

# Rupkatha Journal

## On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

An Online Open Access Journal  
ISSN 0975-2935  
[www.rupkatha.com](http://www.rupkatha.com)

Volume V, Number 1, 2013

---

### Chief Editor

*Tirtha Prasad mukhopadhyay*

### Editor

*Tarun Tapas Mukherjee*

---

### Indexing and abstracting

Rupkatha Journal is an international journal recognized by a number of organizations and institutions. It is archived permanently by [www.archive-it.org](http://www.archive-it.org) and indexed by **EBSCO**, **Elsevier**, **MLA International Directory**, **Ulrichs Web**, **DOAJ**, **Google Scholar**, **J-Gate**, **JournalSeek**, **ResearchGate** and other organisations and included in many university libraries

---

### Additional services and information can be found at:

About Us: [www.rupkatha.com/about.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/about.php)  
Editorial Board: [www.rupkatha.com/editorialboard.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/editorialboard.php)  
Archive: [www.rupkatha.com/archive.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/archive.php)  
Submission Guidelines: [www.rupkatha.com/submissionguidelines.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/submissionguidelines.php)  
Call for Papers: [www.rupkatha.com/callforpapers.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/callforpapers.php)  
Email Alerts: [www.rupkatha.com/freesubscription.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/freesubscription.php)  
Contact Us: [www.rupkatha.com/contactus.php](http://www.rupkatha.com/contactus.php)

---

© *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*

# “That disgrace in human form”: Tipu Sultan and the Politics of Representation in Three 19th Century English novels

Ayusman Chakraborty  
Jadavpur University, India

---

## Abstract

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. This article studies the representation of Tipu Sultan in three nineteenth century English novels – *The Surgeon’s Daughter* by Sir Walter Scott, *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of the Mysore Wars* by Captain Meadows Taylor, and *The Tiger of Mysore* by G. A. Henty . In these works, Tipu is painted in an extremely unfavourable light. Arguing that the politics of imperialism influences such representations, this article tries to show how the depiction of Tipu as a monstrous villain served to justify British rule in India. These novels seem to suggest that the British deserve credit for rescuing Indians from such egregious villain. The article also focuses on politicization of Tipu’s dead body. Colonial art and literature constantly return to the scene where Tipu’s body is discovered by his enemies. This article argues that colonial imagination converts Tipu’s corpse to a ‘grisly trophy’ which becomes a sign of British triumph over Oriental despotism.

[**Keywords:** Tipu Sultan, Mysore, British, Oriental despotism; *The Surgeon’s Daughter*; Sir Walter Scott; *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of the Mysore Wars*; Captain Meadows Taylor; *The Tiger of Mysore*, G. A. Henty]

Among those Indian rulers who challenged British rule in India, few enjoyed as much notoriety as Tipu Sultan, ‘the Tiger of Mysore’. Tipu contested with the English East India Company for supremacy over South India, and kept its progress in check for several years. His proverbial hatred for the British made him their national enemy. Though he was defeated and killed in the end, his spectre continued to haunt British imagination for decades. This article focuses on three nineteenth century English novels which portray Tipu Sultan in an unfavourable light. It aims to analyze the politics of representation in these novels, claiming that the depiction of Tipu as a sanguinary tyrant served the basic political purpose of justifying British rule in India.

This article is divided into two sections. The first section concentrates on the character of Tipu Sultan as depicted in three English novels – *The Surgeon’s Daughter*, *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of the Mysore War*, and *The Tiger of Mysore*. In each of these novels, Tipu appears as an antagonist. Following popular British opinion, the novelists (Sir Walter Scott, Captain Philip Meadows Taylor, and George Alfred Henty) present him as an egregious tyrant who delights in torturing his subjects and enemies alike. This section tries to examine how these three novelists shaped their narratives to highlight the vices of Tipu. Their aim was to vindicate British colonialism, which, they argued, saved

---

*Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* (ISSN 0975—2935), Vol. V, No. 1, 2013.

Ed. Tirtha Prasad Mukhopadhyay.

URL of the Issue: <http://rupkatha.com/v5n1.php>

URL of the article: [http://rupkatha.com/V5/n1/06\\_Tipu\\_Sultan.pdf](http://rupkatha.com/V5/n1/06_Tipu_Sultan.pdf)

Kolkata, India. © www.rupkatha.com

the people of India from such monsters. The second section focuses on a climactic moment of the Anglo-Mysore wars, when the body of Tipu Sultan was discovered by British officers. Colonial imagination freezes this moment, converting it to a timeless scene which marks the fall of Oriental despotism and the triumph of English civilization.

### ***Menacing Monster: Image of Tipu Sultan in Colonial Literature***

It should be noted well in advance that several contemporary historians have opposed colonial representations of Tipu Sultan as a vicious tyrant. They assert that the British historians were guilty of exaggeration. Tipu Sultan was certainly an excellent ruler – an able administrator, a tactful general, and a radical innovator. Though he sometimes committed atrocities, he was not the monster that the British made him out to be. In *An Advanced History of India*, Majumdar, Raychaudhuri, and Dutta describe him as, “A man of sound moral character, free from the prevailing vices of his class, he had an intense faith in God.” They further point out:

“... he was not a fierce bigot. The discovery and study of Tipu’s Shringheri Letters<sup>1</sup> prove that he knew ‘how to placate Hindu opinion, and religious intolerance was not the cause of his ruin.’ Though a pious Muslim, he did not attempt any wholesale conversion of his Hindu subjects as Wilk’s account would lead us to believe; but he forced it only on those recalcitrant Hindus on whose allegiance he could not rely.” (Dutta, Majumdar, & Raychaudhuri 708)

Many contemporary historians agree to this view. However, there are still some historians who argue that British accounts, at least partially, were true. It is not the purpose of this article to side with either of these views. But it does point out that nineteenth century English novels on Tipu Sultan stress only the negative aspects of his personality, to the exclusion of his virtues. As noted earlier, the politics of imperialism influence such representations.

A brief summary of the Anglo-Mysore wars will help us to understand the subject in hand. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Mysore under Hyder and Tipu became a source of danger to British rule in India. Hyder Ali was originally an adventurer in the service of the Hindu rulers of Mysore. Taking advantage of the ruler’s weakness, he usurped the throne. Ambitious and daring, Hyder quickly increased his territories through conquests. The rapid ascension of Hyder alarmed neighbouring powers like the Nizam, the Marathas, and the English. These three formed an alliance and attacked him. However, the Marathas and the Nizam soon backed out. The results of the First Anglo-Mysore war (1766-1769) went in favour of Hyder, who routed the English army and reached as far as the outskirts of Madras. The war ended with exchange of prisoners and restoration of conquered territories to their original possessors. The Second Anglo-Mysore war (1780 – 1784) began when Hyder, incensed at the capture of Mahe in his dominion, encroached upon the Carnatic. The English forces were defeated at Pollilur and Bednur. Large number of English soldiers, including the English commander Brigadier Mathews<sup>2</sup>, was captured. While the war was going on, Hyder died of cancer in

1782. He was succeeded by Tipu who continued hostilities with the English. The war ended with the restoration of status quo by the Treaty of Mangalore (1784). The Third Anglo-Mysore war (1790 – 1792) witnessed the defeat of Tipu Sultan in the hands of the three allies – the English, the Marathas, and the Nizam. He was forced to cede half of his territories to the victors, and to pay a huge indemnity to the English. Undaunted by this defeat, Tipu tried to regain his strength through alliance with the French. Fear of Napoleonic invasion induced the Governor General Lord Wellesley to declare war against the Sultan. The Fourth Anglo-Mysore war (1799) ended with the death of Tipu Sultan and the fall of Mysore. Thus ended the rule of one of the most inveterate and dreadful foes of the English.

The four Mysore wars, Kate Teltscher points out, “were more extensively chronicled than any preceding campaign.” (Teltscher 229) Most accounts paint a very unflattering picture of Tipu Sultan. He is usually depicted as an incarnation of oriental brutality. Though a few writers like Edward Moor showed Tipu in a more favourable light, the British public gave little credence to their testimonies. It was the negative portrait of the Sultan that found common acceptance. Among the various sketches of Tipu Sultan published in the early nineteenth century, Kirkpatrick’s account had the greatest impact on English imagination. Colonel William Kirkpatrick was the first English officer to attempt a comprehensive sketch of Tipu. His *Select Letters of Tippoo Sultan to Various Public Functionaries* (1811) profess to exhibit the Sultan’s character as revealed through his correspondences. Kirkpatrick’s edition is not exhaustive; he admits:

“In making the present selection from about a thousand letters, I have confined myself, almost entirely, to such as either appeared to exhibit the Sultan in some new light; to unfold some of his political, financial, or commercial views; or to elucidate some historical fact. Those which merely related to the details of ordinary business, without eliciting any thing peculiarly characteristic of the writer, have been passed over.” (Kirkpatrick x)

Nor is his presentation unbiased. Kate Teltscher points out that the letters are “framed to conform to expectations of despotism”. (Teltscher 237) While annotating these letters, Kirkpatrick stresses those points which present Tipu in an unfavourable light. What is emphasized is his depravity, not genius. In the “Preface” he provides a long list of Tipu’s vices:

“... the cruel and relentless enemy; the intolerant bigot or furious fanatic; the oppressive and unjust ruler; the harsh and rigid master; the sanguinary tyrant; the perfidious negociator; the frivolous and capricious innovator; the mean and minute economist; the peddling trader; and even the retail shop-keeper.” (Kirkpatrick xiv)

Kirkpatrick’s account greatly shaped the views of future writers.

Another writer, whose account of the Mysore wars became influential, is Colonel Mark Wilks. Wilks served as the Resident of Mysore for several years. His *Historical*

*Sketches of the South India*, in three volumes, severely criticizes Tipu Sultan. In his novel, Taylor pays tribute to this work calling it “a vivid romance from first to last”. (Taylor 602)

As we shall see, the nineteenth century English novelists derived their understanding of Tipu Sultan from accounts like these. Following the example of earlier writers, they presented Tipu as a hardened villain without any iota of grace. Sir Walter Scott’s *The Surgeon’s Daughter*, published in 1831, is first in the order of publication. Tipu Sultan plays a minor role in this novel. The villainous anti-hero Richard Middlemas excites Tipu’s passion by showing him a miniature of his fiancée Menie Gray. Possessed by desire, Tipu persuades Richard to deliver the girl to him for a suitable reward. A surgeon in the service of the East India Company named Adam Hartley, who had earlier courted Menie unsuccessfully, comes to know about this scheme. He travels to Mysore, hoping to protect Menie by appealing to Hyder’s sense of justice. Finally, through Hyder’s intervention, Menie is restored to Adam. Tipu is chastised by his father for his errant behaviour and Richard is punished with a gruesome death for planning to betray Tipu to the English.

*The Surgeon’s Daughter* is not even loosely based on history. In the “Introduction” Scott admits that his friend Mr. Train had narrated to him “the principle incident on which it turns.” (Scott 5) Interestingly, Train’s story has nothing to do with Tipu. The villain in his narrative is an unnamed “native Rajah”. (Scott 9) Scott substitutes this Raja with Tipu Sultan, knowing that to his (English) readers Tipu had come to embody Oriental despotism. Tipu Sultan is sketchily drawn in this novel. Scott presents him in the stereotypical role of an Oriental ruler who lusts after white women. At times, the novel does refer to other aspects of Tipu’s character. However, these are narrated instead of being depicted. One is made to feel that Tipu’s cardinal fault is his propensity to give in to lust; a fault for which he is chastised and cursed by Hyder Ali.

Among the three novels described in this article, Philip Meadows Taylor’s *Tippoo Suldaun: A Tale of the Mysore War* (1840) is the only one that qualifies as a historical novel. The novel closely follows the history of Tipu Sultan, interweaving the main plot with various events of his life. The other two novels present Tipu in the role of a stock villain; they hardly portray him as an individual character. Taylor’s novel, on the other hand, focuses on the workings of Tipu’s mind. His feelings and emotions become our object of interest. The novel follows the gradual degeneration of Tipu’s mind which eventually brings about his downfall. Tipu thus becomes a prominent character, if not the protagonist, in this novel.

*Tippoo Suldaun* narrates the adventures of two protagonists, one Indian and the other British. Tipu is seen through the eyes of these two characters. Kasim Ali, the Indian protagonist, is the son of a *patel* or a village headman. He rescues Ameena, the third wife of Rhyman Ali Khan, from drowning. Out of gratitude, Khan, an officer in Tipu’s army, helps him to join Tipu’s service. Kasim quickly distinguishes himself by his valour. He saves Tipu’s life many times, and becomes a trusted companion. However, Tipu’s brutalities eventually repel him, and he leaves the Sultan. Fearing defection, Tipu sends assassins to murder him. Enraged by this act of treachery, Kasim joins the British and

assist them in their final battle against Tipu. The other protagonist, Herbert Compton, is a British officer fighting under Brigadier Mathews' command. He is captured along with others at the battle of Bednur. Herbert scornfully refuses the offer to join Tipu's service, despite Tipu's repeated persuasions. As a result he has to endure imprisonment for seventeen years. Finally, he is freed after the death of the Suldaun, and returns to his fiancée in England.

Taylor's portrayal of Tipu Sultan is grounded on the works of Kirkpatrick and Wilks. Following them, he depicts him as an erratic ruler, sometimes well meaning but often capricious. Taylor actually quotes Wilks' estimation of Tipu's character - "his were the pranks of a monkey, with the abominations of a monster." (Taylor 602.) Taylor refers to his experiments with medicine and economics, which ended in failure. Where modern historians see originality and innovations, Taylor discerned madness and caprice. He mentions that Tipu's experiments made his subjects suffer greatly. His reign is thus presented as an era of misrule from which the British delivered the Indians.

*Tippoo Suldaun* contains graphic scenes of violence and excesses which highlight the idea of disorder and misrule. Taylor shows that the English prisoners received unjust treatment in Tipu's hand. They were persuaded to convert to Islam. Those who dared to resist were flung over rocks and killed. English youths were castrated and kept as entertainers. Taylor also shows that Tipu was particularly harsh to the Hindus. The Nairs of Malabar were ruthlessly suppressed by Tipu: the men forcefully converted to Islam, and the women "rudely torn away from their families" and converted to concubines. (Taylor 487) Tipu also destroyed the temple of Seringham because of which "a spirit of revenge was actively aroused against him in the minds of his Hindoo adherents." (Taylor 486) Taylor suggests that it was the antagonism of his subjects that hastened his fall. For instance, it was a Nair, forcefully converted to Islam, who helped the British capture Bednur. He declines any reward for his assistance, declaring revenge to be his only award. Behind such descriptions one may discern the working of imperial politics which polarized Hindus and Muslims into mutually antagonistic camps.

It is to be noted that Taylor's description of Tipu Sultan even drew the criticism of English readers. The reviewer for *The Athenaeum* points out that Tipu's vices were greatly exaggerated in this novel. The whole passage deserves consideration:

"The writer of an historical romance is tacitly pledged to maintain truth of character, his range of fiction being limited to incident; and we consider the obligation to be greatly strengthened, when the personage is so little known that the mass of readers is as likely to form an estimate of him from the pages of the novelist as from those of the historian; ... Tippoo Suldaun, though not portrayed by Captain Taylor as the monster, with whom it was the fashion some fifty years ago to terrify women and children, is yet drawn with darker shades than reality will justify, in order that his overthrow, an act of questionable policy, may appear a measure of substantial justice." (*The Athenaeum* 73)

The last line thus identifies the politics behind such negative representations. Ironically, it is a British reviewer who draws our attention to this.

Taylor's portrayal of Tipu Sultan differs from Scott's and Henty's in several aspects. While these two novelists merely report Tipu's atrocities, Taylor shows him in action. This makes the Sultan appear more repulsive. Readers shudder to find him torturing an elephant calf before dispatching it. Even Rhyman Khan, a loyal retainer of Tipu, condemns the action stating, "it is much if Alla does not repay him for it with reverses ..." (Taylor 374) Taylor suggests that such acts of "wanton cruelty" stems from his madness. Tipu's very eyes betray signs of mental unrest:

"His eyes were full and prominent, but the whites of them were of a dull yellowish tint, which, with their restless and suspicious expression, gave them a disagreeable look, and one which bespoke a mind of perpetual but not profound thought..." (Taylor 273)

This is a unique interpretation of Tipu Sultan's character. Other writers usually ascribe Tipu's cruelty to Oriental barbarism; thereby converting it to a generic trait which he shares with other (Oriental) tyrants.

To give Taylor his dues, it must be acknowledged that his description of Tipu Sultan is not completely one-sided. At times, he does refer to Tipu's humane qualities, like love for his mother and wives. After Tipu's fall, Kasim Ali pays tribute to the Sultan by enumerating his virtues:

"he was a great man – such an one Hind will never see again. He had great ambition, wonderful ability, perseverance, and the art of leading men's heart more than they were aware of, or cared to acknowledge; he had patient application, and nothing was done without his sanction, even to the meanest affairs, and the business of his dominions was vast. You will allow he was brave and died like a soldier." (Taylor 648)

Like the reviewer for *The Athenaeum*, we must recognize that Taylor was more just to the character of Tipu in the conclusion of his work. (*The Athenaeum* 74)

Finally, it is time to consider the novel of G. A. Henty. George Alfred Henty (1832-1902) became famous by writing novels for young adolescents. Mark Naidis draws our attention to the fact that "A complete Henty bibliography contains about 220 items; at least eighty of these may be considered historical novels for juveniles." (Naidis, 50) *The Tiger of Mysore: A Story of the War with Tippoo Saib* (1895) is one such novel. Strictly speaking, it is not a historical novel, though Henty often digresses from the main story to narrate the history of Anglo-Mysore wars. It is better to call it an adventure novel, even a 'Ruritanian novel'. The novel resembles Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda* in some aspects. They have some elements in common like escape from castles, impersonations, and swordfights. Dick and Surajah remind one of Rudolf and his sidekick Fitz (in *The Prisoner of Zenda*). Like fictional Ruritania, India in Henty's novel serves only as an exotic backdrop for adventures. The only connection with reality is through Tipu Sultan, who plays the role of an antagonist in this novel.

*The Tiger of Mysore* centers on the adventures of Dick Holland, a young adolescent who visits India to find his missing father. His father John Holland was the captain of a ship that drowned near Mysore. He was taken into custody by Tipu Sultan, and nothing about him was heard ever since. Margaret, Dick’s mother, never gave up the hope of finding her husband. She travels to India as soon as her son is old enough to accompany her. Margaret bears Indian blood in her veins. She is the daughter of a native Rajah who had married an English woman. Her brother Mortiz had inherited the throne of Tripataly. Margaret hoped to find her husband with the assistance of her brother. After adventures at sea, which include fight with a French frigate, Dick and his mother land at Madras. They are warmly received by Dick’s uncle, the Rajah of Tripataly. The Rajah helps Dick by giving him training in horse riding and shooting. Dick is also trained to imitate native manners and customs. After his training is over, Dick travels to Seringapatam in the guise of a native. Surajah, the son of the Rajah’s general, accompanies him. By a stroke of fortune, they save the inmates of Tipu’s harem from the attack of a tiger. Out of gratitude, the Sultan employs them in his service. Using this opportunity, Dick finds out that his father was imprisoned in Savandroog. He also discovers that an English child named Annie Mansfield has been kept prisoner in the Sultan’s harem. Both of them are eventually rescued by Dick and Surajah. The final chapters have little connection with the main narrative. They describe the fall of Tipu Sultan in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War. Dick, who became an officer in the East India Company’s army, fights in this battle. Finally, after the tenure of his service is over, he returns to England to marry Annie. The novel thus ends in the note of a romance, with the hero marrying the heroine and living a happy life thereafter.

*The Tiger of Mysore* presents an apologia for British rule in India. Henty believes that British rule has done much good by introducing order, peace, and stability in the country. To do that, it has been necessary to root out tyrants like Tipu Sultan who manifest disorder and chaos. Very craftily, he makes the Sultan responsible for drawing the British into war. As he remarks in the “Preface”:

“While some of our wars in India are open to the charge that they were undertaken on slight provocation, and were forced on by us in order that we might have an excuse for annexation, our struggle with Tippoo Saib was, on the other hand, marked by a long endurance of wrong, and a toleration of abominable cruelties perpetrated upon Englishmen and our native allies... Tippoo... revelled in acts of the most abominable cruelty. It would seem that he massacred for the very pleasure of massacring, and hundreds of British captives were killed by famine, poison, or torture, simply to gratify his lust for murder. Patience was shown towards this monster until patience became a fault.”  
(Henty n.pag)

This description of Tipu as a monster helps him to justify Anglo-Mysore wars as moral crusades.

Tipu Sultan plays a strange role in *The Tiger of Mysore*. Despite being the main antagonist, he does little by way of action. The novel merely reports his atrocities, it never

depicts them. Only once does Tipu appear as a character. Even then he does nothing but reward Dick and Surajah. This is in stark contrast to Taylor's novel where Tipu has a major role to play.

There is nothing original in Henty's description of Tipu Sultan. Following other writers, he refers to his bloodlust, caprice, and religious bigotry. As in Taylor's novel, Tipu's subjects are shown to abhor his cruelty. Thus the governor of Savandroog criticizes the murder of English prisoners, stating, "these executions make me ill." The chamberlain in Tipu's palace cautions Dick and Surajah about the Sultan's fickleness of temper – "I would warn you that it is best, when the Sultan has had matters to trouble him, and may blame somewhat unjustly, not to seek to excuse yourselves. It is bad to thwart him, when he is roused," (Henty *n.pag*) Henty also refers to Tipu's persecution of Hindus. Pertaub, who is forcefully converted to Islam, resembles the Nair in Taylor's novel. Pertaub has an additional reason for hating Tipu. Tipu had carried away Pertaub's daughter to his harem. The Sultan not only abducts women to satisfy his own lust but also gives them to others. Annie reports that other English girls, confined in the Sultan's harem, were given to his officers as rewards. She herself narrowly escapes a similar fate through the intervention of Dick. It is true that Tipu sometimes did force Christian and Hindu women to marry Muslim men against their will. However, there was no systematic oppression of women from different religions as Taylor and Henty would want us to believe.

As a matter of fact, all three novels have one thing in common: they charge Tipu Sultan with violation of women. It is true that in Scott's novel, Tipu's attempt is thwarted in the end. However, the danger posed to Menie's chastity is as menacing as actual rape. In the novels of Taylor and Henty, women are really violated by Tipu Sultan and his men. Interestingly, earlier writers seldom accused Tipu of rape. Even when they mentioned it, they treated it as a less serious crime.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, sexual violation of women acquires great importance in these three novels. One is led to agree with Jenny Sharpe that "When articulated through images of violence against women, a resistance to British rule does not look like the struggle for emancipation but rather an uncivilized eruption n that must be contained." (Sharpe 7) Thus it is possible to discover a political motive behind the (re)presentation of rape in these novels.

As shown earlier, these three novels depict Tipu Sultan's reign as an era of misrule from which the British liberated the Indians. By vindicating British rule in India, they perform the function of propagandist literature. These novels are based upon the maxim that "if the sultan is tyrannical, the British must be blameless." (Teltscher 231) Readers may recognize that such arguments are still used by neo-colonialist forces, who use it to justify their aggression in the Middle East.

So far we have studied how Tipu Sultan's character was politicized in the three colonial texts. The next section shows that even Tipu's corpse could not escape politicization. Colonial imagination converted Tipu's dead body to a trophy – much like a hunter who preserves his kill.

### ***Grisly Trophy : Politicization of the Dead Body of Tipu Sultan***

The discovery of Tipu Sultan’s dead body by the British marked the climactic moment of the Fourth Anglo-Mysore war. It is a scene to which colonial imagination returns again and again. Later generations seems to have been fascinated by the spectacle of the fearful autocrat lying dead before his mortal enemies. This scene has been represented in a number of literary works and paintings. In my opinion, what becomes apparent through such representations is the politicization of Tipu’s body. Transcending physicality, Tipu’s dead body becomes the eternal emblem of British triumph over eastern despotism.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michael Foucault points out that power relation exerts great influence on the body:

“But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.” (Foucault 25)

To a student of colonial history and literature, this notion has a special significance. Colonialism itself depends on appropriation and subjugation of bodies; as a system, it gives rise to a complex of attitudes towards the body. It is not only living bodies that Colonialism converts to a productive force. Even dead bodies have their own economy within the colonial system. The place occupied by Tipu Sultan’s body in colonial imagination sufficiently proves this point.

The defeat of Tipu Sultan not only signalled the fall of Mysore but also the submission of the whole of India. For the British, the event marked a spectacular success; the threat was contained and the East was finally put in its place. The spectacle of the dead monarch lying beside his slain followers was chosen as the best way of representing this triumph. It is not surprising that the depiction of this scene became a norm for novelists. Sir Walter Scott alludes to this scene, even though the events in his novel happen at an earlier period. In *The Surgeon’s Daughter*, he has Hyder Ali foretell the ignominious death of his son, “Cursed is the Prince who barter justice for lust! He shall die in the gate by the sword of the stranger.” (Scott 129) Scott did this because he knew that any allusion to this scene would definitely heighten the dramatic effect. Even years after Scott, the fall of Tipu continued to remain a favourite topic. A reviewer of Meadows Taylor’s *Tippoo Sultan* chose to quote the passage describing Tipu’s death “as a specimen of the graphic power” of the writer, leaving all other considerations behind. (*Literary Gazette* 25) G. A. Henty’s *The Tiger of Mysore* also describes the final scene in great details. Kate Teltscher tries to account for it in the following manner, “The description of Tipu’s death, with its clear echo of Hamlet’s ‘Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay’, assumes a tragic or mythic quality: the sudden reverse of fortunes recalls the familiar device of peripeteia...” (Teltscher 252)

So what was this climactic scene like? The details vary from one description to another. However, what all narratives emphasize is that Tipu Sultan was found dead among his retainers by an Englishman, often identified as General Sir David Baird. This

same Baird once endured captivity at Seringapatam, and the scene thus takes on an ironic quality. In *The Tiger of Mysore*, Henty graphically describes the event:

“As soon as the whole rampart was captured, General Baird sent an officer with a flag of truce to the Palace, to offer protection to Tippoo and all its inmates, on condition of immediate surrender. Two of Tippoo's younger sons assured the officer that the Sultan was not in the Palace. The assurance was disbelieved, and, the princes being sent to the camp under a strong escort, the Palace was searched. The officer in command, on being strictly questioned, declared that Tippoo, who had in person commanded the defence made against the left column, had been wounded, and that he had heard he was lying in a gateway on the north side of the fort.

A search was immediately made, and the information proved correct. Tippoo was found lying there, not only wounded, but dead. He had indeed received several wounds, and was endeavouring to escape in his palanquin, when this had been upset by the rush of fugitives striving to make their way through the gate.

“The gateway was, indeed, almost choked up with the bodies of those who had been either suffocated in the crush, or killed by their pursuers. On his palanquin being overturned, Tippoo had evidently risen to his feet, and had at the same moment been shot through the head by an English soldier, ignorant of his rank.” (Henty *n.pag*)

Henty's description of this final moment deserves attention for several reasons. The British officers in his narrative exude the spirit of chivalry, unlike their arch-enemy Tipu Sultan. They offer “protection” to the defeated foe, despite their obvious hatred for him. Also, Henty portrays Tipu as a coward who tried to flee from the scene of the battle. This contradicts most accounts which show him fighting till death. Even Taylor depicts Tipu's vehement opposition to the proposal of surrender:

“‘They come, Huzrut,’ said Rajah Khan, trying to rouse the dying man; ‘they come, they are near, let us tell them who thou art, they will spare thee.’

‘Spare me!’ he cried, rousing himself at the last words. ‘No! they burn for revenge, and I should be hung like a dog; no! I will die here.’” (Taylor 644)

These lines remind us of the final speech of Macbeth, “I will not yield/ to kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet”. (Shakespeare *n.pag*)

Among pictorial representations of this scene, David Wilkie's 1838 painting entitled ‘General Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of Sultan Tippoo Sahib after Having Captured Seringapatam on the 4th May 1799’ deserves mention. It depicts Tipu lying horizontally on the right foreground, being observed by Baird. Kate Teltscher points out that the lamps and torches carried by Baird's companions in the picture throw more light on Baird than the dead Sultan. It increases “the impact of Baird's triumphant stance”. (Teltscher 253) General Baird's magisterial gesture, with one arm pointing to Tipu and the other uplifted, represent the final triumph of the English over the Sultan.

From the aforementioned descriptions it becomes obvious that the corpse of Tipu Sultan was animated with a political significance. Tipu's dead body represents the elimination of one of the greatest threat to British Empire in India. One must also pay attention to English presence in this scene. It is the English, and not the Indians, who discover the corpse. They are the ones who understand its value. Under English gaze, Tipu's corpse becomes the symbol of fallen Eastern despotism. The 'body natural' and the 'body politic' merge in his fall, and declare the collapse of the old system of governance.<sup>4</sup> India is now open for Britain to take over.

The discovery of Tipu's body thus gave the conclusive evidence of British victory. The body of the deceased monarch was converted to a macabre trophy, to be possessed in memory and transmitted to subsequent generations through art and literature.

### **Conclusion**

Our study of the three novels reveals that Tipu Sultan elicited two different emotions in the minds of nineteenth century British readers – that of fear and elation. Tipu evoked anxiety and contempt because he represented native opposition to colonial rule. At the same time, his fall came to symbolize the ultimate triumph of colonialism over the colonized. It is therefore 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.

### **Notes**

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Shringheri Letters' refers to a collection of 30 letters exchanged between Tipu Sultan and the Hindu spiritual leader Shankaracharya (of Shringheri shrine). Tipu maintained cordial relationship with this spiritual leader, and bestowed gifts upon him.

<sup>2</sup> Mathews was later assassinated by Tipu.

<sup>3</sup> Very interestingly, it was the British force which violated women at Anantpur during the Second Anglo-Mysore war. Kate Teltscher shows how this event generated fierce debate in early nineteenth century Britain. See Teltscher, 232 – 236.

<sup>4</sup> For explanation of the Renaissance concept of the two bodies of king, see Kantorowicz, chapter 1.

### **Works Cited**

Dutta, Kalikinkar, H. C. Raychaudhuri, R. C. Majumdar. *An Advanced History of India*.  
Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India Limited, 2010. Print.

---

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. Print.

Henty, George Alfred. *The Tiger of Mysore: A Story of the War with Tippoo Saib*. Project Gutenberg EBook. 12 July 2006. Web. N.d.

Hope, Anthony. *The Prisoner of Zenda*. London: Dodo Press, 2008. Print.

Kantorowicz, Ernst. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Print.

Kirkpatrick, William. Preface. *Select Letters of Tippoo Sultan to Various Public Functionaries*. Ed. Kirkpatrick. London: Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, Booksellers to the Honorable East-India Company, 1811. Print.

Naidis, Mark. "G. A. Henty's Idea of India." *Victorian Studies* 8.1 (1964): 49 – 58. Web. 4 October 2009.

Rev. of *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of the Mysore Wars*. *The Athenaeum* 23 January 1841: 73-74. Print.

Rev. of *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of the Mysore Wars*. *Literary Gazette* 9 January 1841: 24-26. Print.

Scott, Walter. *The Surgeon's Daughter*. 1831. Rockville: Serenity Publishers, 2012. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. Project Gutenberg EBook. July 2000. Web. N.d.

Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*. London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Print.

Taylor, Philip Meadows. *Tippoo Sultaun: A Tale of Mysore War*. 1840. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2000. Print.

Teltscher, Kate. *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600 – 1800*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print.

---

*Ayusman Chakraborty is currently working as a Junior Research Fellow of the Department of English, Jadavpur University. For his PhD, he is researching on the life and works of the nineteenth century colonial administrator Captain Philip Meadows Taylor.*

---