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# LUSO, BRITISH, AND FRENCH RELATIONS WITH TIPU SULTAN OF MYSORE (1782-1799)

— Rita Braganza  
AM-31777, Navelim, Goa

## Introduction

The relationship between trade and conquest is very well expressed by Asiya Siddiqui in the following words: "the expansion of trade was closely linked with British conquest and domination, and the supersession of the East India Company by private European traders and finances".<sup>1</sup> The Portuguese power was dwindling and the regional politics in the southern peninsula influenced the trade relations between Goa and its neighbours. Goa and Kamataka, as the two neighbouring states on the western coast of India had developed close political, economic and cultural relations.<sup>2</sup> In 1763, with the rise of Haidar Ali, there was much political and economic interaction between these two regions. The promotion of economic interest was always connected with political conquests and treaties. This was the case with the Portuguese in India also. The British and the Portuguese shared a love-hate relationship which depended on the nature of the circumstances. In fact the Portuguese expressed their view about this relationship in the following words "... we have no worse enemy in India than the Europeans, our 'ally' Britain being the worst of them. But keep up an outward friendship with all, while fomenting trouble between them and Indian leaders".<sup>3</sup>

## The English and Tipu Sultan, 1782-84

The Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-84) was still going on when Haidar Ali with a severe attack of cancer died on 7th December 1782. On Haidar's death, the Portuguese Viceroy wrote to Tipu a letter of condolence which was to initiate Tipu to restore the trade facilities in Mysore which had been cancelled by Haidar. Tipu at this stage had to tackle his dangerous foe — the British. As Col. Humberstone had retreated to Paniani, and Tipu had appeared on the scene, General Mathews was sent from Bombay with a strong naval and military force. The English made an attempt to annex Kanara to the Bombay Presidency. The English fleet under the command of General Mathews landed at Mirjan and captured its fort.<sup>4</sup> The forts of Piro and Basrur, and also the capital of Kanara, Nagar were conquered. On 1st January 1783, the British batteries stormed the fort of Honavar, leaving Capt. Torriano the Commanding Officer of artillery in charge of the fort. Due to the treachery of the Governor of Bednur, Bednur was captured on 27th January 1783. Tipu

attacked Bednur, and after a brave encounter with General Mathews obtained its possession on 30th April 1783. After the reduction of Bednur, Tipu marched to Mangalore, the principal sea port in his dominion.<sup>5</sup> The place was defended by the 42nd regiment of Highlanders under the command of Major Campbell. The chief burden of the siege fell upon the French auxiliaries who alone managed the batteries. Under these circumstances information was received regarding peace being concluded between England and France. The news of the peace in Europe between England and France reached Madras on 24th June 1783. The English hastened to secure a ceasefire, as their position at Cuddalore had become very insecure.<sup>6</sup> Tipu's army, with the support of the French, was pressing the English to surrender, but the news of the peace altered the entire situation. M. de Bussy readily consented to a ceasefire and made an attempt to compel Tipu also to stop hostilities. Tipu at first hesitated, but later changed his mind in view of the withdrawal of the French from the contest, the Bombay attack on the western coast and the Madras offensive from the South. He agreed to an armistice at Mangalore on 2nd August 1783. With this the hostilities on both the eastern and western coasts were suspended.<sup>7</sup>

#### Tipu Sultan and the European Powers

The French Commander, M. de Bussy and his troops declined to fight against the British. Tipu was exceedingly hurt at the conduct of France, in concluding a peace without his participation, but much more irritated against the troops who refused to comply with his orders. He was aware of the insufficiency of his own army, who were in a state to prosecute the siege. Mangalore was very significant to Tipu, and the prospect of losing a place of so much consequence, when they were on the point of conquest was unpalatable for Tipu. He tried every possible strategy both of promises and threats to prevail on the French to resume their operations. But the French quitted the camp of Tipu, mutually dissatisfied with each other. Tipu entertained sanguine hopes of being master of the place in a few days, when the arrival of General Macleod with considerable reinforcements and supplies, put an end to his expectations.<sup>8</sup>

During the period of the Second Anglo-Mysore War, in 1783, the *Alvara* of 8th January 1783 lowered the rates of duties on exports from Goa. The arrival of this decree on the wake of the declining trade did improve the exports from Goa like those of Goa-Balaghat. But the smuggling of treasures on board the Portuguese ships was prevalent inspite of the strict customs regulations. Captain Domingos Xavier Ribeiro of the ship *Amavel Donzella* requested for the safety of treasures on the ship with the intention of reshipment.<sup>9</sup> He further stated in this letter dated 12th October 1786 to grant permission from the Customs Master to reship the same. According to the

Customs Master's report, the above-mentioned person had attempted to carry the treasures including money in a clandestine manner.<sup>10</sup> As a result double customs money was levied on the amount seized and the person discovered was to be rewarded.<sup>11</sup>

The Portuguese corresponded with the Bombay Council in 1783 and sought for better relations between the two nations. They further communicated their request that the Portuguese fortress should be allowed to maintain all franchise and privileges. Although the Portuguese requested for a continuation of their earlier alliances, the British arrested some local soldiers and forced them to transport arms.<sup>12</sup> The British authorities began to harass the local merchants trading between the two regions. The Portuguese demanded the release of prisoners and the goods seized, assuring the British that they will protect the interests of their merchants in the Portuguese region.<sup>13</sup> As the relations between the Portuguese and British were not favourable, the Portuguese focused their attention on getting sympathies from Tipu. The Portuguese informed Tipu, that due to the British invasion of the latter's territories, certain merchants have sought asylum in the Portuguese territory.<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Sufi, a merchant from Tipu's territory was granted protection under the laws of the Portuguese King.<sup>15</sup> In 1784, the Portuguese promised to send to Tipu clocks which would be dispatched after repairing them. Though the above incident portrays a phase of cordial relations between the Portuguese and Tipu, their relations varied depending on the British attitude.<sup>16</sup> The Portuguese had to rely on British support to maintain their empire in India. In 1784 some British sailors who had deserted the British ship were apprehended by the Portuguese and handed over to the British authorities.<sup>17</sup> The British acknowledged the gesture of the Portuguese and continued their alliance with the latter owing to their traditional friendship.

Tipu Sultan was unable to receive aid from the French because Louis XVI was loaded with an enormous national debt and public discontent prevailed in the country. Tipu Sultan was thus in a precarious state because his ambassadors were unable to receive aid from the French. So, the native rulers made attempts to isolate Tipu Sultan by forming alliance with one another. Three French frigates were received at the port of Goa by the Portuguese and the Portuguese Governor granted licenses to French brokers to hold talks regarding trade. The above developments resulted basically due to the treaty of trade between France and England. The Mhamai Brothers acted as official brokers of the French in Goa.<sup>18</sup> In this capacity they attended to the needs of the visiting Frenchmen and French ships, and acted as moneylenders and political informers.<sup>19</sup> The French never gave Tipu adequate naval support in spite of the triumphs of the French Admiral Bailli de Suffren against the

formidable British naval power at sea.<sup>20</sup> The British power was making capital gain out of the sympathy of these Indian rulers who were not only supplying cash and materials to the English and their allies during their war against Tipu, but were also extending moral support to the enemies of the protector of their own motherland.

Although Tipu had been disappointed in his expectations of assistance from France, his insatiable ambition and restless imagination would not allow him to restrain his ambition, for the sake of getting possession of more territories.<sup>21</sup> In 1789 when his extensive kingdom was threatened on all sides by the armies of the British, the Nizam and the Marathas he reversed his policy towards the Portuguese. The English began to move with their army and declared war with Tipu in 1789. The English army was victorious in many provinces and Tipu was compelled to sue for peace. The treaty of Seringapatam (1792) greatly enhanced the strength and territorial extent of the possessions of the Company. The English Company in 1793 declared the promulgation of free trade in pepper, sandalwood, cardamom and all other things except muskets, powder, swords, match locks and all sorts of arms.<sup>22</sup> In a letter dated 3rd March 1793, the Portuguese confirmed that Piro or Sadashivgad was handed over to the Sultan.<sup>23</sup> Sebastiao Joze Ferreira Borroco, *Chancelor da Relacao de Goa e Secretario do Magestoso Estado da India Azia, Portuguez* hoped that with the handing over of Sadashivgad a cordial relationship would be reestablished between the two sovereigns.<sup>24</sup> Though permission was granted for the purchase of merchandise a limit was set up for the amount of goods to be traded. Pundalik Camotim negotiated in the trade transactions and tried his best to obtain goods urgently. But he was unable to get the merchandise. As Tipu did not pass orders for the supply of rice, the Portuguese arrested a person who crossed the borders and entered Goa. When some soldiers from Tipu's army came in his pursuit, the Portuguese did not hand him over to them because there was no mutual agreement among the two sovereigns.<sup>25</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Although the French did not stand by Tipu in the Third Anglo-Mysore War, Tipu did not lose hope. In a letter dated 2nd April 1797 addressed to the representative of the people residing in the Isles of France and of La Re-Union, Tipu made overtures towards good relations. Tipu informed that in the Third Anglo-Mysore War the ambitious English, due to lack of sufficient confidence in themselves allied with the Marathas and Nizam, and attacked him from different quarters. When Tipu was about to conquer them, the French army under the command of M. de Cossigny received an order from M. de Bussy to abandon the Mysoreans. As the Mysore army was abandoned by the French, they were forced to make peace, which was very humiliating.

Tipu cited this factor to apprise the French, that they should assist the Mysoreans if Tipu declared war against the English.<sup>26</sup> Tipu focused on the common enemy, the English and the hatred he had against the English. As a gesture of friendship, Tipu would assist the French with facilities both on land and sea, and also provide gunpowder or other ammunition desirable. He expressed his willingness to support the French in their endeavours towards the British in India. The British realising the intensity of the political scenario befriended the Portuguese in Goa, to fight their common foe – the French. The Portuguese Empire in India was tottering and the British sought to aid them in order to crush the power of Tipu Sultan who had once again risen up after the Third Anglo-Mysore War. The European nations, that is France and England allied themselves with the Mysore and Portuguese respectively to prove their supremacy on the Southern coast. France, with the emergence of the Republic rose up with renewed vigor to deal with their traditional foe – the British.

Tipu took an unusually great interest in trade and commerce and actually encouraged the export of pepper, chilies, sandalwood, cardamom and rice. He established a royal board of nine commissioners of trade with 17 foreign and 30 home factories to carry out under his own elaborate instructions, an import and export trade by land and sea and brought much prosperity to Mysore.<sup>27</sup> Tipu's economic reforms could not bear much fruit because of the two major wars which he waged against the English. The Portuguese were friendly with the English in Europe and they maintained the same relations in India too. Tipu Sultan, the sworn enemy of the English, wanted to have alliance with the Portuguese and the French and strike at the English. Neither the French nor the Portuguese could really extend support to Tipu. The Portuguese power was waning in the second half of the eighteenth century. They did not have the power and courage to ally against the English in India. Moreover, the Portuguese in Goa had to depend on the provisions imported from Karnataka. Thus the Portuguese were in a dilemma. Tipu knew this factor well and tried to capitalize on that and sought political and military support from the Portuguese.

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