

The 'Tiger of Mysore' Who loved Roses

While we all know that we have to thank the Mughals for bringing in musk roses from central Asia to our subcontinent, and with them a great love for this flower, as is evident from the paintings, the poems and the descriptions of the daily use of roses and rose scents by the royals and the aristocracy, it is not so well known that other rulers, before and after the Mughals, ruling different parts of the subcontinent, also had a great love for roses.

One such ruler was Tipu Sultan who ruled a part of the south from 1783-1799. Hyder Ali, his father named him for the great Sufi saint, Tipu Mastan Auliya.

Both Tipu and his father ruled the vast unified state of Mysore with distinction, with a deep concern for the poor, and with no religious bigotry. Being strong patriots, they valiantly fought the rising power of the British in what are called the four 'Mysore Wars', trying desperately, and at first succeeding in large measure to keep the 'foreign devils' at bay.

Whilst constantly fighting to keep their kingdom intact, both Hyder Ali, and especially Tipu Sultan, found time to indulge their passion for gardening. They loved all plants but most specifically roses.

There is a charming story told of how when once the little Tipu was taking a morning stroll with his father Hyder Ali, in the garden of the palace in Srirangapatnam, the capital of the kingdom, he saw beds of red roses all in glorious bloom and he exclaimed, "Ah ! Lal Bagh!".

And thus was the garden called henceforth. Not only the garden in Srirangapatnam, but the beautiful garden in Bangalore, started by Hyder Ali and continued to be filled with plants and trees from all over the world by Tipu, was also named 'Lal Bagh'. And so it remains to this day, a beautiful sprawling oasis in the heart of the super-tech city of Bangalore.

When Tipu Sultan built his beautiful summer palace called the Dariya Daulat in his capital city, on the banks of the River Cauvery, he made a garden in the accepted Mughal tradition, the 'char bagh' style with a canal of water and fountains dividing the squares. He planted roses of all colours but mostly red roses, so this garden too was named Lal Bagh.

Where did these roses come from? Tipu and his father had links with Turkey, Afghanistan and even China, and procured seeds and plants from all these countries. And when Tipu established contact with the French who were in possession of Pondicherry (near Madras) he sent ambassadors to the court of the French sovereign Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette in Paris. There are paintings by Wattier of the royal audience given by the French King, and a bust

of the ambassador, Mohammad Osman Khan is in the national gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland. I am sure they would have brought back many plants and seeds and surely roses since their sultan was so passionately fond of them.

The Dariya Daulat is a building constructed entirely of teakwood, and with every inch of its walls and ceilings covered by murals, painted in Tipu's time and fortunately both the building and most of the murals are in very good condition even today. The main big mural shows Tipu Sultan going to battle with the British, seated on an elephant and smelling a pink rose!!

In the niches in the inside rooms, and as borders over every doorway there are paintings of red roses.

Fortunately for us, the Duke of Wellington, who was, when he was part of the British Army which fought the final battle with Tipu in 1779, only Colonel Arthur Wellesley of the 33rd regiment, lived in the Dariya Daulat after Tipu was slain. Wellesley was made administrator of Mysore by his brother, Lord Wellesley, then Governor General of India in Calcutta.

Colonel Arthur Wellesley lived in this summer palace for five years, maintaining the building, the murals which he had touched up, and the garden with its many rose beds. A photograph taken in 1860 by Henry Dixon which is now in the British Library, shows the rose beds in front of the Dariya Daulat.

Why was Tipu called "Tiger of Mysore"? He had a great love for tigers, indeed for all animals and birds, but especially tigers. He had many tigers in his grounds and he loved tiger stripes. His soldiers uniforms, on his swords and guns, in the carpets in his palaces, and the turbans he wore on his head – all had black and yellow stripes. And to this day the cloth covering his tomb in the Lal Bagh in Srirangapatnam is of black velvet with yellow stripes.

Also, of course his bravery as a warrior, a small kingdom taking on the might of the British Empire, has been eulogized by the title that history has conferred upon him, that of a 'Tiger' .

Many accounts by British soldiers ,like those of Lord Valentie and Lachlan Macquairie (who later became Governor of New South Wales, Australia, and after whom a university, a bank and many buildings are named) remark upon the beauty of the "Loll Baughs" in Srirangapatnam (then called Seringapatam) and upon the passion for flowers of their deadly foe, Tipu Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore.