather as much plunder as they could. They sent army after army into the south, where a state of chronic warfare persisted into the early 19th century.

The earliest Mysore chief for which there exists contemporary historical records was Bettada Chamaraja Wodeyar, who ruled between 1513 and 1553. Mysore was at that time a petty chieftom and its territory probably comprised little more than the town of Mysore and its neighboring villages in the rolling scrub jungle and forests of the Southern Maidan region of the modern state of Karnataka. Vijayanagara ruled the Southern Maidan through its viceroy based at Srirangapatna, an island in the Kaveri River near Mysore. Like other small polities of the region, the Mysore chieftom professed loyalty to Vijayanagara, but always with an eye toward what they stood to gain from the relationship.

Raja Wodeyar, who ruled Mysore between 1578 and 1617, laid the foundation for its elevation as a kingdom by becoming Vijayanagara's viceroy at Srirangapatna in 1610. To achieve this extraordinary victory, Raja Wodeyar appears to have exploited the dissatisfaction of the Vijayanagara emperor with his nephew, Tirumala, then serving as viceroy at Srirangapatna. Probably by peaceful means, but possibly by conquest, Raya Wodeyar successfully deposed Tirumala, took possession of Srirangapatna, and was soon confirmed as the new Vijayanagara viceroy. With this success, Mysore greatly enhanced its status among its peers and took a major step to becoming an independent kingdom.

Chronic internecine warfare, not peace, was the norm across South India in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Mughals, the Deccan sultanates, and the Marathas repeatedly pushed down from the north, seeking territories and rich plunder in the politically unstable south. In the Mysore heartland, the Nayakas of Ikkeri in the western Ghats to the northwest and the rulers of Madura to the south frequently contested the limits of Mysore's territory, as Mysore did to them in return. The Wodeyars also endlessly worked to enhance the legitimacy of Mysore's claim as Vijayanagara's legitimate successor in the region.

Mysore was fully independent of Vijayanagara by the late 17th century. Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar, who reigned between 1673 and 1704, greatly expanded the kingdom in the face of repeated attacks by the Marathas, the Mughals, Ikkeri, and Madura. The kingdom also enjoyed a rare outbreak of peace at the turn of the century, facilitated in no small part by Chikkadevaraja's partnership with Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor.

The Encyclopedia of Empire, First Edition. Edited by John M. MacKenzie.

© 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Published 2016 by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

DOI: 10.1002/9781118455074.wbeoe021

Most Mysore rulers in the first half of the 18th century were dominated by the kingdom's dalavoy or prime ministers, who tended to act more for their own self-interest than for the good of Mysore. After the Dalavoy Nanjirajaraiya was forced to retire in the late 1750s, his power and authority did not revert to the Mysore king, but passed into the hands of Haidar Ali, an officer of the Mysore army who had quickly risen to prominence from the ranks.

Haidar Ali assumed the office of Mysore dalavoy in 1761 and soon usurped the authority of the king, whose role became largely ritual. He reorganized and improved the Mysore army on European lines and actively sought the further expansion of the kingdom. Early during his tenure as dalavoy and de facto ruler, Haidar Ali fought the first of four wars that pitted him and, later, his son and successor Tipu Sultan, against the British.

Mysore under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan endured a stormy relationship with the British at Madras. The latter took an increasingly active role in Indian politics during the second half of the 18th century, a role that was facilitated by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which gave the British the upper hand in India over the French, their traditional enemies.

Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan's wars with the British figure prominently in all of the histories of this period in South India, but these were only four wars among many that Mysore fought with other Indian powers during the late 1700s. The Anglo-Mysore Wars were, however, significant in that the final one ended in 1799 with the successful siege of Srirangapatna, the death of Tipu Sultan,

and the creation of Mysore as a "princely state," or one that was nominally sovereign in British India.

The British reinstated the Wodeyars on the Mysore throne and installed a British Resident in the royal court. With the exception of a 50-year period between 1831 and 1881, during which the British assumed the reins of government, the Wodeyar dynasty ruled Mysore until 1947 when it was accessioned to the newly independent republic. The Mysore princely state, with its former ruler serving as head of government until 1974, formed the core of the modern state of Karnataka.

SEE ALSO: British Empire: 7. India, to 1858; British Empire: 8. India, from 1858; Deccan sultanates; Maratha Empire; Mughal Empire; Vijayanagara Empire

FURTHER READING

- Copland, I. 1997. *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917-1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hasan, M. 2009. *History of Tipu Sultan*. Delhi: Aakar Books.
- Hayavadana Rao, C. 1943-1946. *History of Mysore (1399-1799 AD)*, 3 vols. Bangalore: Government Press.
- Kamath, S. 1980. *Concise History of Karnataka: From Pre-Historic Times to the Present*. Bangalore: Archana Prakashan.
- Michell, G. 1995. *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Satyanarayana, A. 1996. *History of the Wodeyars of Mysore, 1610-1748*. Mysore: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums.