Chapter 4

The Regional Elements in Basavaraj Naikar’s

The Queen of Kittur

Basavaraj Naikar, one of the best known regional fiction writers of South India specializes in historical fiction. His novel on Babasaheb of Naragund is already well-known. The present novel is about the queen of Kittur called Rani Chennamma. She happens to be the first woman to have fought against the British East India Company before Jhansirani Laxmibai (who too hailed from the nearby Kolhapur).

As we can easily understand, the Company ruled India for two hundred years, subjugating the warring princes. They used the policy of divide and rule. Later, they used the policy of doctrine of lapse – as Lord Dalhousie expedited it rapidly. They expedited the Disarmment Act. They treated our princes derogatively. This is the reason why Basavaraj Naikar wrote these historical narratives with much care and pride for their rehabilitation.

Dr. Naikar feels that even the regional literature on the Queen of Kittur is shabby. He writes, “I, therefore, thought of writing a historical novel on the heroic Rani Chennamma in a systematic way.” (Naikar Queen vii)

Australian writer Tom Gibson’s novel A Soldier of India on Jhansirani Laxmibai should have inspired him for this.

In writing the present novel, The Queen of Kittur, Naikar has drawn the raw material from the historical sources like monographs, letters and official records of the East India Company, folk songs and even oral information that are available to him in Dharwad region.
The Queen of Kittur begins with a folksong that praises Raja Mallasarja of Kittur state. Once the music event comes to a finale, the Raja orders his Diwan Gurusiddhappa to make payments and gifts to the gifted singers.

Raja Mallasarja was a very devout person and patronized all the religious institutions like temples, monasteries and mosques. Kallumath Monastery was known as Savira Samstanmath as it had under its control a thousand monasteries scattered all over Kittur kingdom.

One day, Raja Mallasarja visits Kallumath monastery and speaks to its head His Holiness Prabhuswami. A junior swami by name Madivala utters the immortality of life when one thinks of God instead of king. In fact, in response to the king’s magnanimity, Madiwal asks for a fund for regular dasoh. The author describes the king as a benign ruler:

Raja Mallasarja was a great connoisseur of the things of beauty in life. He used to wear fine clothes and therefore his wardrobe included elegant robes made in different parts of the country. He was also fond of beautiful plants, trees and flowers. That is why he had developed a botanical garden in Devarasigihalli. That garden contained a large variety of medicinal plants, umbrageous trees, and colourful and fragrant flowers. (Queen 4)

The king cared for the people. He would expedite good projects and management in terms of polity, economy and society. He conducted a grand dasara festival as much as Sravan month programmes for supporting Virashaiva religion. He donated villages like Chitradurga, Shirahatti and Bidarkal (Garag) to great saints.

Raja Mallasarja’s great diwan, Gurusiddhappa Charantimath hailed from Shapur village (now part of Belgaum). Raja Mallasarja speaks this to his diwan:
“I am worried about the incessant battles between Tippu Sultan and the Peshwas. Practically there has been no peace in the Deccan region. On the other hand, the Company Sarkar has been growing more and more powerful. We’ll be swallowed by the demon called Ingrezi government. We cannot be easy victims to the British demon. That’s why I have been planning of organizing the Desais, chieftains and kings of the Deccan including the Raja of Kolhapur. We have to do this secretly, without giving any clue to the British fellows. Once we are united, we can fight the foreign enemies successfully. (Queen 5)

This description best describes of regionalism as a political term. Raja Mallasarja’s tour for political mileage thus comes alive:

Raja Mallasarja mounted the white stallion and settled himself properly on the saddle. Diwan Gurusiddappa and other Sardars of his retinue also jumped on to their horses and waited for their raja to lead them. As Mallasarja spurred his horse, it began to move slowly, clip-clop, clip-clop. The other horses followed it, raising cloud of dust behind them. They climbed the hills and descended into the valleys and crossed the rivers. when the sun reached the zenith of the sky, they felt a bit tired and hungry. They, therefore, rested under the shade of trees near a large tank and had their lunch of sweet balls, rotis, rice and curds. Then they rested on the mattresses for an hour and had a brief nap. (Queen 7)

As was the order of the day, the feudal system prevailed. So Raja Mallasarja had his own gruese with the underlords like the Desai of Belavadi. Once he suppressed the chief of Belavadi from whose family his own wife Queen Rudramma hailed. That was the reason why Rudramma was a little sad lately.
Now Raja Mallasarja’s party rested outside the village of Kakati with the intention to convince the underlords for the sake of facing Tippu and the Peswas on one hand, and the Company on the other hand. The history of Kakati is known for Chennamma’s life as Naikar recounts:

Kakati was a small princely state near Belgaum. Dhulappagowda Desai and Padmavati lived there in peace and prosperity. In 1778, a baby girl was born to the couple, who were overjoyed by the event and named the baby Chennamma. The astrologers of the court studied the time of the birth of the baby; cast her horoscope and forecast that she would grow into a dynamic and celebrated lady. As the couple had no male progeny, they wanted to bring up their daughter as if she were a son. (Queen 8)

Chennamma as is known in the region, grew into a fiery and pious Lingayat princess. Raja Mallasarja noticed the beauty of the woods. He soon found a group of villagers, imploring for the killing of a tiger which devoured two people recently. The king then decided to hunt it with the help of his select soldiers. Mallasarja nay killed the tiger with an arrow shot, but a heroic young lady, none but the princess Chennamma, also had shot at it, much earlier than him. The beast fell. The two met therefore. Raja Mallasarja spoke to Chennamma, falling in love with her.

A messenger from Dulappagouda Desai arrived there with an invitation. When they reached the mansion of Sardar Desai, they were received with cordiality. They were all conducted to the dining hall and served with a dinner.

Both Raja Mallasarja and his Diwan rested. Sardar Desai who was happy about the guest asked about the purpose of his journey.

“You see, sir,” continued Raja Mallasarja, “the people of Company Sarkar have been trying to swallow our states like a cobra swallowing the poor frogs. If we remain idle now, there is no doubt they will conquer all
of us and reduce us to slaves or nonentities. It is high time for us to be united and fight against the common enemy, I mean the foreigners, like the British, the French and the Portuguese. You have to extend your full cooperation with us by sparing your army whenever we need it. Likewise I have been requesting the other Rajas and Desais for their sympathy and cooperation.”  

(Queen 15)

Now Sardar Desai realized the gravity of situation and wished to contribute his mite for the mighty cause of fighting against the vilayati people. He promised Raja Mallasarja, “What you have been doing is a great adventure indeed, and I give you my word of honour that I shall offer all the possible help that I can.”  

(Queen, 15)

The chiefs turned to private affairs. Raja Mallasarja spoke of the previous day’s hunting with Chennamma. Diwan Gurusiddhappa spoke of the Raja’s love for her. The Diwan requested the Desai to marry her to him. Nonetheless, the Desaini, seconded by Chennamma, did not approve the marriage, because it was a second marriage. The Desai tried to understand the problem from his wife’s side. He said, “Don’t worry about that at all. There’ll be no such problems for our daughter simply because the first wife has no issues. Our daughter will be not only the wife of a ruler but also the mother of a would-be ruler. After all, Mallasarja is a Raja. And a Raja can marry any number of wives only because he can afford to do so. In my opinion, we cannot think of a better husband for our daughter.”  

(Queen 18)

Diwan Gurusiddhappa was very happy to have a positive answer from the Desai family and said, “We are indeed very happy about your approval.” Raja Mallasarja felt very happy about the whole episode.
After a few weeks, the wedding between Raja Mallasarja and Chennamma took place at Kakati with great pomp. The Desai of Kakati and his Desaini shed tears of joy at the wedding of their beloved daughter Chennamma who looked like Goddess Rati herself. Raja Mallasarja looked like Lord Kama himself in human shape. Then all the folks waved arati in front of the newly wedded couple and blessed them.

Chennamma, who had become the second wife of Raja Mallasarja, was now to return to Kittur along with her parents according to Virasaiva convention. The Desai’s family bid her a farewell with arati and the following song:

The Banyan tree has no blossoms,
Borrowing money has no end,
The Hawthorne tree has no shade,
Daughter, the parental home is not permanent.
Revere your parents-in-law,
The neighbouring people around,
And the king, who rules over the kingdom,
My daughter, this is how
You should live in your in-laws’ house. (Queen 21)

Once Chennamma reached the palace of Kittur it was a festival itself. There was a lot of jubilation. Rudramma, the senior wife of Raja Mallasarja clasped Chennamma affectionately and led her towards her lord. Raja Mallasarja was feeling excited. Chennamma saluted her lord by touching her forehead to his feet.

Raja Mallasarja blessed her and there was sobhana. The king said, ‘Now you have filled my home!’ Then Mallasarja clasped her. As he entered the world of ecstasy he forgot the mundane world around him.
Chennamma was absorbed into Raja Mallasarja’s household so affectionately. As she was extraordinarily fair, Raja Mallasarja was attached to her and used to call her Rani Chennagowri. Every day she would learn some detail or the other about the history of Kittur dynasty. One day Rani Rudramma narrated Chennamma the Kittur history:

“Our Raja Mallasarja happens to be the adopted son the Virappa Desai of Kittur throne. He hailed from a relative family of a nearby village called Bogur. He was only seventeen years old when he occupied the throne of Kittur kingdom. Before Kittur had its present name, it was called Gijaganaguda i.e., a nest of bottle-birds. Since the capital was shifted from Sampagaon to the present place, it was called Kittur, i.e., a shifted city. Hardly had three years elapsed after he assumed charge of the Kingdom when he had to fight with Tippu Sultan’s assistant Badrul Zamal Khan, who tried to capture our fort at Desanur. You may not believe the fact that I also participated in that. Defeated by Raja Mallasaraja, Badrul Zamal Khan went back crestfallen. But the vindictive Tippu Sultan came back again with Badrul Zamal Khan and defeated us and took our Raja as a captive. They kept him in prison at Kapaladurga near Periya-pattana. Do you know his age then? He was hardly twenty. He spent nearly three years there. And I was leading a hellish life here at Kittur. But anyway, after the lapse of those three years, Raja Mallasarja cleverly escaped from the prison and went to Coimbatore, which was under the British rule then. He disguised himself as an ordinary person and travelled from place to place, suffering in various ways. At last he reached Babaleswara in the Bijapur region, which was under the Mughals. As he was seen by my relatives there, he was given shelter by them. It is through them that he learnt the development of the kingdom of Kittur. As soon as our people here at Kittur came to hear the news of Raja
Mallasarja’s presence at Babaleswara, they went there and brought him here. They arranged a grand reception to him and celebrated his homecoming. Then he took the reigns of administration in his hands once again.” (Queen 25).

Rani Chennamma felt proud of Kittur.

The fort of Kittur was very impressive. Its construction started in 1676 by Raja Allappagowda, and it was completed after 40 years in 1716 by Chikkamallappa Desai. The fort, circular in plan, consisted of double walls separated by moats on the outer sides, with semicircular bastions on the exterior of outer wall. Originally the main gateway was on the east, approached by the causeway across the outer moat known as Ane Honda.

Rani Rudramma described Chennamma all the details pertaining to feudal chieftainhood. She described the palace, walls, moats, durbar hall, dining hall, stables, quarters for officers and soldiers.

More ingenious than all these was the excellent water supply system from one common source to the whole palace. In the centre of the open back verandah there was a well. Another interesting feature of the palace was the excellent garden provided with cisterns and fountains. The whole palace was of ashlar masonry built with hematite quart, rubble and dressed stone and strong slaked lime mortar. The pillars were constructed with circular discs, greenish stones, placed one on another. The ashlar masonry and arched niches indicated the combination of the Muslim and Maratha architectural styles. On the front porch of the palace the Nandi Dwaja fluttered. The flag had the picture of a white bull sitting in front of Ishwara. In the real world the bull symbolized agriculture, which is the foundation of all culture.

In 1802, Raja Mallasarja saw a lot of political trubulence around his kingdom. He used to hear the news of countless clashes between the Company
people and the local kings. One day Diwan Gurusiddhappa asked Raja Mallasarja,

“Sarkar, the Peshwas have been quite cordial with the British since they signed Srirangapatna Agreement in 1792. Now we have heard reports that General Wellesley is going from Srirangapatna to Pune to reinstate Bajirao Peshwa. Several estate holders along the route have been assisting Lord Wellesley with soldiers and equipments. Should we also contribute our mite to their services just to have their goodwill?”

Raja Mallasarja thought deeply for a moment and said, “Yes, Diwan sir, we must extend whatever little help we are capable of, to the British and please see what we can spare for their help.” (Queen 29)

The next day Diwan Gurusiddhappa and other important members of the court followed Raja Mallasarja to the camp where General Wellesley stayed. After an hour a servant came and told Raja Mallasarja, ‘His Excellency has permitted you to see him.’ Raja Mallasarja, Diwan Gurusiddhappa and his military Commander were conducted by the servant into Lord Wellesley’s chamber. Raja Mallasarja did not know enough English to converse with the Company. He had, therefore, taken with him a gentleman called Rachappa, a bilingual translator.

Lord Wellesley said, “We are very glad to meet you, Raja Mallasarja. Please be seated. By the way, what brings you here?”

Then Raja Mallasarja said “We have come here just to pay our respects, Your Excellency.”

Then Lord Wellesley said “That’s very kind of you, Raja Mallasarja of Kittur. Thank you very much.” (Queen 30)
Lord Wellesley asked Raja Mallasarja for some space. The latter agreed to spare the fort in Sangolli for keeping the Company ammunition.

Then Lord Wellesley said, “You are under the Peshwa dominion, aren’t you?”

Raja Mallasarja replied immediately, “Yes, Your Excellency. We are quite independent, but we have been giving an annuity of Rs.60,000 every year to the Peshwas. But we would like to have our autonomy as usual. Your Excellency must help us.”

Lord Wellesley understood the subtle problem and said, “Don’t you worry, Raja Mallasarja, we’ll see that you enjoy the autonomy of a tributary prince in future. We shall speak to Bajirao about this when we meet him next.” *(Queen 31)*

Then Raja Mallasarja, Diwan Gurusiddhappa and his companions walked out of the Governor-General’s chamber. Thus Kittur earned the Company’s goodwill.

In 1804, Bajirao Peshwa felt rather uneasy when some brahmins of Kittur explained to him about the growing popularity of Raja Mallasarja. These Brahmins had gone all the way from Kittur to Pune to slander the Raja of Kittur.

Bajirao Peshwa knew that Raja Mallasaraja was a bold but well-mannered king. Yet he grew alert about the possibility of some danger from him. He began to imagine that Raja Mallasarja might be a potential future enemy. He called his Diwan and consulted them about Mallasarja. After the secret meeting, he decided to write a letter to Lord Wellesley to dethrone Raja Mallasarja by cancelling the autonomy of the kingdom. Accordingly he dictated a letter to his clerk and handed it over to a messenger. The messenger rode his horse towards Calcutta and relayed the letter to the next messenger going to
Calcutta. Finally the letter was delivered to Lord Wellesley. Bajirao Peshwa and his courtiers waited eagerly for reply.

Nearly a week elapsed. At last a messenger returned from Calcutta and handed over a letter to the Diwan of Bajirao Pehswa.

Bajirao said, “See, how prompt is the Governor-General in replying. Let’s see how he plans to dethrone the Raja of Kittur. The letter was as follows:

I beg leave to deplore a contest with him (the Raja of Kittur), excepting in case of very evident necessity in which the whole force of the Government can be employed. Like Wynad, Coorg, Ballum, Bendur and Soonda, Kittur is situated in, and immediately to, the eastward of the range of Western Ghats. It is, equally with them, difficult for troops; it is inhabited by a similar race of people and the operations of war in it would possibly be attended with the same losses and disasters…. The country is situated on a defenceless point of the Company’s frontier. The fort of Haliyal has no garrison because I have been obliged to draw the troop from there to complete the corps at Goa; and the possession of that fort would give the Raja of Kittur a secure communication and entrance into Canara and Bidnur, both provinces entirely defenceless; and the former, upon the resources of which Bombay, Poon and the army; depend entirely for subsistence…. These facts, however well-founded, are not known and point out clearly the necessity of avoiding to attempt to dispossess the Raja of Kittur of his country till adequate means can be found to insure the object and to guard against the Desai of annoying us which he has in his power.” (Queen 33)

When the translator explained the contents of the letter Bajirao and his Diwan grew pale with disappointment. Then Bajirao consoled himself by saying, ‘Let’s teach him a lesson at the proper time.’
It was in the year 1809 Bajirao Peshwa realized the essential goodness of Raja Mallasarja. He was forced to revise his opinion about him because of Lord Wellesley’s good opinion. He, therefore sent word to Raja Mallasarja for an agreement. Raja Mallasarja accordingly went to Pune along with his Diwan.

The meeting was held in big a hall. The officers of Kittur and those of Bajirao were working out the details of revenue, land and property. At last the Diwan of Bajirao Pehswa read out the agreement:

“In accordance with the agreement between His Highness Bajirao Pehswa of Pune and Raja Mallasarja of Kittur, the latter is allowed to enjoy the freedom and full autonomy for his kingdom on condition that he would pay to the former an amount of one lakh seventy thousand rupees every year. He should be loyal to the Peshwa.” (Queen 34)

Then both signed the documents.

The Marathas flattered Raja Mallasarja remembering his courage in escaping from Tippu Sultan. They confirmed upon his the title ‘Pratap Rao.’

Raja Mallasarja returned to Kittur. Rani Rudramma and Rani Chennamma received him with pride. They waved arati. That evening they arranged a special puja in the palace temple. They invited a few jangamas and offered them a special feast.

The next morning, Raja Mallasarja sent for Diwan Gurusiddhappa and he began:

“Diwan sir, I am thinking of commemorating the title ‘Pratap Rao’ conferred upon me. I would like to have a fort erected at Nandagad. We can name it as Pratapagad Fort which became an international fort. We entertain the merchants from Arabia and Europe via Goa. This centre
should be protected against looting by vandals and robbers. We need a garrison against Eurasia through the Western Ghats. *(Queen 35)*

Around 1810 Raja Mallasarja had reached the height of popularity in the neighbouring ones. He was a great patron of arts. The author describes Poet Amriteswara’s recitations at court. The poem was called *Mallendra Monasollasa Mallatarangini*. The other court poets and artists like Kolli Rangacharya, Vengi Chennabasappa, Kasiraja, Vararudrakavi, Nilakantharya, Magundi Basava, Sivalingasastry and Rudragowda, who understood the stylistic features, the beauty of imagery and the mellifluent language better than the other members of the audience, were nodding their heads. Occasionally Diwan Gurusiddhappa would look at Raja Mallasarja’s face and notice that he was beaming with satisfaction.

The junior Madivalaswami happened to be five years younger than Prince Sivalingarudrasarja. Both were classmates studying under the tutelage of Vengi Channabasavasastri and Kolli Rangacharya. Madivalaswami made rapid progress in his studies and became an expert in *Vedanta*. That was the reason why he had become a darling of H.H. Prabhuswami and Raja Mallasarja. Prince Sivabasavasarja (Chennamma’s son) liked him for his intelligence, but Prince Sivalingarudrasarja disliked him. Madivalaswami developed miraculous powers at a very young age. Even Shri Chidambara Dikshita of Gulahosur, who was about forty years senior to him, was attracted by his occult powers. H.H. Prabhuswami ordained Madivalaswami according to Virasaiva custom.

Boy Madivalaswami never used to go to the palace along with H. H. Prabhuswami on account of Bapusaheb’s (Sivalingarudrasarja) jealousy. But one day he volunteered to accompany him. His Holiness Prabhuswami felt very happy about it and took the boy with him. When both reached the palace, the doors were opened to H.H. Prabhuswami but closed to Madivalaswami. Hence Madivalaswami had to wait outside. Soon H.H. Prabhuswami complained to the
King about Bapusaheb’s jealousy. Madivalaswami for this foretold his master about a bad end for the kingdom.

The Raja with a serious look on his face said, “My dear ladies and gentlemen, I had not thought that the matter would become so serious. It is very unfortunate that the holy worship of the royal guru has been stopped so unexpectedly. First, our reverend guru’s anger culminated in a curse on us. Secondly, we insulted the junior pontiff, Madivalaswami. Thirdly, Rani Chennamma’s vow of receiving grace and prasada from the guru every day has been terminated abruptly. Fourthly, our whole kingdom is put to shame on account of Bapusaheb’s mischief. And fifthly … fifthly” Raja Mallasarja could not continue his talk. *(Queen 40)*

Later the king met the pontiff apologizing. He raised a tunnel up to the monastery for receiving prasad and tirtha.

Bajirao Peshwa had arranged a sojourn to the southern part of India. He had come with all his entourage of infantry and cavalry. After visiting the places of his choice he felt like having the darshan of Lord Kartikeya, the famous deity situated at Sandur. He passed through Gudur, Kampli, Hosapete, Bagilukote and Gurlahosur. He used to send for his subordinate chiefs and Desais, who would rush to meet him to pay homage and gifts. When he reached Bailahongala, he remembered Raja Mallasarja.

Bajirao Peshwa ascertained information about Raja Mallasarja. The spies said that Mallasarja was too popular which made the Peshwa envious. Allappagowda Desai of Shegunashi was feeling very restless and angry with Raja Mallasarja, who had refused to adopt the former’s son for the kingdom of Kittur. He wanted to take revenge against Raja Mallasarja at the appropriate time. Now when he heard the news that Bajirao Peshwa had camped near his
place, he met Bajirao Peshwa, and said that Mallasarja may defy the Peshwa’s overlordship one day. Bajirao’s jealousy of Mallasarja Desai was aggravated by Allappagowda’s malicious interpretation of Mallasarja’s popularity.

One day Saidanasab of Amatur requested the Diwan of Kittur for granting him to renovate a mosque in Kittur. Next day when the Durbar met, Diwan Gurusiddhappa brought Saidansab’s request to the notice of Raja Mallasarja. But Karbhari Mallappasetty was favourably disposed to Saidansab. Later Saidanasab requested Rani Chennamma who asked Mallappasetty to grant a sum of money for the repair of mosque. But the minister Mallappasetti refused it out of enmity. Rani Chennamma listened to their argument. Then she said,

“What you say may be true politically. But the present case is not a political one. Saidansab happens to be a subject of our kingdom. He is asking for some help for the renovation of the mosque. He is not asking for any personal favour. We cannot generalize from a few isolated cases and hate the entire community of Mussalmans.”

Mallappasetty said, “Rani Sarkar, whatever you may say, it is simply not agreeable to us.” (Queen 48)

Finally Rani Chennamma helped the Muslim leader Rs.10,000/- from her purse.

Raja Mallasarja sat on his throne in the Durbar Hall along with his Diwan and officers. He discussed about whether he should meet Bajirao Peshwa. The ministers said he should.

One day Raja Mallasarja took an entourage for meeting Bajirao Peshwa. But he could not be traced for a week. Gurusiddhappa found the news that Allappagouda Desaid of Segunashi died soon after. Diwan Gurusiddhappa
reached Pune to know that Bajirao Peshwa had put Raja Mallasarja in prison because of both envy and fear of him. So Gurusiddhappa assured the Peshwa that Kittur would pay him the yearly annuity as usual, but it could not maintain the Peshwa’s army in Kittur. The Peshwa imprisoned him on some flimsy ground too. Then he was released. The entourage visited the Temple of Edur, and waited at Arabhavi for the Rani Sarkar for receiving.

The Rani Sarkar received the king in bad health. Raja Mallasarja wore in a wan smile and with a wave of his hands tried to console them, “Don’t be sad. It’s a natural law that whoever is born must die someday. I know you are all equally able to protect Kittur kingdom. Gurusiddhappa, you are an able and experienced Diwan. Our Prince Sivalingarudrasarja is still young, though very able. You appoint him as my heir and guide him along the right path. Prince Sivalinga, you must treat your mothers with respect and see that they lack nothing in life.” (Queen 55)

Later the royal entourage returned to Kittur; and the Raja’s home-coming was celebrated by firing 34 cannons because the Raja had ruled for 34 years.

That night Raja Mallasarja took rest. In the next morning he was not feeling better. But, however, after his bath he went with his entire family to Chowkimath Monastery and rendered a special puja to the family deity, Lord Gurusiddha. He had a sense of spiritual fulfilment.

A few days later, the Raja held the two hands of the prince and put them into those of the Diwan and said, “Gurusiddhappa, I have given charge of the prince to you. You should enthrone him and guide him like a father.”

The court physician checked the pulse beat of Raja Mallasarja every now and then, and grew more worried. On Sunday evening, Raja Mallasarja entered into an unconscious state. The royal priest began to chant panchakshari mantra.
The Ranis and the courtiers sat through the entire night watching their beloved Raja. Finally Raja Mallasarja breathed his last.

Rani Rudramma and Rani Chennamma lifted their voices and cried so piteously that it rent the hearts of all. The entire populace mourned the Raja’s death. Fifty cannons were fired from the top of the palace by way of respect for the departed Raja.

The Sardars, the Goudas and the Desais rushed on horsebacks and bullock carts to Kittur with their choruses of bhajans. The funeral procession reached the precincts of Kallumath Monastery. Rani Rudramma and Rani Chennamma offered their tearful salutation to their lord by touching his feet with foreheads. There was a sudden outburst of wailing. The priest slid the body of Raja Mallasarja into a shroud of white cotton cloth into the grave.

The atmosphere at Kittur was very grave. For a couple of days, the courtiers and the citizens sat in their houses mourning the death of their beloved king. The business slackened. The farmers forgot to cultivate their lands for days. Rani Rudramma was deeply steeped in sorrow. It was a great task for Rani Chennamma to pull on everything.

All of them decided for the Prince’s coronation. The news was sent to 800 villages of Kittur kingdom. Prince Sivalingarudrasarja got ready for it. All the courtiers and citizens flocked to the Durbar Hall. The prince entered the hall. He saluted his mother Rani Chennamma. His Holiness Prabhuswami, Sardar Gurusiddhappa and others had gathered to bless the young prince. All the Sardars, Desais and Gowdas were present. Saradar Gurusiddhappa placed the golden crown on the head of Prince Sivalingarudrasarja. He presented the ancestral sword to him. H.H. Prabhuswami officiated the ceremony. The prince repeated the oath, “I, Sivalingarudrasarja, who am crowned as the Raja of Kittur kingdom, swear by Lord Gurusiddha that I shall serve as the servant of
my subjects; that I believe in the ideal that honour is great than my life and that I shall be ever ready to serve and die for my kingdom. (Queen 64)

Then Sardar Gurusiddhappa uttered: “Victory to Raja Sivalingarudrasarja!” Then the whole assembly repeated it twice. Then Raja Sivalingarudrasarja slowly turned towards the throne, bowed down to it and ascended it ceremonially. The teenager Rani Viravva felt proud of him.

Although Sivalingarudrasarja was junior to Sivabasavasarja, he was the son of the senior Rani, Rudramma. People had started gossiping about Rani Chennamma’s intension of enthroning her own son Sivabasavasarja. Rani Chennamma, therefore, put an end to the gossip by keeping her promise to her late husband. She arranged the ritual of Bhairava Kankana for her son, Sivabasavasarja, immediately after the enthronement of Prince Sivalingarudrasarja.

As part of the coronation ceremony, there followed a variety of entertainment programmes. The bards of palace recited the glorious history of Kittur dynasty. After the programme all these skilled artists and soldiers were amply rewarded.

His Holiness Prabhuswami expired a month after the demise of Raja Mallasarja. Consequently, the junior Madivalaswami was deeply saddened. Personal envy and calumny are too common with kings. The new Raja drove away Madivalaswami and appointed Shri Gurusiddhaswami as the pontiff of Kallumath. Madiwaleswami became a wandering monk.

After the demise of Raja Mallasarja, the administration of Kittur underwent a good deal of change. Although Sivalingarudrasarja was a good man, he was too young to understand the subtlety and complexity of human nature. In the morning hours, Raja Sivalingarudrasarja would attend the tuition class conducted by Chennabasappa Vengi. The scholar used to instruct the
young Raja in Nayyayika school of logical philosophy in particular. Similarly the Raja acquired the knowledge of Virasaiva philosophy.

Every day Venkatarao and Mallappasetty would meet the young Raja Sivalingarudrasarja and try to impress him about their own knowledge of administration. The young Raja could not see through their wiles. The two ministers began degeneration in the royal household. Mallappasetty, the Treasurer did all the bad things. One day, Gurusiddhappa told Rani Chennamma that he would like to retire. The queen said no.

Raja Sivalingarudrasarja had heard rumours that the relationship between the Company and the Peshwas was growing bleak. He remained rather nonchalant about them. It was the year 1818, when he was relaxing with his philosophical studies.

Then Diwan Gurusiddhappa alerted him about the possible battle between the Company and the Peshwa at Belgaum. Diwan continued, “Sarkar, this is not the full story. We have received a letter from His Excellency Elphinstone, the Governor, asking for help with men and materials in the case of a fight with the Peshwas.” *(Queen 71)*

In the evening Rani Chennamma sent for Sivalingarudrasaraja. The Raja sat in front of his mother. All of them decided to help the Company against the Marathas. Dr. Naikar describes the battle at Belgaum:

The soldiers of Kittur rode with their *saranjam* to Belgaum and joined the British army under the leadership of Brigadier-General Thomas Munro. The soldiers of Kittur were surprised at the sight of howitzers, the battering train two iron 18 pounders, and four brass 12 pounders and other ammunition erected at different angles facing the fort of Belgaum which was under the Peshwa control. The battle started and continued for nearly twenty days. The soldiers of Kittur contributed their
mite to the British army. At last the Peshwas were defeated by the British. The *Bhagava Zenda* (the Peshwa banner) was lowered and the Union Jack was hoisted on the fort of Belgaum. *(Queen 74)*.

The Company won the war of 1818 and they founded Bombay Presidency. The Company thanked the Kittur king, who however lost his brother Sivabasavasarja.

When the army of Kittur was sent back to Kittur by Munro, the soldiers returned to their kingdom with mixed feelings. Rani Chennamma, Rani Janakibai, Rani Rudramma and the other members of the royal family mourned the death of Prince Sivabasavasarja.

Brigadier-General Munro moved with his army towards Bijapur. But before that he sent an official message to Raja Sivalingarudrasarja to keep the fort of Belgaum for themselves as a reward. Raja Sivalingarudrasarja, his courtiers and the dignitaries of Kittur were very happy to have vanquished the Peshwas at Belgaum and earned the goodwill of the Company. They thought that their future would be bright.

In the fourth Maratha war, it was the Company rulers who achieved victory over the Peshwas. Consequently they annexed the Peshwa Kingdom to the East India Company. They arrested the Peshwa, King Bajirao II, and kept him as a prisoner in Biruru village of Brahmavarta area. They fixed his yearly pension at Rs.800,000 per annum. As a result all the native chiefs, who were under the Peshwa control, came under the control of the Company.

General Thomas Munro one day wrote to King Shivarudrasarja to participate in the meeting at Belgaum. The king, accordingly, sent both Mallappasetty and Venkatarao. Both signed various documents with little thought. Thomas Munro asked their king to sign a *Sannada*. The two on return read out Munro’s letter:
We have no objection to your retention of the land that you have acquired from the Peshwas. We shall honour your status quo as a token of our thanks to you for your cooperation with us in our fight with the Peshwas, we shall exempt you from the payment of one year’s annuity out of two years’ which you owed to the Peshwa. We recognize you as a tributary prince and offer you an annual gift worth Rs.3,950. An annual pesheesh of shapoor rupees one lakh seventy-five thousand will be taken from you and the Samsthan continued to your children and their children (“Putrapoutra”: from generation to generation).”

This Sannad is signed by Thomas Munro.

Mallappasetty continued, “Another important item of the agreement is that we can do away with 473 cavalry, 1000 infantry kept by the Peshwas at Khanapur taluka and Rs.25,000. Instead of that, we have to give up the Khanapur taluka to the Company Sarkar for their use.” (Queen 80)

Raja Sivalingarudrasarja was overjoyed to learn the new terms of the agreement.

Gurusiddhappa said to Rani Chennamma that the most important items of the treaty are that Kittur has to pay the annuity of Rs.1,75,000 to the Company Sarkar and give up Khanapur taluka.

The Rani’s face turned red with anger. She said, “What’s this? We have not won our freedom at all. We have only exchanged our masters. Can we not live independently?” (Queen, 81)

Rani Rudramma was very unhappy about her son’s helping the Company against the Peshwas. She thought that the honour and glory of Kittur kingdom would diminish due to his immature political behavior.
Rani Viravva, the daughter of the Desai of Shivgutti, was only a minor girl of eleven years when she was married to Raja Sivalingarudrasarja. As she had not matured yet, her husband could not have a normal marital life with her. He, therefore, began to take more and more interest in the cook, Mahantavva. He did not have his food served to him by either Rani Viravva or Rani Chennamma, but by the cook, Mahantavva. This is a much needed comic relief in the narrative.

Mahantavva was a beautiful married woman of Gejji family of Nesaragi. She had quarreled with her husband and left him for good. Then she had come to Kittur and joined service as a cook in the palace. This false woman was dismissed later.

Once the people of the surrounding villages complained against the menace of wild animals in the forests of Balagunda, Huliyakattala and Handuru, and requested Raja Sivalingarudrasarja to kill them. The Raja thought it to be his duty to help the people. He did hunting and killed animals like wolves and panthers. There he met Thackeray and greeted him. The Raja felt extreme thirstiness; and drank Thackeray’s milk which was poisoned. The Raja fell unconscious.

That night Rani Viravva, Rani Chennamma and Rani Janakibai waited for Raja’s return to the palace late in the night and felt anxious. As they slept uneasily, they saw ominous dreams.

Once the Raja recovered from his illness, Raja Sivalingarudrasarja began to spend more and more time in the Company of Mallappasetty. One day he consulted Rani Chennamma to the effect that he would retire Gurusiddhappa as he had become old, and appoint Mallappasetty in his place. Rani Chennamma asked him not to do so.
One day Raja had high fever and he fell ill continuously. Once he said “Diwan Sir, I have a feeling that I won’t survive this strange disease. There are certain things in life, which are far beyond anybody’s control. We have got to simply accept them. What about the kingdom after my departure?” Diwan Gurusiddhappa said thoughtfully, “There’s no way other than adopting some boy, Sarkar.” (Queen 88)

The next morning Thackeray, the Collector of Dharwad, visited Kittur out of courtesy and enquired after the Raja’s health. Thackeray, who was a friend of the Kittur royal family right from Raja Mallasarja’s days, used to go for hunting in the nearby forests at Tegur. The Company doctor who examined Raja said that the Raja suffered from TB.

After a couple of days, the courtiers gathered in the Durbar Hall to discuss the future of Kittur kingdom. Rani Chennamma presided over the function. Diwan Gurusiddhappa said, “Gentlemen, you all know that the health of Raja Sivalingarudrasarja is deteriorating day by day and therefore we must do something for the heirship. Though the young Raja married thrice, the last wife being Rani Viravva, he could not unfortunately have any issues. Now the matter is open for discussion.” (Queen 100) Mallappasetty suggested that Kittur should seek Thackeray’s permission for adoption.

The Rani’s blood was up. She burst out, “Who’s that fellow called Thackeray? Mallappasetty sensed the Rani’s anger, but tried to argue a bit. “Rani Sarkar, don’t you remember that we have changed our allegiance from the Peshwas to the Company Sarkar?” (Queen 91) Rani Channamma said the Company won Khanapur from the Peshwas because of Kittur’s support. She ordered Mallappasetty to be careful.

The next day Raja Sivalingarudrasarja sent for his confidants. Konnur Mallappsetty, Kannur Virappasetty and Subedar Mallappasetty joined Sardar
Gurusiddhappa in the royal bedroom. Raja Sivalingarudrasarja said in a weak voice, “See, gentlemen, I have a feeling that I won’t survive this deadly disease. It is inevitable for me to adopt some boy from among our close relatives. You please go to your villages and bring a few suitable young boys so that I can select and adopt one of them for the throne of Kittur.” (Queen 92)

The under officers / ministers obeyed the Raja. They tried to find out a good Lingayat boy in villages like Marikatti, Shahapur, Murugod, Sindholi, Khodanapur and others. Diwan Gurusiddhappa brought eight boys, and the Raja tested them.

“Which boy did you select, Sarkar?” asked the Diwan.

The Raja sat upright against the pillow and counter-questioned, “What’s the name of the boy who selected the sword in the test, sir?”

“Oh, that is Master Sivalingappa, son of Balappagowda of Mastamaradi,” said the Diwan.

“I am really impressed by that boy. I would like to adopt him as my heir. We shall solemnize the adoption ceremony when I feel I am at the end of my life,” he said. (Queen 94)

Then the king dictated a letter for the adoption of a child as heir to the kingdom. He dictated one more letter to Thackeray as follows:

Being extremely ill and reduced I feel desirous to appoint an heir to the Samsthan and have to this end appointed and confirmed by seal, Mallasarja (the original name of which adopted son was Sivalingappa of Mastamaradi) as the Sir-Desai, Sir-Deshpande and Nadagowda of Hubballi, the Sir-Desai and Sir-Deshapande of Azumnagar suruff, Khanapur suruff, Chandgad suruff, Supa etc., to the Samsthan. It rests with you therefore in your goodness to continue him the Samsthan, which
has been enjoyed by my ancestors and myself by your liberality. (*Queen 96*)

On 11, September 1824, Raja Sivalingarudrasarja felt that his end was near. The entire morning, he brooded over the fate of Kittur. About 2 o’clock in the afternoon he sent for his Sardars just to have an exchange of views. As the news of his illness circulated everywhere, the ministers rushed to the palace to have his last darsan.

Soon Raja Sivalingarudrasarja passed away. Rani Chennamma, who saw the death of the Raja, fell upon his chest with a heart-rending cry, “How did you leave us all, my darling son?” Diwan Gurusiddhappa busied himself with all the formalities of the adoption ceremony. Soon all the people gathered in the Durbar Hall. Rani Chennamma, Rani Viravva and other womenfolk gathered on one side of the hall whereas the men-folk sat on the other side. Diwan Gurusiddhappa announced, “Brothers and sisters, as per the wish of the late Raja, we have adopted the boy Sivalingappa and renamed him as Sawai Mallasaraja II. He has been invested with the sovereign power over Kittur as the legal successor.” (*Queen 99*)

The next day Rani Chennamma called a meeting of all the courtiers. All the dignitaries, like Mallappasetty. Kannur Mallappa, Sardar Gurusiddhappa, Himmat Singh, Nursing Rao and Guruputra Virappa were all there. She said:

“Gentlemen, you all know that dark clouds have gathered upon the kingdom of Kittur. Sawai Mallasarja is still a slip of a boy. I, therefore, have to act as his guardian and virtually manage everything. But a mere woman that I am, I cannot go ahead without your help and cooperation. I, therefore, appeal to you to forget your individual differences and get united for the welfare on the kingdom. (*Queen 100*)
That day Sardar Mallappasetty and Konnur Mallappa met Thackeray at his mansion in Tegur Hills itself. The two delivered the letter.

After spending the night in the arms of his mistress at Tegur bungalow, Thackeray returned to Dharwad. He read the letter once again and thought of some plan. Thackeray sent Dr Bell, the first surgeon of Dharwad to examine the condition of Raja Shivalingarudrasarja.

Later that day, the coronation of Sawai Mallasarja II took place in Kallumath. As the Diwan administered the oath the young Raja recited it seriously,

“I, Sawai Mallasarja II, who am enthroned as the Raja of Kittur kingdom today, swear by Lord Gurusiddha that I shall serve the subjects of my kingdom wholeheartedly. I believe in the ideal that the honour and glory of my kingdom are greater than my life. I am ever ready to sacrifice my life for the welfare of my kingdom.” (Queen 101)

After the ceremony Rani Chennamma addressed: “My dear brothers and sisters, I request you all to stand by me in stress and strain and help me protect our beloved kingdom.” (Queen 108) The minister and loyalists swore to support Rani Chennamma. Then Balappa addressed, “Though I am very young, Rani Sarkar will forgive me for declaring my loyalty amidst all the elderly people gathered here that I shall dedicate myself entirely for the protection of our Kittur kingdom.” (Queen 109) The ceremony ended with H.H. Gurusiddhesh’s presidential remarks.

Thackeray had built a mansion amidst forest in Tegur very close to Kittur. He had housed Sairabanu, his mistress there. She was from Kittur court originally. Thackeray did not believe in the legality of Kittur adoption case. His doubts had grown deeper as much because of Dr Bell’s oral report as by Mallappasetty’s confidential opinion. He had also heard rumours about how the
officers of Kittur kingdom had been embezzling money, gold and jewels from the treasury. He, therefore, thought of preventing the misuse of the royal wealth and maintaining law and order there.

So one day Thackeray took an army of five hundred soldiers and went to Kittur. The natives of Kittur were taken aback by the unexpected arrival. Thackeray led the soldiers to the palace and said to Diwan Gurusiddhappa that the adoption of the boy was illegal.

This was as per Lord Dollhousie’s Doctrine of Lapse. Thackeray learnt the amount in the royal treasury, and locked it. He appointed Mallappasetty and Venkatarao as the internal supervisors of the kingdom of Kittur. The same day Collector Thackeray sat in a room of the Kittur palace and shot a letter to Chaplin explaining all the precautionary measures he had taken to annex Kittur to the Company.

Rani Chennamma consulted Diwan Gurusiddhappa and Avaradi Virappa, the Commander of Army. The Diwan supported the Queen. Virappa explained:

“Sarkar, the total strength of our army has shot up to sixteen thousand. All the rahuts including the regular ones and the new recruits have been practicing their art at scheduled time. In case there is any emergency, we’ll give a bugle call here at Kittur, and that will be relayed upto the last village on the border of Kittur kingdom. And within two hours the entire army can be at our disposal here. This is the arrangement that I have made so far. Kindly order me if there is anything else to be done.” (Queen 121)

The Rani radiated the spirit of self-confidence, vibrancy and determination. She looked like the veritable Goddess Parvati with her radiant face and the holy marks of vibhuti. Rani Chennamma consulted Sardar Mallappa about a possible war against the Company as Sardar Rudrappa, the
vakil’s efforts to convince Governor Elphinstone at Pune against Thackeray’s misdeeds failed. She requested the Deccan princes to support her for war. The Raja of Kolhapur and the Portuguese agreed. Rani Chennamma did not bother about Mallappasetty and Venkatarao. Finally Virappa talked of Dasara Celebration; and Rani agreed asking him to take money from the royal treasury by destroying Thackeray’s locks. The Dasara festival was celebrated grandly. H.H. Gurusiddhesh guided it. The prayer that was sung is symbolic of the people’s future, aspiration/destiny: for example,

The Light is shining,
The flawless Light Supreme
Is shining eternally.
The Light is beyond.
The reach of speech and mind;
The Light that is indescribable,
Indeterminate, and immaculate,
Is shining eternally. (Queen 128)

There are details about how the Kittur region celebrated the great Hindu festival.

Thackeray decided to defeat the Rani of Kittur. He thought inwardly that the kingdom of Kittur was a mere straw before the mighty military power of the Company. He had received information from Kaladagi that the Company of the 5th Regiment of Native Infantry, 500 strong and about 100 strong Horse Brigade artillery were moving to Belgaum. He wanted to make use of this opportunity to overawe the natives of Kittur. He even imagined the Rani dallying with him later.

On 18 October 1824 Rani Chennamma called a meeting of all the sardars. When they gathered, she surprised them by revealing the secret measures that Thackeray was taking to annex Kittur. She gave an impassioned speech:
“Dear brothers, Kittur is ours. We are masters of our own territory. The British say that the adoption is not valid because we did not take their permission. Where is it stipulated that we should take their permission for taking a son in adoption? Kittur had an agreement with Munro that we were their friends, i.e., tributary princes. (Queen 131)

That day Rani Chennamma had a dream wherein her late husband alerted her against the Company. He said his best wishes would go with her. Later that day she had the blessings of Gurusiddhesh.

Everyone was enthused by the passionate speech and they concluded it with the slogans, ‘Victory to Rani Chennamma,’ and ‘Victory to the kingdom of Kittur.’ The Queen said:

“Now, all the sardars; subhedars, killedars, dalavais and chaubaris of Kittur should be properly instructed about their duties. Similarly all the shetsannadis of our villages should be asked to rush to the city of Kittur. We should also request King Rajaram of Kolhapur to send a contingent of his army to Kittur to help us against the British. We must start this work today itself in right earnestness.” (Queen 136)

Avaradi Virappa stood up facing Rani Chennamma. He said, “Rani Sarkar, you have placed a very heavy responsibility upon my shoulders by making me the Commander-in-Chief.” The same evening many messengers were dispatched by Commander Avaradi Virappa to all the 800 villages of Kittur kingdom in order to convey Rani Chennamma’s express orders.

As soon as these people received Rani Chennamma’s message, they began to send their soldiers to Kittur with all the weapons they could collect.

Thackeray set out to Kittur along with Captain Elliot, Captain Deighton, Captain Black and others. The 5th Regiment of Madras had moved from
Kaladagi up to Dharwad and now proceeded towards Kittur. The carts carrying the artillery trundled along the zigzag path. There was cavalry.

Commander Avaradi Virappa heard from his spies that the Company servants were erecting their tents two miles west of the city of Kittur. The sentries, posted at Gadadamaradi, were watching all the movements. Every three hours or so, they used to send reports to the Commander-in-Chief. The blacksmiths of Kittur were all busy in their smithies manufacturing new weapons. A sentry stood on the top of the hill at Narendra, which was the last border picket of Kittur nearest to Dharwad. It commanded a wide view of the surrounding landscape.

On 21 October 1824, Thackeray thought of cowing the people of Kittur into submission. He asked Mr. Stevenson and Mr Elliot to rush to Kittur and get a bond from them about the destruction of treasury keys. Stevenson and Elliot reached the fort, they dismounted from their horses and walked into the visitors’ chamber. The Kittur officers refused to obey Thackeray’s orders.

The two Company officers reported the same to Thackeray. Thackeray said, “See, Mr Commander Sir, the leaders of Kittur have become very arrogant of late. I have to teach them a lesson. Today you must rush into the fort with your hundred horsemen and capture all those leaders, including Mr Gurusiddhappa. I must have them before me by the evening.” (Queen 143)

The soldiers of Kittur were ready to fight the enemies. They stood at all the vantage points of the fort. Commander Virappa was waiting for the right moment. As the Company horsemen entered the fort, the natives did not show any resistance. The front gate of the fort was kept open. Then the thrity-six cannons trundled along slowly into the fort. As per the orders of Thackeray, Captain Elliot and Stevenson were to lead the horse artillery and the other Company officers through the fort of Kittur to overawe them into submission.
Immediately the Kittur soldiers attacked the Company soldiers and the fight went on. Meanwhile patriotic cheers were heard. When the Company soldiers saw some of their own men lying dead in the fight, they began to run for their lives. Thus within a couple of hours the Company Horse Artillery of hundred soldiers were routed.

Rani Chennamma learnt that a few of the Company soldiers had sought shelter in the civilians’ houses. Commander Virappa reported that the soldiers of Kittur had captured a few company soldiers and their wives and brought them to the palace. Thackeray’s two children were there. Then the Rani ordered Commander Virappa to take care of them.

The next day Thackeray set out to the fort of Kittur along with his retinue. As he reached the fort he sent a message thus: “Thackeray Esquire has asked you to surrender the kingdom peacefully to the Company.” (Queen 148) Rani Chennamma refused to accept Thakeray’s terms and conditions. The next day Thackeray went in his palanquin into the fort of Kittur. He sat in the kutcheri and sent his messenger to Diwan Gurusiddhappa asking for an interview with Rani Chennamma. Within a short time, he received the return message in which the Rani had declined to see him. Thackeray felt deeply humiliated. Captain Black walked into the Commissioner’s office tent and told Thackeray that the mortar guns were parked near the fort-gate. Now Thackeray wanted to lose no time as he had already decided to act and wreak vengeance upon Kittur.

Rani Chennamma addressed her people: “My dear brothers of Kittur we have to fight against the Company government until the last drop of blood remains in our body.” (Queen 154) She appointed Amatur Balappa and Habsi Ram as her bodyguards. Finally His Holiness Gurusiddhesa said in his serene voice, “May Lord Gurusiddha give all the necessary courage to fight for your motherland.”
She turned to Sardar Avaradi Virappa who replied: “Sarkar. All the sixteen thousand soldiers of Kittur kingdom are waiting on the fort-precincts for the royal order.” (Queen 157) Rani Chennamma asked for her stallion, encouraging Balanna and Rayanna.

On the same morning, i.e., 23 October 1824, the artillery officer of the Company army rode to the fort of Kittur to change their guards. When he went near the outergate, he was rather surprised to see it closed. Thackeray felt uneasy and asked Captain Black to place two more mortar-guns, the Horse Artillery and the Cavalry.

Captain Black, Lieut Deighton and Mr Sewell led different sections of the army. Thackery ordered the Diwan of Kittur to open the gates. Rani Chennamma refused it. The gate was suddenly burst open but to Mr. Thackeray’s dismay, several thousands of Kittur soldiers rushed out on horseback. Mr Thackeray did not know how to cope with the situation. Captain Black and Lieut Deighton on either side of the gate wanted to operate mortar guns. The gallant soldiers rushed around them and began to hack them to pieces. Commander Avaradi Virappa was directing his army intelligently. Soon Captain Black and Lieut Deighton were hacked to death.

Mr Thackeray was watching everything furiously. The heroic soldiers of Kittur rushed forward into Mr Sewell’s section and started to hack them. There was a din of confusion. When Mr Thackeray, seated in a palanquin, carried by eight Company soldiers, looked up at the rampart of the Kittur fort, he saw Rani Chennamma riding her horse and directing the Kittur soldiers to shoot at the Company soldiers. Rani Chennamma was observing Mr Thackeray from the top. Amatur Balappa, who was an expert shooter, had held his gun aiming at Mr Thackeray’s chest. Mr Thackeray wanted to shoot at the Rani and, therefore, took up a gun from his soldier. Amatur Balappa lost no time and triggered the gun, which burst with a bang. Within no time the bullet hit the chest of Mr.
Thackeray, who fell down. The Kittur soldiers were engrossed in hacking, striking and mangling Company enemies. When the thick-lipped Negroid Habsi Ram saw Mr Thackeray being killed by the bullet, he rushed to the spot and killed the palanquin-bearers. Soon the gallant soldiers began to cheer and shout, ‘Victory to Kittur, Victory to Rani Chennamma.’

A few officers of Mr. Thackeray’s group escaped. They were running for their lives. Mr A.R. Stevenson, Mr Elliot and Sirastedar Mr Srinivasarao were running in different directions. Kannur Mallappa, Kannur Virappa and Sardar Mallappa were all looking crestfallen were punished for their indifference.

The next morning all the important Sardars gathered in the Durbar Hall and received appropriate rewards. Now that the old scores were settled, the people of Kittur rushed to the palace to celebrate their unprecedented victory.

The Company officers, who had escaped from the battlefield at Kittur, were fleeing all through the night. Dr. Turnbull, Officer of the decimated Horse Artillery, reached Dharwad. There was a gloomy atmosphere all around the hills of Dharwad. Musgrave Harris wondered at what Dr Turnbull said at the Company disaster. Harris wrote a letter to Col Pearce instantly. The company officer Walker Fullerton and others were overawed. Suddenly a messenger rushed into the chamber and said, breathlessly, “Sir, our Thackeray is no more.” Mr Walker Fullerton, the Assistant Collector of Dharwad, called his scribe and dictated the following letter:

Directions

Ride ................Ride
Any Officer whatever Belgaum
Speed, all speed
Sir or Sirs
For God’s sake send a force immediately without delay to Kittur. The artillery is cut to pieces – Mr Thackeray supposed to be killed, Captain Black cut to pieces. Sewell expected to die – Deighton killed, and Thackeray’s two Assistants Elliot and Stevenson not heard of … For God’s sake, send immediately. Our force is no use whatever, as we only muster 100 strong.

Dharwad. Yours

Sd/-

8 o’clock at night 23rd Walker Fullerton

Assistant Collection

(Queen 176)

Lieut Col Durand sent a messenger to the Commanding Officer at Bellary to apprise him of Thackeray’s death.

Rani Chennamma had a darshana of Gurusiddesh at the monastery. The next morning all the Sardars attended the meeting in the Durbar Hall. Rani Chennamma listened to the opinions of the Sardars, who happened to be her well-wishers. She said,

“Genetlemen, there is no disagreeing with your views at all. We shall act accordingly but in a gradual manner. We shall treat Stevenson and Elliot amicably and ask them to plead for our causes and wait for the result. We have already sought the help of the Raja of Kolhapur and many other kings of the Deccan. If all of our native kings join together we can fight the Company Sarkar very easily.” (Queen 180)

Rani Chennamma allowed the Company officers Stevenson and Elliot stay happily in Kittur prisons. This pleased them. Stevenson then wrote a letter to W. Chaplin, Commissioner in Deccan. Rani Chennamma worried about
Kittur’s destiny. She ordered for the closure of the ferry on the Malaprabha River near Mugutkhan-Hubbali. She had a meeting. The Diwan said: “As per the direction of Rani Sarkar, we have to depute our vakil Srinivasarao to go to Dharwad and try for negotiation and peaceful settlement of the matter.” (Queen 187)

Chaplin, the Commissioner of the Deccan, at Pune was shocked out of his wits when he heard the news of Thackeray’s death at Kittur insurrection. “Now, we cannot keep quiet,” said he in an impassioned tone. Then he said to his assistant, “The only way to defeat the Rani is to take her by surprise. We require some time to mobilise our forces at different headquarters. Until then we shall pretend to carry on negotiations with the Rani.” Mr Chaplin then, said “We shall appoint Mr R. Eden as the Acting Political Agent with headquarters at Belgaum and Mr Munro the Junior as the Acting Collector at Dharwad.” (Queen 188)

Col Pearce, Commander of the Headquarters Field Force Doab at Belgaum, had been sending detailed information about the forces that he had sent to Kittur. As he received directions from Mr. Chaplin, he instructed Lieut Col McLeod to proceed towards Kittur. Soon Col McLeod was asked to proceed to Dharwad instead. Then Col Pearce dictated another letter to the Officer Commanding at Bellary, requesting him to send a Company of European Foot Artillery, two Complete Companies of H.M. 46th foot and Regiment of Native Infantry.

A couple of days after the coronation of Sawai Mallasarja II, Sardar Gurusiddhappa called a meeting. After much discussion, they unanimously decided to attack the Company Treasury at Dharwad. Sardar Gurusiddhappa therefore ordered a detachment of his army to proceed to Dharwad and wait there for an opportune time.
Rani Chennamma and Diwan Gurusiddhappa, Virappa all the citizens of Kittur decided to fight the last battle against the Company.

Elphistone, the Governor of Bombay learnt that all the Company officers were worried about the plight of the prisoners. As a political authority he considered it as a matter of prestige. Elphinstone wanted to discuss the matter personally with Mr Chaplin. He, therefore, proceeded to Pune. Mr Chaplin explained to His Excellency all the measures he had taken to suppress the insurgents of Kittur. He informed how the Rani of Kittur wanted to be independent and now did not want to release the prisoners until she received an assurance from the Company about the independence of Kittur.

Governor Elphinstone decided to vanquish Kittur. After half a day’s rest he began to send messages to different military heads of South India. He issued instructions to the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Alexander Campbell, to send whatever army Col Pearce might require and further to send messages to Bellary, Gooty, Bangalore and Arcot regarding the regiments for Kittur. But he had sent Rani Chennamma a message to the contrary effect.

His Excellency refused Rani’s request outrightly. Mr Chaplin left Bombay for Belgaum on 17 November 1824, along with the troops available at Bombay and collected the troops at Pune. Word was sent by Chaplin to the Raja of Kolhapur who was requested by the Rani of Kittur to help her vanquish the Company. The Raja of Kolhapur was always pretending to be friendly with the Company.

When Mr Chaplin reached Belgaum, he learnt that all the military detachments were coming towards Kittur as per his instructions. Col Deacon from Solapur replaced Col Pearson of Dharwad as the latter fell ill. Col Seely rushed to Belgaum on 24 November 1824. By 25 November 1824, all the preparations seemed to be complete. As per the master plan, all the Company
troops had camped at the strategic spots around Kittur. Lieut Col Walker of the Madras Regiment was posted at Khanapur, a town in possession of the Company. Major Trewson was posted to command the unit stationed at Belgaum. The military plan of the Company was to attack Kittur from three sides: from north from Belgaum, from southeast from Dharwad via Tadakod and from west from Khanapur. Within a couple of days detachments from Mysore, Chitradurga, Madras, Arcot, Solapur, Satara, Bombay, Pune and Vengurla had been posted within a radius of about one and a half miles from Kittur.

The Company preparation disturbed Kittur kingdom. Rani Chennamma appealed to the citizens for a united front and face the company Sarkar.

Mr Chaplin was known as a shrewd politician. He came down to Kittur to supervise all the military activities. His intention was to see that Kittur was cut off from the outside world. The Company officer promised Sivabasappa, a kittur enemy, whatever he could do.

Meanwhile Kittur Vakil’s plea to Chaplin failed. Chaplin threatened. He did not promise it even when Elliot and Stevenson were released. Chaplin refused freedom provoking Rani Chennamma. Unfortunately the Raja of Kolhapur sided with the Company. Rayanna, Rani Chennamma’s great soldier worried.

The battle was destined to take place. Chaplin surrounded Kittur all the three sides. He asked Rani Chennamma to surrender which she refused. Rani Chennamma ordered for the war. Sardar Gurusiddhappa led the army stationed at the Gadadmaradi and was assisted by other leaders like Avaradi Virappa, Golandaz Himmat Singh, Narsing Rao, Guruputrappa, Appana Dasagaon, Sangolli Rayanna, Bichagatti Chennabasappa and Gajavira.
Meanwhile the Company army of 25000 soldiers came towards Kemmanamaradi. Col Deacon led it. The Kittur army at Kemmanamaradi was led by Avaradi Veerappa. Col Walter ordered his platoon to attack. This was from Kemmanamaradi. Col Deacon marched towards Kittur from Ranagatti. There were Col Mc Lead and Munro. The two party rushed at each other.

As the afternoon advanced, the soldiers of Kittur were overwhelmed by the new batches of Company soldiers rushing in upon them. As hours elapsed, many soldiers of Kittur fell in pools of blood and attained heroic death. The only of their strength was their patriotism. But the company soldiers were at an advantage in they had superior weapons.

Naikar provides us a classic example of how Indian(s) soldiers should have behaved irresponsibly at wars. He writes: “A soldier of Kittur, Girimalla, who had witnessed his companions dying at the hands of Company soldiers, felt a bit nervous that he too might follow suit. He thought of his young wife and children and felt concerned about them so much that he wanted not to participate in the next day’s war. (Queen 251)

On the 4th morning, the soldiers of Kittur were ready on the battlefield at Gadagamaradi. They were commanded by Sardar Avaradi Virappa. The few soldiers who survived in the previous day’s battle on Kemmanamaradi joined. Girimalla, who was insulted by his own wife, was determined to fight.

Shelling started between the Kittur fort and the Company camp. Within an hour a battle proper started. The whistles and bugles were heard. Col Deacon ordered his army to attack. Sardar Virappa shouted his orders to the patriotic soldiers. The enemies rushed at each other with vengeance.

The Kittur soldiers fought with an unprecedented bravery and hacked many Company soldiers to death. Soldier Girimalla killed three to four enemies. Sardar Virappa was actively directing his soldiers. As the day advanced, many
soldiers on both sides were killed. But soon fresh batches of Company soldiers swooped on the Kittur soldiers. There was simply no balance. They had paid their last homage to their Rani. Most of the Kittur soldiers had lost their lives. Sardar Virappa felt disheartened.

The next day, the Company army moved towards Kittur fort.

Diwan Gurusiddhappa spoke of his helplessness. Rani Chennamma regretted about the Raja of Kolhapur’s betrayal. Rayanna said Kittur army needed to be alert as the Company army surrounded the fort. The Kittur army fired canons all the morning. Alas, some treacherous people had made the canons ineffective. Kittur’s own enemies had mixed cowdung and millet grains in the gunpowder. This was done by Kannur Virasangappa and Hurakadli Mallappa. Rani Chennamma ordered the death of the two.

Outside the fort, Col Deacon stood with his army in front of the main gate. Col Walker was assisting him. Others like Lt. Col MeLeod, Captain Crew of Mysore Horse Artillery, Col. Trewson etc., surrounded the Kittur fort and began to fire. They had realized by now what they had heard about the impregnable fort of Kittur. It was built with hard, red granite stones.

The Rani had realized that the Kittur kingdom was coming to an end now. Death was the only way out from a life of struggle and humiliation. Though a woman, she was made of very hard mettle. She guarded the young Rani Viravva. She knew that the soldiers of Kittur were loyal and patriotic and many of them had already laid down their lives for the sake of their beloved kingdom. She knew that the Kittur fort was surrounded by the large army of the Company. She remembered His Holiness’s words about the ephemerality of mortal life.

The Company army tried to breach Kittur fort. As per Col Deacon’s order, the battering train stationed in front of the main gate was operated along
with other cannons. The shells whizzed before hitting the fort. The bullets were hit by the soldiers of Kittur also on the Company soldiers. There was a regular dialogue of firing. The main gate of the fort was broken. The soldiers of Kittur were alarmed at the sight. As they rushed into the fort, the soldiers of Kittur put up a brave fight with them and hacked the Company soldiers to death. In that scuffle many soldiers on both the sides died.

Mr Munro was stabbed. After a couple of hours of fight, most of the soldiers of Kittur lost their lives. The other soldiers of Kittur, began to run for their lives. Although many Company soldiers had died, they were replaced by fresh batches. The Sardars like Avaradi Virappa, Kinker Venkanna, Kumma Imam and others thought that it was useless to fight with the large Company army. They thought of their own personal safety and escaped.

Commander Gurusiddhappa grew desperate and thought not of the kingdom but of the safety of Rani Chennamma and Rani Viravva. He implored Rani Chennamma, “Rani Sarkar, the story of Kittur is finished. There is no point in being here. We request you to escape from here and that quickly too.” But Rani Chennamma said, “Sardar Gurusiddhappa, do you think my life is more precious than yours and those of all our loyal and heroic soldiers?” (Queen 262)

As a majority of Kittur soldiers lay in the pools of blood, the Company soldiers began to advance slowly towards the central palace. At last when they entered the inner chamber, they saw Rani Chennamma and her daughter-in-law Rani Viravva. Sardar Gurusiddhappa, Himmat Singh, Sangolli Rayanna and other leaders were there. They arrested all of them. There was simply no limit to the joy of Col Deacon and other military officers. They were extremely happy to have vanquished the rebellious Rani of Kittur.
The Company troops occupied the forts. Col Deacon, Lieut Col McLeod, Captain Spiller and Captain Jameson and others stood in front of their troops. They hoisted the union jack. Chaplin, too happy, wrote of the victory to the Bombay Governor Elphinstone. He ordered for the transfer of the Ranis; and imprisonment of Gurusiddhappa, Rayanna and others. Naikar writes about the wealth of Kittur as seized by the company:

The officers looked diligently into the registers of Kittur and found that the Kittur kingdom had 286 villages and 72 hamlets and that the annual income from them was about Rs.4,00,000. The officers were really very much impressed by the figures. The next day they ransacked all the treasuries of the kingdom and were flabbergasted to find that the total cash amounted to Rs.16,00,000. They heaped all the jewellery, silver and gold ornaments on a carpet in a room. The multi-coloured gems and stones dazzled their eyes. They had never seen such exotically beautiful ornaments in their lives. They inwardly felt that their arrival into the Oriental country was justified as it could compensate for their separation from their motherland by its rich wealth of jewels and gold. (Queen 269)

Rani Chennamma owned 3000 horses, 2000 camels and about a hundred elephants. Col exclaimed, “That’s why the Rani was so confident of herself.” The military strength is really very large for the size of the kingdom. The Company got 36 cannons and 56 guns.

As the authorities of the East India Company were apprehensive that the patriots of Kittur kingdom might seek the help of the Portuguese rulers of Goa, they had stationed their army along the Western Ghats to prevent any possible transaction there. Rani Chennamma wondered about the strange course of her destiny. She felt that the wheel of Time had turned conspicuously. Chaplin took Rani Chennamma’s signature for the legal document that announced the annexation of Kittur to East India Company. The company granted her a Jahagir
of eleven villages and hundreds of servants for the ranis. They did not feel any reduction in the comforts of life. Chaplin shot Shivabasappa to death for his betrayal of Rani Chennamma. This man had adulterated the gunpowder.

Rani Chennamma and her two daughters-in-law were detained in the Collector’s bungalow at Dharwad for one day and then they were taken to Bailahongala. The Chief Commander of the Kittur army, Sardar Gurusiddhappa and other prominent rebels were kept in jail at Belgaum. After receiving the letter from Mr Chaplin, the Political Agent at Dharwad sent his assistant to the prison at Belgaum to fetch the five prisoners, namely, Timmappa Daftary, Balappa Kotya, Narsing Rao Mummadar, Kaone Koganavar and Sheikh Junglee Jamadar. But the company did release certain rebels. The leading rebels like Baba Naik, Basalingappa, Rudranaik, Kulbasappa, Yelnaik, Appanna, Bhima, Ranoji, Koneri, Khenchappa, Nemanna, and Appaji were all kept in jail at Belgaum. Later some of them transferred to the jail in Bombay.

Commander Gurusiddhappa, Sangolli Rayanna, Balnaik Basalingappa, Kalabasappa, Bhima, Kenchappa and Appaji were all kept behind bars at Belgaum as they were the ringleaders of rebellion. The Political Agent of Dharwad sought permission from Mr Chaplin and announced a prize of Rs.30,000 for those who could help the Company government to capture Avaradi Virappa. They found that Sangolli Rayanna could not be punished, as there was no documentary evidence against him. He was, therefore released. But Gurusidhappa and his close associate got hanged.

Then the Company soldiers announced publicly that people could buy the debris at the rate of Rs. 5 per cartload. Soon the news circulated. Consequently, both rich and poor people bought the cartloads of debris, which included rocks, wooden pillars, doorframes, window frames of teak, wooden grills etc., and transported them to their places in order to recycle them for the construction of
their own houses, temples and monasteries. Thus the Company destroyed Kittur.

Rani Chennamma, who stayed in the jail of Bailahongala, had grown conspicuously old after the kingdom of Kittur was annexed to the Company. One day she asked Captain Harris to allow the pontiff H.H. Gavisiddesh. The swami visited her. He brought the news that Rayanna was planning to revolt against the Company. Rayanna himself met Rani Chennamma in disguise and sought her blessings.

Later Rani Veeravva was separated from Rani Chennamma, and kept in Dharwad. She was killed by poisoning by the caretaker (a relative) Happalisetti in the Ravivarpet Lane. On the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of February 1829, Rani Chennamma stared at the broken tower of Kittur palace through the round window of the prison and breathed her last. Naikar writes:

Although the Kittur kingdom was lost physically to the company government, it remained evergreen in the memory of the people who tried to immortalize it in their songs and poems, plays, myths and legends. Magundi Basava, one of the court-poets of Kittur, wrote a narrative \textit{lavani} about the beloved Rani Chennamma and Raja Mallasarja. Several other poets and folk-singers composed their own songs and sang them in the lanes of villages that once belonged to Kittur kingdom, and inspired the people to continue their life heroically facing all the contingencies of their life.\textit{(Queen 304)}
References: