

The Rehabilitation of Tipu Sultan by Bhagwan S. Gidwani's "*The Sword of Tipu Sultan*"

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Abstract

The Learning of Monarchs in particular Indian Monarchs by their sophisticated life style is out of the ordinary intelligence. Indian Monarchs had been projected as antagonists and arch Villon to the public in the British era. This actually induced the patriotic zeal among the Indian historical Novelists and made them come up with the detailed accounts of events that actually happened in the past. It was proved by the collection of the folklore, lullaby and data from the contemporaries of the kings. It is Bhagwan S. Gidwani who term re-reading of history through literature in his works. *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* is one of his novels that aims at projecting the true history of Tipu Sultan. In that respect, the article focuses on unveiling how Tipu Sultan was rehabilitated through Bhagwan S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*.

Keywords: Disunity, Military Inclination, Imagination, Rehabilitation.

In the author's note prefixed to his novel *The sword of Tipu Sultan* (1976) Bhagwan S. Gidwani states that his interest in Tipu Saltan was the result of a French student's remark in London that Tipu Sultan was one of the few kings who had died in battle. He read a few books on Tipu Sultan and found that most account of Tipu were ambiguous, distorted or contradictory. He also found that, against the Portrayal of Tipu as an arch-villain by English by English commentators; no one had attempted a fair portrayal of Tipu's character or the events in his life.

Therefore Gidwani decided to embark on a long "Voyage of Discovery". He studied a vast quantity of Indian, British, French, Turkish, Persian, Dutch and Portuguese materials relating to Tipu. Then he started writing a book of History on Tipu, but gave it up and wrote a novel, because he felt that history would be too poor a medium to recapture imaginatively achieve this more effectively.

Gidwani wrote the novel with two objectives: to rehabilitate the much-maligned Indian Monarch Tipu Sultan and to draw, from Indian past history, lessons for the present

Tipu himself was very much alive to the relevance of the past to an understanding of contemporary history. Quite sadly, what he learnt from the Indian past was that India was weakened not so much by our outside power but the peril, the weakness, the sickness within us --- disunity. To him this realization was a lesson for the future. It is this same lesson that Gidwani also deduces from the story of Tipu Sultan in the course of the novel.

That is why Gidwani dedicates the novel “to the country which lacks a historian,” “to men whom History owes rehabilitation” and “to the youth of India who must be told the truth.” The omniscient narrator of the novel achieves exactly that.

On a night in 1782, the British army retreats from a hill in Malabar, fearing an irresistible attack by Tipu Sultan's forces. Quite ironically, Tipu's Forces are just then evacuating the opposite hill when news has arrived of the death of Tipu's father Hyder Ali Khan. Hyder's trusted lieutenant Sheik Ayaz tries to seize the throne, but the attempt is foiled by Hyder's minister Purnaiya.

Tipu's mother Fakhr-un-Nissa recalls how, being childless, she went on a pilgrimage, accompanied by Hyder, to the tomb of Saint Tipu Mastan Onlia in Arcot, promised to deliver her first-born to God's service and was foretold that her first-born would be a Sultan.

The narrator recalls that, when Tipu was five years old, Hyder was sent to Dindigul as military commander. On the way Fakhr-un-Nissa delivered her second son Karim prematurely in a palanquin during a battle. Hyder's trusted friend and counsellor Purnaiya effected the recall of Hyder to Mysore to put down a near-mutiny. Hyder exploited the chaotic political conditions in Mysore, caused principally by the feuds between the brothers Nanjaraj and Devaraj, ministers of the king. Hyder also brought about reconciliation between Nanjaraj and Devaraj. As a result of all these moves, Hyder became the Commander-in-Chief of Mysore.

Tipu's Teachers Maulvi Obedullah and Goverdhan Pandit familiarized him with India's ancient and rich heritage while Ghazi Khan trained him in sports and martial arts. Just before Hyder became the supreme commander, a palace conspiracy forced him to flee to Bangalore, while Tipu and Karim were imprisoned in the Seringapatam fort. Tipu courageously and resourcefully escaped from the fort with Karim. Soon afterwards it was discovered that Karim suffered from an incurable malady, which rendered him unfit to rule. So, when Tipu was twelve, Hyder decided that Tipu would not enter God's service, but would rule Mysore after him.

Tipu is troubled by doubts regarding his future and his mission in life. He longs for a spiritual life, but has been forced against his will to fight. At the same time, his perception of the British strategy in India and the traditional Indian disunity moves him to a nationalist commitment. But, When Purnaiya meets him with a long list of traitors, Tipu is disillusioned. He requires time to silence the storm in his heart before deciding on his future course of

action. Parting from Purnaiya, he goes to Kolar, where his father is buried. There he meets Goverdhan Pandit, who helps him to make up his mind. On 2 January 1783, Tipu reaches Chithoor and is crowned.

Determined to liquidate the Kingdom of Mysore, the British attack Tipu on several fronts but are defeated and forced to sue for peace. The treaty of Mangalore is signed on 11 March 1784. The British use the respite from war to arm themselves, to bribe Tipu's lieutenants into treachery and to persuade the Nizam and the Marathas to attack Tipu. But Tipu weathers the storm. The Marathas sign a treaty with Tipu in April 1787. The Nizam is ignored.

Lord Cornwallis, who became governor-General in August 1786, decides to crush Tipu and spends four years preparing for it. Tipu spends those four years improving the lot of his people. His liberal decrees and democratic measures earn him the veneration of the common people. But they cost him the loyalty of his military commanders and of his rich and powerful subjects.

The British, with the Nizam and the Marathas as allies, attack Tipu in May 1790 on the pretext that he is harassing their ally, the ruler of Travancore. A savage war is fought for two years with changing fortunes. By 1790 the British are so frustrated that General Meadows tries to commit suicide and Cornwallis considers a parley with Tipu. On the Mysorean side, with Tipu's wife Ruqayya Banu dead, Tipu himself indisposed, and Purnaiya down with a wound, Mir Sadik takes over command. He persuades Tipu to parley with the British and is himself entrusted with the task. Before Purnaiya can recover, Mir Sadik concludes a treaty with the British which is highly unfavourable to Mysore. By the treaty of Seringapatam, signed on 3 March 1792, Tipu cedes half his territories to the British and their allies, agrees to pay a cash indemnity of 33 million rupees, and hands over to the British two of his sons to guarantee the fulfillment of his obligations.

Cornwallis's successor, John Shore, not being of a military inclination, leaves Tipu alone. Through prudent measures, Tipu nurses Mysore back to prosperity.

Shore's successor, Richard Wellesley, is a diehard imperialist and is determined to establish the British Indian Empire. Using mean intrigue, he falsely claims that Tipu has isolated the treaty and attacks Mysore. The Nizam joins the British, but the Marathas do not. Mir Sadik, who has turned traitors, helps the British to score easy victories and besiege Seringapatam. Tipu decides to die fighting. At the same time, he persuades Purnaiya to leave the fort in order to keep the nationalist spirit alive and carry on the national cause.

Mir Sadik is made overall commander and he soon engineers the murder of all commanders loyal to Tipu, throwing the Mysorean forces into confusion, the entry of the British into Seringapatam, the surrender of the fort to the British. Tipu realizes the magnitude

of the treachery afoot too late. Accompanied by a handful of loyal soldiers he fights bravely like a tiger until he is killed by a British bullet.

Gidwani asserts that his portrait of Tipu Sultan is quite accurate because the imaginative judgements he has formed have a firm foundation in historical truth and that he has let the facts speak for themselves, intervening only to separate the lie from the truth. In order to secure verisimilitude to his imaginative recreation of Tipu Sultan and his times, Gidwani cited numerous historical dates. By presenting Tipu's personality, Gidwani convincingly gives the lie to the malignant portraits of Tipu painted by partisan historians. Gidwani maintains that, as Mir Sadik says in the novel, history is written as a conqueror wishes it is to be written. Above all, Gidwani secures the validity of his narrative by interspersing it with numerous incontrovertible facts of history.

Since the principle objective of the novel is to rehabilitate Tipu, he dominates the novel is to remarkable feature of the characterization of Tipu is the method adopted by the novelist. With the patient care of a painter, Gidwani paints one feature of Tipu's personality after another through incident as well as interior monologue, until the final portrait emerges – a portrait that is artistically more satisfying than the schizophrenic caricature painted by imperialist historians. Another important feature of the characterization of Tipu is the detailed picture that Gidwani presents of the several influences that shaped Tipu's personalities and character: Hyder Ali Khan, Fakh-un-Nissa, Maulvi Obedullah, Goverdhan pandit, Ghazikhan, and French, American and Indian thought and philosophy. Gidwani's implied proposition is that a prince shaped by such a confluence of influences could never have turned out to be the monster that the British made him out to be.

An important feature of Tipu's portrayal in the novel is the constant dramatic conflict in Tipu's mind between his natural inclination and initial training on the one hand and his destiny and the imperatives imposed by that destiny on the other highly reminiscent of Arjuna's dilemma in the Gita. Tipu is acutely conscious of the fact that, in that cruel period, he cannot be a being after his own heart. The whole of the chapter entitle "A Soul in Torment" portrays the dramatic conflict in Tipu's mind.

The final portrait of Tipu that emerges is admirable; Tipu is a loving son and an affectionate husband; he is kind, compassionate, considerate, grateful and forgiving; he is courageous and resourceful; as a general, he is farsighted, unconventional, heroic, generous to captured enemies and chivalrous to their womenfolk; he has a keen intellect and he loves learning; he is pious and tolerant of faiths other than his own; he is a staunch nationalist; he is loved, nay, venerated by his people; he loves and trusts. In sum Gidwani's Tipu Sultan emerges as the first nationalist Monarch of India and The first royal martyr to the course of Indian nationalism

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