

## **Analytical Study of Tipu Sultan's Relations with the Ottoman Empire**

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Tipu Sultan faced a united and stronger British power in India because the Governor-General since 1784 also became the Commander-in-Chief and now had complete authority over the other subordinate governments in India. More significantly, the Company which had largely functioned independently and had limited resources was now controlled fully by the British government. The British through trade, diplomacy, duplicity, subversion, coercion and war had extended their influence to large parts of India. In southern India Tipu was the only major Indian ruler who defied the British and refused to become a vassal of them not due to any innate hostility to them but because he could see their evil designs in India. Being a proud and successful ruler, Tipu was determined to preserve if not expand his kingdom. In order to face the formidable British challenge, he devised several strategies and one of the most notable was his decision to seek foreign military assistance and recognition. This paper which has been divided into three parts makes an attempt to delineate his diplomatic moves mainly with the Ottoman empire. First part examines Tipu's compulsions which propelled him to seek legitimacy from the Ottoman Sultan. The second part highlights the objectives and functions of the mission sent to the Sublime Porte and in the end an assessment of its implication on Tipu's rule are presented.

The Mughal Emperor in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was still regarded as the legal sovereign throughout the country. The Nizam of Hyderabad was the viceroy of the Deccan and the nawab of Carnatic the governor of the area but subordinate to the Nizam. Robert Clive's treaty of Allahabad with the Mughal emperor Shah Alam slightly upgraded the position of the Carnatic governor who now came to be known as *walajah* thus putting an end to his dependence on the Nizam. Both still remained representatives of the Mughal emperor in their respective areas. The maharajas of Mysore family were the tributaries of the Mughal empire and hence nominally under the Nizam. Haidar Ali an employee of the Mysore maharaja endowed with deep acumen, sound political instinct

and exceptional qualities as a military leader extended his personal territory and emerged as a strong and powerful leader. Despite his newly acquired possessions Haidar Ali kept on the cover of being subordinate to the maharaja. In 1768 the Nizam had ceded the *diwani* of Mysore to the English but it was Haidar Ali who saved it from the British clutches. The Nizam, however, refused to recognize Haidar Ali's exploits and in 1779 in a letter to Basalat Jung, Nizam Ali Khan refers to Haidar as a mere *zamindar*. Angered at the loss of his territories to Haidar, the Nizam in January 1782 signed an agreement with the British to invade Haidar's territories and to divide it. Despite several overtures from Haidar, the Nizam continued to perceive him as an usurper of his territories.

Upon Haidar's death Tipu Sultan's legal predicament was all the more acute and in fact became embarrassing. Being a proud and courageous ruler Tipu decided to seek legitimacy to his extremely vulnerable legal status. He did not want to be branded as a rebel against the legal authority. Moreover, a large section of the Indian Muslim population still regarded the Mughal emperor as their political and religious head. Tipu's defiance would be construed as sin and punishable. He therefore decided to approach the Mughal court to get him self recognized as one of the princes of the Empire in 1783. By this time unfortunately the resource less and blind Mughal emperor Shah Alam III lost all authority and had become a puppet of the British. But it was well known that Shah Alam was unhappy with his dependent and humiliating status with the English. Initially feelers were sent out that he was inclined to support Tipu whose cause was energetically pursued by the French at Delhi. But the British had the support of nawab Majud-dawalah, the *naib wazir*, and acting chief minister at the time. They used him to frustrate Tipu's dream of being recognized as a prince of the Mughal empire. At any rate, both the Nizam and the *walajah* would have opposed any move towards according legitimacy and granting equality, let alone higher status to Tipu. In order to extricate himself from this dilemma Tipu, given his ambition, decided to take drastic steps to enhance his legitimacy. In view of the non co-operative attitude of the Indian rulers and their short-sighted policy of co-operating with the British to work against him, Tipu did not want to keep his subjects in suspense which could have been manipulated by his enemies to the detriment of his rule. Moreover if he was portrayed by them as a rebel it would spread disaffection in the military as well, especially among the large Muslim soldiers – the backbone of his support.

Towards this end he decided to overthrow the Mysore *maharaja*. It must also be stressed that Tipu had become fed up with his

conspiracies, intrigues and collusion with the English and his enemies. Moreover convinced of the implacable hostility shown by the Nizam and the *walajah*, Tipu decided to declare himself an independent king. Tipu's anxiety in this matter is evident from the fact that at the time of negotiating peace with the Marathas in 1787, he insisted that the Maratha chieftain Peshwa Haripant should in future address him as king. The Peshwa refused to address Tipu as *badashah*. However due to the intervention of many influential people, who pointed out that it was a trifling matter, a compromise was arrived at and Haripant agreed that in future Tipu would be addressed as 'Nawab Tipu Sultan Fateh Ali Khan'. Tipu also wanted the Nizam to recognize him as king, but he only promised to call him 'Tipu Sultan'.

The treaty of peace between Tipu and the Peshwa signed in April 1787 is significant because soon after Tipu adopted the title of *badshah*. It has been pointed out that celebrations to commemorate this event took place on a Friday with several lakh of rupees distributed among the poor at Tipu's orders. From now on the main Friday *khutba* was recited in the name of Tipu Sultan *badasha*. This was an important event as it was done to elevate his legitimacy and pave the way for establishing relations with other rulers on the basis of mutual respect and recognition. The alternative for Tipu was to be a subordinate either of the Nizam or the *walajah* and given his status and determination, he considered it quite unacceptable and in fact humiliating. Moreover, because of the rapidly hostile policies pursued by the two and due to their determination to destroy Tipu, he had no hopes of getting recognition for his independent identity from them. To cap it all, both were deeply dependent on the English who were doing everything in their power to undermine and bring about Tipu's downfall. Actually Tipu was in a great dilemma over his legal status. Because he was involved in a bitter conflict with the British he feared that they would use their influence over Nizam and *walajah* to challenge his legitimacy and ultimately overthrow him. In order to neutralize this impending challenge he declared himself as an independent monarch. Since most of the well known Indian rulers were too deeply committed to the British in securing short term benefits, Tipu had no hopes of being fully recognized by them. Under the circumstances he decided to approach foreign rulers to get his independent status acknowledged. In this connection he decided to send missions to the Ottoman empire, Persia, Afghanistan, France, Oman, Mauritius, Egypt and other places. At this stage one may legitimately ask whether Tipu really needed outside recognition for his position or was he using it as a cover to embark on a covert mission to seek outside military, political and diplomatic support in order to confront the British and his

other enemies from a position of strength. What is clear is that he was at this stage pursuing an ambitious and bold policy to strengthen and consolidate his position vis-à-vis the British who had now become his mortal enemies. It must be stressed that they identified Tipu as the stumbling block to their goal of establishing British control over India because he was 'unquestionably the most powerful of all the native princes of Hindustan' and they feared that 'his steadiness in establishing that system of Government and discipline in his army, which have raised him above the other princes in India, cannot fail to make him everyday more formidable'. No wonder Lord Cornwallis cut Tipu's empire by half and Lord Munro wrote on 21 September 1798 'our first care ought to be directed to the total subversion of Tipu's'. The British hostility persisted despite Tipu's readiness to accede to any condition that should leave him in his situation of 'an independent prince'.<sup>1</sup>

In open defiance of the British, Tipu had declared himself king and struck new coins and had a throne of gold, ornamented with precious jewels in the shape of a tiger made for him which indicated his unconcealed desire to be recognized. However most of the Indian rulers had in one way or another recognized Tipu as the *de facto* ruler but *de jure* recognition had come only from abroad especially King Zaman Shah of Afghanistan, the French King Louis XVI, the Persian monarch and others. Since the Ottoman Sultan was still the caliph whom Muslims worldwide still regarded him as their political and religious head, Tipu besides his desire for recognition also looked upon the Sublime Porte as an important source of support against his adversaries.

Moreover Tipu had become disillusioned with the French due to their treachery during his father's period in the second Anglo-Mysore war. In this war, they had made behind his back, a separate peace with the English. In fact he had called them 'false and perfidious' and had agreed with Wellesley that 'the French are of crooked disposition, faithless and the enemies of mankind'.<sup>2</sup> But Tipu had not entirely severed his ties with them as he still hoped they could prove useful partners against his opponents. Tipu had also learnt that the French government had changed its policy in India by promising the British not to give any cause of provocation. The French policy was also determined by the sixteenth article of the Treaty of Versailles (1783) which forbade the English and the French from participating in the wars of the Indian powers. They also refused to enter into an alliance with Tipu which

<sup>1</sup> J. Rennell, *Marches of the British Armies in India during the Campaigns of 1790 and 1791* (London: 1792), p.c. XXXIX.

<sup>2</sup> Mohibbul Hassan, *History of Tipu Sultan* (Calcutta, 1971), pp.112 & 295.

prompted the sultan to reject French demand for wide ranging concessions in trade in his kingdom. Tipu felt that if he accepted French proposals it would give Paris complete monopoly over the trade and commerce in his kingdom – a thing he had rejected when proposed by the British. However, he was inclined towards giving them major concessions in return for military assistance against his adversaries. With France plunged into turmoil and instability whatever little hopes Tipu had received from French were dashed. This explains his decision to send a high powered delegation to the Ottoman government with three main objectives. Firstly to gain recognition as an independent monarch of Mysore; secondly to seek military assistance and, lastly, to explore the possibility of establishing close economic and trade ties.

At this stage it is necessary to briefly assess the Ottoman empire's position which was under mounting challenge from the European powers. After they took over Constantinople in 1453 the Ottoman's were undisputed naval power in the Mediterranean but this collapsed in 1571 when they were defeated at Lepanto. European control and hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean was restored. With the rise of the Europeans the Arab-Islamic lake, as the Indian Ocean was known, was dominated first by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch, French and soon by the British who later, on, became undisputed masters over the area. Arab *mudarabah* or speculative trade declined and the Europeans through their monopoly trade came to dominate the territories as well. Bernard Lewis quotes from Umar Talib, one of the Turkish elite, who complained in 1625 AD that:

The Europeans have become acquainted with the whole world, sending their ships everywhere and seizing the harbours. The goods from India, Sind and China previously came to Suez and were distributed by the Muslims to the whole world. Now, however, these goods are transported by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English to the Frankish countries, from whence they distribute them to the world. The goods that they don't need, they bring to Istanbul and the Islamic countries, selling them at five times their value, thus reaping great profit. For the reason both gold and silver have become scarce in Islamic countries.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Bernard Lewis, 'Some reflections on the decline of the Ottoman Empire', *Studies Islamica*, 9, 1959, p. 118, see also K.N. Chaudhari, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1950* (Cambridge, 1985).

The British founded branches of the East India Company in the ports of the Gulf and the south of the Arabian peninsula, especially in Muscat, Basra, Bahrain and Bushire. English expansion in the region began after they had firmly established their control over India starting from 1630. From their stronger position in India the balance of power began to tilt decisively in their favour from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The British wrested control of the Straits of Malacca from the Dutch in 1688 by which they became masters of the eastern trade with China and the East Indies. After they gradually consolidated their hold over India from 1690 onwards the British were successful in driving out the Dutch from their bases in the Gulf in 1765.<sup>4</sup>

France which now began to threaten British colonial position in the region lost the struggle in 1771 especially during the seven years war between 1765-72, which resulted in the strengthening of the British imperial hegemony in the area. Taking advantage of the preoccupation of the French with their revolution the British since then began to dominate Muscat which had emerged as a regional commercial center since 1719. In 1798 the British succeeded in signing a treaty with Muscat, which was the first foothold for their colonial administration in the Gulf. Meanwhile because of the Persian occupation of Basra between 1776-79 and also due to a plague there, the British shifted their main route terminus to Kuwait which under the Al Sabahs had emerged as an important commercial center since 1752. The British here again were the most influential powers. Moreover they had a resident in Bushire, consul in Basra and consul-general in Baghdad which signified their dominant position in the region.<sup>5</sup>

Under the pretext of trying to put an end to piracy, slave trade and a stop to arms trade in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf, the British had subjugated all their rulers in the Gulf area. They began the establishment of their control over the Gulf area by weakening the commercial and economic capacities and subjecting them ultimately to the colonial administration of which they made India the headquarters.

Britain started the systematic sinking of the trading vessels of the Gulf emirates merely on suspicion, instead of taking them to the nearest port, as the agreements had stipulated. Muscat was identified as the major target. Thus Bruce, quoted by Arnold Wilson asserts: 'The

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<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Abdullah al Azzawi, 'France's Political Activity in the Arabian Gulf and British Counter-Measures, 1793-1798', *al Khalij al Arabi*, Basra University, No. 3-4, 1986, pp. 29-43.

<sup>5</sup> K.M. Pannikar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1953) and *Malabar and the Dutch* (Bombay: 1931), p.56.

shipping capability of the Arabs of Muscat and their tremendous human potential was such that it aroused fear of their seizing control of the entire Gulf...'. In another place he says: 'However, the Arab pirates of Muscat were the worst offenders. They had become so strong that they were able to drive the Portuguese from Mombasa...'.<sup>6</sup>

Lawful resistance to foreign influence was intentionally confused with act of piracy. It was a confusion aimed at camouflaging imperialist designs and in making resistance appear as piracy and thereby giving the colonial power an excuse for suppressing local Arab resistance.<sup>7</sup> With the domination of Muscat in 1798 the era of the Pax Britannica in the region started. With the Gulf region firmly under the control of the British, Tipu's trade relations with the area suffered. He had to soon take some bold steps to revive the commercial relations with the area lest it undermine his position at home. Tipu still perceived the Ottoman empire as strong and hence thought of seeking assistance.

As early as 1784 Tipu had sent an exploratory mission to the Sublime Porte to find out whether an embassy there would be productive. When he was told about the efficacy of having a mission at the Port, Tipu decided to send a large mission consisting of 900 people on 17 November 1785. The leader of the delegation was Ghulam Ali Khan and included Nurulla Khan, Lutf Ali Khan, Jafar Khan and others. The delegation after a long and difficult sea/land journey via Muscat, Bushire, Basra, Baghdad and other places reached Constantinople on 25 September 1787. It was only on 5 November 1787 the Ottoman Sultan Salim-III received Tipu's emissaries with honour and decorated them. The Sultan accorded permission to Tipu to assume the title of an independent monarch and the right to strike coins and to have the *khutba* read in his name. The envoys were also given for Tipu friendly letters, *khillats*, a sword and a shield studded with precious stones by the caliph and his grand *wazir*. With this, one of the major objectives of the mission had been accomplished.<sup>8</sup>

Tipu also sought military assistance from the caliph to put an end to the British menace in India. In order to impress upon the caliph the gravity of the situation and the urgency of his demand, Tipu sought to arouse the religious sentiments of the caliph by highlighting to him the subversive and deceitful manner in which the British had become overlords of large parts of territories which actually belonged to the

<sup>6</sup> Arnold Talbot Wilson, *The Persian Gulf* (Oxford, 1928), p. 322.

<sup>7</sup> Khaldoun Hasan al Naqeeb, *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula: A different Perspective* (London, 1990), pp.31-42.

<sup>8</sup> Mohibbul Hassan, *op.cit.*, pp.128-38.

Mughals. More significantly in order to make sure his mission would succeed, Tipu also impressed upon the Ottoman Sultan that the British were humiliating the Muslims in India by forcibly converting them to Christianity and changing the mosques to churches.

The Ottoman Sultan found it easy to recognize Tipu as an independent king but found his request for military assistance hard to entertain, because he himself was preoccupied with defending his possessions under challenge from the Russians, Austrians and others. He politely but firmly turned down Tipu's request for a body of Turkish mercenaries to be sent to Mysore to fight against the British. Actually Tipu wanted the Ottoman Sultan to send him a body of troops whose expenses would be borne by him and they would be sent back to Porte at his expense whenever they would be required by the caliph. In the end, the sultan declined to provide any tangible military help to Tipu. It must be repeated that the Ottoman Sultan facing outside threats could not expect help from France due to the turmoil there leading towards revolution. In fact, Britain was busy mediating peace between Turkey and her enemies, Russia and Austria. The Ottoman Sultan, therefore, was in no mood to help Tipu and lose British friendship.

Lastly, Tipu aware of the rich potential of his kingdom especially in the field of agriculture and other items which were in great demand, sought to establish state to state trade ties. The lucrative trade had made Mysore the richest and most prosperous part in the country which the British and the French sought to dominate and control. Tipu correctly analyzed the reasons for the political decline of the Muslims, the most important being their indifference to trade, commerce and industry. The Europeans through extensive monopoly of trade had elbowed the Muslims out of this field and also controlled and dominated the Muslim states. He urged the members of the delegation to secure trade privileges with the Ottoman empire on a reciprocal basis; he wanted Basra in exchange for Mangalore, that Turkey should help him in establishing various factories in Mysore and by sending technicians specialized in the art of making muskets, guns, glass, chinaware and other military hardware and in return Tipu would send workers required by the caliph. As the English agent from Basra reported: 'We have reasons to believe that the embassy to the Porte is for the purpose of obtaining *firman*s to establish factories in the Turkish 'dominions...'. Manesty, the English agent at Basra, also wrote to the Court of Directors on 5 September 1786:

The Wakils want to obtain *Firman*s to establish factories in Turkish dominions for selling the productions of his kingdom. We think this is a circumstance very material for the Honourable



Court of Directors to be acquainted with, as we apprehend it precludes all hopes of your servants at Tellicherry being able to provide pepper for your homeward ships.<sup>9</sup>

In early 1799 Caliph Salim III addressed a letter to Tipu describing the French invasion of Egypt and their plan to conquer Arabia, divide it to republics and extirpate Islam. He further wrote that the French also wanted to conquer India and deprive its people of their religion, life and property. He advised Tipu to refrain from any hostile activities against the English at French instigation, and offered to adjust satisfactorily any cause of complaint that he might have against them. Tipu replied to the caliph professing devotion to him and agreeing that as the French were on inimical relations with the head of the faithful, all Muslims should renounce friendship with them. Later on the British made full use of the passages from the caliph's manifesto and letter to Tipu 'which expose the character of the French Republic and the outrages committed by the French against the acknowledged head of the Mohammdan'.<sup>10</sup>

Although the British had succeeded in frustrating Tipu's attempt to get recognition from the Mughal emperor in Delhi, but despite their influential presence and machinations at the Ottoman court, Tipu did succeed in gaining recognition for his independent status as a king. Even though the British were quite concerned for a variety of reasons at the recognition of Tipu, but their rapidly growing influence in the country and in Indian Ocean region gave them comfort and confidence about their ultimate ability to encircle and crush Tipu.

It must be pointed out that the British were apprehensive of Tipu's growing contacts with the Muslim rulers both in India and abroad. His extensive links with Afghanistan, Persia, Oman, Ottoman empire and other smaller states, his strategy aimed at intensifying political and economic co-operation particularly setting up of factories, state to state trade ignoring the Europeans, establishing military co-operation, all were considered too dangerous and revolutionary ideas which if implemented could undermine their position in the area and ultimately dash their hopes of establishing an empire where the sun never sets.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from the British, the Nizam was equally furious at Tipu's recognition by Turkey which was a *coup de grace*. Since the Ottoman

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.130 and 137.

<sup>10</sup> Birendra Varma 'Tipu Sultan's Embassies to Constantinople and Kabul', *Journal of Historical Research*, XVI:I (15 August 1973), pp.51-6.

<sup>11</sup> I.H. Qureshi, 'The purpose of Tipu Sultan's Embassy to Constantinople', *Journal of Indian History* (Tranvancore) Vol. 24, 1945, pp.77-85.

Sultan still enjoyed greater prestige as the most dominant Muslim power relegating Mughal emperor into the background, the Nizam felt out maneuvered as he could no longer claim to be legally superior because 'the Sultan of Mysore had a better title to his kingdom than the viceroy of the Deccan to his viceroyalty'.<sup>12</sup> No wonder the Nizam wanted the British to wipe out Tipu for which he provided all assistance.

The mission which Tipu sent to Sublime Porte succeeded in strengthening trade ties with the Gulf area and getting specialists for the numerous industries which cropped up in Mysore. But it must be pointed out that it had a negative impact on Tipu's rule. The mission and its relative success simply infuriated the British and compelled them to redouble their efforts, to crush Tipu. The Nizam was also mad at the success of Tipu's diplomacy. Tipu's not inconsiderable achievements at Constantinople, Kabul, Persia which brought name and fame from abroad and ended his isolation throwing his enemies in confusion, should have been undertaken little earlier and on a sustained basis. The British correctly analysed Tipu's comfortable and secure position at home which propelled him to seek outside recognition and success, hence they did everything to pull him down from within using his enemies and their manipulative skill.

To conclude, the British challenge to Tipu was formidable. It prompted him to respond with equally forcible, bold and prompt measures to neutralize this challenge. Most remarkable was his attempt to seek help from foreign countries, especially Ottoman empire. That Tipu could survive several wars and rule for so long was mainly because of his many shrewd diplomatic and astute military moves. From the very outset it was abundantly clear that a war between Tipu and the British-led coalition would be an unequal contest. But what is significant is Tipu's courage to dare the British and all his enemies. He offered such stubborn resistance which even the British could never contemplate.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.