

TEWODROS AND TIPU AS WARRIOR AGAINST IMPERIALIST BRITAIN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Tipu Sultan of Mysore, Mughal Empire (r. 1782 – 99) and Emperor Tewodros of Ethiopia (r. 1855 – 68) were regnant rulers who wished to modernise their respective realms with the help of Western powers. Tipu sought French assistance to fight the British and Tewodros sought British military and technical aid to ward off Ottoman menace from Ethiopia's northern borders as well as to subdue the intractable domestic feudal warlords with a view to unifying and stabilising his fledgling empire. Both demanded to be treated by their preferred donor countries as equals. However, they failed to achieve their ends and collided with the British – Tipu Sultan against the British East India Company and Tewodros against Queen Victoria's (r. 1837 – 1901) government. Consequently, both rulers lost the battle and their lives, the causes of their defeat and downfall being, *inter alia*, their personality traits and their lack of understanding of Anglo-French diplomatic and colonial complications.

Key words: Gondar, Mysore, Magdala, Tewodros, Tipu Sultan, *zamana masafent*

Prolegomena

The military might of the imperialistic British was tested in two battles – one fought at Tipu *Sultan's* (1750 – 1799)¹ fortress at Srirangapatnam in the south Indian state of Mysore in 1799 and the other at Emperor Tewodros II's fortress at Amba Magdala in north central Ethiopia in 1868. These two battles present interesting features with respect to the character, attitudes, and motivations of the metropolitan power and its two remarkable adversaries as well as the final denouement of the violent dramas enacted in their respective realms. Both Tipu and Tewodros were proud and regnant despots who sought Western technological and military assistance from France and Britain respectively, but

¹ For Tipu's own explanation of "Sultan" as title as found on his personal seal see DIROM, A. Narrative of the Campaigns, p. 251.

always on their own terms, and intent on being treated as equals. Tipu sought French help to avenge his earlier defeats by the English in a determined drive to oust them out of India while Tewodros resorted to political blackmail against the British government by holding a number of the latter's representatives and citizens (along with a few German missionaries) hostage when he failed to elicit British military and technical help with a view to subduing his domestic adversaries and dislodging the Egyptian (Turkish) military base from its northern borders. Although both the Indian and the Ethiopian rulers appeared to betray a degree of patriotic sentiment – Tipu's paranoia of the British and Tewodros's of the Turks respectively – they failed to enlist the support of the two Western colonial rivals.

This comparative exercise illustrates the usefulness of what Skocpol and Somers designate as “comparative history as the contrast of contents”.² It seeks to show how the unique features of each particular case help illuminate two contrasting episodes of British encounter in Mughal India (1526 – 1857) and Gondarine Ethiopia (c. 1635 – 1855). In the former, the East India Company (EIC) of Britain acted as a defender of its mercantile interests against the aggrandising ambition of a putative illegitimate regional despot on the one hand, and by the same token, as a determined imperialist expansionist metropolitan power. In the latter case, the British government acted as a reluctant foreign power seeking no territorial involvement, but obliged to carry out a rescue operation for their citizens held hostage by a mercurial and merciless African ruler, who actually sought British (and, to an extent, French) involvement to accomplish his personal national agenda. In both instances the British appeared to defy the sovereign authority, and defile the majesty, of the native rulers. Tipu failed to tone down his irrepressible jingoism and Anglophobia while Tewodros failed to control his roily temper, and both increasingly weakening themselves by alienating the support of the powerful warlords as well as common peoples of their respective realms, or to assuage their wounded personal pride. Yet, with all their daring and drawback these two “oriental” despots caused their mighty adversaries grave concern.³

² SKOCPOL, T., SOMERS, M. *Comparative History*, p. 178.

³ I consider Hindustan and Abyssinia as belonging to the “Orient” because throughout the Middle Ages till the seventeenth century these two regions were fused together by the Europeans as Middle Indies, the imagined abode of the mythical Christian patriarch Prester John.

Tipu Sultan

Tipu began his reign as the *Sultan* of Mysore in 1782 with an armistice with the EIC following a series of unsuccessful battles in the same year.⁴ However, he recovered his ground when the EIC entered into a truce with him in the Treaty of Mangalore (11 March 1784). Two years later, Lord Charles Cornwallis began his tenure as the Crown appointed Governor-General of Bengal (r. 1786 – 1793) under the shadow of the India Act of 1784 by which the British Crown had assumed control of the colonial government. Though the India Act had prohibited him from pursuing any hostile action against a native state except for purposes of defence, Cornwallis formed a triple alliance with the Marathas and the *Nizam* (the Mughal appointed Governor of the Deccan) in response to the *Sultan's* aggression against Travancore, a state under the Company's protection, and overpowered Tipu's force. The ensuing Treaty of Srirangapatnam (17 March 1792) stripped almost half of Tipu's territory, including Coorg and the Malabar district along the western sea coast.

Cornwallis left India in 1793 and his temporary successor Lord Teignmouth (Sir John Shore, r. 1793 – 1797) remained noncommittal in the Company's relationship with the Indian states. Meanwhile, Tipu became busy enacting a series of reforms to improve his government, economy, and defence, and to establish diplomatic relations with the *Nizam* and the Marathas, the French, and even the Afghans. The Afghan *Amir* Zaman Shah Abdali (Durrani, r. 1793 – 1800) invaded the Punjab and Lahore in 1797. The *Sultan* allied with the Directory government of France (1795 – 1799) “for the purposes of destroying the English in India and dividing the country between himself and France”.⁵ The *Sultan's* desire to bring the British to books with French help led him to fall for the so-called Malartique Scheme for enlisting the French army in Mauritius (Ile de France) masterminded by a footloose French privateer named François Ripaud de Montauvert (1755 – 1814). But the governor of Mauritius, Comte de Malartique (r. 1792 – 1800), could not supply an army that Ripaud had promised Tipu. Ultimately a ramshackle volunteer force of some hundred plus men from Mauritius arrived in India to fight for Mysore.⁶

This event forced Teignmouth's successor Richard Wellesley, Lord Mornington (r. 1798 – 1805), to revive Cornwallis's “triple alliance” against Tipu *Sultan* ordering him to disarm and sever the French connection.⁷ This ultimatum was ignored by Tipu and, despite the exchange of several letters

⁴ See SIL, N.P. Siraj-ud-daula and Tipu Sultan; SIL, N.P. Tipu Sultan in History.

⁵ LYALL, A.C. The rise and expansion of the British empire in India, p. 236.

⁶ FERNANDES, P. Tiger of Mysore, pp. 144 – 148.

⁷ MALCOLM, J. The Political History of India, Vol. 2, pp. 197 – 239: Wellesley's minute of 12 August 1798.

between him and the Governor-General and Lieutenant General George Harris (1746 – 1829), commander of the joint forces of the EIC, nothing came off. The Company's army marched against Mysore on 5 March 1799. The fortress of Srirangapatnam was taken by assault on 4 May and Tipu *Sultan* was killed in action in the evening of the same day.

Tewodros

Tewodros, born Kassa Hailu (b. 1818), was the younger son of Hailu Wolde Giyorgis, a minor Governor of Qwara, the border district between Lake Tana and the Sudan border near Gondar, and was raised for a time by his mother Attitegeb of Infraz near Gondar, following his father's death in 1820. In 1827, Kassa became a ward of his elder half-brother Kinfu Hailu (c. 1800 – 1839), son of his divorced stepmother.⁸ He received clerical (*debtera*) and academic education and also gained training and experience as a marksman and horseman and even participated in his elder half-brother's campaigns against the Egyptians at the Ethiopia-Sudan borders. Following Kinfu's death in 1839 Kassa relocated to Gojjam as a client of *Ras* [Chief] Goshu Zewde (1825 – 1852).⁹ However, he was unable to obtain Kinfu's fief, the region of the so-called *Ye Maru Quimis* ("the delicacy of Maru" meaning the sources of Maru's income), comprising Dembea, Qwara, Begemdar and Metemma in the southwest, originally belonging to *Dejazmach* [Commander of the Armed Forces, or a Count] Maru, and subsequently allotted to Kinfu by *Itege* [Empress Consort] Menen Liben Amade (r. 1840 – 1847), wife of the Emperor Yohannes III (c. 1824 – 1873) of the Solomonic dynasty.

Thereupon Kassa formed a *shifita* [outlaw] band in the Lake Tana region of Gojjam sometime in 1839 – 1840 and emerged as its redoubtable leader.¹⁰ In 1847 he married Tewabech (d.1858), daughter of *Itege* Menen's son *Ras* Ali Alula (c.1819 – 1866), the Warrasek [*Warra Shaykh*, Islamic convert and claiming an Arab descent] Yajju ruler of Begemder, the *Re-ese Mekwanint* ["preeminent nobleman"] and the *Enderase* ["Regent for the Emperor"]. As the imperial grandson-in-law, Kassa received the governorship of Qwara with the title of *Dejazmach*. He forcibly occupied his inheritance, Kinfu's fief, defeating his imperial grandmother-in-law's forces in 1848. He then attacked his father-

⁸ Wolde Maryam, Tewodros's contemporary chronicler from Shewa, regards Kinfu as Kassa's uncle. Wolde is echoed by DUFTON, H. *Journey through Abyssinia*, p. 121 as well as by HOLLAND, T.J., DOZIER, H. (Eds.) *Records of Expedition*, Vol. 1, p. 71. I follow SOKOLINSKAIA 2007. See note 9 below.

⁹ SOKOLINSKAIA, E. *Kenfu Haylu*, p. 386.

¹⁰ BATES, D. *Abyssinian Difficulty*, p. 13.

in-law Ali's capital at Debre Tabor with a view to pre-empting the latter's political agenda of seizing the imperial throne at Gondar, and routed his cavalry at the two battles of Takes (near Lake Tana) and Ayshal (Gojjam) in May-June, 1853, forcing Ali and his allies to flee to Yajju for safety. Next, Kassa killed his former patron *Ras* Goshu Zewde of Gojjam in a battle in 1852 subdued *Dejazmach* Biru Goshu at another battle in 1854. These battles ended the troublesome *zamana masafent* [era of the princes], the century-long internecine wars since the death of Emperor Iyasu II (r. 1730 – 1755).¹¹

In August 1854 Kassa invited *Abuna* [Bishop] Salama, the Metropolitan of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (r. 1841 – 1867) and a client of *Dejazmach* Wube Haile Maryam of Tigre and Semien (c. 1800 – 1855), and with his blessings proclaimed himself a *Negus* [King] and had his marriage to Tewabech sanctified. After having defeated and imprisoned the intractable Wube at the Battle of Deresge on 9 February 1855, *Negus* Kassa usurped the imperial throne by ousting its worthless, albeit legitimate, incumbent Yohannes III, and was anointed and crowned *Atse* [Emperor] *Neguse Negast* [“King of Kings”] by the *Abuna* at the Deresge Maryam Church.¹² The newly created emperor adopted the regal name of “Tewodros”.

With a view to uniting Ethiopia under a single imperial authority, Tewodros swept into the lands of the Christian warlords of Yajju, Wag, and Lasta as well as Wollo, belonging to the Islamic *imams* of the Mammadoch dynasty, in March 1855. He seized the impregnable hill fortress of Magdala (the *amba* Magdala rises to a height of 9000 feet above sea level in the province of Wara Himano on Wollo border, some 180 miles from Gondar) on 12 September and made it his treasury, defensive stronghold, and prison for important political prisoners. He next invaded Shewa, ruled by its *negus Meridazmach* [Supreme General] Haile Melekot (b. 1795). Following his sudden death, Tewodros

¹¹ My dating of the onset of *zamana masafent* in 1755 follows HENZE, P. Layers of Time, though some scholars prefer a much later date 1769, marking the murder of Emperor Iyoas (r. 1755 – 1769) by *Ras* Mikael Sehul (c. 1691 – 1779), or 1784, when the imperial power sustained its *coup de grace* with the deposition of Emperor Tekle Giorgis, described by Nathaniel Pearce (1779 – 1820) as a handsome coward, and upon whom the Ethiopian tradition bestowed the moniker of *Fisame Mengist* or the “end of Government”. See HALLS, J.J. Life of Pearce, Vol. 1, p. 272; RUBENSON, S. King of Kings, p. 18. For a provocative and densely argued thesis on the nature and significance of *zamana masafent*, see BEKELE, S. Reflections on Wära Seh Mäsfenate, pp. 157 – 179.

¹² *Dejazmach* Wube of Tigre and Semien [harboured] imperial ambition. Tigre had been corresponding with the British Government since 1805 during the heydays of Anglo-French rivalry in the Mediterranean and Red Sea regions. In 1841 Wube wrote Queen Victoria (r. 1837 – 1901) soliciting British friendship: “With us is the power say the French; [but] the Englishman is strong say we; therefore raise your power.” See RAM, K.V. The Barren Relationship, ch. 1.

appointed the late king's brother Haile Mikael as the *Meridazmach* of the kingdom and departed with a considerable cache of treasures and numerous hostages from the Shewan royal family.

Tewodros now set about consolidating, reforming and stabilising the political, economic, and cultural life of his empire. Unfortunately, his project was vitiated by his somewhat rash and rigorous measures that alienated the national Church and the aristocracy. This situation was further aggravated by his incompetent foreign policy. He was paranoid about the perceived dangers from the Ottoman Turks, who along with their satellite Egypt posed real problems to the security of Ethiopia's northwestern borders and trade interests in the Red Sea region. He was also unaware of the nature and extent of Anglo-French colonial interests as well as Anglo-Egyptian relations. His expulsion in 1854 of the Lazarist missionaries along with their Prefect Apostolic Justin de Jacobis (1800 – 1860), whom he suspected of subverting his authority in northern Ethiopia, strained Ethiopia's relationship with France as well as the Vatican, patrons of the Lazarists. Within the country the missionaries also secured the goodwill of Agaw Neguse of Semien, the ambitious nephew of Tewodros's arch enemy Wube.¹³

Even though Tewodros allowed some Swiss and German Protestant missionaries to settle at Gaffat near Debre Tabor, his ordering them to convert the Falashas (Ethiopian Jews) into the Orthodox faith caused problems. He was further aggravated by the Anglo-German missionary Henry Stern's (1820 – 1885) remark in his book *Wandering Among the Falsahas in Abyssinia* (1862) on the emperor's penurious childhood after his father's death and his mother's low life as a *kosso* vendor, resulting in the impetuous author's incarceration at Magdala. Stern's colleague Henry Rosenthal (1846 – 1909) was held for trying to convert the Falashas into Anglicanism. Worst of all, Tewodros felt slighted (despite his admiration for the female head of a global empire) by his unsuccessful bid in obtaining help from England for the modernising project of his fledgling empire.¹⁴ He confined the British consul Charles D. Cameron (d. 1870) for having failed to bring a written response from the Queen of England to his letter. This development in tandem with a series of tangled events comprising provincial, ethnic, and religious rebellions against the Emperor and his mounting pressure upon the Protestant missionaries to produce weaponry for

¹³ The Lazarists were a congregation of secular Catholic priests founded by St. Vincent de-Paul. Their Paris headquarters at the priory of St. Lazarus of Bethany ran from 1632 to 1792. St. Lazarus may refer to either a Biblical figure (John 11 & 12) or to the bishop of Aix-en-Provence who died in 441.

¹⁴ ANGELFIRE. Emperor Tewodros II. [online]. Curiously enough, he must have been aware of the powerful dowager Empress Mentewab (r. 1730 – c. 1769/70) and had personal experience with the regnant *Itege* Menen, whom he subdued.

him ultimately leading to the British rescue operation commanded by Sir Robert Napier (1810 – 1890), resulted in Tewodros's suicide on 13 April 1868.

Tipu and Tewodros Compared as Man and Statesman

Tipu failed to obtain recognition from the Mughal court in Delhi or from the Turkish *Sultan*, the *Caliph* of Islam for his adopted title of *Padshah* [King] of the Deccan since January 1786.¹⁵ Nevertheless, he reached for a still loftier caesaropapist status combining secular as well as spiritual eminence and thus, reportedly, “assumed specious authority of a prophet”.¹⁶ Like Tipu of Mysore, Kassa Hailu of Qwara snatched the crown, so to speak, from the legitimate Solomonic ruler of Ethiopia Yohannes III, and as noted earlier, was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia. His adopted regal name endowed his personality with the mystique of the legendary monarch Tewodros while his crown gave him the legitimate and sanctified authority to rule the country.

Both Tipu and Tewodros were charismatic personalities though possessed of a somewhat different physical stature. Most descriptions of Tipu uniformly identify his corpulent medium build and though according to Major Alexander Allan (1764 – 1820), he had “an appearance of dignity, or perhaps sternness, in his countenance, which distinguished him above the common run of people”.¹⁷ Charles Stewart (1764 – 1837) of the Bengal Army regarded him as “naturally active, fond of riding, and...long walks”.¹⁸ In fact Lt. Col. Russel thought the *Sultan* “was the best horseman of the whole army”.¹⁹ In 1866 a physician of the Indian Army Medical Service, Dr. Henry Blanc (1831 – 1911), noticed the forty-eight year old Tewodros possessed of “all the dignity of a sovereign, the amiability and good-breeding of the most accomplished ‘gentleman’”.²⁰ A British journalist found him “very muscular and broad-chested”²¹ According to

¹⁵ HABIB, I. (Ed.) *Confronting Colonialism*, p. xxiv; NADVI, M.I.M. *Tipu Sultan*, pp. 122 – 123; DE, B. *The Ideological and Social Background of Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*. In HABIB, I. (Ed.) *Confronting Colonialism*, pp. 3 – 12.

¹⁶ RENNELL, J. *Memoir*, cited in RAO, C.H. *History of Mysore*, Vol. 3, p. 1232.

¹⁷ Cit. NOLAN, E.H. *British Empire in India and East*, p. 479. Allan's description of the *Sultan* corroborates that by Capt. Benjamin Sydenham's (1777 – 1828) *testis oculis* sent to George Macartney, erstwhile governor of Madras (r. 1781 – 1785), on 25 May 1799: “his [Tipu's] appearance denoted him to be of above the common stamp and his Countenance expressed a mixture of haughtiness and resolution”. SYDENHAM, B. *Account of Siege*. [online]

¹⁸ STEWART, C. *Catalogue of Library of Tipu*, p. 92.

¹⁹ LAFONT, J.-M. “Mémoires” of Russel. In HABIB, I. (Ed.) *State and Diplomacy under Tipu*, p. 98.

²⁰ BLANC, H. *Narrative of Captivity*, p. 10.

²¹ STANLEY, H.M. *Coomassie and Magdala*, p. 451.

Henry Dufton (d. 1868), the Emperor's features were "altogether European," betraying "nothing of the negro about him".²²

Differences in physiognomy and personality notwithstanding, both Tipu and Tewodros were notorious for their penchant for violence. Lt. Col. William Kirkpatrick (1756 – 1813) writes how the *Sultan* ordered an assault on a region and the destruction of "every living creature in it" and further, how he ordered all the troublesome male population of a particular village to be castrated.²³ Major Allan reports on Tipu's murdering the European captives on 28 April 1799, the very day he was negotiating with Lt. Gen. Harris for truce terms.²⁴ Writing on Tipu's Battle of on 18 February 1782 against the EIC's army led by Col. John Braithwaite (1739 – 1803), Stewart observes that the *Sultan*, reportedly, "manifested...his naturally cruel disposition" at the battle against the EIC's army on 18 February 1782 and that, had it not been for the interference of M. Lally, comte de Lally-Tollendal (1702 – 1766), commander of the French army in India, and other French gentlemen, "he would not have left a single man of the British detachment alive".²⁵ Almost a century after Tipu's death, the British civil servant Lewin Bowring (1824 – 1910) found numerous instances of the *Sultan's* "ferocious character" in his correspondence.²⁶ In fact even Tipu's father Haidar Ali Khan (r. 1761 – 1782) is reported to have lamented that "his son was of a lesser intellect, wantonly cruel, deceitful, vicious, and an intractable person".²⁷ Joseph Michaud (1767 – 1839), who admired the *Sultan's* industriousness, moral discipline, and indomitable courage, also observed:

the more he encountered obstacles...the more irascible became his temper, and...to conquer these difficulties, he had very often recourse to acts of tyranny.... [P]ride was only a childish vanity, and his ambition came near to delirium...He belonged to that small group of persons who could never put up with reverses, and who in adversity would not fall much lower than in their good fortune.²⁸

It is to be noted, however, the young Tipu *Sultan* had elicited approbation as well as apprehension from the British governor of Madras for his courage and charisma. George McCartney wrote on 14 December 1782, barely a fortnight

²² DUFTON, H. Journey in Abyssinia, pp. 97 – 98.

²³ KIRKPATRICK, W. (Ed. & Transl.) Letters of Tipu, letter # 85 (emphasis in original) and translator's Observations, p. 3.

²⁴ Cit. RAO, C.H. History of Mysore, Vol. 3, p. 1025.

²⁵ STEWART, C. Descriptive Catalogue, p. 45.

²⁶ BOWRING, L. Haidar and Tipu, pp. 218 – 222.

²⁷ Cited in SHARMA, H.D. Real Tipu, p. 18.

²⁸ MICHAUD, J. Histoire de L'empire de Mysore, p. 151.

before Tipu's succession on 29 December upon his father Haidar Ali's death (7 December 1782):

the youthful and spirited heir of Hyder, without the odium of his father's vices, or his Tyranny, seems by some popular acts and the hopes which a new reign inspires, and by the adoption of European discipline likely to become and even more formidable opponent than his father.²⁹

The regnant *Sultan* took his *métier* to extreme, thereby unwittingly denying himself the counsels of his ministers. One scholar has provided a list of eighteen dissidents from Tipu's government.³⁰ Tipu also alienated himself from the leading *palegars* [warlords] of his realm because of his highhandedness. He was practically left in the lurch to face the enemy virtually alone at his headquarters on his "May Day" in 1799. Major Allan observes shrewdly: "It is impossible that Tippoo could have been loved by his people. The Musselmen [*sic*] certainly looked up to him as the head of their faith;...but they could not have been attached to him, by affection...."³¹

In similar fashion, Emperor Tewodros betrayed a violent visage and temper.³² Ethiopian sources called him "The fire of Qwara".³³ A sympathiser of the indigent peasantry since his days as a *shifita*, he punished those, including his own troops who oppressed them, by mutilation sometime in 1854 – 1855. He was especially remorseless with the Gallas of Wollo and with his implacable enemy Ras Agaw Negusé of Tigré who suffered painful slow death with his hands and legs amputated and thirsting for water that was denied him till his final gasp.³⁴ Once he ordered an old cripple panhandler beaten to death in front of him because he had the gall to lump His Majesty and the generous Europeans together by addressing both as *getoch* [lords].³⁵ Theophilus Waldmeier (1832 – 1915), one of the artisan missionaries of Gaffat, who once admired Tewodros as a "model prince," observed: "I often wished I was chained with the other prisoners at Magdala, out of sight of the formerly good-hearted, but now so cruel, monarch."³⁶

There might be various reasons for Tewodros's violence. The British consul at Massawa Walter Plowden (1820 – 1860), observed in his report of 25 June

²⁹ Madras Military Consultations (14 December 1782), cited in FORREST, D. *Tiger of Mysore*, p. 115.

³⁰ See NADVI, M.I.M. Tipu Sultan, pp. 222 – 240.

³¹ Cited in RAO, C.H. History of Mysore, Vol. 3, p. 1025.

³² DUFTON, H. Journey through Abyssinia, p. 97; BLANC, H. Narrative of Captivity, p. 10.

³³ CRUMMEY, D. Violence of Tewodros, p. 108.

³⁴ CRUMMEY, D. Violence of Tewodros, pp. 118 – 120.

³⁵ BLANC, H. Narrative of Captivity, p. 177.

³⁶ WALDMEIER, T. Autobiography, p. 96.

1855 to the Foreign Office in London that Tewodros was too sensitive about his sovereignty to put up with any perceived lack of respect for or recognition of it.³⁷ “Tewodros’ cruelty could only be explained,” writes Amanuel Sahle, “when we see him as a war-lord who became emperor of Ethiopia in spite of himself. He knew too well that he was a usurper and that his countrymen knew this as well.”³⁸ His subconscious inferiority complex for his penurious childhood and early youth, his failure to unite the country under a single political authority, his messianic dream to be the divinely mandated monarch to usher in a new order as well as his unrelenting animus against the Muslims made him impervious to rational judgment. He was also frustrated in his attempt to put an end to the endemic political instability as well as to centralise, modernise, and energise his government, society, and economy. His innate fear of failure prompted him to pre-empt it by ensuring success through extreme measures – a kind of *violentum pharmacum* or violent medicine – to cure the chronic malaise of his society.

It also appears that warrior Kassa the alpha male was a crypto passive character. He was goaded into battle with his father-in-law by his wife Tewabech Ali who also admonished him against any show of loyalty or weakness for Empress Menen. In fact Tewabech exercised considerable moral influence on her husband who was spiritually destroyed after her untimely death. He was practically humiliated by his second wife Tiruwork (Tirunesh, c. 1848 – 1868) who never showed any affection to the enemy of her father *Dejazmach* Wube. He was forced into a relationship with a widow with five children, *Itege Yetemegnu* (or Yetemannu), whom Dr. Blanc describes as “a rather coarse, lascivious-looking person”³⁹ (2004/1868, p. 20; see also Dagne 1963, pp. 115 – 17). Tewodros’s personal life thus generated a sort of self-hate and as compensation he derived a perverse pleasure in torturing to death those who could not fight back. Yet on occasions he could seem to be affable to an astonishing extent. Even the Catholic missionary de Jacobis, who had been driven out of Gondar by Tewodros, found his persecutor an “extraordinary” ruler for “his laws and admirable ordinances of public prosperity and morality”.⁴⁰ Dufton, who personally witnessed the softer side of the Ethiopian monarch, observed confidently: “Theodore is not *all* devil!”⁴¹

Tipu and Tewodros were equally admirers of the Europeans, especially their weaponry, and solicited their unqualified cooperation in this regard. Tipu

³⁷ PLOWDEN, W.C. Travels in Ethiopia, pp. 456, 458.

³⁸ SALEH, A. Tewodros II. In BEYENE, T., PANKHURST, R., BEKELE, S. (Eds.) *Kassa and Kassa*, p. 199.

³⁹ BLANC, H. Narrative of Captivity, p. 20. See also DAGNE, H.G. Letters of Tewodros, pp. 115 – 117.

⁴⁰ Cit. MARSDEN, P. Barefoot Emperor, p. 34.

⁴¹ DUFTON, H. Journey through Abyssinia, p. 105. Emphasis added.

importuned the French and Tewodros the British, especially the Protestant missionaries, with their requests, even demands, to manufacture guns and ammunitions. They succeeded for a while in minor ways, but eventually failed to sustain or augment the hothouse production of arsenal in battle. Tipu sought French technological assistance and his embassy sent to France in 1788 was mandated to recruit artisans and professionals and collect some select plants and implements, particularly clocks and a printing press.⁴² Sadly, however, his innovative spirit was actually counterproductive, in that it was guided less by genuine impulse than by “the whim of the moment”.⁴³ Mark Wilks (1759 – 1831) observed that the *Sultan* was “an innovative monarch, [who] made no improvements” and Francis Buchanan added that Tipu’s aim was political rather than “to improve his country”.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Tipu’s Mysore, a sort of fledgling and fragile military fiscal state, did betray some technological advance, at least in silk and weapons production. Edward Moore praised Tipu’s guns “as good as any in the world”.⁴⁵ The *Sultan* also endeavoured to build up a “public-sector” company under his personal control with a view to developing and strengthening his economy in the 1790s.⁴⁶ However, all his exertions ultimately met with dismal failure. An economic historian has persuasively argued: “There was only one model of successful military fiscalism in eighteenth-century India, and it was represented by the East India Company.”⁴⁷ His penchant for introducing innovations was so chaotic as to cause deeper chasms between his goals and the ability of his personnel to reach them as they had to cope with novelties almost every other day. Unfortunately, the *Sultan* turned a deaf ear to the counsels of his ministers and instead relied on the advice of an illiterate watchmaker from France who became his secretary and councillor as well as chief interpreter. The *Sultan* told Lieutenant-Colonel Russel, commanding officer of the French detachment in the Mysore army: “I want to expel them [the British] from India, I want to be the friend of the French all my life.”⁴⁸ As mentioned earlier, his sheer desperation for obtaining French help mingled with his total lack of

⁴² SRIDHARAN, M.P. Tipu’s Modernization. In HABIB, I. (Ed.) *Confronting Colonialism*, p. 145.

⁴³ MICHAUD, J. *Histoire de L’empire de Mysore*, p. 156.

⁴⁴ WILKS, M. *Historical Sketches*, Vol. 2, p. 763; BUCHANAN, F. *Journey from Madras*, Vol. 1, p. 70.

⁴⁵ GHOSH, A. *Rockets of Tipu*. In RAY, A. (Ed.) *Tipu Sultan*, p. 167.

⁴⁶ For arguments about Tipu Sultan’s military-fiscal state see GUHA, N. *Pre-British South India*; STEIN, B. *State Formation and Economy*; and BAYLY, C. *Military-Fiscal State*.

⁴⁷ ROY, T. *Rethinking British India*, p. 8. See also SEN, S. *Liberal Empire*.

⁴⁸ LAFONT, J-M. “Memoires” of Russel. In HABIB, I. (Ed.) *State and Diplomacy*, p. 99.

understanding French policies and preferences led to the fateful ‘Malartique Proclamation’ that provided Lord Wellesley the *casus belli* against the *Sultan*.

Tewodros desired to transform Ethiopia into a ‘modern’ state on par with Western countries and as one sustained by a policy of military fiscalism, resembling, Tipu Sultan’s Mysore.⁴⁹ According to de Jacobis, his primary goal was to unify and pacify the country under the Monophysitic Orthodox Church. Another goal of Tewodros was to eradicate the country’s multiple corruptions since the *zamana masafent*. His final goal was to enter into diplomatic relations with the states of Europe. Unfortunately he failed to realise his admirable agenda due to a variety of reasons: his innocence of European political, social, and cultural attainments, diplomatic and imperial priorities vis-à-vis his country’s endemic political instability, and his problems with the European missionaries. Above all, his escalating violence and anger, and unrelenting addiction to alcohol, especially following the death of Tewabech in 1858, the murder of his friend Plowden, and his *liqe mekwaw* [the highest court functionary who had the right to impersonate the sovereign in battlefield] John Bell in 1860, alienated him from many parts of his country. Further, his failure in institutional restructuring together with excessive centralisation alienated the nobility who totally abandoned him in 1868.⁵⁰ He was left virtually on his own with his defunct weapon, the much vaunted Sebastopol the *Bomba*, on his hilltop hideout at Magdala, where he used a British pistol, a gift from Queen Victoria brought to Ethiopia by the Consul Cameron, on himself and it performed with deadly accuracy!⁵¹

Tipu and Tewodros as Religious Zealots

Apparently, both Tipu and Tewodros were religious zealots, the former Islamic and the latter Christian. The *Sultan*’s measures and policies, including renaming his government as some kind of theocracy or *Sarkar-i Khudadad* [dieudonné government], or reorganising his army into *ilahi* or *ahmadi*, comprising slaves

⁴⁹ See MARSDEN, P. Barefoot Emperor, p. 35. Shiferaw Bekele argues that Tewodros innovated nothing, but renovated something, especially the provincial government by reducing the power of the traditional governors and appointing a second class “governor,” *meslāné*, who exercised little local initiative and became creatures of the central government, that is, the Emperor himself. Kassa angered many traditional warlords, especially those having connection with the Solomonic dynasty. Similarly, Tewodros’s military reforms by way of making his soldiers practice European drill and discipline under his friend John Bell resulted in a mutiny and forced the emperor to give up the program (BEKELE, S. Kassa Historiography. In BEYENE, T., PANKHURST, R., BEKELE, S. (Eds.) *Kassa and Kassa*, pp. 300 – 305, 314).

⁵⁰ ORLOWSKA, I. Ethiopian Political Culture, p. 317.

⁵¹ See CRUMMEY, D. Tewodros as Reformer, pp. 437 – 469.

or *chelas* (from the ranks of the converted Muslims of the Coromandel region and of the Portuguese Christians of the west coast), were Islamic in tone and tenor.⁵² He deported about 60,000 Konkani Christians of Mangalore on 24 February 1784 to Srirangapatnam for purposes of wholesale conversion, confinement, and circumcision.⁵³ He also razed to the ground a total of twenty churches in Mangalore, Bantval, Moolki, Cundapore, Barcor, Onore, and Sanquerim.⁵⁴ For both Tipu and Tewodros, religious differences were treasonous and thus their resolution called for a “final solution”. Yet there was a qualitative difference between the degree and extent of cruelty exhibited by them. Contrasted with Tewodros’s gruesome sanguinary practice of amputation of his victims’ limbs, Tipu’s order for mass circumcision, and some cases of outright murder of his prisoners appears perversely mild, to say the least.

Tipu issued coins that at once proclaimed the primacy of Islam and his political independence by omitting the required reference to the imperial Mughals.⁵⁵ He even had the *khutba* [sermon in the mosque] read in his name in place of the traditional reference to the Mughal Emperor on the basis of his claim that he was *sultan-i-din* [“prince of the faith”] dedicated to upholding “the honour and interest of Islam...and...its increase and diffusion”.⁵⁶ Mir Hussein Kirmani points out that “the Sultan had a great aversion to Brahmuns [*sic*], Hindus and other tribes,” built a mosque in every town, and appointed a *muezzin* [crier who calls the faithful to prayer], a *moula* [master], and a *kazi* [judge] to each.⁵⁷

The *Sultan’s* ceremonial sword bears the inscription that it “is lightning for the destruction of the unbelievers”. At the centre of his personal seal the Arabic inscription reads: “I am the messenger of the true faith.”⁵⁸ His own essays (*Sultan-ul-Tawarikh* and *Tawarikh-I-Khudadadi*) and letters speak eloquently of his religious fanaticism. The *Sultan’s* letter to Zaman Shah of Afghanistan, (30 January 1799) reads: “I am prepared to...carry on a holy war.”⁵⁹ Another dated

⁵² RAO, C.H. History of Mysore, Vol. 3, pp. 899 – 900.

⁵³ FARIAS, K.K. Christian Impact, p. 40 citing Tipu’s *Sultan-ut-Tawarikh*.

⁵⁴ PRABHU, A.M. Saraswati’s Children, p. 183.

⁵⁵ Bandyopadhyay observes that Tipu’s coins are similar to Haidar’s bearing the figures of the Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati or Vishnu and thus “it does not seem justified to brand Tipu as an ,intolerant bigot” (BANDYOPADHYAY, S. Tipu’s Tolerance. In RAY (Ed.) *Tipu Sultan*, p. 193). However, Brittlebank states on the authority of Henderson (HENDERSON, J.R. Coins of Haidar and Tipu, pp. 13 – 14) that although Tipu retained Haidar’s initials and the icon of the elephant on the coins minted during his reign, “he did away with the Hindu figures...and adopted a style which was predominantly Islamic” (BRITTLEBANK, K. Tipu’s Legitimacy, p. 67).

⁵⁶ KIRKPATRICK, W. (Ed. & Transl.) Letters of Tipu, letter # 331.

⁵⁷ KIRMAN I, M.H.A.K. History of Tipu, pp. 154 – 155.

⁵⁸ DIROM, A. Narrative of Campaigns, p. 251.

⁵⁹ MARTIN, M. (Ed.) Wellesley Correspondence, Vol. 5, p. 23.

10 February 1799 to the Grand Seignior of Constantinople, expresses Tipu's readiness to assist the "Musselmans in the general cause of religion."⁶⁰ In his *Fathul-i-Ahi-Islam*, Tipu declared a "Holy War...against the English" who had allegedly converted Muslim men, women, and children and destroyed mosques and tombs.⁶¹ Quite appropriately his epitaph describes him as "a martyr to Islam".⁶²

Tipu Sultan's violence against the Hindus of Coorg, Cochin, and Travancore resembles Tewodros's against the Muslim Gallas of Wollo. Admittedly Tipu, like the Mughal and the Afghan rulers, appointed meritorious Hindus to positions of trust and responsibility for the sake of, ed. making use of their efficient services,⁶³ but had little qualms offering higher positions even to illiterate Muslims.⁶⁴ Reportedly, the *Sultan* addressed the chief abbot of the Sringeri monastery as *Jagadguru* ["World Teacher"] and even "went barefoot to Sringeri Math to receive the Swamy's blessings".⁶⁵ The portraits of Tipu and his father in full regalia hang on the walls of a Hindu temple at Sibi near Bangalore, which was patronised by the *Sultan*.⁶⁶ Some modern biographers of Tipu believe that the *Sultan*, like his Mughal forbear Aurangzeb (r. 1659 – 1707), was a genuine patron of Hindu temples – a comparison that does credit neither to the Mughal nor to the Mysore *padshah*.⁶⁷

Tewodros sincerely believed that he was "*ya-krestos barya*" ["slave of Christ"].⁶⁸ He claimed in his famous missive to Empress Victoria that he received his crown and country from God.⁶⁹ These pronouncements were aimed to convey the impression that he was invulnerable and invincible. He disapproved of the lewd, the laggardly, the liars, the traitors, and the troublemakers, and also "hated the priests, despised them for their ignorance, spurned their doctrines, and laughed at the marvellous stories some of their books contain," though he could be seen "marching with a tent church together with an army of clerics and *debteras*," writes Blanc, who observed him from close quarters.⁷⁰

Tewodros was, however, well-versed in the scriptures, an adherent of the *Tawahedo* doctrine, and a firm supporter of the Ethiopian Church that belonged

⁶⁰ MARTIN, M. (Ed.) Wellesley Correspondence, Vol. 5, p. 24.

⁶¹ HABIB, I. (Ed.) *Confronting Colonialism*, p. xxv.

⁶² KEENE, H.G. *History of India*, Vol. 1, p. 320.

⁶³ SHARMA, H.D. *Real Tipu*, p. 125.

⁶⁴ KIRMANI, M.H.A.K. *History of Tipu*, pp. 154 – 155.

⁶⁵ SALETTORE, B.A. Tipu as Defender of Hindu. In HABIB, I. (Ed.) *Confronting Colonialism*, p. 127; SUBHAN, A. Tipu Sultan. In RAY, A. (Ed.) *Tipu Sultan*, p. 43.

⁶⁶ BRITTLEBANK, K. *Tipu's Legitimacy*, 152.

⁶⁷ CHATTY, S. Tipu as Defender of Hindu. In HABIB, I. (Ed.) *Confronting Colonialism*, p. 111; see also PANDE, B.N. *Aurangzeb and Tipu*.

⁶⁸ See QUIRIN, J. *Society and State from Northwest*.

⁶⁹ FLINT, J.E. *History of Africa*, p. 71.

⁷⁰ BLANC, H. *Narrative of Captivity*, p. 14.

to the metropolitan See of the Egyptian Coptic Church.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the Ethiopian Church remained deeply divided. Gojjam followed the so-called *Quibat* [Uction] doctrine that believed that Christ's divinity followed his anointing by the Holy Spirit at his Baptism. Shewa, on the other hand, followed the so-called *Sost Lidet* [Three Births] theology according to which Christ underwent three births: from God the Father at the Creation, from the Holy Virgin at the Nativity, and from the Holy Spirit at the Baptism. A number of regions harboured a group that subscribed to the so-called *Tsega* [Grace] doctrine that maintains that Christ became divine by the Grace of God the Father when the latter proclaimed the infant Jesus as Son at the Baptism.

With a view to achieving unity and uniformity of religion as an adjunct to the country's political unification and governmental centralisation, Tewodros enlisted the services of the *Tāwahedo* stalwart Salama. But, the *Abuna's* personal project was to utilise the government's aid in crippling the power of the Catholics as well as the *Tsega* and the *Sost Lidet* splinter groups. Salama was an inveterate foe especially of the influential Lazarist Bishop de Jacobi whom he ousted from Gondar and dismantled the Catholic mission. Contrary to Salama's benign contempt for the Protestant missionaries, Tewodros welcomed them, especially the Chrischona Brethren from Switzerland, who had come to Ethiopia to settle and earn a living primarily by selling their skills to the Emperor while restricting their evangelical activities to bible studies and starting schools. The other Protestant (Anglican) mission was led by Henry Stern (1820 – 1885) whose candid but careless description of Tewodros as a "poor boy, in a reed-built convent" who became "the Sovereign of a great and extensive realm" profoundly offended the Emperor at a time when he was proclaiming his Solomonic lineage.⁷²

Actually, the Emperor desperately needed funds to finance his 'national' modernising project. These could be procured from the rich clerical landholders squandering their unearned and untaxed wealth in luxurious and licentious life style and in proliferating idle and immoral priests. He thus sought to limit the number of church officials and seized all clerical lands leaving just enough land for the church's sustenance. This measure, along with others, to subordinate the church under the state authority resulted in strained relations between the sovereign and the *Abuna*. The situation worsened when Alexandrian Patriarch Kyrillos IV (r. 1854 – 1861) visited Ethiopia at the behest of the *Khedive*

⁷¹ *Tāwahedo* or *Monophysite* doctrine believes that "God is one in three and three in one. The unity of God is...an all-inclusive perfection. So the one is also eternally three." He is, affirms the Anaphora, "three names and one God, three prosopa [.,persons'] and one appearance, three personas and one essence". See SAMUEL, V.C. Church of Ethiopia.

⁷² STERN, H. Falashas in Abyssinia, p. 62.

[Viceroy] of Egypt to mediate between the king and his archbishop. The Coptic divine failed in his mission and further incensed the monarch who suspected him as a spy when he found out that his august visitor had written back home asking for an Egyptian military regiment to train the Ethiopian army. Consequently, both the *Abuna* and the Patriarch were consigned to Tewodros's hilltop prison at Magdala. Despite such heretical actions, Tewodros at heart was religious and is reported to have quipped that he was husband of Ethiopia and fiancé to Jerusalem.⁷³

The religious zeal of both the *Nawab* and the *Atse* exhibited a distinct streak of communalism and fanaticism. Taught by a *maulavi* in his childhood Tipu's religious *mentalité* was as deeply Islamic as Kassa's was intently Christian in view of his early education at monastic schools. Tipu aspired to preside over a *Khudadad Sarkar*, a distinctly Islamic state, whereas Tewodros, claiming descent from Solomon and also to be a slave of Christ, was determined to crush or convert the Muslims in the country and aspired to ally with the Christian rulers of the world to form a global Christian commonwealth. His ethnic/racial bias against the Oromo or the Gallas was further accentuated by their Islamic faith. By the same token he would have nothing to do with Western Christianity – Catholic or Protestant. His own faith was firmly grounded in the Eastern Orthodox theology of *Tāwahedo*. Both rulers also practiced forcible conversion into the respective faith – Tipu forcing the Hindus of Coorg and the Christians of Mangalore and Tewodros the Muslim Gallas. Though Tipu showed a partial tolerance for Hindu religion, especially for its putative miraculous practices, he was too good an adherent of the Sunni sect to put up either with the mystical Mahdavis or the orthodox Wahhabis within the Islamic *oikoumene*.⁷⁴

Tipu and Tewodros: Magic and Miracles

Both Tipu and Tewodros were believers in miracle and oracle. Tipu's reputed patronage of Hindu temples, monasteries, priests, and monks was more than a display of his religious toleration and eclecticism. He sported a gold ring etched with the name of the Hindu God Rama – a gift from the Shankaracharya *Guru* of the Sringeri Sharada Math.⁷⁵ Rama is also considered the ideal Hindu king whom Tipu may have fancied as a role model. It should be noted further that his

⁷³ See ARAIA, G. Great Unifier [online].

⁷⁴ See OLIKARA, N.G. Light of Islam. [online]. Mahdavia is an Islamic sect founded by Hazrath Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (1443 – 1505) of India. Wahhabism or *Wahhabiyyah* is a conservative branch of Sunni Islam founded by Muhammad ibn al-Wahhab (1703 – 1792).

⁷⁵ See OLIKARA, N.G. Tipu Sultan. [online].

letters to the *Guru* of the Sringeri Math “was inspired by the foreboding of doom and his desperate attempt to avert it”.⁷⁶ Tipu often resorted to religious rituals and wore apotropaic objects and trinkets – Hindu as well as Islamic – to counteract calamities. He wore turbans with sacred Islamic quatrains embroidered on them and dipped in the holy waters of the Zam Zam well in Mecca. Similarly he wore “holy talismans like rings set with jewels varying every day in colour according to the course of the seven stars”.⁷⁷ Tipu had been warned by his Muslim and Hindu astrologers of his doomsday, Fourth of May, the last day of the Lunar month.⁷⁸ On the morning of that day he ordered some Brahmin astrologers to perform their prescribed rites to avert the predicted ‘dreadful misfortune’ befalling him that day. Despite his public avowal of Islam, Tipu basically was, as Dennys Forrest observes, “intensely superstitious, with an obviously higher opinion of astrologers than of *maulavis*. The seven stars rather than the hand of Allah seem to rule his universe”.⁷⁹

The credulous *Sultan* might have developed a defeatist mentality of a doomed man since his Mauritius venture a little over three months prior to the attack on his fortress at Srirangapatnam. Lt. Col. Wilks writes of the *Sultan’s* apprehension of an impending dissolution of his empire based on a folk tale of cephalomancy he actually believed. According to this tale, the mysterious power of a crushed human skull showing some cracks caused the death of forty persons. When Tipu noticed some cracks on the mast of the ship the Frenchman Ripaud had taken to the Isle of France in December 1798, he was convinced that these cracks foreboded the destruction of his empire and thus ‘he readily made up his mind to throw himself unconditionally in his Lordship’s (Wellesley’s) compassion’ after he had read the Governor General’s letter of 9 January 1799.⁸⁰

When his overture failed, he prepared for a showdown, but could not summon the skill of a military strategist. Used to having his own way in every contingency in the past he had deprived himself of the counsels of his ministers who dared not speak for fear of incurring their master’s wrath. During the last three and one half weeks of the siege of Srirangapatnam, Tipu established his residence at Cullaly Deedy (formerly a water gate in the north side of the fort), a small stone *choultry* [‘resting place’] within the gate enclosed by curtains, thus forming a small apartment. Nearby there stood four small tents for his servants and his store. We see him totally helpless and hapless on the day the British force assaulted his fort. On being apprised of the advance of the enemy soldiers

⁷⁶ SHARMA, H.D. *Real Tipu*, p. 123.

⁷⁷ See OLIKARA, N.G. *Light of Islam*. [online].

⁷⁸ STEWART, C. *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 88.

⁷⁹ FORREST, D. *Tiger of Mysore*, pp. 212, 206,

⁸⁰ WILKS, M. *Historical Sketches*, 2: pp. 332 – 333. Wilks does not mention how he obtained information on Tipu’s reaction to Mornington’s letter of 9 January 1799.

toward the fort, Tipu quite sensibly thought of fleeing his stronghold along with his family, but changed his mind when one of his councillors warned him of the dire consequences of their flight on the morale of the soldiers engaged in defending Srirangapatnam. “I am entirely resigned to the will of God, whatever it may be,” said he and so changed his mind about leaving.⁸¹ Michaud writes how the *Sultan* consigned his life to fate and resolved to fight (“since a man died only once it did not matter to him what moment he happened to finish his career”) to death rather than surrender to the enemy.⁸² Sadly he met with an undeserved and ignoble end – though sword in hand but dying not at sword point as behooves a noble warrior but by a cheap shot from a greedy English grenadier attempting to snatch the gold buckle of his jewelled sword belt as he lay severely wounded.

Like Tipu, Tewodros was “more bigoted than religious”. The Emperor hated the priests, their sermons and homilies, and the scriptural tales of magic and miracles, but followed his astrologers and soothsayers to the hilt. However, it is noteworthy that his lucky charm had a deep unmistakable Christian content.⁸³ For example, the amulet he wore as he committed suicide contained a prayer of the sixteenth-century King Serse Dengel (r. 1563 – 1597) seeking divine enlightenment with a view to becoming an ideal ruler and leader of his people.⁸⁴ Tewodros, reportedly, was deeply self-reflexive and quite frank about his personal failings.⁸⁵ Both Tipu and Tewodros appear to have solicited divine intervention on the eve of joining battles. Their conduct in this regard has a respectable precedence in global history, especially in that of Greco-Roman civilisation. There is an uncanny parallel between the behaviours of both the *Nawab* and the *Negus* on the last day of their battle and their life. Both were painfully aware of the outcome of their confrontation against the British, but both ultimately decided not to give up, but go on fighting till the end. Both also acknowledged their personal faults and failings with unabashed candour.

Tipu and Tewodros: Their Limitations and Legacy

Professing a righteous rage against the EIC’s expanding power and imperialist projects Tipu *Sultan* was determined to drive the British from the shores of Hindustan and showed little qualms wooing foreign powers, both Christian

⁸¹ KIRMANI, History of Tipu, pp. 176 – 177.

⁸² MICHAUD, F. *Historire de L’empire de Mysore*, p. 167. See also STEWART, C. *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 87.

⁸³ BLANC, H. *Narrative of Captivity*, p. 12.

⁸⁴ PANKHURST, R. *Theodore’s Amulet*, p. 291.

⁸⁵ See RUBENSON, S. *Ethiopian Independence*, pp. 261 – 268 for the Emperor’s attitudes and behaviors prior to his death.

(France) and Islamic (Afghanistan and Turkey). Yet his death in action brought for him the posthumous renown of a martyr and a patriot. His bureaucratisation of the administration, economic measures and trade policies, and suppression of the feudalistic *palegars* have been seen by historians as deliberate and progressive modernising measures, but in actuality these were all designed to erect an extractive state for the primary purpose to fuel its expansive imperialist dictatorial project. Moreover, in hindsight, it is clear that Tipu's kingdom was considerably weakened by his policy of emasculating the *palegars*, whose privileges and properties he diminished greatly. He unwittingly subverted the base of the strength of his realm which facilitated the British conquest of Mysore.

Tewodros's unrelenting but unrequited drive for erecting a united Christian *commonwealth* in Ethiopia created a mindset that was characterised at once by his uncompromising conviction in a divinely mandated legitimacy justifying the means to achieve his end at the beginning of his imperial reign and a remarkable confession to his utter failure in this regard toward the end of his life and career. Though an arrogant and proud warrior, he had the courage to admit his defeat as could be seen in the letter he wrote General Napier following the disastrous Battle of Aroge (10 April 1868) led by the emperor's gallant commander of the advanced guard *Fitawrari* Gabriyé just three days before he committed suicide at the besieged fort of Magdala: "believing myself to be a great lord, I gave you battle; but, by reason of the worthlessness of my artillery, all my pains were as nought".⁸⁶ The man who was so inordinately violent by nature also exhibited his remorse of being so: "Oh my God, my Creator, what kind of man are you making me, quickly destroy me, that thy creatures may have peace."⁸⁷ A contemporary British account summed up the emperor's character as an amazing amalgam of opposites: "He is represented as uniting in himself the most opposite and conflicting qualities – brutality and intelligence, benignity and tyranny, moderation and madness, savage prejudice and political sagacity."⁸⁸

Both Tipu *Sultan* and Tewodros dreamed to become the undisputed masters of their respective realms they had won by their sheer military power, but they were pitted against a superior adversary. Both rulers realised the utter need to borrow Western military and industrial technology. Sadly both failed to elicit the attention of their chosen donors – France and England. When Tipu sent an embassy to King Louis XVI (r. 1774 – 1792) in 1788, the latter, while showing the Mysore ambassadorial team an elaborate protocol of courtesy, categorically informed them on 10 August 1788 of France's unwillingness to enter into a

⁸⁶ HOLLAND, T.J., HOZIER, H. (Eds.) Record of Expedition, 2: p. 42.

⁸⁷ WELD BLUNDELL, H. History of Theodore, p. 20.

⁸⁸ ALDEN, H.M. John Bull in Abyssinia, p. 340.

defensive or offensive formal treaty with Tipu *Sultan*. As Ray observes: “It seems that Paris was totally against signing any treaty with an Asian power, if not an Indian power.”⁸⁹ The aggrandisement of Tipu’s Mysore was a direct challenge to the EIC’s expansionist agenda enshrined in Lord Wellesley’s policy of Subsidiary Alliance.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the real threat to the English dominion in Mughal India came from Revolutionary France that Tipu was soliciting for military help. By itself the *Sultan’s* Mysore was no more than an uncalled for irritation not much to be worried over but for the possible intervention of France.⁹¹

Tewodros never wanted European soldiers to be employed by his army; he mainly sought experts in crafts and gunnery, especially cannon-making from England, but got almost nothing except a supine silence for a long time initially, followed by an apparently mild response that contained a veiled warning to him to free the hostages before he could expect to obtain any technological assistance from that country. Tewodros’s Ethiopia was an embarrassment, even a nuisance, for imperial Britain. In view of their geopolitical commitments and interests the British strove to hold Russia at bay and thus keep Turkey and British India’s Afghan border secure on the one hand and maintain a friendly relationship with their traditional rival in the colonies France against the rising power of Prussia.

The British imperialists were no mere predatory land grabbers. They were pragmatic political actors par excellence. No doubt, their imperialist project was based primarily upon profit motive but always within the framework of international law as well as domestic constitutional constraints.⁹² Thus, the EIC’s forces left Mysore following Tipu’s death after having restored the erstwhile traditional ruling dynasty to the throne at Srirangapatnam. Needless to mention, they took care to restore a tractable government for the sake of maintaining political balance of power in Deccan and of ensuring progressive expansion of the Company’s sphere of influence over the fast declining Mughal India. Similarly, the British army withdrew from Ethiopia soon after it had achieved its objectives and seen to the restoration of a functional government following the downfall of Tewodros’s tottering empire. Just as Tipu Sultan’s

⁸⁹ RAY, A. French Reports on Tipu. In Idem, *Tipu Sultan*, p. 146.

⁹⁰ See HUTTON, J. Subsidiary System, pp. 172 – 185.

⁹¹ MARTIN, M. Despatches of Wellesley. Spain, pp. v – lxix: Wellesley’s speech at the House of Commons (21 January 1794). For a recent analysis of Tipu’s character and conduct see SIL, N.P. Tipu Sultan, pp. 1 – 11.

⁹² A few months after the fall of Srirangapatnam, Lord Wellesley wrote his superior in London Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Control (r. 1793 – 1801): “If you have a little patience, the death of the Nizam will probably enable me to gratify *your voracious appetite for lands and fortresses*.” Cit. FORREST, D. Tiger of Mysore, p. 310. Emphasis in original.

children were looked after by the British Government, by bringing them to Calcutta, Tewodros's son was taken to London to be placed under the personal care of the Queen.

In hindsight, it is quite clear that both the Indian and the Ethiopian rulers brought about their own *nemesis*. Despite their professed secular and progressive outlook and their projects to modernise their respective realms at par with the nation states of the West they admired, they remained tenaciously anchored in their respective faiths as well as adamant in their resolve to uphold their sovereign power and honour even when they solicited foreign aid and intervention in their economy and military establishments oblivious of European global entanglements. Tipu's overtures to France in the late eighties and nineties were made in utter disregard of the domestic and diplomatic conundrum of Revolutionary France as was the case with Tewodros's to Britain without any knowledge of the British colonial concerns following the Great Mutiny and the assumption of imperial control of India as well as the Anglo-Turkish diplomatic obligations following the Crimean War (1854 – 1856).

Then both Tipu and Tewodros were innocent of Western diplomatic practice and protocol. Their typical grandiloquent rhetoric proclaiming their personal grandeur befuddled the European rulers who were used to rational, restrained, friendly, and yet firm diplomatic language unknown to their oriental counterparts. Ironically enough, even though both rulers were avid correspondents, they failed to persuade their preferred Western powers. Sheer problems of communication – both linguistic and logistical – led to the collapse of negotiation and resolution.⁹³ Yet we must recognise the crucial role Tipu *Sultan* played in the history of British imperialism in India and Emperor Tewodros played in the history of Ethiopia's modernisation and unification. The *Sultan's* daring and defiance determined the course of the British East India Company in consolidating its hold on India at large.⁹⁴ Tewodros "perceived as did none of his predecessors among the *masafent* that the political anarchy, moral laxity, and technological backwardness of his people threatened national survival." Indeed his efforts at "a national revival combined with the transformation of his country into a modern state" endured and ensured the survival of Ethiopian independence.⁹⁵

Both the fallen heroes left an indelible memory for their meteoric rise and monumental fall. While, admittedly, Tewodros was conscious of his concern for

⁹³ Tewodros, reportedly, was a "prolific letter-writer" (PANKHURST, R. *Tewodros Bomba*, p. 193). For Tipu's correspondences see KRKPATRICK, W. *Letters of Tipoo*; KAUSAR, K. *Correspondence of Tipu*; and HUSAIN, I. *Tipu's Briefs for Embassies*. In HABBIB, I. (Ed.) *Tipu Sultan*, pp. 19 – 65.

⁹⁴ SIL, N.P. *Tipu Sultan*, 9.

⁹⁵ RUBENSON, S. *Ethiopian Independence*, p. 269.

the unity and strength of Ethiopia as a whole, it is doubtful if Tipu ever aspired to a prosperous and independent India, as he was aware only of his own *patria*, Mysore, not of a larger political entity called Hindustan, though he was probably aware of its spatial identity.⁹⁶ Tipu *Sultan*, who never tired of being showered with panegyric from admirers and sycophants, got himself one of the most fantastic encomia after his victory over the battalion of Colonel William Baillie (d. 1782) in the first Battle of Pollilur on 10 September 1780. Thus he was remembered as a veritable King Braveheart (“Rustam-hearted King”), who made “the English lions quake with fear” and “the Maráthás...flee like deer,” compared to whose generosity Hátim was a miser, “and whose wisdom makes “all the sages of the earth appear before him like ignorant children”.⁹⁷

Tewodros, on the other hand, is reported to have made a disarmingly candid admission as to his personal behaviour when he told the British diplomat of Assyrian origin Hormuzd Rassam (1826 – 1910) at Debre Tabor on 3 July 1866: “My father was mad, and though people often say that I am mad also; I never would believe it; but now I know it is true....Yes, yes, I am mad....Do not look at my face or take heed of my words when I speak to you before my people, but look at my heart.”⁹⁸ This insanity, clinically proven or not, joined with the Emperor’s catastrophic capriciousness. As the persecuted priests of Magdala lamented: “...with King Theodore, a man who would seem to drive him to anger, moves him to mercy, and a man who seems to move him to mercy excites his anger, and a man may be executed for a trifling word, or get off scot free”.⁹⁹ Tewodros’s horse-name is given as Abba Tataq, that is, “lord of valour, vitality, and violence” and one of the *fukkare* poems [poems of hero worship], invokes his memory thus: “If you want to mention (someone), let’s mention the brave Kaša from Q^wara, Abba Mogād [Lord of Storm],”¹⁰⁰ who, as Alaqā Wolde Maryam remembered, “scorned to die by the hand of a man”.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Tipu wrote the Grand Seignior of Constantinople on 10 February 1799: “It is my hope, from the supreme king of kings, that as at the appearance of a second Adam, the religion of Islaum [*sic*] will obtain exclusive prevalence over *the whole country of Hindostan*” Martin, *Despatches of Wellesley. Spain*, p. 25. Emphasis added.

⁹⁷ Translated from Persian and cited in BOWRING, L.B. *Haider and Tipu*, p. 172 note 1. Hatim at Ta’iy (d. 578) was a Christian poet of pre-Islamic Arabia noted for his generosity.

⁹⁸ BLANC, H. *Narrative of Captivity*, p. 178.

⁹⁹ WELD BLUNDELL, H. *History of Theodore*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ GELAYE, G. *Amharic Praise Poems*, p. 1357.

¹⁰¹ WELD BLUNDELL, H. *History of Theodore*, p. 39.

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