

UNIT 58 – UPSC - Tipu Sultan : Fourth Battle of Mysore

India's History : Modern India : Fourth Mysore War: The British defeat Tipu; Death of Tipu; Partition of Mysore ; Tipu's history - 1799

Tipu Sultan



The second half of the eighteenth century was a period of great confusion in Indian history, which witnessed the rise of a colonial power. The only state that offered stiff resistance to their expansion was Mysore, which fought not one but four wars. Tipu participated in all those four Mysore wars, in two of which he inflicted serious blows on the English. In fact Tipu's rule starts in the midst of a war against the English and ends in the midst of war against them. His short but stormy rule was eventful for his several engagements with his neighbours, the Marathas and the Nizam, as well, whose shortsighted policy prompted them to join the colonials against Mysore. Tipu remained fully involved in warfare from his youth until his fall in the fourth Mysore war. From 1760 when Haidar Ali allied himself with the French against the English to 1799 when Wellesly destroyed Tipu, Mysore had become the terror of Leadenhall Street, the headquarters of the East India Company. These forty years of Tipu both as a prince and a ruler witnessed continuous warfare.

Having learnt the western technique of warfare, Tipu was not slow in making use of it. He was himself bold, dashing, and a person of undaunted adventurous spirit. Under his leadership Mysore army proved a school of military science to Indian princes. The dread of an European army no longer wrought any magic on him. Tipu's infliction of serious blows on the English in the first and second Mysore wars damaged their reputation as an invincible power. Grant wrote to Shelburne, "An English army much superior to one which under a Lawrence, or a Clive, five and twenty ago made Hindoostan, nay some of the powers of Europe tremble at the bare recital of its victories, now for the first time was retreating in the face of an Indian army." This was a reference to colonel Bailey's capture and general Munro's flight in the second Mysore war. Alexander Dow wrote his history, "We were alarmed, as if his horses had wings to fly over our walls."

Tipu was a far-sighted ruler, who discerned the danger to the freedom of the land by the colonial expansion, which necessitated continuous warfare. Apart from this he had his own agenda to assert his own authority over the neighbours, the Marathas

and the Nizam, who were not reconciled to the rise and growth of Mysore as an independent powerful state. This weakness of the neighbours was fully exploited by the English whose shrewd political sense involved them as allies against Mysore. In all four Mysore wars the Marathas and the Nizam were willing to support the English rather than either Haider or Tipu. In the third Mysore war all three formed a powerful confederacy against Tipu, and in the fourth Mysore war the Nizam was an ally of the English. The third cause for the continuous warfare was the need to suppress the far too many units of independent power, the feudatories and small principalities, whose mutual rivalries and ambition had caused great confusion in Karnataka. It was Tipu's policy to establish a strong central authority which would serve the people better.

Thus the English, the Marathas, the Nizam and the feudatories were the principal causes for Tipu's wars. The most serious wars were against the English, who had never been confronted with a more formidable foe. In the first Mysore War Tipu, a lad of 17 years, suddenly surprised the English when he appeared at the gates of Madras in September 1767. He caused great consternation to the governor of Madras, to the Nawab of Carnatic, Muhammad Ali, and to almost all the councillors who very narrowly escaped being taken in the country house in the company's garden. Happily for them a small vessel that by accident was opposite the garden furnished them with the means of escaping. Thus, it was a providential escape of the entire Madras government, which were about to be captured by Tipu, who had been placed in independent command of a body of troops in the first Mysore war.

Tipu's training in the art of war started as early as 1763, when he was hardly 13 years old, in Haider's attack on Malabar where Tipu displayed great dash and courage. That was his first experience of war. He was present in Haider's negotiations with the Nizam in the first Mysore war when the tact and resourcefulness of the young prince impressed the Nizam and won him over to Haider's side. It was Tipu who obtained the ratification of the treaty of Alliance between the Nizam and Haider in 1767. Tipu had gone to the Nizam's camp at the head of 6000 troops and successfully concluded the treaty. This was the first diplomatic assignment of Tipu, who was well received by the Nizam, who conferred on him the title of Nasib-ud-daula (fortune of the state) and also Fateh Ali Khan.



Tipu had taken great interest in the Mysore-Maratha war of 1769-72. After the death of Peshwa Madhava Rao in 1772, he was sent to the northern part of the Mysore to recover the territories which the Marathas had occupied. By the time of second Mysore war he had gained great experience both of warfare and diplomacy. In September 1780 he inflicted a crushing defeat on Colonel Baillie near Polilur. This was the first and the most serious blow the English had suffered in India. The whole detachment was either cut or taken prisoners. Of the 86 European officers 36 were killed, and 3820 were taken prisoners of whom 508 were Europeans. The English had lost the flower of their army. Baillie himself was taken prisoner. This defeat caused so much consternation in Madras that half of its Black Town was deserted. Sir Hector Munroe, the hero of Buxar, who had defeated three rulers of India (Mughal Emperor Shah Alam, Oudh Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah, and the Bengal Nawab Mir Qasim) in a single battle, would not face Tipu. He ran for his life to Madras throwing all his cannons in the tank of conjeevaram.

Likewise, Tipu inflicted a serious defeat on Colonel Braithwaite at Annagudi near Tanjore on 18 February 1782. This army consisted of 100 Europeans, 300 cavalry, 1400 sepoy and 10 field pieces. Tipu seized all the guns and took the entire detachment prisoners. One should remember that the total force of a few hundred Europeans was the standard size of the colonial armies that had caused havoc in India prior to Haidar and Tipu. In December 1781 Tipu had successfully seized Chittur from British hands. Thus Tipu had gained sufficient military experience by the time Haidar died in December 1782.



The second Mysore war came to an end by the treaty of Mangalore. It is an important document in the history of India. It was the last occasion when an Indian power dictated terms to the English, who were made to play the role of humble supplicants

for peace. Warren Hastings called it a humiliating pacification, and appealed to the king and parliament to punish the Madras government for the faith and honour of the British nation have been equally violated. The English would not reconcile to this humiliation, and worked hard from that day, 11 March 1784, to subvert Tipu's power. The treaty redounds great credit to the diplomatic skill of Tipu. He had honourably concluded a long-drawn war. He frustrated the Maratha designs to seize his northern possessions. The great advantage was psychological, the mode of conclusion was highly satisfactory to him. The march of the commissioners all the way from Madras to Mangalore seeking peace made Munro remark that such indignities were throughout poured upon the British, that united efforts seemed necessary to repudiate the treaty at the earliest time. Such public opinion in the country highly gratified Tipu who felt it was his great triumph over the English. That was the only bright spot in his contest with the English, the only proud event which had humbled a mighty power.

The treaty of Mangalore carried the seeds of strife with the Marathas, because they were disappointed in their expectation of acting as the mediators and of recovering their losses in the north of Mysore. Tipu had emerged with enhanced prestige whom even the mighty English could not humble. This excited the jealousy of both the Marathas and the Nizam who fought a war with him for two years from 1785 to 1787. The Nizam was also not friendly towards Mysore ever since he had come to power in 1761. He regarded himself as the overlord of the entire south, and expected Haidar and Tipu to be his tributaries. As he was militarily imbecile he allied himself either with the Marathas or the English to distress the Mysore rulers. There was always a pro-British party at Hyderabad which dissuaded the Nizam from being cordial to Tipu. In the war that followed Tipu had the upper hand despite the alliance of his two neighbours. The war came to an end in April 1787 by the treaty of Gajendragadh by which he ceded Badami to the Marathas hoping to win their support against the English or at least to prevent them from joining the English.



Tipu was disappointed in his expectations. Far from joining him to remove the English from India, both of them, the Marathas and the Nizam, joined the English in a powerful confederacy against Tipu in the third Mysore war. The allies struggled hard

for nearly two years from 1790 to 1792. Lord Cornwallis who had surrendered to the Americans at Saratoga in the new world assumed the command and with great difficulty he was successful in a surprise night attack to enter into the island of Srirangapatana on 6 February 1792. Tipu was made to make peace by surrendering half of his kingdom, and paying three crores as indemnity, apart from sending two of his sons as hostages to Madras. This was a serious blow to Tipu.



Very soon Tipu was able to build up his power again, paid the indemnity, and got his sons back. He intensified his contacts with the French, the Turks and the Afghans. The Nizam was also made friendly, who was made to recruit a contingent of 14000 troops under a French, Raymond, who was friendly to Tipu. Napoleon was also on the way to India to help Tipu, who had invited Zaman Shah of Afghanistan as well to help him remove the English from India. When all these plans were about to mature, destiny willed otherwise. Napoleon was defeated at Accre in Syria and forced back to France. Zaman Shah was made to beat a hasty retreat to Kabul because of British machinations that brought about a rear action from Iran on Afghanistan. Wellesley forced the Nizam to disband Raymond and accept a British detachment under subsidiary system. Having finished this task he declared war on Tipu, sending the largest English army ever assembled in India. The fourth Mysore war was a short affair. Keeping Tipu in false hopes, he suddenly surprised him by unacceptable demands. When Tipu refused to accept them, the English breached the fort and in a bloody encounter, fighting against heavy odds he was killed on 4 May 1799. The last hope for the freedom of the land was thus extinguished. He died a soldier's death for the defence of the cherished values of his land under a spontaneous combustion of hostile forces.