



Irwin Canal Ryots Agitation (1931-32) - A Study

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ABSTRACT : Irwin Canal is in present Mandya district. The region of the Mandya district lies in the north-eastern parts of Mysore district. Irwin Canal ryots agitation in the thirties was against the Government Policy of irrigation and agriculture. The struggle by then had limited agendas: focusing on high water cess or levy, against the block system of irrigation, abolition of interest and increasing number of installment for the payment of water cess etc. For the first time in Mysore State, Cauvery falls at Sivasamudra, was harnessed in 1902 for generation of electrical power. Later on due insufficient flow of water in the river, especially during summer, made it difficult to maintain continuous supply of power. As a result, the authorities felt the need for a reservoir on the Cauvery River. The then Deputy Chief Engineer, Captain Dawes prepared a rough scheme for construction of a reservoir at Kannambadi. The Cauvery River, for which the dam was to be constructed, did not only pass through Mysore but also Madras. Since 1892 there existed an agreement between the Madras Government and the Mysore Government entitled: Rules defining the limits within which no new irrigation works are to be constructed by Mysore State without previous reference to Madras Government. Madras although a downstream State, could veto any irrigation work in Mysore.¹ The reason why Mysore had to accept the 1892 agreement was of course its constitutional provisions under the British Government.

Keywords : Mandya, Kannambadi, Kaveri, H Honnaiah, H.K. Veeranna Gowda

Introduction :

M. Visweshvaraiah, who became the Chief Engineer of the State, pursued the scheme and a project estimate was prepared for building a dam in two stages. Inspire of protests from Madras, Visweshvaraiah got the permission from the Viceroy to proceed with the first stage to raise the dam to a height of 80 feet above the river bed was started in 1911 and it was completed in 1915. The second stage could not be taken up as it was disputed by Madras Government. Further the second agreement was made in February 1924. After this agreement the second stage of construction to raise the height of the dam upto 124.8 feet was taken up and it was completed in 1931.

After this, Government ordered for survey and constituted a special committee under M. Visweshvaraiah to advise the government to take necessary measures for the development of irrigation. In May 1927, the committee recommended the opening of the north bank high-level canal and the Government of Mysore sanctioned it in July 1927. The construction of the Canal was started in September 1927 and the main canal from the reservoir upto 1-lulikere Tunnel and the Maddur branch was completed in 1931. It was called Irwin Canal, (now called Visweshvaraiah canal) was designed to irrigate about 1,20,000 acre of land mostly in present Mandya district²

Problems of the Ryots

The Krishnarajasagar reservoir was constituted for multipurpose, for generation of hydro-electrical power and irrigation purpose. Its cost was about 5 crores at that time. The Irwin Canal cost was another 2 crores. The investment was made from general funds hoping that it would yield the revenue gradually. To recover the huge sum of money that had been invested, the government gradually. To recover the huge sum of money that had been invested, the government decided to collect contribution from the ryots of the area who were directly benefited by the supply of water from the reservoir. The government fixed the rate of contribution and water rate at Rs.90 to Rs. 120 acre, to be paid in 10 installments. But the ryots wanted the contribution to be fixed at Rs.75 per acre. A rebate of 5% was allowed if the amount was paid before the end of the year. Otherwise, they were permitted to pay in 10 installments with an interest at 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ %. A uniform water rate was fixed at Rs. 10 per acre.³

The Government also introduced the block system. According to this system, the ryots were forced to grow sugar cane for the first year, paddy for the second year and dry crops for the third year (the system of rotation of crops). But this system was inconvenience to the ryots. The Irwin Canal ryots felt the heavy burden of contribution and were also not happy with the block system.

H Honnaiah (Induval village near Mandya) and Hounaganahalli Puttannaiah met H.K. Veeranna Gowda (Maddur) to take lead in the ryots agitation. They formed an association under the leadership of H.K. Veeranna Gowda. The deputation of ryots met the Dewan in October 1931 and represented their grievances. As nothing came out of it the ryots again decided to meet the Dewan in Bangalore personally to get their grievances redressed.

H.K. Veeranna Gowda and his friends decided to visit all the taluks and villages of the Irwin Canal area and explained the ryots about their problems. They conducted several meetings. The first meeting took place at Mattitaleshwara Temple premises (Mallavalli Taluk) from there the meetings were held at Chikka Arasinakere, Gejjalagere, Gowdagere, Holalu, Keregodu, Mandya, Maddur, Malavalli,

Srirangapattana, French Rocks (now Pandavapura) and explained the iyots about their problems and decided to go on Jatha to Bangalore to meet the Dewan personally and submit their memorandum regarding their grievances. Before going on Jatha, the leaders of the ryots wrote a letter to Dewan stating that, about 10,000 ryots wanted to meet Dewan personally at Bangalore to get their grievances redressed. For that, Dewan's Personal Secretary advised the ryots that 10,000 ryots need not come to Bangalore. The leaders can come with limited ryots and meet Dewan on 4th January 1932 at about 2:00 PM at Athara Kacheri.⁴

After getting letter from the Dewan, H.K. Veerarma Gowda discussed with other leaders and made some rules and regulations and also some disciplines to be followed during Jatha' to Bangalore. It was as follows:

- 1) The Irwin Canal area ryots decided to go on Jatha from each village.
- 2) They decided to take one or two bullock carts from each village along with food grains, fuel, utensils etc required for 8 days.
- 3) They should walk on the left side of the road and should form a line of two persons and the line was to be expanded to a distance of 2 kilometers and without giving any trouble to the cars, buses, lorries etc.
- 4) They should not leave the rows and should not spoil the road side⁵

These were printed in a pamphlet form and distributed in all the towns and villages of the Irwin canal area. The leaders requested the ryots to assemble near Kodehalli (near Maddur). As a result 4,000 ryots of Irwin Canal area decided to go on a Jatha to Bangalore, a distance of 50 kilometers by walk on 31st December 1931 and reached Bangalore on the morning of 4th January 1932. It was remarkable for the discipline, the traffic and sanitary rules it observed on the way to Bangalore. The officials were struck by the peaceful converging of a large number of ryots to Bangalore and the ryots assembled before the Athara Kacheri.

At the request of H.K. Veeranna Gowda, the Dewan came down from his office and met the ryots. The ryots presented the signed representations to a Dewan. Veeranna Gowda explained the difficulties the ryots. The Dewan agreed for some concession aid promised to visit the spot and examine other demands of the ryots.⁶ However the Dewan permitted the ryots to pay the contribution in 12 years instead of 10.

Dewan's Visit to Mandya

The Irwin Canal ryots held a number of meetings among themselves for mutual consultations to make proper representations to the Government about their difficulties. But the District Magistrate prohibited such meetings in the area. In June 1932 when the Representative Assembly was in session. H.K. Veeranna Gowda had organized a meeting of the ryots at Mysore on 8th June, 1932, with the intention to give facts and figures on the hardships of the ryots to the members of the Assembly.⁷

The Dewan visited Mandya on 7 July, 1932 and had personal knowledge of the magnitude of the genuine difficulties faced by the ryots and to consider the way to overcome the difficulties. The ryots demanded that instead of dividing the land into three blocks, it should be divided into two blocks and allow them to grow wet crops in one block and garden crops in another. The demand was fully examined and the officials expressed that the division of land into two blocks would render the block system meaningless. Though the problem could not be resolved, the Dewan's visit enabled him to understand the problems of the ryots. Though the Dewan appeared to be flexible in his attitude, the officials were bent upon implementing the triennial block system.

Due to the above facts, even after protest for a long time, Government did not consider the problems of the ryots. So the ryots refused to use the canal water for irrigation. The canal water was wasted for 3 to 4 months without use. Government tried many methods to convince the ryots to cultivate their lands. Firstly they tried to convince Veeranna Gowda. But it was not successful. The Officials tried another method and met some of the members of the ryots family whose husbands or sons involved in some of the court cases.

The Government promised them that they will cancel all the cases against them if they agreed to cultivate their lands by using canal water. Secondly official met some of the ryots who had taken loans from the Government for cultivation and they did not pay it back for a long time, and also some patels and Shanbhogs, who did not pay the revenue collected from ryots to the Government, and also those ryots who submitted application for the loans for agricultural purpose. The officials explained them that, if they agreed to use canal water for irrigation, the Government promised to help them.⁸ And those ryots who agreed for this, the Government supplied iron plough, modern irrigation equipments, good seeds and fertilizers. The Government also helped the ryots for cultivating their lands. The ryots also started sowing groundnut, paddy and sugar cane and got bumper crops. The Government itself harvested these crops and took portion of crops towards the loans and the remaining amount was distributed among the ryots. After seeing this, the remaining ryots turned against Veeranna Gowda for their failure to use canal water and irrigate their lands. Finally the ryots agreed to use canal water and such undertaking was given to the Government, In this way the agitation of the Irwin canal ryots came to an end.

Notes & References

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8. Dr. K. Veerathappa, op'.cit..