

## KOVAI METRO MUSINGS

# Anglo-Mysore Conflict: Race Course, Puliyakulam Were Once A Warfield

Coimbatore was an integral part of the Anglo Mysore conflicts and suffered much due to the same. The region was kind of caught between the devil and the deep sea due to prolonged battles at multiple locations over long periods of time. Tipu Sultan succeeded Hyder Ali by the year 1782 and the second Mysore war came to an end by 1784. Both Tipu and the English were only waiting for an opportunity to annihilate each other and ever lasting peace could have possible only after the extermination of one of them. Tipu Sultan inherited Coimbatore from his father and managed to retain it till his end in 1799. He had a modern army which was strong and well equipped. In fact he was among the earliest to use rockets in warfare. Tipu had become a member of the Jacobin club and tried to create a strong military alliance with Napoleon.

Commander Fullerton captured the forts at Coimbatore and Palakkad during the year 1783 at the time of the third Mysore war (1780 - 1784) and managed to seize Rs.55000 and a lot of food stuff. However Tipu chose to continue his siege of the Mangalore fort with all his fury and strength. The English were unable to hold on and they capitulated. Finally both the parties signed the Mangalore treaty which ensured peace for another five years only. Coimbatore was returned to Tipu as a consequence of the same. Tipu arrived at Coimbatore during the year 1789 with a large army and chalked worked out his plan for invading Travancore. He requested the kingdom of Travancore to hand over the captured parts belonging to the kingdom of Kozhikode and it was refused due to their closeness to the English. Tipu offered his prayers at the Masjid in Coimbatore and launched his attack of Travancore. The armies of Travancore had to retreat and the region invaded by Tipu met with death and destruction. This forced the rulers of Travancore to seek the help of the East India Company.

Timmaiyya, the head of the Coimbatore fort ordered the polygars of this region to assemble at the Coimbatore palace. All of them arrived except Venkatapathy, the polygar of Dhali and therefore Timmaiyya launched an attack on Dhali and captured it. The poligar Venkatapathy who had hid himself in the Anaimalai forests was hunted down and killed. He was decapitated and his head was hung at the Coimbatore fort while his supporter, the Vanavarayar of Samathur was shut at the Srirangapattinam prison. The English understood that it would not be possible to capture the south without getting rid of Tipu and therefore they devised a 'divide and rule' strategy. They decided to align themselves with the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad and finish him off. Several battles were fought at Sathyamangalam, Coimbatore and other places. Coimbatore was captured by the English during the course of the war. However

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General Kamaruddin of Mysore fought valiantly while also relying on strategy and captured the fort at Coimbatore. Pitched battles were fought at Sukravpet and armies of the polygars were slaughtered by the armies of Mysore. The English accumulated their armies from Mumbai and Kolkata with additional support from the armies of the southern polygars, the English laid siege to Srirangapattinam. Tipu ordered the garrison at Coimbatore to destroy the fort at Coimbatore in 1792 and come to the capital. Finally, the Nizam, Marathas, English and polygars made Tipu close the third Mysore war at a time when he was bereaved and sick. The kingdom of Tipu became half the size however Coimbatore was returned to him.

Tipu was seething with fury due to the debacle suffered at the time of the third Mysore war. He was badly in need of money and therefore he began to fleece people in the name of taxes. Temple wealth was seized by him and the polygars who were unable to comply, ran away to the forests. The patta-karar of Palayakottai was incarcerated and put into the dungeons at Dharapuram while the patta-karar of Kadaiyur was kept at the Sankari fort as a prisoner. Kangeyampudur Pallavarayar and his son were taken to the prison in Srirangapattinam. The polygar of Puravipalayam escaped to the forests of Kerala. Finally the Vanavarayars of Samathur and the Kalingarayars of Uthukuli aligned with the English and hatched a plan to put an end to Tipu Sultan. Their families were safely moved to Mumbai during those times. Tipu persecuted people on the basis of religion in Tamilnadu and people were forced to change their faith. He made changes to the names of places based on the basis of faith.

It was in 1799 that the fourth Mysore war began

and a weakened Tipu was encircled at Srirangapattinam. The Kalingarayar of Uthukuli and his armies fought side by side with the English and helped them seize Coimbatore. The polygar of Uthukuli and his armies moved towards Srirangapattinam along with Stuart, James and Attlee who lead the English armies. In fact Sir Thomas Monroe, who later became the Governor of Madras was part of the battle scenes at a junior level and he has chronicled some of the happenings. Finally, the English and their allies killed Tipu Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore and captured Srirangapattinam in the year 1799. The victors shared the spoils and Coimbatore came under the umbrella of the East India Company. Mysore was returned to the its hereditary rulers, the Wodeyars.

The harsh measures adopted by Tipu Sultan at Coimbatore and the loss of life due to wars finally came to an end and peace began to prevail once again in this region. The English used to attack from the Puliyakulam and the Race Course areas which were but wetlands on the northern side of Valankulam. Slowly, the town limped back to normal. Everlasting peace returned to Coimbatore. However it took several decades for the people to forget the agonies caused due to the Mysore wars.

The town began to undergo one more change due to the influence of the English who introduced modern industry to this region. The importance of Coimbatore began during the rule of the rulers of Vijayanagar and it continues to be an important centre for commerce to this day. Coimbatore was made the district headquarters on the 24th of November 1804 and the day is now being celebrated as Coimbatore Day.

—Rajesh Govindarajulu

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