Tipu Sultan's female entourage under East India Company rule

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Abstract

After the Fourth Mysore War, when the British were dismantling Tipu Sultan's establishment, the East India Company unexpectedly took charge of 601 women who resided permanently inside Srirangapatnam Palace. Along with Tipu's sons, they were moved 200 miles east, to Vellore Fort, in the Company-controlled territory of Madras Presidency. Documentation about these court women held in colonial archives describes moments when they behaved in unexpectedly difficult ways. Because historians have traditionally cast the women of Tipu Sultan's court as voiceless victims, their actions, as described in these colonial sources, have been overlooked. When examined, the descriptions show that they were using the domestic powers granted to them under Tipu Sultan's establishment to influence their treatment by the East India Company. By placing these accounts alongside the broader context of the Company's military history, it becomes apparent that the women of Tipu Sultan's female entourage fomented the events that led to the Vellore Mutiny of 1806.

Keywords: India; Mysore; Vellore; 1806 Mutiny; women; East India Company; Tipu Sultan; Haidar Ali; colonialism; gender

In 1800, the East India Company placed 601 women who permanently resided inside Tipu Sultan's palace at Srirangapatnam under house arrest. The interactions between these women and the East India Company were documented in colonial accounts that are today held in the British Library's India Office Collections and in the Wellington Archives at the University of Southampton. These archival sources, all of which are written in English, contain fascinating descriptions of Tipu Sultan's female entourage under East India Company rule, making it possible to piece together not just what the Company did to them, but also how the women dealt with their peculiar status as the wards of a foreign trading company. Thomas Marriott, a young Orientalist scholar who oversaw their care from 1800 to 1806, was the first person to document their internment. Guided by Orientalist principles, he generated detailed accounts of this courtly community while acting as an intermediary between

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them and the East India Company. In 1802, the women were moved to Vellore, and were interned inside the city's fort for the rest of their lives.

This article re-evaluates the context and causes of the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 by exploring these accounts of the women's internment by the East India Company. Before the Fourth Mysore War in 1799, the women of Srirangapatnam Palace lived inside a fully functioning, pre-colonial court. Their transfer from Tipu Sultan's inner court to East India Company custody happened swiftly, and they continued to conduct themselves according to the customs of their previous lives under Tipu's authority. Colonial accounts of the women generally focus on the vexation of British officials when the women behaved in unexpected ways. The British had no understanding of the women's roles at court, and as will be seen, severely underestimated what they were capable of doing. These accounts of their unexpected behaviour highlight the arenas that fell under their control and show how they used these seemingly insignificant domestic powers to deal with their new colonial masters.

Unsurprisingly, considering the developments explored in this article, the women of Tipu's court went unmentioned in published accounts of the Vellore Mutiny. The earliest published accounts of the mutiny, authored by William Cavendish Bentinck and Robert Rollo Gillespie, focus on the unfolding of military events and reflect their authors' personal interests.[1] Gillespie, who led the relief force to Vellore, described the actions of the mutineers and the reaction of his forces. As for Bentinck, his account was an open letter to the East India Company's directors, written in protest of his removal from India after he was accused of contributing to the Vellore mutiny's causes. In the early nineteenth century, women were regarded as having a marginal role within society, hence the women residing inside Vellore Fort were deemed insignificant to the mutiny's events. This attitude has followed through into postcolonial studies of India's history, with stories of women being conventionally side-lined as areas of "specialist interest at best supplementary to more established frameworks for political and social investigation".[2] This prejudice explains why the women of Tipu's court have received virtually no attention from historians.

For over 200 years, therefore, the role of these hundreds of women in fomenting the mutiny has gone effectively unnoticed, in spite of the numerous references to their actions in colonial archives. By viewing contemporary accounts of Tipu's female entourage as more than simple anecdotes of female misbehaviour, new causes of the Vellore Mutiny come to the foreground. Reframing their actions gives a new perspective to our understanding of this flashpoint in South Asia's colonial history and highlights the value of the subaltern critique of gender studies.

Dismantling Tipu Sultan's court

On 3 May 1799, the East India Company's army killed Tipu Sultan of Mysore during the Siege of Srirangapatnam, bringing the Fourth Mysore War to an end. To eliminate any

[1]W. C. Bentinck, *Memorial addressed to the Honourable Court of Directors by Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, containing an account of the Mutiny at Vellore, with the Causes and Consequences of that event, February 1809* (London, 1810); R. R. Gillespie, 'Account of the Vellore Mutiny, 1806', *The Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* 69, 1 (1806), pp. 466–467.

[2]R. O'Hanlon, 'Cultures of Rule, Communities of Resistance: Gender, discourse and tradition in recent South Asian historiographies', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, 25 (Sept 1989), p. 94.

chances of a rebel uprising taking control of Mysore, the Company swiftly dismantled Tipu Sultan's court. Richard Colley Wellesley, the Governor General at Fort William, placed his younger brother, Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, in charge of Srirangapatnam Island, where Tipu Sultan's court was based. Many of the ministers who had served under Tipu Sultan were offered positions in the new Wodeyar court that the Company set up on 30 June 1799, when Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, a five-year-old boy, was placed on the throne of Mysore Kingdom.[3] The soldiers under Arthur Wellesley's command looted Srirangapatnam, transforming it from the affluent centre of a wealthy kingdom to a squalid, desolate place.[4] Objects that were seen as holding particular potency or value, such as Tipu Sultan's throne and the manuscripts from his library, were sent to Richard Wellesley in Calcutta as trophies.

Having plundered Tipu Sultan's capital and placed a child on Mysore's throne, the East India Company then exiled Tipu's family, ensuring that his heirs no longer resided within the borders of Mysore Kingdom. Between 1799 and 1802, under Arthur Wellesley's command, the Company's armies escorted these family members from Srirangapatnam to the fortress town of Vellore, in the Company-controlled territory of Madras Presidency. At that time, Vellore Fort was regarded as "the strongest fortress in this part of India, and for that reason [it was] chosen for the residence of…" Tipu Sultan's family.[5] The sons were moved to Vellore between 1799 and 1801, and were installed, along with their entourages, inside pre-existing buildings inside the fort. The older sons, who were by now young adults with families of their own, were moved there in July 1799, while their younger brothers who were still children, were moved in October 1801.[6] Tipu's sons remained at Vellore Fort until August 1806, when they were sent to Calcutta after the Vellore Mutiny.

In 1802, the women of Srirangapatnam Palace were escorted in two groups along the 200-mile overland journey to Vellore Fort. To accommodate them, the East India Company constructed two new complexes of apartments inside the fort to serve as their residences. Named the Tipu Mahal and the Haidar Mahal, they were intended to mirror the organisation of the *zenana* within the palace at Srirangapatnam, one half of which was for the female entourage of Haidar Ali, and the other half for Tipu's entourage.[7] In 1782, when Haidar Ali died, Tipu took over his father's court, so the Haidar Mahal contained the mothers, stepmothers and nursemaids of Tipu and his siblings. The women of the Tipu Mahal contained the entourage that he had personally gathered, which included the mothers of his children. Construction of the new *mahal*s inside Vellore Fort began in 1800. Lady Henrietta Clive, the wife of Edward Clive, the Governor of Madras, travelled to Vellore that year and wrote in her diary that the new accommodation would be a huge improvement over their previous lodgings at Srirangapatnam. Inside the new buildings at Vellore, she said that the women

[3]Krishnaraja Wodeyar III was descended from the Wodeyar family of Mysore that Tipu Sultan's father, Haidar Ali, usurped the throne from in the early 1760s.

[4]J. Nair, *Mysore Modern: Rethinking the Region under Princely Rule* (London, 2011), Chapter 3.

[5]G. A. Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt* (London, 1811), i, pp. 398–399.

[6]J. Salmond, *A Review of the … Decisive War with the Late Tipu Sultan in Mysore* (London, 1800), appendix D, 2, pt. 32; British Library, IOR/F/4/113, 2126, p. 1.

[7]Letter from A. Anderson to A. Wellesley on the condition of buildings at Srirangapatnam, 5 May 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/116, folder 1.

would have "two apartments each, besides a verandah, which must appear magnificent to them, after the confined space they had been accustomed to live in".[8] John Goldingham, the Civil Engineer of Madras Presidency, was placed in charge of building the *mahals* at Vellore Fort.[9] During that same period, between 1799 and 1803, Goldingham was also rebuilding Government House Madras for Edward Clive and Lady Henrietta. [10]

Transporting key members of Tipu's family to Vellore facilitated an exodus of thousands of Mysorean citizens. Some of them were from other branches of the family, such as the adult daughters of Tipu Sultan, who wanted to live near to their mothers and brothers. Others were people who had earned a living by offering services and goods to Tipu's court. A report written in August 1806 claimed that 1,812 "servants and adherents" of Tipu Sultan resided permanently in Vellore's *pettah*, the market area of the city immediately outside Vellore Fort's east facing entrance.[11] In 1846 it was estimated that "some 3,000 Mysoreans had followed the family of Tippoo from Seringapatam, and had settled either in the town or in the immediate neighbourhood of Vellore".[12] More recent studies claim that around 6,000 Mysoreans moved to Vellore in the early nineteenth century.[13]

The breaking apart and controlling of Tipu Sultan's possessions, administration and family was part of a much larger colonial documentation project, instigated by Richard Wellesley. Using the schemata of imperial rule, both the people and the places of Tipu's Mysore were collected, classified and studied. Many facets of this project are familiar to us today, such as the Great Survey of Mysore (1799–1810),[14] and the founding of Fort William College at Calcutta, where about 2,000 of Tipu Sultan's looted manuscripts were deposited. Richard Wellesley even commissioned Thomas Hickey, one of the most sought-after artists in India at that time, to travel to Srirangapatnam and Vellore between 1799 and 1801, to paint sixteen portraits of the highest-ranking males connected with the Mysore court. Seven of the portraits were of Tipu Sultan's oldest sons, the defeated scions of Mysore Kingdom. The Hickey portraits were sent to Calcutta in 1804[15] and displayed inside Calcutta's Government House, the seat of the East India Company's power in India,[16] as a clear statement of imperial dominance over Tipu Sultan's establishment. The dismantlement of Tipu's court was an act of control that was recorded through pictures, reports, maps and plans.

The schemata of British military power also extended to the physical removal of people from Mysore Kingdom. The Company placed the women, along with their sons, inside Vellore's granite, moated fort in the Company-controlled territory of Madras Presidency. What the East India Company failed to recognise was that the women's roles at court were dependent not on a geographical location, but, rather, derived from human

[8]Letter from H. Clive to E. Clive, 16 March 1800. N. Shields, *Birds of Passage* (London, 2009), p. 115.

[9]There is an architect's drawing of Vellore's *mahal* buildings in the British Library's Mackenzie Collection, WD2729.

[10]Letter dated April 1803 on the cost of building projects in Madras and Vellore. British Library, IOR/E/890, pp. 636–638.

[11]Report by Col R. R. Gillespie. British Library, IOR/H/509, pp.163–179.

[12]C. Macfarlane, *Our Indian Empire: Its History and Present State* (1847), 2, 1847, note on p. 158.

[13]J. Hathaway, *Rebellion, Repression, Reinvention: Mutiny in comparative perspective* (California, 2001), p. 96.

[14]P. Robb, 'Completing "Our Stock of Geography"' or an Object "Still Sublime": Colin Mackenzie's Survey of Mysore, 1799–1810', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1998), pp. 181–206.

[15]British Library, IOR/P/6/30, p. 9065.

[16]M. Archer, *India and British Portraiture* (London, 1979), p. 223.

relationships. Because thousands of Mysorean citizens had followed them to Vellore, they had retained the key source of their domestic powers.

Thomas Marriott and 601 women

The earliest colonial documentation about the women of Tipu Sultan's inner court was written in June 1800 by Captain Thomas Marriott (1773–1847), the newly-appointed "assistant to the paymaster of stipends allotted for the support of the family of the late Tippoo Sultaun".[17] He was 27 years old when he arrived at Srirangapatnam and had already been in India for nearly ten years. Marriott was recognised by his superiors as "peculiarly qualified by his skill in the Native languages",[18] and was connected through his family to Warren Hastings, India's first Governor-General, who famously nurtured and supported British Orientalist scholarship at Calcutta. Thomas Marriott's father, Randolph Marriott, was friends with Warren Hastings, and Hastings's second wife, Marian, was Thomas's godmother.[19] On learning of Thomas Marriott's role at Srirangapatnam, Warren Hastings wrote to Randolph Marriott, "[t]he appointment of your son Thomas to the charge of Tippo's family is highly honourable to him".[20] Hastings's enthusiasm was understandable, as this role presented Thomas with the unique challenge of applying British Orientalist scholarship to the governing of an Indian court.

Thomas Marriott's work at Srirangapatnam required him to directly communicate with the women in the palace, and the women, "[i]n order that they might converse with … Marriott, who had the whole arrangement of their affairs, without a breach of Mussulmaun propriety, … adopted him into their family, and, consequently, call[ed] him brother".[21] He was an East India Company servant, but, at the same time, he had been accepted into a complex courtly network made up of hundreds of women. His first actions in this role were the subject of a report dated 2 July 1800, addressed to Josiah Webbe, the Chief Secretary to the Government at Madras, recommending how best to organise the women's care. His diligence to this task makes it a fascinating description of the inner workings of Tipu's female entourage. The report's key objective was to establish whether any of the women could be released back to their birth families, and how best to care for those who would become the Company's wards. Marriott wrote, "I have taken every opportunity of sounding the ideas and wishes of the women themselves".[22] Through these discussions, he learned that most of them came from local Hindu families, and could not return to their childhood homes after living in an Islamic household. He also learned that some of the women had been "exceedingly well educated in the Mahal", and requested that they "commit their wishes to paper", resulting in him receiving several "voluminous" responses. Marriott concluded that most of the women did not have families beyond the walls of the palace to which

[17]Letter from J. Webbe to A. Wellesley, 26 June 1800. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/45, folder 3.

[18]W. C. Bentinck, *Memorial addressed to the Honourable Court of Directors by Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, containing an account of the Mutiny at Vellore, with the Causes and Consequences of that event, February 1809* (London, 1810), p. 15.

[19]S. Grier, 'Vellore, 1806', *The National Review* (London, 1911), p. 865.

[20]Letter from W. Hastings to R. Marriott, 9 Oct 1800. British Library, Mss Eur C133/1, f. 23v.

[21]Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India,* i, p. 401.

[22]T. Marriott to J. Webbe, 1800. British Library, IOR/H/461, p. 171.

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they could return, and as for those women who did, "the number of applications [to leave would] be very few indeed" when they realised that, "on being released [from the palace, they would] forfeit all claims to maintenance from the Company".[23]

Marriott's 1800 report was also informed by textual sources. He was appointed because of his skill with languages, which he most likely began learning at Calcutta and Madras in the 1790s. When Marriott arrived at Srirangapatnam he met with the head men and officers of the late Tipu Sultan's court, and "[w]ishing to take advantage of this opportunity afforded me, I devoted most of my spare time to the study of Arabic, which I had commenced about 3 years before". Marriott befriended Habib Allah Khan, one of Tipu's private secretaries, whom he described as "the most intelligent, liberal minded & enlightened man I ever met amongst the natives of India". The two men translated into English "the 39th Book of the Mucktifir-u-nafiqah", which concerned inheritance law. If Habib Allah came across difficult passages in the text, he would call upon "the assistance of some of the learned of the Sheriyah Sect then residing in Seringapatam".[24] With the help of Habib Allah and "some of the principal Moormen here", Marriott's translation, in his view, gave him the authority to refute objections that were being raised by Tipu Sultan's sons "against letting a single woman out of the Mahal". Having determined through his studies that the sons' objections to trimming down the number of women at court had no genuine basis in Islamic law,[25] Marriott sought ways to reduce their numbers.

In the middle of Marriott's 1800 report, on two facing pages, there are lists showing the hierarchical arrangement of the women (see Figures 1 and 2 below). On the left page he described the 333 women in the Tipu Mahal, and on the right page, the 268 women of the Haidar Mahal.[26] The lists describe a structure that was similar to the organisation of women in a pre-colonial Mughal court.[27] The highest-ranking women, at the top of both lists, were the wives of Tipu Sultan and Haidar Ali. Below them were "1st Class" courtiers, described as "unmarried women called *Gain* or *Musruttis* [author's italics] for their accomplishments in playing, singing etc". Below these women, the "2nd Class of unmarried women called *Khan Khuwas* [author's italics] appointed to attend the Sultan in his visits to the Mahaul" were counted. Below the "2nd Class" private entertainers he listed the "*Ahuddi Wallis"* [author's italics] who worked in the palace as cooks, seamstresses, nurses, teachers of writing and embroidery, messengers, dairy workers, guards and other such infrastructural roles. The higher a woman's rank on the list, the more attendants she had. The three wives of Haidar Ali shared 31 attendants between them, the largest number per woman within the palace, while the two wives of Tipu Sultan only had six and five attendants respectively. The 51 "1st class" women of the Tipu Mahal had 124 "attendants and slaves", while the 29 "2nd class" women of the Tipu Mahal shared 20 attendants between them.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 174.

[24] T. Marriott's notes following the English translation of an Arabic manuscript dated 1800. British Library, Mss Eur C639, f. 37.

[25] British Library, IOR/H/461, p. 174.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 176–177.

[27] K. Schofield, 'The Courtesan Tale: Female Musicians and Dancers in Mughal Historical Chronicles, c.1556–1748', *Gender & History* 24, 1 (April 2012), pp. 154–171.

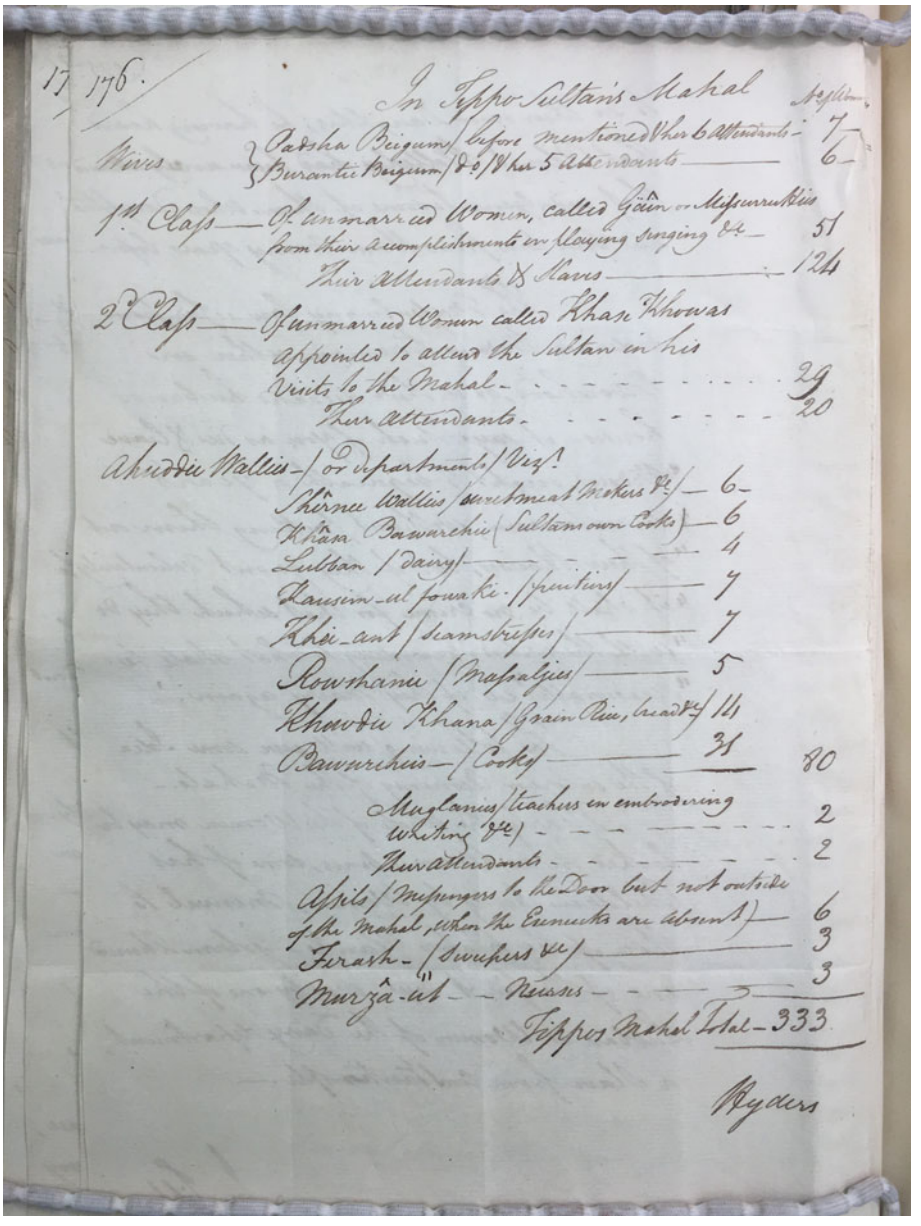

Figure 1. T. Marriott to J. Webbe, 1800. British Library, IOR/H/461, p. 176.

Amongst the *ahuddi wallis*, only two women, the "teachers of embroidery and writing", had attendants.

The "1st class" and "2nd class" women on Marriott's list were all trained in performance arts and made up about half the women in Srirangapatnam Palace. Like the female courtiers in a Mughal household, they were referred to as "unmarried". The singers (*gain)* dancers and musicians (*musrutti*) classified as "1st Class" women were permitted to leave the palace to

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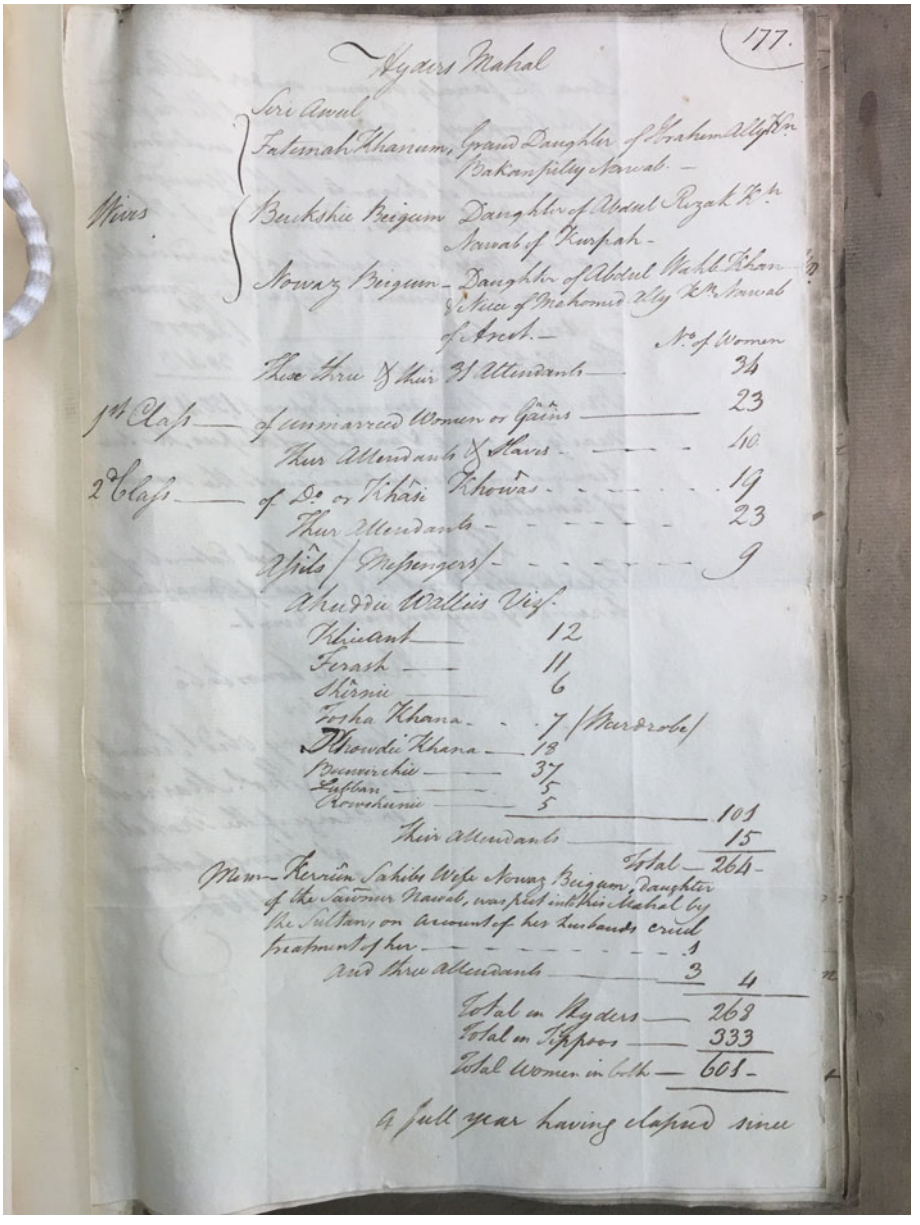

Figure 2. T. Marriott to J. Webbe, 1800. British Library, IOR/H/461, p. 177.

perform to mixed male and female audiences, and appear to correspond, more or less, with Mughal performers known as *domni*s, whose role it was to perform on behalf of the women of the harem at life cycle events such as weddings.[28] The equivalent community within

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 154–155.

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Mughal courts came from hereditary communities of musicians and dancers, and were customarily not obligated to provide sexual entertainment to their patrons. Their lack of sexual involvement is what made it permissible for them to move outside of the palace's harem. Unlike the "1st class" women, Marriott described the "unmarried" women of the "2nd Class" as those who attended the Sultan during his visits to the *mahal*. They were performers of a more private nature, and most likely corresponded with the "domestic singers" of a Mughal court, who were the sexual property of their master, and the mothers of his heirs. For this reason, unlike the 1st class *gain* and *musrutti* women, the 2nd class *khan khuwa*s women were restricted to life inside the harem and were only permitted to entertain their master and the other women of the palace.

The two wives of Tipu Sultan both came from politically important families. They are named in Marriott's report from 1800, and their family backgrounds are described. The first wife, Padshah Begum, was the sister of Gulam Imam Husain Khan, the "Pondicherry Nabob" who was a descendant of Chanda Sahib. The second wife, Burrantie Begum, was the daughter of a Delhi nobleman named Mir Mahd Pussun Beg. Her maternal grandfather, Said Mohmmed Khan, was the Subhar of Kashmir.[29] Information about the other women in Tipu's court is embedded into Thomas Marriott's accounts of their sons. For example, Fateh Haidar, the oldest son of Tipu Sultan, was the child of a dancer from the Tipu Mahal named Rowshuni Begum. She was originally named Pum Kusur, and along with her sister, Taj Kusur, came from Adoni, "from whence they were taken by Tippoo Sultaun". [30] As a publicly named woman with courtesan origins, she and her sister most likely belonged to the "1st Class" of unmarried women from Tipu's court. Abdul Khalik, Tipu's second son who was taken hostage under Charles Cornwallis after the Third Mysore War, and resided at Madras from 1792 to 1799, was the son of "Zaafran Sahibe (or the Saffron Lady) … a Hindu taken from her parents at Mysur".[31] The third son of Tipu Sultan, Mohamed Sultan Moihudeen, was born to Tipu's deceased wife, Nawal Begum. She was "the daughter of Haidar Ali's General Laala Mian … [and was] buried inside Haidar's mausoleum", the Gumbaz at Srirangapatnam.[32] Moizudeen, the fourth son of Tipu, was the child of

> Dur dana Beigum … originally from Delhi. She and about twenty other young women were purchased at that City by the agent of Hyderaly Khan, but had not arrived further south than Aurangabad when Tippoo Sultaun succeeded his father in this purchase… [33]

Presumably, these women were slaves who were being transported from Delhi to Srirangapatnam in 1782, the year that Haidar Ali died. A full list of "The Families of the Late Hyder Ally Khan and Tippoo Sultaun", giving the names of 412 women interred inside Vellore Fort, was not compiled until 1823.[34]

[29]British Library, IOR/H/461, pp. 172–173.
[30]Report on the character of Tipu's four oldest sons by T. Marriott, April 1804. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 347.
[31]*Ibid*., p. 355
[32]British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 361.
[33]*Ibid*., p. 367.
[34]British Library, IOR/F/4/886/23065, pp. 42–62.

The move to Vellore

In March 1802, as the construction of the new *mahal*s was nearing completion, Arthur Wellesley implemented plans to transport the women from Srirangapatnam Palace to Vellore Fort.[35] The first group to leave, the older women of the Haidar Mahal, began the journey in May 1802, with the younger women of the Tipu Mahal following in June. Thomas Marriott, who was tasked with reducing their numbers in advance of the move, wrote to Arthur Wellesley in March 1802 that out of the original 601 women, there were now 345 individuals that would be transported.[36] However, when the women of the Haidar Mahal departed from Srirangapatnam in early May 1802, Thomas Marriott, who was accompanying them on the journey, realised that there were far more women in the group than he had anticipated. Although he had nearly halved their numbers, he did not realise until then that the remaining women, with the support of Tipu Sultan's sons and Srirangapatnam's eunuchs, had brought new women into the palace to replace the ones who had been removed. With the transport of the first group of women already in progress, Marriott sent a letter ahead of them to Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Dallas, the man in charge of receiving the women at Vellore, explaining that 106 additional women in the Haidar Mahal, and an estimated 100 more in the Tipu Mahal, had been "smuggled in[to the palace], most of them without permission … & many of them by permission of … officers holding temporary command" at Srirangapatnam. [37]

Because the new women had not lived in Srirangapatnam Palace during Tipu Sultan's lifetime, Thomas Dallas felt that the East India Company should not receive them at Vellore Fort. In his letter to Marriott he said,

> …it is unreasonable that the Company, who's bounty has been so liberally extended to every branch of the Families should be imposed on and saddled with an improper and unnecessary expence [sic]. I therefore think you had better, on the road down, mention the impossibility of my receiving into the Mahals here any but those who were originally belonging to the Mahals at Seringapatam as the Extra women must have been introduced without our knowledge… [A]s you are a man of great address and a favourite with the ladies, I trust you will have matters so arranged by your arrival here that there will exist no difficulties… [38]

Marriott, who had been working closely with the women for almost two years, objected to Dallas's course of action. He explained in his reply to Dallas that if any of the women from the Haidar Mahal, newcomers or not, were turned away and sent back to Srirangapatnam, then the women of the Tipu Mahal, who were still at Srirangapatnam, would refuse to depart for Vellore. The result would be the women being permanently split between two locations, with half of them remaining in Mysore Kingdom. He also informed Dallas of "the impossibility of separating them [the newcomers] without using force". [39] Marriott

[35]Letter from T. Dallas to A. Wellesley, Vellore, 16 March 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/113, folder 2.

[36]Memorandum from T. Marriott to A. Wellesley, 27 March 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/112, folder 3, p. 1.

[37]Letter from T. Marriott to T. Dallas, 9 May 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/116, folder 1.

[38]Letter from T. Dallas to T. Marriott, 7 May 1802, pp. 1 and 3. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/116, folder 1.

[39]Letter from T. Dallas to A. Wellesley, 12 May 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/116, folder 1.

foresaw that the 1st class *musrutti* women would most strongly oppose the removal of the newcomers because "Tippoo allowed all the first class or *Musrutties* [author's italics] two slaves each during his life – but by Casualties of Death and the Princes each taking so many into their own families, many vacancies occurred & the only terms on which the Women would give up their old slaves, were that they should be replaced by new ones". He accordingly advised Dallas that "[t]he only way I see of getting rid of them [the newcomers], except by force, is to dismiss them from the Mahal whenever their mistresses die". [40] Faced with the unexpected prospect of the move being a failure, and the women being split between two locations, Dallas conceded that it was easier to allow the newly introduced women into Vellore's *mahal*s. He cascaded this information to Arthur Wellesley, signalling that he thought that "they had better be allowed to remain, as discharging them would awake … dissatisfaction which it may be as well to avoid".[41] In total, 583 women were transferred into the newly-constructed *mahal*s of Vellore Fort in 1802.[42] When the move was nearly complete, Arthur Wellesley expressed his gratitude to Thomas Marriott in a letter that he expressively signed, "Believe me yours most sincerely".[43]

The transport in 1802 was the first recorded moment when the women exerted their will on the East India Company. To the British men who were organising their transfer to Vellore, such as Thomas Marriott, Thomas Dallas and Arthur Wellesley, the women's actions were viewed as extreme truculence rather than political manoeuvring to stop their numbers from being reduced. The incident, which we know about today through Arthur Wellesley's private correspondence, went unrecorded in the East India Company's records. The unexpected issues surrounding the women's relocation to Vellore say a great deal about Thomas Marriott's unusual role. He imposed upon the women the East India Company's edict to move them hundreds of miles to an unfamiliar place, but he also successfully convinced his East India Company colleagues to grant the women their demands.

Over the next four years at Vellore, the number of women continued to increase. Perhaps inadvertently, Marriott had sanctioned the introduction of newcomers, particularly amongst the "1st Class" *musrutti* singers and dancers. By 1806, there were 790 individuals living inside the *mahal*s of Vellore Fort, an increase of over 20 per cent more than the number of women received during the 1802 transport. The newcomers included 14 boys and 33 girls who had been "adopted" by the women.[44] One account from 1804 mentions that one of the palace's dancers, Rowshuni Begum, the mother of Fateh Haidar, Tipu's oldest son, adopted a girl named Goolzeib "as her pupil and looks upon [her] as her daughter".[45] Adoption of girls was a common practice amongst professional dancers,[46] suggesting that the women of the *mahal*s had continued to conduct themselves in the manner that they had lived within Tipu Sultan's court at Srirangapatnam.

[40]Letter from T. Marriott to T. Dallas, Bangalore, 9 May 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/116, folder 1.

[41]Letter from T. Dallas to A. Wellesley, 12 May 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/116, folder 1.

[42]Account of expenses from the 1802 move. British Library, IOR/F/4/113, 2126, 105.

[43]Letter from A. Wellesley to T. Marriott, 26 June 1802. Wellington Archive Southampton, 1/119, folder 2.

[44]List of women and children in Vellore Fort compiled by T. Marriott, 28 August 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, pp. 180–181.

[45]Report on Tipu's sons by T. Marriott, 1804. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 347.

[46]Nair, *Mysore Modern*, p. 205.

The expense of supporting this unexpectedly growing community became an issue for William Cavendish Bentinck, the Governor of Madras who replaced Edward Clive in 1803. On 28 February 1806, Bentinck decreed that,

> By the stipulation contained in the 6th article of the Partition Treaty of Mysore we observe that the Company have the power to reduce the sum appropriated for the maintenance and support of the Families of the late Hyder Ally and of Tippoo Sultaun…

Consequently, he ordered that all the inhabitants of the *mahal*s should have their allowances cut by between one third and one half. To determine the size of each cut, he wrote, "the amount of such reduced allowances in all similar cases, shall be proportionate to the character and conduct of the Claimants".[47] This determination, however, overlooked the complicated hierarchy of the *mahal*'s inhabitants, whose status ranged from high born women to slaves. The task of informing them of their reduced incomes, and of choosing which women would be most affected by these cuts, fell on the Paymaster of Stipends, Thomas Marriott. He was instructed, from then onward, to write annual reports showing the exact amounts being expended for their maintenance.[48]

Under the Treaty of Mysore, which was set up under Edward Clive's administration, Mysore's new Wodeyar court paid for the maintenance of Tipu's imprisoned family, and this funding was then administered by the Company.[49] Bentinck's compulsion to control costs at Vellore was not about saving money for the East India Company. It was a way for him to differentiate his own austere administration from that of his predecessor. Edward Clive had been an outspoken supporter of Richard Colley Wellesley's notoriously exorbitant establishment. As Governor General, Wellesley's key responsibility was to safely oversee the funding of the Company's business investments. Shipments of silver bullion, intended to fund trade activities, were regularly sent from London to Calcutta. But instead of following the Court of Directors' instructions, Wellesley funded projects of his own choosing. One such ad-hoc project was the unexpectedly expensive Fourth Mysore War, while others included construction projects such as the building of new Government House buildings at Calcutta and Madras, and the creation of the *mahal*s inside Vellore Fort. In 1805, Richard Colley Wellesley resigned before the Company's directors could recall him.[50] Edward Clive had already been recalled in 1803 after publishing an open letter in support of Wellesley's policies, claiming that "the Controlling Authorities at home [by the Court of Directors], are governed by principles radically incompatible with the present extent and magnitude of the Indian Empire".[51] It was under the shadow of Edward Clive's dismissal and Richard Wellesley's imminent departure that William Cavendish Bentinck distinguished himself from his predecessor by cutting funding to Vellore.

[47]British Library, IOR/ E/4/897, pp. 125–126.
[48]British Library, IOR/E/4/897, p. 132.
[49]British Library, IOR/F/4/113, 2126, pp. 4, 24A-24M.
[50]H. Bowen, *The Business of Empire. The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 206.
[51]E. Clive, *To the Honorable the Court of Directors for the Affairs of the Honorable the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies* (London, 1803), p. 53.

The Vellore Mutiny

William Bentinck's order to cut funding to the *mahal*s, issued five months before the Vellore Mutiny, posed a threat to the women's way of life which catalysed them into taking a stand against the East India Company. New research inspired by the subaltern critique of gender studies has identified instances where women who lost power under East India Company rule protested their unfair treatment in unexpected ways. For instance, Indrani Chatterjee has shown that women who lost their rights to own property in early nineteenth-century Bengal because of the East India Company protested against their unfair treatment through self-immolation.[52] Likewise, Lata Singh's work on the 1857 Revolt demonstrates that the courtesan Azeezun of Kanpur quite literally went to battle with the East India Company because its policies directly threatened her way of life.[53] It follows that the women of Vellore's *mahal*s used unanticipated methods to confound the Company's hold over them.

On 10 July 1806, between 2 and 3 O'clock in the morning, the military events of the Vellore Mutiny began when the *sepoy*s of the Madras Native Infantry killed fourteen officers and 115 men from the Company's 69th Regiment. The rebels took control of the fort and raised the flag of the Mysore Sultanate, declaring Tipu's second son, Fateh Haidar, as their king. One officer escaped from Vellore and raised the alarm at the Company's garrison at Arcot. A relief force commanded by Captain Robert Rollo Gillespie was raised and arrived at Vellore later that same day. Gillespie gave orders to kill any *sepoy*s who stood in their way and executed those who had sought refuge inside Vellore Fort's palace buildings. In total, nearly 350 rebels were killed during the incident. Further executions followed, with some mutineers being shot by firing squad or hanged, and others being gruesomely blown apart after being strapped to the mouths of cannons. It was the largest *sepoy* uprising in the East India Company's history to precede the events of 1857–8.

The East India Company identified the Vellore Mutiny's two main causes as resentment amongst the *sepoy*s over a change to their uniform, and "the Residence of the Family of the late Tippoo Sultan at Vellore".[54] In May of that year, *sepoy*s of the 4th Regiment of Native Infantry at Vellore had refused to wear a new turban, and instead of trying to remedy this discontent, William Bentinck had forced through the change in uniform.[55] Investigations into the dispute over the new headgear began in May and June 1806, several weeks before the Vellore Mutiny took place. It was assumed that *sepoy* objections were religiously motivated, even though the soldiers belonged to a broad range of religious backgrounds. The closest the Company came to a precise cause of this shared religious discontent over the uniforms was a suggestion that the new turban contained Christian imagery, thus associating it with forced conversion. Whatever the rationale, the Company's investigations seemed determined to link the *sepoy*s' discontent to this change in uniform.

Hidden amongst the testimonies of the Company's court proceedings into the mutiny's causes, however, there is plenty of evidence that the inhabitants of Vellore were antagonising

[52]I. Chatterjee, 'Monastic Governmentality, Colonial Misogyny, and Postcolonial Amnesia in South Asia', *History of the Present* 3, 1 (Spring 2013), pp. 57–98.

[53]L. Singh, 'Courtesans and the 1857 Revolt: Role of Azeezun in Kanpur', *Indian Historical Review* 34, 2 (July 2007), pp. 58–78.

[54]Bentinck, *Memorial addressed to the Honourable Court of Directors*, p. 71.

[55]D. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 136.

the *sepoy*s. The earliest report of discontent over the turban, gathered on 10 May 1806, two months before the mutiny, recorded that two *havildar*s[56] insisted that "if they wore it, their cast [sic] would not supply them with water", and they would not be permitted to marry women from their community.[57] A week later, on 19 May, similar complaints arose from *sepoy*s claiming that "their families would not live with them, [n]or would they prepare their rice for them, should they wear the new Turband". [58] After the mutiny, a *sepoy* testified in court that similar threats were waged towards him by "Tippoo's people and the village people [who] would not continue them in their cast, or give them rice or water or let them have their daughters in marriage" if they wore the new turban. [59] These accounts suggest that men who wore the turban received threats of expulsion from their private homes, or from the homes of others, or that their communities would ban them from marrying or establishing new homes. Such threats of domestic expulsion are the sort of discontent that women typically raise towards men.

The "Court of Enquiry" that was set up at Vellore to investigate the mutiny's causes[60] held the Mysorean community in the *pettah* district of Vellore responsible for stirring dissent amongst the *sepoy*s. One report claimed that "the numerous moor people inhabitants of the Pettah … began to poison the minds of the troops by observing that such dress was very bad and improper",[61] while, according to another, "[t]he thousands of adherents of Tippoos House assembled, and uncontrolled in the populous Pettah at Vellore, will ever furnish powers to disseminate the most destructive tales".[62] These developments bear comparison with possible causes of the 1857 Mutiny-Uprising at Meerut, where women from the *bazar* accused *sepoy*s of displaying feminine behaviour, thus shaping an "emotional topography" that contributed to the largest mass rebellion in the history of the East India Company.[63] Back in 1806, the people residing in Vellore's *pettah* similarly antagonised the *sepoy*s through utterances that provoked an "emotional topography" of discontent. The *pettah* at Vellore was beside the fort's only entrance, on the east side of the city. It was Vellore's main public meeting place, and its proximity to the fort made it a key residential area for close members of Tipu Sultan's family.

The Vellore Mutiny was preceded by a busy wedding season, when in early 1806 four of Tipu Sultan's daughters, all of whom lived in the *pettah*, were married inside Vellore Fort. Ullmeer Ulnissa Begum was married on 7 February 1806, Fatima Begum on 13 March 1806 and Budi Ulnissa Begum on 8 June 1806.[64] The fourth daughter, Noor Ulnissa Begum, was in the midst of her marriage festivities when the Vellore Mutiny broke out. Her wedding party began on 3 July 1806, and on the evening of 9 July, mere hours before the mutiny

[56]A *havildar* is a *sepoy* whose rank corresponds to that of a sergeant.
[57]Report of J. Darley, Vellore, 10 May 1806. British Library, IOR/H/507, p. 19
[58]Report by Captain Moore, 19 May 1806. British Library, IOR/H/507, p. 26.
[59]Testimony of Shaick Hamed Sepoy, Weds 30 July 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 216.
[60]Testimonials of the "Court of Enquiry" at Vellore, July-August 1806. British Library, IOR/H/507 and 508.
[61]Account of Shaik Ahomed Sepoy, 21 July 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, pp. 382–383.
[62]Report of J. F. Cradock, 25 July 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 412.
[63]W. R. Pinch, 'Women, Gender, Emotions: Rethinking Meerut in 1857', *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Occasional Paper, History and Society, New Series* 83 (New Delhi, 2015).
[64]T. Marriott's account of Tipu Sultan's daughters, Fri 8 Aug 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, pp. 280–284.

began, a *nautch* was held as part of the continuing celebrations inside the fort.[65] Forty "Dancing Girls" from the Tipu Mahal, from amongst the first class entertainers described in Thomas Marriott's 1800 report, performed for the wedding guests that evening. These performers, who represented Noor Ulnissa Begum's side of the family, "were admitted, … arguably to the custom of such persons, always attending marriages and remained there until after the Mutiny".[66] All four of these weddings in early 1806 would have been huge community events that lasted for several days, featuring singing and dance performances by the outspoken, "first class" *gain* and *musrutti* women of the *mahal*s. The stories that were told to the wedding guests during these music and dance performances were narrated by the women. Were they responsible for disseminating "destructive tales" to the people of the *pettah*? Did they subvert the authority of the *sepoy*s at Vellore by making fun of their hats?

In the lead up to these preparations, the daughters who resided in the *pettah* were in regular communication with their mothers and stepmothers inside the fort's Tipu Mahal. In his court testimony following the mutiny, Thomas Marriott revealed that

> …the daughters were allowed at stated periods to come in to see their mothers, and the Sons in Law were generally invited to come in occasionally to the dinners given on their sisters in laws marriages when they might have had personal communications with such princes as were present…[67]

The purpose of Marriott's testimony was to explain how the men living outside the fort might have communicated with the sons of Tipu Sultan inside it, but his evidence actually reveals how simple it was in practice for the women of the *mahal*s to communicate with their daughters in the *pettah*.

The records and court testimonies accumulated at Vellore both before and after the mutiny show that the women inside the *mahal*s were fully aware of the *sepoy*s' discontent in the midst of a busy wedding season, when *nautch* parties, which were major social events, were regularly being hosted inside the fort. According to one testimony, "about a month before the… mutiny broke out the Mother of the Prince Shukerulla, was very earnest in recommending to him [Thomas Marriott] not to enforce the wearing of the new Turban by the Sepoys". On the night of the mutiny itself, a "fire broke out in that part of the Palace occupied by Tippoos Women".[68] Marriott went to the *mahal*s afterwards to make sure the women were safe, and "the first thing she [the mother of Prince Shukerulla] claimed was Marriott Sahib, did not I tell you what would be the consequence of making the Sepoys disaffected?"[69]

From 1800 to 1805, the women of Tipu Sultan's entourage lived in a manner that was comparable to their previous lives inside the palace at Srirangapatnam. Those who were trained dancers and singers continued to practice their craft and brought young people into their community to train in their performance traditions. William Bentinck's decision

[65]Gooroopah Hercurrah's account of Noor Ulnissa Begum's wedding in Vellore Fort, 9 July 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 198.

[66]Description of marriage celebrations of Tipu Sultan's daughter on 9 July 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 161.

[67]Account of Tipu's daughters by T. Marriott, Fri 8 Aug 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 283.

[68]G. Harcourt's report to the Governor in Council at Fort St George, 23 July 1806. British Library, IOR/H/507, p. 423.

[69]Sworn statement of T. Marriott, 9 August 1806. British Library, IOR/H/508, p. 166.

to reduce their allowances hindered their ability to continue in this way of life. The women from the inner court of Tipu Sultan's kingdom were well placed as a conduit of communication between Vellore Fort and the *pettah*, and tapped into the area of court life that traditionally came under their control, the forging of marriage alliances and the celebration of life events, as a forum to raise dissent and retrieve their autonomy.

The domestic roles of royal women were a key source of political power in South Asian courts. For instance, Ruby Lal's work has explored how Mughal court women upheld "scripted roles in the interests of the monarchy", and could influence matters of succession, the arranging marriages and the brokering of peace.[70] Similarly, Priya Atwal's work on the Sikh Empire shows that the purpose of wedding celebrations in Ranjit Singh's court was to secure alliances and reify the might of the royal dynasty.[71] Studies of India's princely states under colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have also examined the roles of court women, describing how they were capable of influencing important decisions beyond the walls of the *zenana*. According to Angama Dey Jhala, by forging marriage alliances, "[z]enana women challenged the status quo, pursued their own powerful interests, galvanised politically expedient support and pushed their platforms of resistance, both in relation to imperial rule and male patriarchy".[72] The women of Tipu's exiled court at Vellore were fully capable of altering their personal circumstances, as well as circumstances beyond the walls of the fort. It made perfect sense that when their way of life came under threat, they used the means under their control to foment the circumstances that led to the 1806 Mutiny. Bentinck had no way of knowing how the cutbacks at Vellore would prove to be a catalyst for these events, and likewise the women in the *mahal*s had no way of knowing how brutally the East India Company's armies would suppress the resulting mutiny.

Aftermath

After the Vellore Mutiny, the women of Tipu Sultan's inner court were cut off from their sons and forced to live off their reduced allowances. But if this was deliberate punishment for their involvement, it was never recorded as such. In accounts of the uprising that consider the possible role of Tipu's family, the sons are inevitably singled out, with their exile to Calcutta often seen as proof of their guilt.[73] Yet, the Company initially did not hold the family personally responsible for what had happened. According to the Supreme Court at Calcutta in 1807, the exile of the princes from Vellore was not a punishment. The Company "exculpated the Princes from exciting the Mutiny" in late 1806, and relocated them to Calcutta,

> …so that they may during the rest of their lives dwell quietly and in Peace – which they could not have done so well at Vellore, from its proximity to Mysoor; where everyone inclined to disturb the Peace would have taken their names.[74]

[70]R. Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 105.
[71]P. Atwal, *Royals and Rebels: The rise and fall of the Sikh Empire* (London, 2020), p. 113.
[72]A. D. Jhala, *Courtly Indian Women in Late Imperial India* (London, 2008), p. 110.
[73]K. K. Pillay, 'The Causes of the Vellore Mutiny', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 20 (1957), pp. 306–311.
[74]Letter from T. Marriott to his parents, quoted in a letter from his mother, Elizabeth, to W. Hastings, 13 April 1807. British Library, Mss Eur C133/2, ff. 90–1.

This ruling, however, differs from the stories that were popularly circulated in newspapers in both India and England at that time, which misrepresented their exile to Calcutta as proof of their involvement in the Vellore Mutiny. [75]

Thomas Marriott was himself exonerated of all blame on 15 June 1807, when Calcutta's High Court determined that he was innocent of "neglect of duty" at Vellore.[76] All the same, while he was not held responsible for any of the mutiny's events, Marriott's career as Paymaster at Vellore came to an end in August 1806 when he was placed in charge of moving Tipu Sultan's sons and their retinues to Calcutta. In September 1806 Marriott arrived by ship at Calcutta along with Tipu's sons. He then spent nearly a year organising and supervising the overland transport of the "6000 souls" who made up their families and servants, along with their possessions, from Vellore to Calcutta.[77] Before his departure from Vellore, Thomas poignantly arranged for his own brother, Charles Marriott, to succeed him in the care of the "600 dowagers" inside the fort. [78] Thomas Marriott, the women's adopted brother, must have wanted his successor at Vellore to be a blood relation whom both he and the women could trust.

The Court of Directors in London reacted to news of the Vellore Mutiny by recalling William Bentinck in 1807, accusing him of mishandling the situation that arose over the *sepoy*s' change of uniform.[79] Bentinck after all had reacted in an unexpectedly violent way when the *sepoy*s initially refused to wear the new turban in the weeks before the mutiny by sentencing them to "nine hundred lashes each with a cat of nine tails on their bare backs at such time, … [after which they were] discharged from the Honorable Company's Service as turbulent and unworthy subjects". [80] The directors back in London believed that this punishment led to the mutiny, which Bentinck in turn had brutally suppressed by sanctioning the execution of hundreds of *sepoy*s. Two decades later, Bentinck expressed his complete lack of contrition for his actions towards the *sepoy*s at Vellore when he wrote, "I cannot forget that I was then the innocent victim of that unfortunate catastrophe".[81]

Accounts of "the state prisoners of the Mahals of Vellore"[82] continued to feature in the Company's records over the next few decades, but as time went on, they became less frequent and more anecdotal, giving sparse descriptions of moments when the women were seen as raising trouble. One such moment arose in 1820, during the eighteenth year of their internment at Vellore, when the women broke the composure of Lieutenant John Jones, the Paymaster of Stipends at that time. In a report giving no information about what triggered the incident, Jones wrote to the Governor of Madras that the women of the *mahal*s were insisting that their allowances be doubled so they could live outside of

[75]Letter from E. Marriott to W. Hastings, 17 April 1807. British Library, Mss Eur C133/2, f. 94.

[76]Letter from E. Marriott to W. Hastings, 15 June 1807. British Library, Mss Eur C133/2, f. 106.

[77]T. Marriott to his parents, quoted in a letter from E. Marriott to W. Hastings, 13 April 1807. British Library, Mss Eur C133/2, f. 88.

[78]T. Marriott to his parents, quoted in a letter from E. Marriott to W. Hastings, 10 Dec 1807. British Library, Mss Eur C133/2, f. 116.

[79]C. H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784–1834* (Bombay, 1961), pp. 160–161.

[80]Accounts of sepoy insubordination in response to the new turban, May-June 1806. British Library, IOR/H/507, pp. 64, 93, 136.

[81]W. C. Bentinck, 'Minute on Sati, 8 November 1829', in *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck,* (ed.) C. H. Phillips (Oxford, 1977), i, p. 334.

[82]British Library, IOR/E/4/963, p. 1083.

the fort. To force through their demands, without "any cause whatever… these women were extremely outrageous" and walked out of the fort. An exasperated Jones wanted the women who had "quitted the Palace without any cause whatsoever & still persist in remaining out" to have their Company allowances completely withdrawn. [83] The Governor in Council at Madras reacted by immediately removing Jones from the post at Vellore. His replacement, Major Augustus Andrews, reported in July 1820 that he had "been able to appease the bickerings of all the classes of women that have for a considerable time existed in the Palaces and indulge a hope that peace and quietness will pervade throughout the several classes".[84] However, when Andrews was instructed to provide a census of the women, he was incapable of performing the task, saying that they invoked the names of Thomas Marriott and Arthur Wellesley, declaring that the East India Company had previously cared for them "to the manner as observed in their own cast [sic], and in a similar manner they were formerly treated by Hyder Ally and the late Sultan", and that they "would rather sacrifice their lives" than take part in such an exercise.[85] The protest seems to have been an attempt to regain the conditions of their treatment before 1806, which, according to the women, properly acknowledged their roles under Tipu Sultan's rule.

In 1828, William Bentinck returned to India as the East India Company's fourteenth Governor General, bringing with him the sting of his expulsion from Madras in 1807. In 1834, as his term as Governor General was coming to an end, he abolished the post of Paymaster of Stipends at Vellore Fort, along with the workforce that supported the Paymaster's role.[86] From then onward, the Paymaster's duties were divided between Vellore's Commander and the Fort Adjutant, and the Indian men who had worked under the Paymaster of Stipends were dismissed.[87] Audits were carried out on the Company's distribution of payments, and after a long struggle to assemble a "muster roll" of the women in the *mahal*s, it was discovered that

> …25 casualties have occurred which are not accounted for and that the Rhatibs and other allowances together with Clothing Money have hitherto charged to Government for these deceased persons – These several sums have it appears, been made over to the friends or relations of the deceased, as will be seen by the accompanying Roll – and it is clear that the reason why the Ladies objected to a Muster being taken, was to enable them to carry on these impositions… [88]

A table follows the report, giving the names of the 25 deceased women. To emphasise the point that their deaths had been hidden, a column intended for recording each woman's date of demise, simply states - for all 25 entries - "died many years ago but the date cannot be ascertained".[89] This apparent deception was used to further justify the abolition of

[83]Correspondence between Lieut J. Jones, and E. Wood, 2 June 1820. British Library, IOR/F/4/881/23029, ff. 7–11.

[84]Letter from A. Andrews to Fort St George, 27 July 1820. British Library, IOR/F/4/881/23029, f. 20.

[85]Letter from A. Andrews to Fort St George, November 1820. British Library, IOR/F/4/881/23029, ff. 41–42.

[86]Letter from G. M. Stewart and W. Cullen to Sir F. Adam, 31 Oct 1834. British Library, IOR/F/4/1485/58544, p. 51

[87]"Servants Employed in the Paymasters Department for the Month of March 1834". British Library, IOR/F/4/1485/58544, p. 29.

[88]Letter from G.M. Stewart to Chief Secretary Fort St George, 21 Nov 1834. British Library, IOR/F/4/1485/58544, p. 95.

[89]British Library, IOR/F/4/1485/58544, pp. 102–106.

Vellore's Paymaster of Stipends post. The deceased women's payments were stopped, creating conflict within the *mahals*, and the Commander at Vellore was forced to equalise some of their payments. He wrote to the Chief Secretary at Fort St George, "I hope therefore that this arrangement [to equalise the women's payments] will be approved of, as it has relieved me from the Constant Clamour and annoyance I was subjected to, whenever I visited Tippoo's Palace".[90]

Over the following two decades, we find that the surviving women featured less and less in the Company's records. Accounts of "the state prisoners of the Mahals of Vellore" only occasionally show up in the mid-1840s to register their decreasing numbers.[91] As time progressed, the Company increasingly regarded them as a homogenous community whose costs needed to be reduced as their numbers went down. In 1858, Lady Charlotte Canning recorded the last known account of the women of Tipu's inner court in her diary, writing that inside Vellore Fort, "[t]here are still some Mysore Begums", and that "a few cakes appeared at meals being little offerings from these people".[92]

Conclusion

Historians have failed to associate the women of Tipu Sultan's court with the events of the 1806 mutiny at Vellore because the details of their actions have been overlooked or discredited. When they are mentioned in published sources, it is usually to describe them as victims of a despotic Muslim ruler.[93] In Thomas Marriott's first report on the 601 women in Tipu Sultan's palace, he espoused precisely such views when he wrote,

> … a considerable majority of the women of Tippoo's Mahal were originally Hindus, & that on their entrance into it, which always happened whilst very young, the Parents of most of them were 'no more', for it was generally from the families of People, whom the Sultaun had either put to death or held in Confinement to obtain their wealth that his Mahal was supplied with women. [94]

In the same report, Marriott mentioned that a "list of the daughters of some of the principal families [in Mysore Kingdom], with their ages annexed, was found in the Sultans writing desk amongst his memorandums", and that Tipu employed a "confidential servant, Raja Khan, [who] had free access into the private apartments of any of his subjects, and could carry away any of the women, without their daring to make opposition". [95] Marriott's report thus cast Tipu as a predator who could enslave any woman whom he desired in Mysore Kingdom. This barbaric image suited the East India Company and allowed it to justify its treatment of these women after the Fourth Mysore War, with their internment (despite the women's protestations) presented as proof of Britain's moral superiority over Tipu

[90]Letter from G.M. Stewart to Chief Secretary Fort St George, 9 December 1835. British Library, IOR/F/4/1485/58544, p. 187.

[91]Minutes of the Political Department at Fort St George, 21 May 1845. British Library, IOR/E/4/963, pp. 1083–1085.

[92]Charlotte Canning's diary, Monday 15 March 1858. British Library, Mss Eur F699/2/2/3/5, f. 24v.

[93]For example, see K. Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 96–97.

[94]British Library, IOR/H/461, pp. 169–170.

[95] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Sultan's apparent tyranny. Documentation regarding Tipu's female court, espoused by men who were employed by the East India Company, in effect described both a male gaze and an imperialist point of view that together had the effect of belittling the women and discrediting their actions.

Research and writing on the Vellore Mutiny has generally been carried out by military historians. The outcome of this has been interpretations that dwell on the actions of military men at fixed moments in time and space, while the actions of the broader Mysorean community drift insignificantly at the edges. The crux of most writings on the Vellore Mutiny has been a determination to answer the question that was posed in the early nineteenth century, as to whether the mutiny was caused by a disagreement over headwear or was an insurgency spawned within the family of Tipu Sultan. Both of these causes are relevant when they are connected with the actions of Tipu Sultan's female entourage. One of their key roles at court was to uphold the family line and influence matters of succession. Another key role was to entertain, with almost half of them serving as professional singers, dancers and musicians, making them the court's story tellers. They were family members who were perfectly placed to spawn political discontent through narratives of their choosing.

It is often claimed that the social history of marginalised groups is difficult to research because of a dearth of sources. This article has sought to show that there are sufficient sources in colonial accounts to describe the women of Tipu Sultan's court under East India Company rule. When these sources are viewed in relation to the Vellore Mutiny, it becomes increasingly apparent that the events of 1806 were prompted by the profound discontent amongst the women when William Bentinck cut their allowances. Their determination to adhere to the lives, and standard of living, that they had enjoyed under Tipu Sultan provoked them into action, but because these actions were either viewed as insignificant or marginalised as moments of incomprehensible fractiousness, historians have overlooked them. To see beyond the male gaze that has dominated studies of the Vellore Mutiny, all one must do is look at Tipu Sultan's female entourage.

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