

A REVIEW OF PRAXY FERNANDES'S STORM OVER SERINGAPATAM: THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF HYDER ALI AND TIPPU SULTAN

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Storm over Seringapatam: The Incredible Story of Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan

By Praxy Fernandes (1924-2002) (a former Indian Administrative Service officer of 1947 cadre)

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Praxy Fernandes's *Storm over Seringapatam: The Incredible Story of Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan* is a highly engaging biography, written in a popular style that chronicles the life of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan; the rajah of Seringapatam (Mysore, India) during the 18th century. Its language is unrestrictedly rhetoric and perspicuous, comprises of the 'sequential' historical description on the lives of the Sultans; summed up in twenty-six chapters. The biography applies the mode of an anecdote, euphemism, synecdoche, allegory, and extended metaphors like the word "canvas" to describe the socio - political conditions of the 18th century and to reconstruct the history of the Sultans, specially Tipu Sultan.

The biography gives a detailed account of the historical battles and treaties held during the period of their reign. It also elucidates about the prodigious cultural and political

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vexations taking place during that time. For example, the British showed a mischief to expand their colonial rule in India. They were identifying those Indian monarchs who could betray one another for petty avarices. However, they failed to chase the adamant rulers - Haider Ali and Tipu Sultans shown in the Chapter- "Lions roar no More", which led to the origin of many conspiracies against the latter.

The text recounts the conspiracies originated against the Sultans like Lord Cornwallis who developed a 'Grand Alliance' with the Nizam and the Marathas, Richard Wellesley's misconduct of 'Subsidiary Alliance', 'The Malarctic Proclamation' occurred in 1797 -98 "a casus belli of the final Mysore war" and the cause of Tipu's fall in the chapter "The Dormant Volcano". "The Last Struggle" is an important chapter that shows the atrocities befell upon Tipu because "he was clearly unprepared for war and was in no position to launch an offensive". He fought bravely but some of his false confidants betrayed him as they had already allied with the British. Fernandes remarks "Sultan was wounded three times, his horse was killed under him, and he received a gun shot in his chest".

The biography also states that Tipu was a man of placid disposition. He had an unflinching love for innovation, development, and furtherance of his ideas in his empire. His most serious concern was to develop his kingdom "Tipu's conception of the Nation - State, the responsibilities of the government to the people, the elimination of feudalistic intermediaries, his attempt to build up a standard system of laws and his creation of a civil service were modern ideas, out of tune with his times and therefore unacceptable to those around him".

Praxy Fernandes also discusses various other controversial issues like Hyder's "Hitler methods" to punish the Nair rebellions. However, Fernandes writes Tipu was more barbarous than his father "he captured several thousand Nairs and circumcised them and admitted to Islam".

Praxy Fernandes is a Kanara Christian who belongs to those descendants who were either imprisoned by the Sultans or circumcised into Mohammedanism forcibly as he asserts "I belong to the community known as the Kanara Christians". Various schools of thoughts retort that the Sultans, specially Tipu Sultan inflicted severe pain upon the Christians and persecuted the Kanara Christians. Fernandes heard of these statements from the people of his race for whom the name of Tipu evoked dread and nameless fear "To us; he has been a symbol of religious bigotry and the epitome of bigotry". But, he denies these allegations. He believes that only those were banished from his state who were spying against him and joined the hands of the British with an aim to ruin his regime. He states that Sultans were not persecutors of those who would live in peace in their state. Praxy Fernandes vindicates Tipu by adding that he requested the Archbishop of Goa to send Catholic priests for his Christian subjects who were neglecting their duties.

Praxy Fernandes's biography is a dramatic effort to reproduce the historical characters who according to him were the noble rajas and always had a proclivity to strengthen their kingdom, and who hated the Colonial miscreants the most. Though, often they

executed some reprehensible acts to advance their political expansions, that had to be desired for the *Rajas* to survive their dominion.

Fernandes's biography entails an idea of 'prosopography' exposing the Sultans' personalities, and their strategic rule in a concise and concrete manner. It cites exactly, from the acclaimed and authentic primary historical sources.C. Guddumaiah acknowledges "Praxy Fernandes's biography provides accurate and credible information about the struggle launched by Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan against the colonial forces in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. The scholar also presents very useful information on the strategic relations during the period of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan, based on authentic primary sources".

George Saintsbury in his *Some Great Biographies* (1892) says a real biography ought to be something more than the presentation of mere materials, however excellently calendared, something more than memoirs, letters, diary and so forth. The whole ought to be passed through the mind of a competent and intelligent artist, and to be presented to us, not indeed in such a way that we are bound to take his word for the details, but in such a way that we see a finished picture, a composition, not merely a mass of details and data". Praxy Fernandes's biography portrays the charactersthat transpire theirhistorical evidents to the implied readers effectively,through the orotund dictionand figurative literature.

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