

# Tipu sultan and the conflicting interpretations of history

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## Manifest pedagogy:

Tipu Sultan is an important ruler of modern India and his defence of Mysore against the British is an issue of importance. Though a controversial question on Tipus religious policy is not possible in Mains. His reforms and wars can be an area of interest for UPSC in prelims and Mains

## **In news:**

- The newly appointed BJP govt of BS Yediyurappa has cancelled the annual event of Tipu Jayanti celebrations observed in Karnataka

## **Placing it in syllabus:**

- Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.

## **Dimensions:**

- Tipu periodisation
- Conflicts with the English- The four Anglo- Mysore wars
- Tipus reform measures and idealism
- Tipus international diplomacy
- Tipus attitude towards people of other religion

## **Content:**

### **Tipu periodisation: (1750-1799)**

Tipu Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore, was the Indian ruler who

resisted the East India Company's conquest of southern India. He had inherited the throne from his father Haider Ali, who had driven out the previous Hindu dynasty.

He tried to build up an alliance to drive the British – 'those oppressors of the human race' – out of India and intrigued with the French in Paris and Mauritius. Tipu was instructed in military tactics by French officers in the employ of his father, Hyder Ali. In 1767 Tipu commanded a corps of cavalry against the Marathas in the Carnatic (Karnataka) region of western India, and he fought against the Marathas on several occasions between 1775 and 1779.

He succeeded his father in December 1782 and in 1784 concluded peace with the British and assumed the title of sultan of Mysore. In 1789, however, he provoked British invasion by attacking their ally, the Raja of Travancore. By the Treaty of Seringapatam (March 1792) he had to cede half his dominions.

He remained restless and allowed his negotiations with Revolutionary France to become known to the British. On that pretext the governor-general, Lord Mornington (later the marquess of Wellesley), launched the fourth Anglo- Mysore War. Seringapatam (now Srirangapatna), Tipu's capital, was stormed by British-led forces on May 4, 1799, and Tipu died leading his troops in the breach

**Conflicts with the British (Anglo-Mysore wars):** The Anglo-Mysore Wars were a series of four wars fought in India over the three decades of the 18th century between the British East India Company and the Kingdom of Mysore

### **First Anglo-Mysore War (1767-1769)**

In 1767, Mysore was a powerful state under Hyder Ali. In 1769, the first Anglo-Mysore war was fought in which Haider Ali defeated the British and **Treaty of Madras** was signed between them. Haider Ali occupied almost the whole of Carnatic

## **Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-1784)**

Warren Hastings attacked French port Mahe, which was in Haider Ali's territory. Haider Ali led a common front with Nizam and Marathas and captured Arcot (Capital of Carnatic State).

In July 1781, Haider Ali was defeated at Porto Novo by Eyre Coote and saved Madras. In December 1782, after the death of Haider Ali, the war was carried on by his son Tipu Sultan.

Tipu Sultan signed **Treaty of Mangalore** in March 1784 which ended the second Anglo-Mysore war.



## **Third Anglo-Mysore War (1789-1792)**

The third war was fought between Tipu Sultan, and British East Indian Company began in 1789 and ended in Tipu's defeated in 1792. In this war, Marathas and Nizam aided the British and Cornwallis captured Bangalore. The war ended by signing of **Treaty of Seringapatna**, between Tipu Sultan and Lord Cornwallis. In this treaty, Tipu ceded half of his territories and two of his son's as a hostage of war



## **Fourth Anglo-Mysore War (1799)**

In Fourth War 1799, the British army led by Lord Wellesley attacked and defeated Tipu Sultan in a fierce war. He met a heroic death on 4th May 1799 while defending his capital Seringapatnam.



**Tipu's reform measures and idealism:** Tipu was less worried about form and more about the substance of governance. He considered agriculture as the life blood of the nation and took steps for taking over derelict land and protection of the

cultivator and his descendants. He had encouraged the farmers to cultivate commercial crops to overcome poverty and unemployment problems. He had several commercial depots in foreign countries such as Pegu, Muscat, Turkey and Istanbul for selling sandalwood.

He introduced sericulture in Mysore on a large scale and maintained records about the cultivation of sericulture. He was primarily responsible for the construction of well laid out roads and communication facilities. He had given loans and subsidies to the farmers and provided the benefit of land revenue exemption. Tipu also promoted animal husbandry, horticulture, sericulture, social forestry and other branches of agriculture.

Tipu wanted to develop the economy of Mysore State in a different way and make his citizens economically self-reliant and politically sovereign republics. He gave importance for the development of economic bonds between South India and the Persian Gulf. In a letter addressed to Chief of the factory at Muscat, Tipu had requested the Imam to send Dingies, a small vessel employed in the trade between Malabar Coast and Persian Gulf in return of rice produced in India.

He wrote letters to Muscat to dispatch expert shipbuilders to the Mysore territory. Maldiv Islands continued to be an important naval dockyard during his time. Mangalore, Bhatkal, Coondapur and Tadadi became important naval centres of his times. Tipu also invited experts from Turkey, China, France and Iran and set up industries in Channapatna, Bidnur, Chitradurga, Bangalore and Srirangapatna. He had invited Chinese experts for improving sugar manufacturing in his territory. Pearl fisheries were encouraged by him in the Malabar coast. He sent a mission to France to import skilled workers and arsenals in 1785.

He took measures to bring social reforms like ban on the use of liquor and all intoxicants, the ban on prostitution and the

employment of female slaves in domestic service, the abolition of the Nayar practice of polyandry in Malabar and Coorg, the repeal of the custom of human sacrifice in the temple of Kali near Mysore town and restrictions on lavish extravagance for marriages, festivals and charities.

His administration saw a strong and well-organized central government, a well-knit district and provincial administration directly under the control of the centre, well-trained and disciplined civil, military and diplomatic services, uniform set of laws and the direct contact between the subjects and the state by the removal of intermediaries

**Tipu's international diplomacy:** Tipu was greatly disappointed when he realized that local powers in India lacked national consciousness. Tipu tried his best to enlist the cooperation of both the Marathas and the Nizam, but none of them recognized the political sagacity and foresightedness of Tipu.

It was this factor which compelled him to develop friendly relations with foreign powers. He appointed trade agents and diplomatic missions to accomplish this goal of diplomacy. He tried to enlist the support of France, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, hoping to form a formidable front against the English by appealing to their religious sentiments.

He had appealed to the French General to send a strong army of 10000 to be under the his authority within India. He was a member of Jacobin club of France. Tipu Sultan had strongly persuaded the French to assist him in the Third Mysore War against the British but they remained neutral because Tipu had initiated a war against the English at the wrong moment.

Tipu made an attempt to cultivate diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Sultan and French King and assured them that they could share the British possessions in South India with him. Turkey did not have either the wish or the capacity to respond to Tipu's diplomatic initiatives and France incurred severe

loss in the war with Britain

**Tipu's religious idealism:** Tipu is being considered by many historians as a great secular ruler and a splendid supporter of Hindu temples. He consulted with astrologers of Ranganatha temple, Sreerangapattana before his every administrative or war attempts. He gifted the astrologers with lots of money.

Believing, according to the predictions of astrologers, that he could become the undisputed ruler of the whole of South India, after defeating the British, he performed all the suggested rituals in the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple. It is only for the satisfaction of the Brahmin astrologers who used to study his horoscope that Tipu Sultan had patronised two temples. The wealth of many Hindu temple was confiscated before 1790 itself mainly to make up for the revenue loss in the country.

By his six to eight years of presence in Malabar, the entire costal belt of the region converted to Islam. Some of the largest and wealthiest groups of families of Calicut were converted in mass to Islam. He renamed several places with Islamic tenor. His role in Malabar and Coorg region shows some elements of religious extremism and intolerance.

But after being defeated in the first Anglo-Mysore war he started dealing cordially with the Hindus in his kingdom so as to avoid insurrection and get support in the face of the British power. The credit of re-consecration of Sharada idol made of sandalwood, the main deity at Sharada Peeta, Sringeri of Chikmagalur goes to him and his contributions to the Peeta are well documented.

When the Peeta came under attack from Maratha army when Sachidananda Bharathi was the pontiff, Tipu Sultan was waging a battle at Kannur in Kerala. On learning about the raid from the Marathas, he sent an army to Sringeri to drive away Marathas. The army was stationed at Sringeri to offer

protection from further attacks. According to documentations Tipu brought back Sachidananda Bharathi again to Sringeri and offered donations in huge quantities and got consecrated a sandalwood idol of Sharada.

Tipu Sultan was a ruler of the past and we cannot expect him to be Secular and tolerant in the modern sense. His history shows evidence of both statemanship and tolerance to Hindus along with persecution and forced conversions of Hindus. In his defence of Mysore against the British he showed the character of the highest order of Patriots. In his reformative and innovative measures he showed the character of a great administrative genius. There is enough evidence in history to celebrate or condemn Tipu Sultan.

But today there is an active project of communalizing history and there is focus on Politicising historical figures. In this project Tipu Sultan is a controversial figure as he can be interpreted both ways. In the interest of Indian National unity and to foster the genuine feeling of tolerance and brotherhood among communities it is better to look at the Tipu's tolerant aspect rather than dividing the communities by bringing forth his intolerant measures. There is a need for constructive use of history