

OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 135

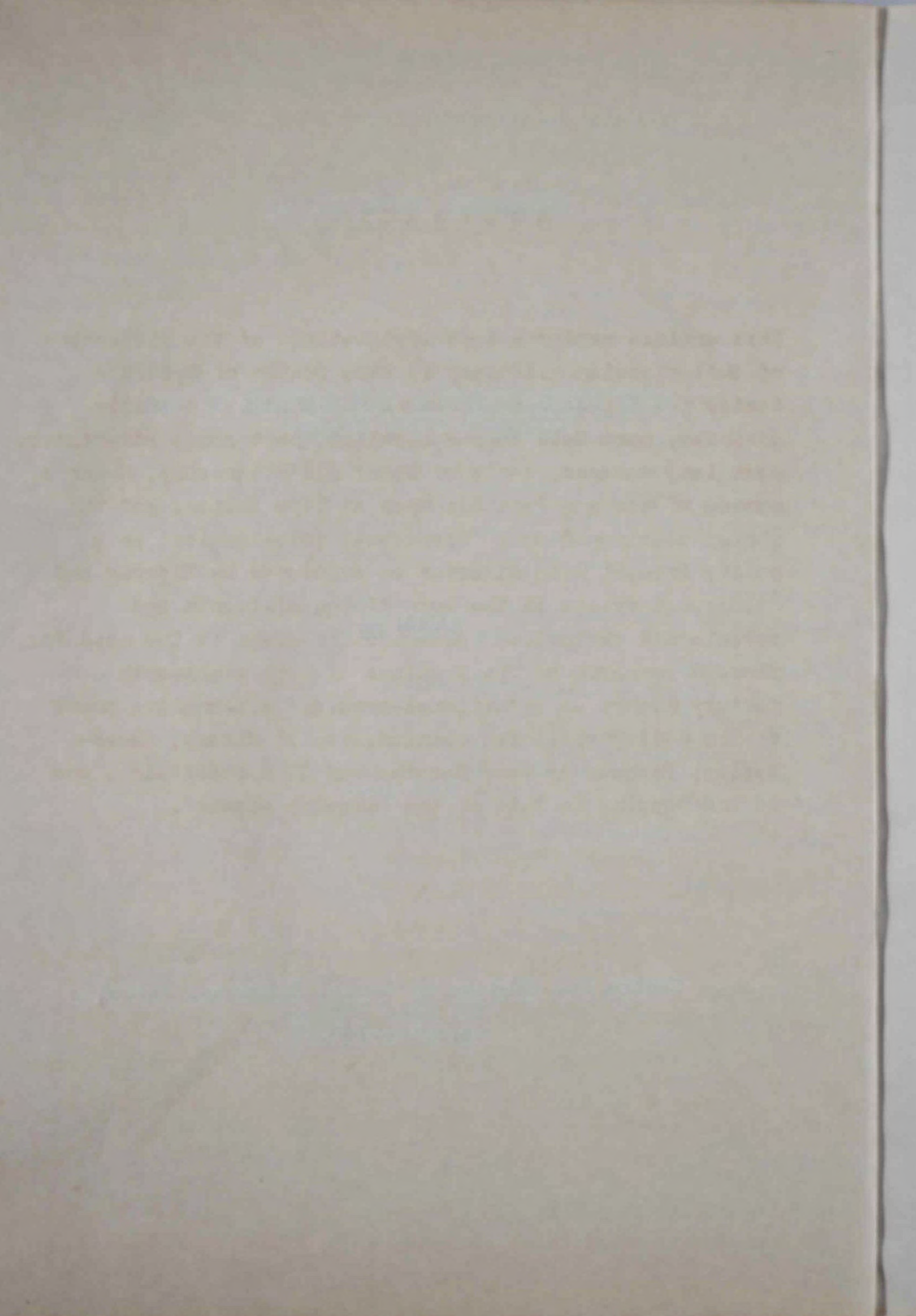
SOME SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE
COGNOMEN 'TIRU SULTAN'

BARUN DE



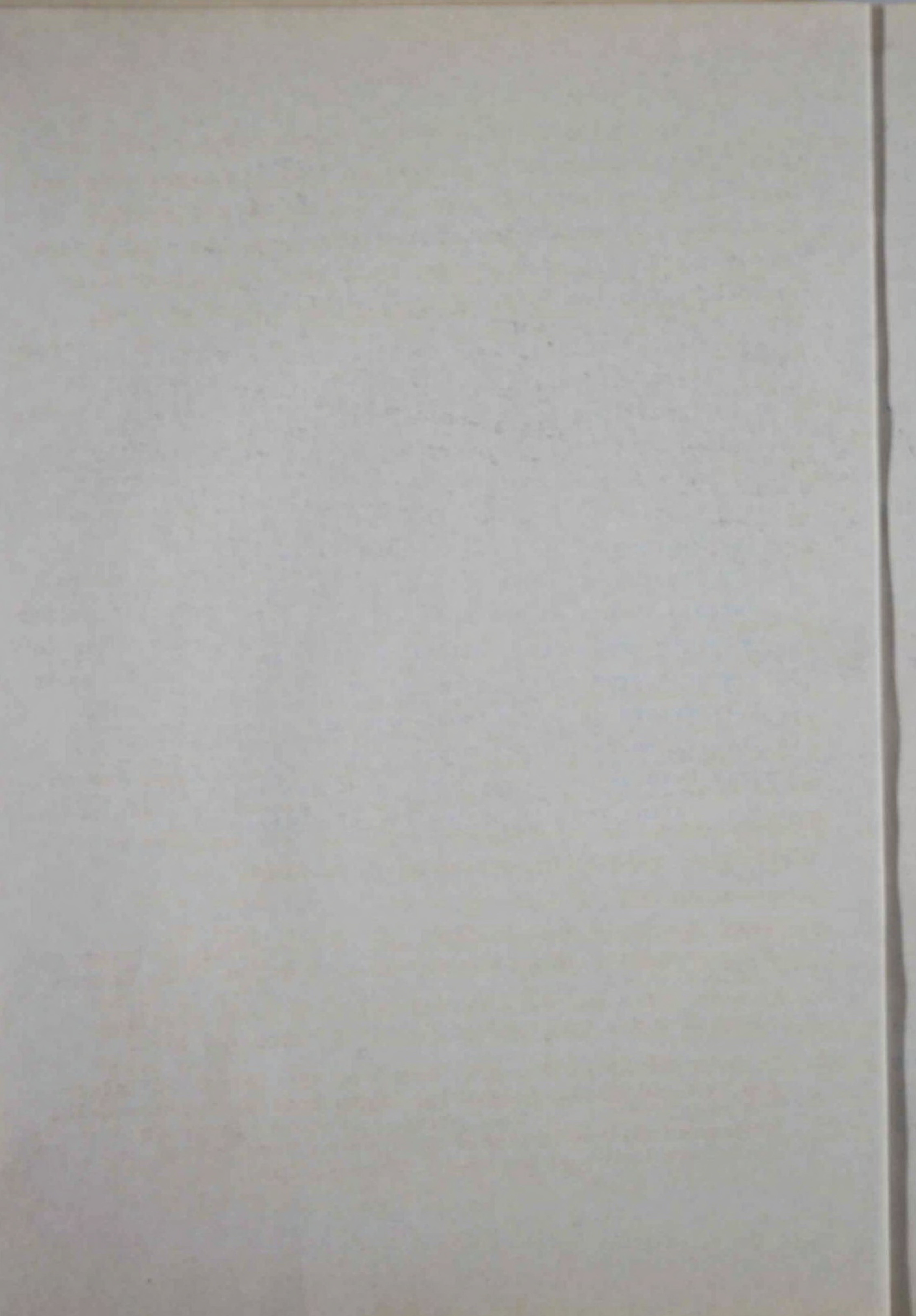
JULY 1992

Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
10, Lake Terrace
Calcutta-700029.



ABSTRACT

This article explores some implications of the dialectics of Sufi plebeian militancy in Tipu Sultan of Mysore's family traditions and cognomen. It studies the fully plebeian, part Sufi shrine servitor, part armed adventurer, part land manager, roots of Hyder Ali's ancestry, Hyder's naming of his son Fath Ali Khan as Tipu Sultan, and the social bearing of Sufi 'withdrawal intoxication' in a policy fraught with disaster as evidenced by Bijapur and Haidarabad events at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Attention is drawn to the need for renewed research on the premises of late eighteenth century Mysore as a 'national-popular' alternative power to the collaborationist compradorism of Nizams, Nawab-Wazirs, Peshwas or many Maratha and Sikh chieftains, and to the bearing in this of the "Dervish streak".



Tipu Sultan, Mysore's last independent ruler, was a distinctly alternative element in late eighteenth century South Asian political culture.¹ Unlike the nominally independent Nizam Ali Khans, Asafuddaulahs, Nana Fadnavises or other princes and statesmen of an age when colonialism was destroying the Indian ancien regime brick by brick, Tipu, like his father Hyder Ali and his northern contemporary Mahadaji Sindhia, refused to be pliant and complaisant to British diplomatic blandishments allied with military threats during the age from Warren Hastings to Wellesley. Plebeian in his social origins, more of a ghazi than the average feudal carpet-knight he was a throwback to the pre-Mughal Deccan Sultans, seeking acceptance of his imperial aspirations from West Asian and continental European peers, so as to effectively challenge British Indian competition for dominion in South India.² More than any indigenous ruler in eighteenth century India, Tipu was interested in state power and its commercial capacity. But more than any of them, except his father and Mahadaji, he recognised the need to fight for it. He did this in a pragmatic way, using French absolutist alliance, Jacobin ideology, as well as the neo-Madari principles of a shaheed, without any scruples of artificial consistency, or ideological purity.

1. This paper is a brief statement of the thesis informing data presented in my longer paper entitled "Some Observations about the Social Origins and Naming of Tipu Sultan which was read in the actual Session meeting (Modern India Section) at Delhi in February, 1992.
2. I am grateful to Dr. A.K. Pasha of the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for new insight on this point, given in his paper presented to the National Seminar on Tipu Sultan at Bangalore University, 18-19 January, 1992.

Tipu's contacts with France in its pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary generation are fairly well known. What is practically unexplored are the implications of the dialectics of Sufi plebeian militancy in Tipu Sultan's family traditions and cognomen. This note seeks to initiate discussion on the data, which may be carried out by people more qualified to do so -- i.e. by those who, unlike the present writer, can read the Persian sources themselves, a field now sadly neglected by scholars of South Indian history, except perhaps by some in the U.S.A. like J.F. Richards and R.M. Eaton. It also seeks to arouse debate on the variety of indigenous reactions to political conditions in eighteenth century India.

1. Plebeian Oeifyina of the Lineage :

Prof. Mohibbul Hasan, still Tipu's best biographer, noted many years ago that the veracity of tales about Hyder Ali's ancestry "is for the most part obscure" and that the only detailed pedigree -- by the anonymous author of the Karnama-i-Hydari about his distant forefathers moving as Quraish from Mecca, to Sana'a in Yemen to Baghdad, to seventeenth century Ajmer and its dargah, to Shahjahanabad Delhi was "possibly .. manufactured to bolster up the domestic prestige of Haidar and Tipu". But it is certain that his more proximate forefathers were dargah servitors, then land managers then petty warriors. Their description in Prof. M. Hasan's evocative narrative bears rereading.³ Tipu Sultan's grandfather's grandfather, Shaikh Wali Muhammad "came to Gulbarga from Delhi with his son Muhammad Ali during the reign of Muhammad Adil Shah (1626-56) of Bijapur -- i.e. at the time of the breakup of the latter Vijayanagara domains

3. Mohibbul Hasan, History of Tipu Sultan (Calcutta 1951, Second Edition 1971) pp.1-2.

ruled from its refuge at Chandragiri' an age of Deccani expansion into Karnataka. "A religious man" he "attached himself to the Shrine of Sadr-ur-din Husaini, commonly known as Gisu Daraz" on a monthly subsistence allowance. His son was married to a servitor's daughter. On his death, Muhammad Ali trekked further south to Kolar on the edge of the plateau to look after and rent fields and gardens. His four sons forswore the "life of devotees". They took to warfare -- in an age when Aurangzeb Alamgir's troops were pressing into Tamilnadu from Golconda. After his death in 1697, his third son Fath Muhammad went further south in the service of the Mughal new ruler of Arcot Nawab Sadatullah Khan, who made him a jamadar and gave him the command of 200 foot and 50 horse in the lowest rungs - perhaps below the mansabdari system.

Fath Muhammad Khan thus moved from a dervish-cum-land management background to being a soldier of fortune. He briefly served the Nayak, or rather autonomous chieftain Raja, or Mysore, but left due to dissensions among the chiefs. He died in the service of the petty Nawab of Sira, an official of the Later Mughals, where Haidar Ali was born in 1721. Haidar stayed in his father's profession, but retained the pious connections. His first wife, who was paralysed for life after childbirth, was daughter of a pirzada Sayyid of Sira. His second, Fakhr-un-nissa, however came from a higher military rank. Daughter of a quondam kiladar (castellan) of Cuddapah, when she "became pregnant .. with her husband (she) paid a visit to the tomb of Tipu Mastan Aulia in Arcot .. built by Nawab Saadatulla Khan in about 1729 .. and (they) prayed for her safe and easy delivery and for the birth of a son .. (who in) 1750 .. born to her at Devanhalli .. was

named Tipu Sultan after the name of the saint⁴. Also he was called Fath Ali after his grandfather, Fath Muhammad Khan.⁴

The juxtaposition of cognomens signifies the duality of the two parts in the lineage, part Sufi servitor, part petty military adventurer.⁵ This was a social position far below the elite compradores of colonialism in the eighteenth century Indian ruling class in Hyderabad, the Maratha Confederacy, Awadh or Bengal. Indeed this ancestry was not even that of "service gentry", a term coined in the early 1980s by C.A. Bayly of Cambridge to categorize the relatively stable socio-economic base of the Later Mughal, U.P. petty rural, madad-i-maash grantee aimmadars or prebendaries, or the now semi-permanent talukdars or

4. Ibid. p.6.

5. A recent reference to Tipu by Sanjay Subrahmanyam "A Note on Some Early Nineteenth Century inam Records in the Karnataka State Archives" Indian Economic and Social History History Review, Vol. XXVII, No.4, Oct-Dec 1991 refers to "The defeat and death of Fateh Ali Khan, better known by the sobriquet of Tipu Sultan". The name was Fath, not Fateh, Ali. Praxy Fernandes, The Tigers of Mysore : A Biography of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan (New Delhi, first published 1969, revamped, 1991) repeats Mohibul Hasan, in writing "The additional name Fath Ali .. does not appear to have been used much".

jaqirdars.⁶

The Muslim naiks of late eighteenth century Mysore were certainly below the status of small-town ulama. Their immediate background was the lowest rung of military adventurers whose status was gained by their arms, cunning, self-assertion -- i.e. popular heroic, 'in Gramscian terms with common sense,' rather than elitist intellect. With myths of Arab origin and tenuous claims to broken Quraish, i.e. Prophet's kin lineage, they were not even legitimate princes, since the Wodeyars were still immured in Seringapatam palace itself. They lacked the foreign ethnic specificity and racial elitism of the Turani, Irani, Kashmiri, or Rohilla adventurers of the North. Neither foreigners nor Navyat (direct newcomer to South India) the Quraish rulers in Mysore were fully plebeian.

2. The Dervish Streak :

In Tipu's struggle against encirclement there is however a deeper strand. What British romantic imperialists like John Buchan or P.C. Wren in the late 19th or early 20th century fantasising about "the thin red line" fighting the

6. C.A. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars : North India Society in the Age of Expansion, 1770-1870 (Cambridge 1983) pp. 43, 49-50. This ascription of social stability in the eighteenth century was first put forward by Noman Ahmed Siddiqui, Land Revenue Administrator under the Mughals, 1700-1750 (Aligarh, 1970) in unspoken contradiction of the dourly secularist critique of the rural and small town ulama class, beneficiaries of much of the aimma as "creatures .. natural apologists and propagandist of the Mughal state", and as "seedplots of Muslim communalism in the countryside", made in Irfan Habib, The Agrarians System of Mughal India, 1556-1907 (Aligarh 1963) ch. VIII, pp.310-311.

Mahdi's dervishes in The Sudan, or even later the Saudi Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen in southern Iraqi or Najd deserts, or the Pathan followers of the Faqir of Ipi in Waziristan in the 1930s, called the Ghazi streak. A recent populariser of the Mysore resistance has sought to score a cheap point over historians, better than himself, in correcting "Lord Macaulay ('s Historical Essays) who goes to the -- extreme (of imputing that Haider's) extraction was humble. His father had been a petty officer of revenue. His grandfather a wandering dervish. One must forgive the English historian the liberties he took with historical facts for the drama and thunder of his prose". Praxy Fernandes then proceeds to note that the dervish was Hydar's great grandfather who had actually wandered from Delhi to Gulbarga. He then proceeds to make a slip of fact as trivial as that for which he forgives Macaulay⁷. However, the hare coursed by Macaulay in his mid-nineteenth century elitism about social origins will be well worth tracking.

The original in Tipu's cognomen, the Mastan Aulia was a ascetic Muslim presumably to the point of estatic fantasy (mastani). A Persian manuscript, the Rauzat-ul-Auliya mentions his death in 1725 (the tomb-shrine as we know was constructed in 1729). The Auliya's residence in the late seventeenth century first, was at Shahpur Hillock outside Bijapur city, where many Sufis congregated from the Bahmani times, then a migrant in Arcot, where Nawab Saadatulla

7. Praxy Fernandes, The Tigers of Mysore, pp.17-18; as usual, taking his facts from Prof. Mohibbul Hasan, he garbles it thus "Mohammad Ali migrated south in the service of Nawab Mohamad Shah. "Shah Muhammad is as different from Muhammad Shah as a great grandfather from a grandfather.

Khan set up the Eastern Carnatic capital of the early eighteenth century. The parallelism with Muhammad Ali and Fath Muhammad's times and shifts may be noted. The Tariama-yi-Rauzat-al-Auliya-i Bijapur further noted him as "one of Amin-al-din Ala's murids, Tipu Auliya .. who is said to have ignored the distinguished Shaikhs of his time" and was a naked fakir like Shah Nangi Majzab (d.1713) whose name was the give-away.⁸

Such majzubs as the 'Mastan', mad or intoxicated with the spirit, "dead to the world", sometimes with the aid of narcotics such as bhang or charas, have been socially described by Eaton in Sufis of Bijapur. He particularly emphasises that "miniature paintings of seventeenth century dervishes of Bijapur reflect these features and some also reflect the entranced expressions on their faces. .. None of them is known to have written anything himself, and the hagiographic biographies provide only the briefest sketches of their lives .. their doctrinal positions .. were to varying degrees unorthodox .. their accentric behaviour attracted attention to them in the seventeenth century, just as the unique dance ceremony of the Mevlevi Sufis of nineteenth century Ottoman Turkey attracted the attention of contemporary European observers who on this account forever associated the adjective 'whirling' with 'dervish'".⁹

8. Richard Maxwell Eaton, Sufis of Bijapur, Social Roles of Sufis in Mediaeval India (Princeton, 1978) pp.266, 269-270.

9. ibid. p.267 quoting from D. Shea and A. Troyer, translation of Muslin Fani's, Dalbistan .. etc. (Paris, 1843) p.123.

Eaton proceeds to quote Muhsin Fani's description in the Dabistan-i-Mazahib comparing the 'Madarian' with 'Sanyasi Avadhuts. Both sported common signs -- matted locks, smeared with bhasma (ashes), iron chains around their heads and necks, flaunting black turbans and flags, smoking bhang seated round fires. Tipu Mastan is mentioned as a new initiator, and by no means follower in late pre-colonial Madari practice. It is not surprising that Hydar Naik and Fakhrunissa in their popular religious faith, should also, in a pragmatically secular way invest the attribute of 'Mastan', to the more sovereign value system, connoted by 'Sultan'; from other - worldly ecstasy to this - worldly ~~ecstasy~~ ~~worldly~~ authority, from the extremely spiritual to the highly temporal. There is a large element of the aspirations of social inversion in the cognomen, Tipu Sultan ÷ the factually subaltern Naik wanted to become Padshah Ghazi, as Tipu actually became in 1787, when he declared that the infirm Delhi Padshah, blinded by a swaggering Rohilla captain, had become unfit to rule.

Many Sufi devotees were deeply imbricated in state power as part of the social dialectics of religious free-thinking. Eaton's analysis of "The State and the Family of Bandanawaz Gesudaraz", i.e. of Saiyid Muhammad Husaini's family, constructed from a series of over 25 farmans from the Bijapur court over the period 1659-76 documents the Gulbarga locale. A large lower class following an economy of seasonal fairs displaying and selling according to the Abbe Carre, a French traveller "streamers, balls, whirligigs, pots, plates, cradles" which implied a market economy, was linked with a gentry class. Sajjada-nashins and pirzadas were increasingly involved in Hindu-Muslim social violence in seventeenth and early eighteenth century Deccan and Karnataka,

which escalated as Hindu nayaks and palegars began to resist the Bijapur-Golconda thrusts south into Mysore and upper and western Tamilnadu, and Mughal imperialists pressed hard on the thrusters from further north. The reflection of this was to be found in the chakkinamas or foodgrain grinding wheel accompaniment dirges sung by the lower classes as much as in local accounts of pirzada gentry violence against Hindus.¹⁰

"The political and social disruptions accompanying the decline of the Kingdom (of Bijapur) were followed by further disruptions after the Mughal conquest".¹¹ Cholera in 1689-90, the Bhima River floods in 1696, a terrible famine in 1717, and growing tensions in the Deccan ruling classes which the Later Mughals sought to standardise: there was also the subordination into dialect of Dakhni Urdu by Northern forms of speech of the imperial camp, patronised by the imperialists and their ghair-mulki (extralocal) followers. A chakkinama of the year Aurangzeb conquered Golconda, which is kept in the Hyderabad Salar Jung Museum is redolent of a mood of embittered snobbery:

"The twelfth century (Al Hijri --- i.e. 1689) has arrived and Aurangzeb is king. Pawns have leaped to become queens.

Those who used to be nobles now have to serve these mean people. Khayasta, Khattris and Brahmans of the army have gained much have become an estranged retinue.

North Indian leatherworkers, Tanners, and Untouchables, Washermen, Oil-Dealers and Garderers, all have become rulers."¹²

10. ibid. pp.:39-40, 243-44.

11. ibid. p.270.

12. quoted in ibid. p.272.

There is here the same refrain one gets in the shahr-i-ashobs of the eighteenth century North, about the Indian social structure and its mental world turning upside down.¹³

In this disruptive world of social disharmony, the choice of a Madari cognomen may appear trivial nomenclature. But in its deep structure may be found the popular faith in a Madari holy man, one who was no ordinary fanatical fakir, but was close also to plebeian Hindu ways of indigenous faith and practice, whose symbols of power in asceticism many Madaris donned, in a sort of extra-communalist, apocalyptic religious authority.¹⁴ By the mid-eighteenth century co-existence of social symbiosis and communal (in the sense of social class and rank ordering, and not just religious distinction, as we find reflected in the Chakkinama quoted above) did continue. Such a composite culture did represent a secularising a force, since dervish-veneration with its implied alternative to landed gentry authoritarianism, may have given a greater plebeian, 'common-sense' hegemony to a rising mercenary, ruling class in South Eastern Carnatic.

-
13. The earliest and still best account of this mood will be found in Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, Three Mughal Poets, Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan (Harvard, 1968) Chapters 1 and 2, particularly pp.64-68 for the account of desolate Delhi by Sauda.
14. This aspect of Madari expression of extra-communal spiritual authority is dealt with in Atis Dasgupta's forthcoming book on Fakir and Sanyasi Uprisings (Calcutta, to be published in 1992). A sidelight on a early 19 century Mymonsingh fakir called Tipu Pagal (The mad) will be found in Gautam Bhadra's forthcoming book on Unish Sataker Banqia Krishak Chaitanyar Ek Adhyay (Calcutta, to be published in 1992).

That such maizub simplicity ideally, if not practically, did appeal to Tipu's own imagination may be inferred from illustrated manuscripts depicting vignettes of utterly plebeian Sufis in prayer and ecestasy which were found in his rich library in Seringapatana. Looted by the British army, parts of this ultimately found their way to the Asiatic Society of Bengal and also the India Office Library, London. Some of them, utterly simple in their representational form, were on display in the Exhibition held at the national Seminar on Tipu Sultan in January, 1992 at Bangalore. More research, on people actually venerated by Tipu, and elements of ideology in his "Dreams" which are purported to have been collected, will be necessary if done only by scholars who not only can study Persian but also take note of the social psychological aspects.

3. Some Interim Conclusions :

Characterising the Sufi landed gentry, R.M. Eaton correctly ignores the late Dr. N.A. Siddiqui's fantasy about Muslim aimmadars as an integrative social yeast among a predominantly sectarian Hindu population at the pargana levels. He opts for Irfan Habib's earlier categorisation of such ulama as "bastion(s) of conservation because they had nothing except orthodoxy to justify their claims to the state's bounty" and "what the Mughal Emperor Jahangir called his 'army of prayer'¹⁵ Tipu's class position as far as his social origins went was below this sort of gentry estate. But he did not go beyond such bastions of conservatism in his attitude to religion or communal matters, whether syncretist,

15. Eaton, Sufis of Bijapur, pp.219, 242, and quoting from Habib, loc. cit. p.310.

orthodox or modernizing missionary in Mysore, Coorg or coastal Kanara, where his arbitrary absolutism of the cujus regis ejus religio variety was no different from the seventeenth century Sultans and Padshehs.

However, we can go further. In their non-elite, plebeian aspect the Dervishes were implicit cultural alternatives to the Deccan landed gentry elites, whether Muslim or Hindu. As conditions at the level of polity, i.e. of stable state power, crumbled at the central level, but jutted out in regional outcrops by the 1750s, Indians in different parts of the subcontinent began to share only a sense of helplessness before the increasing 'rapine, plunder and anarchy', the labels with which Irfan Habib branded in 1963, the internal, precolonial conditions of early eighteenth century indigenous rule in India which colonial rule compounded by overassessment and drain of wealth. The cultural aspect of this sense of general crisis and insecurity of life and property is brought out by Eaton thus :

"Referring to 'the decaying Mughal-Maratha - Rajput civilization' of eighteenth century North India, Herman Goetz observed that 'the retirement from worldly affairs into a life of pious devotion is not less remarkable in this age. The dervish and the jogin are likewise a favourite theme of art and literature, the simple, sober life without many wants and fears, far from the vanities, the lies and the ferociousness of the courts became an almost sentimental desire'. Goetz recognised that the phenomenon of withdrawal from society on the part of certain individuals represented a response to certain historical conditions. It was their perception of these historical conditions that seems to have caused them to form what Victor Turner has called

'communities of withdrawal and retreat'. This involved, wrote Turner, 'a total or partial withdrawal from participation in the structural relations of the world, which, is, in any case, conceived of as a sort of a permanent, disaster state'¹⁶.

² As the Marathas punched holes in the Mughal provincial system in the Deccan, Gujarat, Central India, Rajasthan, and Bengal, as the Indian armies of Awadh and Hyderabad were defeated by the Persians at Karnal and the Afghans later began to conquer the Indus Basin Subahs, as the defeats of the Carnatic Nawabs at San Thome on the Adyar River and at Ambur by the French showed up the utter fragility of the regional powers (with some few exceptions as at Kerala where Marthandavarma defeated the Dutch in Colachel in 1741) and as all the major contestants for North India slogged each to stalemate 20 years later by the time of Third Panipat (1761), the 'disaster-state' premised by Turner had many new reactions. British colonialism which ultimately won out was only one.

The 'disaster-state' or, to make it more explicit, acceptance of disaster as a dominant social condition, was not necessarily accepted by everyone in the subcontinent. All participants in the games of ruling-class politics did not buckle under colonial suzerainty as the Nizam or the Nawab-Wazir, the Maratha sardars or the Phulkian Sikh chieftains ultimately did, by the end of the eighteenth century.

16. Ibid, pp.279-80 quoting (a) H. Goetz, The Crisis of Indian Civilisation in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries (Calcutta 1938) p.18, (B) Victor W. Turner, The Ritual Process : Structure and Anti-Structure (Chicago, 1969) p.154 ftnt.

Mysore may have been an exception to that general practice, but its reaction may have been more general than the usually accepted explanation of the defiance, the almost berserker¹⁷ resistance to the newly emergent British colonialist imperialism, which in the eighteenth century was the principal contradiction for Indians in the later half of it. This berserker policy of fighting the British till the end represented the flipside of the coin we have been calling mazjubi or mastani (withdrawal intoxication). Hyder Ali, who named his son Tipu Sultan, and Tipu himself, sought to build a 'national-popular' alternative in Karnataka -- not an anti-structure, as the mastans or pagals remained confined to, but an alternative power. It is this political cultural difference in the Indian political scene which is the clue to the sheer persistence -- one might almost call it secularising fanaticism conched in Islamic rhetoric -- of his attempts to modernise against the grain of Indian socio-economic practice. It was the realisation of this fanatical urge for destroying old social bases for the patricianate of the Kanara coast and Malabar Hills (in Mangalore, the pro-British local Catholics, in Malabar the Nayar feudals who kept their ^{lower class} women's breasts naked, in Coorg, the Hindu feudal recalcitrants) coupled with nourishing of the rights and customs of non-recalcitrant local notables (such as the Shringari Math ravaged by Southern Maratha waranders) that forms the base of the 'national-popular' element in the late eighteenth century Mysore state, which impelled the British to gird themselves to fight Tipu -- and only after him the Marathas. In defeating his aspirant absolutism, the British

in the end turned to imperial absolutism themselves.¹⁸
But that is another story.

18. The character of Tipu's absolutism and of the British awareness that it represented the real indigenous challenge to their alien colonialism will be found in Asok Sen "A Pre-British Economic Formation in India of the Late Eighteenth Century : Tipu Sultan's Mysore" in Barun De, ed. Perspectives in the Social Sciences, I Historical Dimensions (Calcutta, 1977) and Burton Stein, Thomas Munro, The Origins of the Colonial State His Vicious of Empire (Delhi, 1989) p.20.