Seeking an Ally against British Expansion in India: Tipu Sultan’s Mission to the Ottoman Empire

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Abstract: After British defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, they emerged as a new power in Europe and expanded its sovereignty all over the world by controlling overseas trade gradually. They aimed to take advantage of the wealth of India thanks to East India Company starting from 17th century and in time; they established their hegemony in the Indian subcontinent. When Tipu Sultan the ruler of Mysore realised this colonial intention of British over India in the second half of 18th century, he wanted to remove them from India. However, the support that Tipu Sultan needed was not given by Indian local rulers Maghals, Nizam and Marathas. Thus, Tipu Sultan turned his policy to the Ottoman Empire. He sent a mission to Constantinople with some valuable gifts to take Ottoman’s assistance against British. The proposed paper analyses the correspondences of Tipu Sultan and Ottoman Sultans Abdulh I and Selim III and how British superior diplomacy dealt with French, the Ottomans and Indian native rulers to suppress Tipu Sultan from accumulating power as well as to stop him from making any alliances to the detriment of British interest.

Key Words: Tipu Sultan, Kingdom of Mysore, South India, the Ottoman Empire, British, Divide and Rule Policy, Colonialism.

I. Introduction

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world history. Its immense resources coupled with prosperous cultural, religious and scientific backgrounds have made it the centre of global attention since antiquity. For a direct contact with the affluent India, Vasco de Gama reached India by sea in 1498; hence, this was the time of exploration of new non-European territories by Europeans as it was coming of ages towards enlightenment. This exploration age was a turning point for European nations as well as for India. Portuguese became the first European colonial power that made its way into India to benefit from latter’s immense natural resources. The rise and fall of Portuguese was very rapid compare to its contemporary European powers. These were followed by Dutch who however like Portuguese did not last long. With the involvement of French and British in India, the tussle between French and British for the control over India culminated in various major wars. In time, the British gradually increased their hold over India as they defeated number of rulers through their divide and rule policy.

While European powers were trying to get an edge over each other, one of the initial attempts against colonialism and imperialism by Indian local leaders can be traced in the latter half of 18th century. The late half of 18th century witnessed the reign of two ambitious, determined and intelligent rulers Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan in the Kingdom of Mysore in India’s southern region, so Mysore emerged as one of the centres and a symbol of resistance against European colonial and imperial project. They played very significant role in Indian history, especially, for taking the Kingdom of Mysore to its zenith even in the face of strong the Mughal Empire. They dominated the political, social and economic life of south India.

In this paper, what kind of strategies Tipu Sultan followed and what kind of difficulties he faced in order to exile British from India will be examined. Besides, the main intention of this paper is to deal with his expectations from the Ottoman Empire through his mission and correspondences and British measurements towards Tipu Sultan’s activities. Before examining relation between Tipu Sultan and the Ottoman Sultans, the rise of Mysore Kingdom in the hands of Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan will be concentrated.

II. The Rise of Mysore

Throughout history, when a person got the power to ascend the throne, the legitimacy of his power was generally referred to a noble descent. The ancestor of Haider Ali with his roots traced to the Qureshi tribe of Arabs, the tribe of Prophet Mohammad, had come to India as the wave of Islamic expansion was taking place to...
the East according to their accounts. His father Fatah Mohammad eventually settled in Kolar, in the southern part of Mysore. Fatah Mohammad married there and he had two sons, Shahbaz and Haider Ali (Bowring 1969: 12-13). The career of Haider Ali began with Haider Sahib, the son of Fatah Mohammad’s brother Mohammad Ilyas. After the death of Fatah Mohammad, Haider Sahib, orphaned Haider Ali and his brother Shahbaz came to live in Seringapatam where they were trained under military tradition. Haider Ali proved his worth at the siege of Devanahali in 1749 thereby earning the title of Khan. He commanded an army of independent 200 soldiers and 50 horses that was gifted to him by Nanraj, the Raja of Mysore (Rahim 1957: 400). Ali served in the military of Mysore rulers and eventually emerged as a powerful military leader due to his strong military and political prowess (Pasha 1999: 2).

Haider Ali was an able administrator who studied the structure, strengths and weaknesses of the British and French military organizations. When realizing the importance of a well-organized army, he utilized the services of European military officers mainly French to train his troops, officers and son Tipu Sultan (Rao 1946: 347). Apart from military specialists, Haider Ali hired some French officers and engineers for his institutions thereby shaping and setting up an enmity towards British (Fernandes 1969: 25). This shows that Haider Ali and Ottoman sultans shared the common interest of the institutionalization of state machinery as it was this time that the latter recognized the power of western military advancements. This is a basic sample of how the western influence and power had spread all over the world.

When Mysore was captured by Haider Ali in 1763, he expanded his territories by bringing Dharwar, Gutpurba, Kistna, Chittledroog, Kurpa, Canara and Malabar respectively under his direct rule (Duff 1912: 399; Chandra 2015: 27). In the meantime, Marathas also expanded their territories over the coastal areas which meant that the conflict with Mysore was inevitable (Bandyopadhyay 2013: 34). In 1768, when the Nizam left the Diwani of Mysore to the British, it was Haider Ali who saved it from the hands of British. However, Nizam tried to undermine this achievement of Haider Ali by referring to him as a mere Zamindar (Pasha 1999: 2).

Haider Ali died at the age of 82 on 06 December 1782 and was buried at Seringapatam, and a magnificent mausoleum in his remembrance in the Lall Bag garden stands witness to his reputation (M.M.D.L.T. 1976: 258). His death was kept secret for several days by his ministers namely Purnaiya and Krishna Rao with even his army being kept in dark as were British unaware (Bowring 1969: 118). Maha Mirza Khan, an official of Haider Ali’s court, brought the news to Tipu Sultan, who immediately left from Malabar by appointing Arshad Beg Khan on his behalf and headed towards the main army which remained loyal to him (Husain 1957: 433). Tipu Sultan, also known Feth Ali, was born at Devanahali near Bangalore in 1750. Tipu Sultan was introduced to military training by French officers in the employment of his father. He accompanied his father against the British in the First Mysore War in 1766, when he was 15 years old. Besides, he was well educated person and was capable of speaking Urdu, Persian and Arabic (Ozcan 2012: 192).

Soon after the death of Haider Ali, General Mathews came from Bombay with naval forces and captured the hill fort of Rajamanadurg, then Ankola and Sadasivagad forts respectively in 1783. In response, Tipu Sultan attacked British and imprisoned many of their soldiers, so he recaptured places that had been taken by British. Moreover, Tipu Sultan also marched to Raja of Malabar. Eventually in March 1784, Tipu Sultan, British, and Rajas of Malabar recognized each other as friends and allies (Muthanna 1962: 267). Lord McCartney, the governor of Madras, concluded a treaty with Tipu Sultan and the Treaty of Mangalore was signed on 11 March 1784. It was a great triumph for recently instated Tipu to make British cede to his demands (Nath 1961: 219; Ali 1972: 11). British might had lost their prestige and advantages at the Second Anglo-Mysore War against new ruler Tipu Sultan, but they were clearly capable of holding their territories in India. Both British and Tipu Sultan knew that this treaty just delayed their struggle of against each other for a while.

### III. Tipu Sultan’s Mission to Constantinople and British Policy towards Tipu Sultan

Tipu Sultan was very clever and foresighted man who knew British intentions on India and therefore sought alliances with other powers to put an end to British India Empire. For this purpose, he sent envoys to the Ottoman Empire, France, Afghanistan and Iran. Nevertheless, the lack of vision and jealousy of neighbours towards Tipu mainly Nizam and the Marathas, disunity among Indian rulers and diplomatic and military success of British emerged as the big difficulties for him. Besides this, Tipu Sultan’s position was different because he sought independence. The Nizam, the Marathas and the Nawab of Carnatic had legal recognition by the Mughal emperors, but Tipu Sultan was deprived of such recognition (Ali 1972: 27). The main aim of Tipu Sultan was to obtain a legal position in India. Issuing coins without any reference to the Mughal Emperors and inserting the name of Shah Alam in the Friday Khutba were not enough to get the legitimacy and his independence (Bandyopadhyay 2013: 34-35). In order to realise this goal, he needed Muslims’ supports. The legal prestige of Mughals was still high and constituting any unjustified rebellion against Mughal authority meant going against Shari’a (Qureshi 1957: 37-38). Tipu tried to obtain the sanad of Arcot through his wakil in Delhi and offered to pay the peshkash and a large sum of money to Emperor Shah Alam. Though the French representative in Delhi supported him, but the English company’s representative and Emperor’s favourite
minister Majjud-ud-daulah, a staunch British backer hindered the move and so Tipu Sultan could not get both the grant of Arcot and khilat (Hasan 1971: 129).

There was another way for Tipu Sultan to get his legal independence, that of sending envoys to the Ottoman Sultans who were Caliph of Muslim world. Tipu Sultan showed his respect to the Ottoman Caliph. He was the first Indian Muslim monarch to receive a letter of investiture from the Ottoman Caliph (Özcan 1997: 12). In this way, in 1784, he sent Osman Khan as an ambassador to Sublime Porte for the purpose of obtaining some introductory information whether a more formal plenipotentiary would be beneficial. Osman Khan, the first envoy of Tipu Sultan was sent to the Ottoman government, brought a letter to the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid I. There were three main frames in this letter. First, the collapsing of Muslim states in India after Timurid. Second, the oppression of Christians towards Indians and the Jihad of Hyder Ali Khan against Christians and his victories. Third, the types of gifts that will be sent by Tipu Sultan and request for making things easier for him (C. HR, 673/1255).

After taking a positive response, he decided to despatch an extensive mission to the Ottomans. The delegation was led by Ghulam Ali Khan and included Lutf Ali Khan, Nurullah Khan, Jafar Khan, Sayyid Jafar and Khwaja Abdul Qadir (Pasha 1999: 9). Ghulam Ali Khan was informed about the kind of treaty signed with the Ottoman government on the following basis:

First, the Mysore and the Ottoman government should always remain on friendly terms with each other. Secondly, the Ottoman government should send Tipu a body of troops whose expenses would be borne by him, and they would be sent back to Constantinople at his expense, whenever they would be required by the Caliph. Thirdly, the Caliph should send Tipu technicians who should be able to muskets, guns, glass, chinaware and other things. Lastly, Tipu should be given trade facilities and privileges to the Ottoman government in Mysore kingdom, Tipu, in addition, proposed that he should be given the port of Basra, and in return he would present the Caliph the port of Mangalore (Hasan 1971: 130).

The real purpose of Tipu Sultan seems to obtain political and military assistance of the Ottoman Empire to expel British from India. Seeking military aid from a foreign state was not new for Tipu Sultan. His father Haidar Ali had earlier received 1,000 troops from Shiraz in Persia (Ali 1972: 26). Besides, commodities of Mysore were in great demand outside and he wanted to enhance Mysore’s trade and commerce network with the Ottoman Empire.

On 1 March 1786, Tipu Sultan sent a directive to the mission which was still waiting in India because of monsoon. In this directive, he offered them to go to Constantinople through Basra and Baghdad. The reason was that he thought they could analyse the port of Basra for his future purpose and intentions. Moreover, because Tipu Sultan had a big attention for this territory, the mission was suggested to visit the holy shrines of Najaf, where the tomb of Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph, is located. With this visit, they could ask tomb keepers whether they want to be built a waterway from Euphrates to Najaf which would be financed by Tipu Sultan. Through this, it is pretty evident that his intention was to win Shias and Jafaris over (Bayur 1948: 622). Eventually, the envoys left from Sublime Port on 9 March 1786 with four ships named Ghurai Surati, Fakhuru'l-Merakib, Fath-i Shahi Muazi and Nabi Baksh including about 900 staff, four elephants and valuable products (Khwaja Abdul Qadir 2005: 25).

According to Ottoman historian Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, the Indian mission arrived Baghdad in September-October 1786 and envoys were cordially welcomed by Suleiman Pasha, the governor of Baghdad. Receiving an investiture from the Ottoman Caliph and to confirm this, he was offering some territories with all their income (Ahmed Cevdet Pasha 2011: 214). Eventually, the offering of some territories in India arouse the Ottoman government’s curiosity. They had never been offered this kind of proposal. All envoys were invited to Sublime Porte by Sultan and Kapucubasi Mustafa was given 20,000 kurush to bring them to Constantinople (C. HR, 62/3075: C. HR, 178/8857). Thus, they were transported by water to Baghdad and then by Mosul, Diyarbakir to Constantinople (Wilks and Hammicks 1980: 362-363). When the Ottoman government informed about the visit of Tipu Sultan’s envoy, they inquired about Tipu Sultan and Mysore from British ambassador in Constantinople.

After a long journey, the envoys arrived in Üsküdar on 1 September and on 25 September entered Constantinople with a retinue of 400 men (Khwaja Abdul Qadir 2005: 61). When envoys landed in Constantinople, firstly, they were welcomed by Reisi’s-küttab Suleiman Feyzullah Efendi. Although there is no archival document that proves or gives evidence about their negotiations, Ahmed Cevdet Pasha has articulated and has given extensive details in his work about these negotiations. He has argued that at the outset of dialogue, the political structure of India immediately after the death of Timurid and his successors were mentioned. The intentions of Portuguese and French along with British interests in India and the successes of Tipu Sultan were also mentioned about. After this short introduction, he has noted that they began to implement their words to get hold over Indian territories since British were thinking in larger perspective unlike Indian rulers who were basically worried about their own small kingdoms. According to him, this was the main reason behind Tipu’s offer of territories to Ottomans. In this background, his main intentions were to establish a direct communication between two countries by offering some territories of Mangalore to the Ottomans in exchange of territories of...
Basra. Reisü‘l-küttab Suleiman Feyzullah Efendi pretended not to understand and so asked whether they wanted to start ambassadorial relations from Basra. Through these questions Ghulam Ali made his point clear to Reisü‘l-küttab that Jafer Han who was wanted to be the ruler of Basra. After that, Reisü‘l-küttab asked him about the territory which was offered by them to the Ottoman Empire, this attractive explanation of Mangalore port did not prevent the rejection of this offer (Ahmed Cevdet Pasha 2011: 215-217).

Envoys gave two main reasons why Tipu sultan paid attention to Basra. The first reason was the rainy and dampness weather of India which spoiled goods and some agricultural produce. Hence accumulating them at a port outside of India like Basra could be suitable. Second reason was the protection of Basra from Arab and Persian attacks. However, this offer made Suleiman Feyzullah Efendi angry as it was thought insulting of Ottoman sovereignty in the region (Bayur 1948, 627: Ahmed Cevdet Pasha 2011: 217).

The time when Tipu Sultan’s envoys arrived in Constantinople was not an appropriate time to seek Ottomans’ assistance as they had wished for. After the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman Empire began to lose its power against Europeans and the endurance of the empire at European frontiers became one of the most crucial issues. For that reason, the balance of power policy shaped the Ottoman foreign policy. Now Russia and Austria had declared war against the Ottoman Empire which crippled the latter. The misfortune of Tipu Sultan was not confined to this. Ottoman’s French ally moreover was struggling with domestic troubles in its motherland and so could not help the Ottoman Empire. In this war, British were the only nation that supported the Ottomans towards Russia and Austria. Under these circumstances, Sultan Abdulhamid I did not want or afford to oppose the British by entering into an alliance with Tipu Sultan (Fernandes 1969: 107). On the other hand, the arrival of Tipu’s mission in Constantinople worried British. Nevertheless, Sir Robert Ainslie, the British ambassador in Constantinople, did not allow any marginalisation of the British interests in India by keeping track of Tipu Sultan’s mission (Ali 1972: 28).

After some time shortly, Sultan Abdulhamid I received the envoys with honour. The request of Tipu Sultan to be recognised as a sovereign king was easily acceded by the Ottoman Sultan. This was also the most honourable moment for the Ottomans because of confirming a king’s sovereignty. This was not the first confirmation of an Indian ruler by the Caliph. Previously Itutmush, Mahmud of Ghazna, Muhammad bin Tughlak, Firoz Shah Tughlaq and Muhammad of Malwa had sought investiture from Abbassid Caliphs (Hasan 1971: 128).

Tipu Sultan’s another expectation from the Ottoman Sultan was to obtain commercial privileges. Tipu Sultan had targeted the creation of a strong Muslim state based out of Mysore with Mangalore as its major port. He tried to expand his economy beyond his borders by seeking commercial ties with Ottoman Empire (R isso 1989: 386). He believed that the reason for the political decline of Muslim states is related to their economic difference and industry. Thus, European powers controlled Muslim countries under their domination (Hasan 1971: 130). He wanted the Ottomans to help him by sending technicians and craftsmen who were able to make muskets, guns, glass, and chinaware. However, his proposal about exchange of Basra and Mangalore was not accepted (Pasha 1999: 10-11).

Last proposal of Tipu Sultan was to make military co-operation between the Ottoman Empire and Mysore. He agreed to undertake all transport expenditure of these soldiers. In addition, whenever Sultan wanted to return these soldiers, they would be sent back (Ali 1972: 26). He tried to impress the sultan by using religious passion that Britishers were putting pressure on Muslims and forcibly converting them into Christianity (Hasan 1971: 129).

The mission of embassy was over after three years. The delegation returned back to Mysore via Cairo and Suez. In addition, they did not skip to make pilgrimage at Mecca. The embassy spent a large sum of money, lost men and ships with precious items. In spite of enormous expenditure, they had only got the recognition of Tipu Sultan as an independent king with the right to strike coins and to have the Khutba read in his name (Khwaja Abdul Qadir 2005: 62).

While Tipu’s envoy was in Constantinople, he also sent another envoy to France to seek military aid. Nevertheless, social and economic chaos in France did not allow this co-operation to work. Tipu also dispatched envoys to different countries to seek their assistance and friendly relations. These attempts to seek external cooperation and victory inside India raised the hostile of British, Maratha and Nizam towards Mysore. Tipu was aware of the global power and superior diplomacy of British. He also knew that playing the game with their rules was the only way to throw them out of India. Therefore, he tried to involve external powers in this game by sending envoys to them. However, losing American colonies made British more careful about India. If they lost their territories in India, it meant they would lose all their power. The inevitable truth lying for British was to annihilate Tipu Sultan. At least, even reducing his power could be beneficial for them. Thus, British formed a powerful confederacy against Tipu by allying with the Nizam and the Marathas on 4 July 1790 even though Tipu tried to break it (Ali 1972: 39-40). The third Anglo-Mysore War was a disaster for Tipu Sultan. He left some important territories by singing humiliating Treaty of Seringapatam. This military and political victory increased the reputation and prestigious of Lord Cornwallis and British in India whereas Tipu lost his reputation and territories (Ozcan 2012: 193).
Ottoman and Tipu correspondences appeared at the fourth Anglo-Mysore War. British changed their policy with Lord Wellesley. He thought non-intervention policy was outdated for company intention and not guarantee for British security in India (Bakshi 1971, 3). Also, Tipu Sultan did not give up his anti-British policy. His attempts to involve an alliance with French, Ottomans and other states concerned Wellesley. This concern heavily rose when Napoleon invaded Egypt. Napoleon wrote a letter to Tipu from Cairo to send him some ambassadors. British secret service in Mauritius took some measures and informed Wellesley about the activities of Tipu’s envoys (Muthanna 1962: 275). The situation could create problem for British: therefore, Tipu Sultan had to be crushed out in order to build an English empire in India and French must exile from Egypt (Edwardes 1967: 26). Thereupon British applied to Sublime Porte to give advice to Tipu in the name Caliph to bring an end to this hostility. Ottoman Sultan Selim III sent a letter to Tipu Sultan about French and their intention on both the Ottoman Empire and India. In the last letter of Selim III, he warned to Tipu Sultan against French and mentioned about the historical background of relationships between French and the Ottoman Empire. According to Selim III, Ottoman Empire established good relations with French against other Christian states of Europe from Suleiman I (Law maker) by giving special capitulations in 1535. However, the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte demolished the friendship between these two states (Bayur 1948: 644). Actually, this occurrence was not new for Tipu Sultan. In the second Anglo-Mysore war, French made a separate peace with British (Pasha 1999: 6) and now Tipu was warned by Selim III. Furthermore, the Treaty of Versailles guaranteed to British not to give any problem in India had already shaped French policy towards British. It is so obvious that the occupation of Egypt by French was a big disappointment for Selim III. The support given by British to Ottomans in their hard times made Ottomans and British closer. Therefore, Selim III emphasised on French duality to take Tipu Sultan’s attention. Selim III showed the French as notorious by giving emotional explanations of what they had done in the past. To him, the main aim of French was to send over a corps of troops to India via Suez. If they take control of India, they could not hesitate to deprive of Muslim’s lives and prosperities in India. Lastly, he advised to Tipu to be in good relation with British. Hence he was willing to solve whenever he had any problem with the British (Bayur 1948: 650-651). This letter is the brief success of British policy on Tipu Sultan, the Ottoman Empire and French. They defused French with the Treaty of Versailles in the past when British lost the Second Anglo-Mysore war. In addition to that, they turned the attack of Napoleon on Egypt into an advantage and gained confidence of the Ottoman government by helping them, so Selim III tried to convince Tipu Sultan about British intention. The response of Tipu to this letter was very hopeless. Tipu Sultan described himself as the only protector of Islam in India and did not have any suspicion for the Ottoman assistance. He did not approve what French did to send troops to India via Suez. On the contrary of Selim III, he accused of British and their intention which was to remove Islam in India. In this letter Tipu Sultan pointed out that British were apprehensive of his growing contact with the other rulers. He added in the end of his letter that when he sent his first envoy to the Ottoman Empire 13 years ago, British were scared of a united Islam alliance: hence they set up good relationships with the Nizam and Marathas (Bayur 1948: 650-651). Napoleon was defeated by Ottomans in Egypt and now the ruler of Mysore Tipu Sultan was alone to fight the British who made agreements with Marathas and Nizam against Tipu Sultan. Before this last letter of Tipu Sultan arrived in Constantinople, he lost the long confrontation with the British army in the Castle of Seringapatam (BOA, HAT, 145/6119) and eventually lost his life after a getting seriously wounded in the battle. After the death of Tipu Sultan at the hands of British troops, Mysore was given under the former Hindu Wodeyar dynasty with the Subsidiary Treaty (Bakshi 1971: 136). His entire family and their servants were embarked on twelve ships and sent to Calcutta (Gupta and Chaliha 1991: 183). He was not only a great warrior but also an innovative ruler kept adopting new technologies for the betterment of his empire. After him the British invaded and settled in India for many decades by using their divide and rule policy.

### IV. Conclusion

When Vasco de Gama sailed for India from Portuguese in 1498, he was unaware that this would change the course of world history. His courage and success paved the way for other European sailors who sailed to other parts of the world. Meeting with new world’s affluence, Europeans tried to colonize those territories. One of these territories that Europeans benefit from was India. Colonisation attempts in India succeeded by British thanks to their divide and rule policy and superior diplomacy. Their intention on India was realized by Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan in south India. Their struggle with British, nearly 50 years, was one of the important periods of Indian history. Tipu Sultan devoted his life to push out British from India. For this purpose, he dispatched his envoys to many rulers include Ottoman sultans Abdul amid I and Selim III. However, British superiority diplomacy was the biggest obstacle stood in front of Tipu Sultan. He could not get any advantage from Mughal emperors suppressed by British, French who signed the Treaty of Versailles and suffering from French Revolution and lastly the Ottomans who were in battle with Russia and Austria. Tipu Sultan paid special attention on Ottoman relations based on three main aims: Recognition as legal king of Mysore by Ottoman Caliph, military assistance and economic privileges. However, both British effects on the
Ottoman Empire and the hard political and economic situation of the Ottoman Empire did not give permission to enhance any co-operation: therefore, the mission and following correspondence failed to obtain either any commercial privilege or military help by the Ottoman Empire except recognition of Tipu’s legal situation by Ottoman Caliph. This unsuccessful attempt of Tipu Sultan arrived at the conclusion with the victory of British in front of Seringapatam Castle, so this victory demonstrated that British existence could not be removed from India.

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