



TIPU'S RESISTANCE TO COLONIALISM

Dr.B.P.Mahesh Chandra Guru* Dr.Gurusiddaiah, C Dr.Sreekantaiah*** Abhilash, M.S******

* Professor, Department of Studies in Communication and Journalism, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Karnataka.

**Assistant Professor, Department of Studies in History, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Karnataka.

*** Guest Faculty, Babasaheb Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Studies and Research Centre, Bangalore University, Bangalore, Karnataka.

**** Research Scholar, Department of Studies in History, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Karnataka.

Abstract

Haidar and Tipu were fortunate in being able to administer from Seringapatam which commanded a strategic position in the heart of South India. The uncompromising and death defying fight against colonialism put up by both Haidar and Tipu has been a rare event among the rulers of India. Tipu confronted the British East India Company (EIC) with adamant resolve and this audacity of a regional potentate of Mughal India has endeared his memory to posterity. Tipu tried to enlist the support of France, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan to form a formidable front against the English since he viewed the expansion of the British in the East as a threat to Indian sovereignty. The fourth of May 1799 was looked at with particular satisfaction by the British rulers as the day on which an indomitable opponent of theirs was at last destroyed. However, the day was also looked at with sadness by all patriots who vehemently supported those who fought against European colonialism.

Preamble

Historical, cultural, political and economic relations have existed between Persian Gulf and South India before even the pre-Christian era. Mysore State was a formidable power which belonged to South India. Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan were the great rulers of Mysore State in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan were the only major rulers in South India who defied the British and refused to become tributary to the East India Company, mainly due to their patriotism and self-esteem. They were also great rulers, visionaries and nation builders. They further prepared grounds for a historic alliance between Mysore State and the Persian Gulf for the welfare of the Mysore State. Haidar Ali was not a born diplomat but he was a great fighter. Tipu was both a great diplomat and a fighter. He struggled all through his life to free India from British colonialism by building an alliance between Mysore State and the Persian Gulf. Tipu's historical and heroic resistance to colonialism is examined in this article based on qualitative research methodology.

European Colonialism in India

There was long-distance trade in the Indian Ocean area for a very long time. The Arabs had gained supremacy over the Indian Ocean in the name of inter-continental trade. This subsequently passed on to the Portuguese, Dutch, French and finally to the British. Several historians have commonly stated that European colonialism was a significant factor in the structure of production and political organization on the Indian sub-continent. But the high seas did not belong to any one nation and the traders easily avoided getting caught by anybody. European colonialism was institutionalized in India mainly due to the naval superiority, monopoly trade and vulnerability of Indian ports etc.

The French Revolution in Europe drove Portugal into a still closer alliance with the English. The Portuguese carried out royal commands mainly on the western side of the Indian Ocean. The private world of the Portuguese was closed to the Indians since the merchants were very friendly with the local masses. The Dutch, who were most potent in the Seventeenth Century, had their own establishments which benefited them economically and otherwise, yet they substituted the cult of efficiency for sporadic and occasional violence. The Dutch were split into private and official categories as were the Portuguese who proceeded. In the 17th Century the main objective of the Dutch was not exploitation but commerce. Later the situation changed since exploitation was found to be more profitable than commerce. The European and the Asian were partners before establishing colonial empires



in the Indian sub-continent (Panikkar, 1959).¹ There was no question of equality or friendship in the idea of partnership even though both shared the same structure of trade and politics in the Eighteenth Century.

The British East India Company which was established on 31st December 1600 by Queen Elizabeth I was an umbrella organization. It was one among several European trading ventures that sought to tap the richness of the East. This company encountered a well organized and financially sound rival, the Dutch East India Company. The English factories transferred their profits from India to England through other Europeans. The English in the Seventeenth Century India confronted the Mughal Empire at its height. The Mughals welcomed the English to offset the predominance of the Portuguese and later the Dutch, who realized the opportunities afforded for profitable trade. The company founded its factories in 1660s in Surat and other places. The company had secured three presidency capitals – Madras, Bombay and Calcutta by 1700, which were not established with the objective of colonial conquest.

After the death of Aurangzeb, the English consolidated their position in India. The battle of Plassey (1757) caused a dramatic turn in the economic relationship between India and England. The Seven Years War between England and France paved the way for the Paris Peace Agreement in 1763. The East India Company gained greater control over Bengal, India's richest province. This gave it the resources to dominate the other players in a continuing contest among India's regional states. The Company also organized a more efficient state structure on the basis of a larger revenue base and military supremacy.

Resistance of European Colonialism by Tipu Sultan

The struggle of power in the various regions of South India had been in the process of formation, their full development had not been in sight and whatever that had developed had not been strong enough to meet the threat. At the dawn of the Eighteenth Century, the Mughals entered a stage of decline. Mysore, Nizam in the Deccan, the Maratha Confederacy and the English East India Company were in the fray (Venkatasubramanian, 1989).²

The access to Mysore from the eastern parts of South India has been easier throughout the ages both because of the lower altitudes of the Eastern Ghats and the many passes running through them. Most of the battles between the rulers of Mysore and the English were also to be decided here. While the military and diplomatic history of the eighteenth century will not engage our attention it is necessary to remember that nature has placed Mysore in such a position that, in spite of distinct characteristics of its own, it is not insulated from the rest of south of India as a whole. In his relation with the Europeans, Haidar never failed to assert his superiority. Both the French and the Portuguese had experience of this. French appeals to spare the Zamorin, who had sought shelter with them, were turned down by Haider in 1774. On another occasion their request to spare the territory of Kunjan Nair, long their dependant at Mahe, was not only not heeded by Haidar; he annexed the area in question and exacted from the French a sum of Rs.1 lakh as punishment for opposing his move. The Portuguese were compelled to cede a portion of the territory north of Goa to Haidar. Mysore rule was extended for the first time over the territories of several Indian chiefs who had paid tribute to the Portuguese till that time. In fighting against the English, Haidar did not fail to turn their own military qualities against them (Guha, 1985).³

An instance of Haidar's ability to utilize the forces raised by the English to serve his own ends was clearly provided during the battle of Mulbagal (October, 1768) during the first Anglo-Mysore War. Following extreme

¹ Panikkar, K.M (1959) A History of Kerala (1498-1801), The Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, India, p.233.

² Venkatasubramanian, T.K (1989) Role of Tipu Sultan in the Integration of Political Forces of the South in the Second Half of the 18th Century, In. B.Muddachari (Ed), Souvenir of Seminar on National Integration with Special Reference to Tipu Sultan, Department of Studies in History, University of Mysore, India, p.124.

³ Guha, Nikhiles (1985) Pre-British State System in South India, Mysore, 1761-1799, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, India, pp.64-65.



scarcity of provisions in the English camp, many of the English and Indian sepoys who donned the Company's colors crossed over to Haider's side. Haider's artillery was managed with equal skill and fired as briskly as those of the English a circumstance never experienced before from any of the country powers (Robson, 1786).⁴

Haider is such a flyaway bird that he never waits till we throw salt upon his tail, or we should have caught him many a day ago. This mobility declined under Tipu (Lord Macartney, 1950).⁵ Tipu had prevailed upon the Marathas, Nizam and other Indian rulers to forge an alliance against British and resisted colonialism. He vehemently opposed the invasion of India by the foreigners and advocated self rule. He strived for making Mysore state as a prosperous and progressive through efficient system of administration based on democratic values. He firmly believed in the development of agriculture, industry and commerce sectors which constituted important components of integrated development of the state. He introduced commercial regulations to ban trade with the British.

The well-regulated, vigorous Government of Haider has, under his son, become more systematic and stronger; the European discipline has been more rigidly enforced, and all kinds of fire-arms, which were formerly imported by strangers, are now made by his own subjects under the direction of foreign workmen. He conducts the operations of war on regular principles, taking the forts, and securing the country as he advances; and add to all that by destroying or expelling all the Rajahs and Palegars, by not permitting his great officers to keep any independent bodies of troops, and by paying all the military himself, he has adopted the wisest measures for securing to his descendants the undisturbed possession of his dominions (Munro, 1791).⁶

Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan were formidable adversaries who inflicted a severe defeat on the British and came near to breaking the power of the East India Company. Haider Ali was a remarkable man and one of the notable figures in Indian history. He had some kind of a national ideal and possessed the qualities of a leader with vision. He realized, long before others did so, the importance of sea power and the growing menace of the British based on naval strength. He tried to organize a joint effort to drive them out. His son Tipu continued to strengthen his navy. Tipu also sent messages to Napoleon and to the Sultan in Constantinople (Nehru, 1956).⁷ Pandit Jawaharlal recalls the historic struggle launched by Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan against British colonialism.

If he had remained in arms, we never could have settled this country unless we incurred the enormous expense of keeping our army in the field and even then the operations to be carried on would be liable to all the hazards of protracted military operations. He has saved us this at least, and has thereby rendered us a service almost as great as any of those rendered by His Highness the Nizam. Whatever he desired to be done he himself ordered, and the rest of the assembly had no choice but to give their assent. Tipu applied himself to governmental tasks with the same assiduity as Haider. Their daily routine followed almost the same pattern. Haider and Tipu were fortunate in being able to administer from Seringapatam which commanded a strategic position in the heart of South India (Kirmani, 1958).⁸

Tipu confronted the British East India Company (EIC) with adamant resolve and this audacity of a regional potentate of Mughal India has endeared his memory to posterity to whom he stands for a liberator of colonial

⁴ Robson, Francis (1786) *The Life of Hyder Ally*, S. Hooper, Oxford University, London, U.K., pp.73-74.

⁵ Lord Macartney (1950) *Correspondence to Sir John Macpherson*, 12 June 1782, in C.C. Davies, *The Private Correspondence of Lord Macartney*, London, U.K., p.47.

⁶ Munro (1791) *Correspondence to George Brown of Leith*, 10 Aug, in Gleig, Munro, Vol.-I, pp. 132-133

⁷ Nehru, Jawaharlal (1956) *The Discovery of India*, 6th edn., London, U.K., pp.272-73.

⁸ Kirmani, Mir Hussain Ali Khan (1958) *History of Tipu Sultan*, Susil Gupta pvt. Ltd. Calcutta



India who could have been (Ali, 2002).⁹ Most kings in India at the time of European conquest of our country, representing predominantly feudal interests, utterly failed to perceive the nature of colonialism, or wallowing in the self-indulgence of the feudal class, were just too bored to be provoked by such concerns. Industrial capital which was assuming its maturation generated in the consciousness of Haidar and Tipu the earliest manifestation of the class interests of the national bourgeoisie. War consumed most of the 38 years of rule by Haidar and Tipu. They fought against warlords as part of their conquests and resisted British attempt at occupation and subjugation. Thus there was never a year that passed without these rulers mounting their horses and taking to the field.

The uncompromising and death defying fight against colonialism put up by both Haidar and Tipu has been a rare event among the rulers of India, all of whom during this period encountered British and French colonialism (Saki, 1998).¹⁰ By the will of God, authority is hereby given in regard to the obtaining and giving of written agreement. To wage war against the English, agreement is made that until the taking of the fort of Chennapatan (Madras) along with the country of Carnatic the other ports and Mumbai (Bombay) and Bengal, together with its dependencies, the two (contracting) rulers (sardars) will not make peace with the English. After the conquest of the entire country of Carnatic and the fort of Chennapatan (Madras), whatever is attached of old as **jagir** to the fort of Pondicherry, that, together with the port of Chennapattan and the country attached to it of old, and, in addition, other ports on the sea-coast of that side, should be given over to the French Commander for the King of France. The fort of Trichinapalli, Thanjavur, etc., in the country of Carnatic, which has been in the possession of Muslims from olden days, would be given over to the custody of the servants of this Government (Husain, 2001).¹¹

These documents are well preserved at present in the Persian Manuscript section of the Salar Jang Museum (Acquisition No.3195, Farsi Nasr 100), Hyderabad. It could be inferred that Tipu wanted to form an alliance with the French to crush the English and oust them from the Indian soil since they were the most formidable force to be reckoned with during his time. Tipu had stated that the English had committed much oppression and tyranny on Muslims and others in India during the last 30 years and inflicted extreme tyranny and oppression also on the French.

The Fathul Mujahidin or Triumph of the Warrior authored by Tipu Sultan in 1783 was the result of this rich experience. It was the summing up of the practice of the Mysore army and was a seminal theoretical contribution which Tipu Sultan made to the science of war. For their rich experience, their innovation and theorization in the science of warfare Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan stand out as among the greatest of warriors that Karnataka has produced. The Fathul Mujahiddin was produced in the context of the anti-colonial struggle and as such its immediate objective was to serve as a weapon in the war of resistance against British colonialism. In his lifetime, Tipu was also witness to the success of the American War of Independence from the clutches of British colonialism. Tipu not only grasped the importance of international events, but sought to build the solidarity of the nations oppressed by British colonialism and utilize the friendship of those having a contradiction with it out of their own imperial interests. Haidar had set in motion his interest in the need to study international political developments (Saki, 1998).¹²

⁹. Ali, B. S (2002) A critique of Tipu Sultan's political economy, In A. Ray (Ed.), Tipu Sultan and his age: A collection of seminar papers, Calcutta, India: The Asiatic Society, pp. 3-22.

¹⁰. Saki (1998) Making History: Karnataka's People and their Past, Vol. I-II, Vimukthi Prakashana, Shimoga, India, pp.375-442.

¹¹. Hussain, Iqbal (2001) The Diplomatic vision of Tipu Sultan: Briefs for Embassies to Turkey and France, 1785-86, in: Irfan Habib (ed), State and Diplomacy under Tipu Sultan, New Delhi, pp.40-42, pp.40-42.

¹² Saki (1998) Making History: Karnataka's People and their Past, Vol. I-II, Vimukthi Prakashana, Shimoga, India, p.378.



Tipu's army was guided by this work all through his reign. By virtue of this his army became so well organized and his strategies so perfect that everyone dreaded him (Hussain, 1986).¹³ Next comes a long and bitter invective, apparently leveled at Europeans in general, but evidently intended to apply more immediately to the English, whose various possessions in the Carnatic, in Bengal, and on the west side of the peninsula, are particularly noted and stigmatized as the acquisitions either of fraud or of violence (Kirkpatrick, 1811)"¹⁴ Tipu's letters to various public functionaries reveal the anti-colonial content and nationalistic aspirations.

Tipu Sultan was a Muslim by birth and disposition. But in his anti-colonial attitude, the motive force was not Hindu-Muslim conflict. The attitude of the whiteman towards the Hindus and Muslims was the same. It was essentially a question of British versus the Native not one of Hindu, Mussalman or Christian. Tipu had no need of placating the sentiments of a particular religious group. Tipu declared 'My people degraded, my revenues impoverished, and my country ruined that commanding officers, their Dubashes and servants reap the harvest of their oppressions and grow rich in the spoils of their injustice. Tipu Sultan's efforts to integrate the anti-colonial political forces of his time met with partial success only. South India had no Voltaire or Montesquieu (Nawab, 1800).¹⁵

The Sultans of Mysore, Haidar Ali and Tipu proved much harder nuts to crack. They defied the British and their allies. They fought four valiant wars in the fourth war British gold effected what British guns had so far failed to accomplish. The ministers betrayed the master. Tipu refused to surrender and died bravely fighting in defence of his fort (Chand, 1965).¹⁶

The fourth of May 1799 was looked at with particular satisfaction by the British rulers as the day on which an indomitable opponent of theirs was at last destroyed. For the same reason the day was looked at with sadness by all who had a care for the memory of fighters against colonialism (Habib, 1999).¹⁷

The scholar pays rich tribute to Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan for their fight against British colonialism. These quotations help to remind us that in the conception of our past, as held in our nationalist historiography, Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan have occupied an honored place for their valiant fight against British colonialism.

Tipu never entertained any illusion about the danger to our land from the growth of British power in India. Long before the events of 1857, Tipu struggled hard to rouse the consciousness of the people to the impending danger from the English. He played a dominating role in elevating a small state like Mysore to the rank of an important power, and brought it in contact with the bigger world, all with the purpose of removing the foreigners from the land. His regime began with the war against the English, and ended in a war against the English. His strategy and struggle failed because of the disunity in the Indian camp (Ali, 1989).¹⁸

Tipu Sultan wanted to end British colonialism in India by enlisting the support of French (Lafont, 2001).¹⁹ Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan were indomitable opponents of the colonial regime. This realization assumes significance

¹³ Hussain, Mir Mahmood (1986) "Fathul Mujahidin in Sultan", *Journal of the Tipu Sultan Research Institute and Museum*. 3, Pp.19-20

¹⁴ Kirkpatrick, William (1811) *Select Letters of Tippoo Sultan*, London, UK, Letter No.200, p 234.

¹⁵ Nawab, Umdat-ul-Umara, (1800) *Letter to Edward-Clive-Secret Sundries*, 24th June, Volume 21, p.1058

¹⁶ Chand, Tara (1965) *History of the Freedom Movement of India*, Revised edn., Delhi, India, pp.226-27.

¹⁷ Habib, Irfan (1999) *Confronting Colonialism-Resistance and Modernization under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan*, Indian History Congress, Tulika, New Delhi, India, Introduction .p.XV.

¹⁸ Ali, Sheik B (1989) *Tipu's Struggle Against the British*, In. Muddachari, B. *Souvenir on National Integration with Special Reference to Tipu Sultan*, The University of Mysore, Mysore, India, pp.24-32.

¹⁹ . Lafont, J.-M (2001) *The memoires of Lieutenant Colonel Russel concerning Mysore: In the service Historique de l'Armee de Terre*, Chateau de Vincennes, Paris.



especially in light of the recent tendency to devalue the historical struggles launched by these two rulers (Habib, 2002).²⁰ Siraj-Ud-Daula took part in the battle of Plassey to fight against the British power while Tipu Sultan fought against the British who were interested in enhancing their corporate as well as political gains in the sub-continent (Sil, 2005).²¹

Tipu had invited Muslim monarchs from other places to restore certain balance of power in India against the growing influence of the East India Company. There was a constant campaign against Tipu by the English. No one in India had humiliated and dictated terms to the English as Tipu and Hyder had done. The intensity and hostility had gone to such a level that the English regretted that their language was not copious enough to find sufficient epithets to condemn him with (Sayeed, 2015).²²

Tipu even wrote the government of Isle de France (Mauritius) proposing an indissoluble treaty of alliance and fraternity creating a family bond between the two states (Martin, 1837).²³ Tipu Sultan was the ruler of the native state of Mysore. His fierce opposition to British rule in India earned him unrivalled notoriety in England. Colonial writings usually portray him as a cruel tyrant who tortured Indians and Englishmen alike. These novels seem to suggest that the British deserve credit for rescuing Indians from such egregious villain.

Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, was one of India's greatest leaders and a huge thorn in the side to the expansionist ambitions of the East India Company. The newly discovered documents give a fascinating insight into Tipu's court and provide some of the earliest known descriptions of the treasures within. There is also a description of Tipu's throne itself which was not sent back to London because it was made from gold. Instead it was destroyed and distributed among the company's officers (Brown, 2012).²⁴

Tipu Sultan and the spectacle of the Mysore Wars were a key contributor to shifting British attitudes about empire in the late eighteenth century. Tipu was the ruler of the Indian state of Mysore, acknowledged by contemporaries to be a powerful ruler, a military commander of great distinction – and a hated foe of the British East India Company. Tipu fought three separate wars against the Company; during the course of these conflicts, he was portrayed by the British as a cruel and tyrannical despot, a fanatical Muslim who forced his subjects to convert to Islam and tortured captured British soldiers in his foul dungeons. The vilification of Tipu was linked to the development of an imperial culture. Expansionist Governor-Generals consciously blackened the character of Tipu to make their own aggressive actions more palatable to British audiences at home. Through a process of reversal, preventive war came to be justified as defensive in nature, protecting the native inhabitants of Mysore from the depredations of an unspeakable despot. The increasingly vilified and caricatured representations of Tipu allowed the East India Company to portray itself as fighting as moral crusade to liberate southern India from the depredations of a savage ruler. In combating the imagined despotism of ‘Tippoo the Tyrant’, the East India Company found its redemption (Soracoe, 2013)²⁵.

Tipu Sultan elicited two different emotions in the minds of nineteenth century British readers – that of fear and elation. His martyrdom came to symbolize the ultimate triumph of colonialism over the colonized. It is therefore

²⁰ . Habib, Irfan (2002) *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization Under Haidar Ali & Tipu Sultan*, Anthem Press, New Delhi, India.

²¹ . Sil, Narasingha P. (2005) *An Anatomy of Colonial Penetration and Resistance in the Eighteenth Century: The Odyssey of Siraj-Ud-Daula and Tipu Sultan*, *Journal of Asian History*, 39(1): 44-91, www.jstor.org

²² . Sayeed, Vikhar Ahmed (2015) *On the life and times of Tipu Sultan*, Interview with Prof. Sheik Ali, *Frontline*, December 11, Chennai, India, www.frontline.in

²³ . Martin, R. Montgomery (1837) *The Despatches, Minutes and Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley during his Administration in India*, Vol. V, W.H. Allen and Co. Leadenhall Street, London, U.K.

²⁴ . Brown, Mark (2012) *Tipu Sultan papers reveal wealth of spoils after India siege*, *The Guardian*, July 09, www.theguardian.com

²⁵ . Soracoe, Michael (2013) *Tyrant! Tipu Sultan and The Reconceptation of British Imperial Identity, 1780-1800*.



not surprising that colonial literature exhibits ambivalence towards Tipu Sultan. The tiger of Mysore is finally stuffed – to frighten, as well as to fascinate, British spectators (Chakraborty, 2013).²⁶

Tipu lived at a time when anti-colonialism was growing without the feeling of a composite nation. Tipu had to engage with two enemies: colonial and palegars (feudal chiefs). The birth day should be celebrated as ‘anti-colonial day’ to silence his critics but make them fall in line with his dream of a strong sustaining ‘make in India’ project (Assadi, 2016).²⁷

Tipu Sultan stands in history of India as a symbol of resistance to British colonial expansion. It is unfair to dub Tipu Sultan a tyrant since he was certainly a very important figure in the Indian resistance to Britain. If Indians want to celebrate the anti-colonial struggle then they must celebrate Tipu Sultan. The British had not made any derogatory comment on Tipu as a mass rapist and a brutal killer. There was no doubt that he played an important role in resisting the rise of British power. Tipu Sultan should be studied in the context of the period he lived in and contemporary ideas must not be applied to his actions (Habib, 2017).²⁸

Tipu Sultan was the most powerful of the native Princes of India. In 1788 three ambassadors sent by Tipu Sultan of Mysore arrived in Paris to ask Louis XVI to form an alliance against British forces in India. He strongly resisted the East India Company’s conquest of southern India. He had persuaded the French to support him in his fight against the British since he was influenced by the French Revolutionary ideals. He also wanted to expand trade relations with the French and facilitate the economic prosperity of Mysore state. Tipu defeated the foreign invaders in the First and Second Anglo Mysore War and even dictated terms to the British in the subsequent Treaty of Madras and Mangalore respectively. He had built a strong army which was competent enough to beat the British army. He was defeated and killed in the Fourth Mysore War since the native rulers had ditched him and supported the British. The people of Coorg and Malabar considered British as their friends and Tipu Sultan as their enemy due to religious hatred and fundamentalist mindset.

Conclusion

European colonialism was institutionalized in India mainly due to naval superiority, monopoly of trade and vulnerability of Indian ports. There was no question of equality or friendship in the idea of partnership even though both shared the same structure of trade and politics in the Eighteenth century. Tipu tried to enlist the support of France, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan to form a formidable front against the English since he viewed the expansion of the British in the East as a threat to Indian sovereignty in general and Islam in particular. Tipu failed in his diplomatic missions with France, which did not respond to his demands militarily and otherwise. Haidar Ali and Tipu fought against warlords as part of their conquests and strongly resisted the European colonialism. They were formidable adversaries who inflicted a severe defeat on the British and came near to breaking the power of the East India Company. The 4th of May 1799 was considered by the British rulers as the day on which an indomitable opponent of theirs was at last destroyed. However, the day was also looked at with sadness by all patriots who vehemently supported those who fought against European colonialism.

²⁶. Chakraborty, Ayusman (2013) Tipu Sultan and the Politics of Representation in Three 19th Century English novels, The Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, www.rupkatha.com

²⁷.Assadi, Muzaffar (2016) Tipu sultan fought British colonialism, The Times of India, Bangalore, November 10, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com

²⁸. Habib, Irfan (2017) To celebrate anti-colonial struggle, celebrate Tipu Sultan, Interview, Financial Express, New Delhi, India, October 29, www.financialexpress.com



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