

The Religious Legacy of Tipu Sultan

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Abstract: Tipu cherished the welfare of both the Muslims and the Hindus in his state. He had a yearning love for freedom from the British yoke. Tipu Sultan was radical in more than one sense. He was the first to ban consumption of alcohol in the entire state, not on religious grounds. He didn't worry about the decline in income due to it. He was praised for this act by Gandhi. He was the father of missile technology. He was the first to introduce sericulture in the Mysore state. As a Muslim ruler in a largely Hindu domain, Tipu Sultan faced problems in establishing the legitimacy of his rule and in reconciling his desire to be seen as a devout Islamic ruler with the need to be pragmatic to avoid antagonizing the majority of his subjects. During his period 90% alms was given to the Hindus. When the Marathas plundered Sringeri Mutt, killed the Brahmins and took the golden statue of Sarathadevi, Tipu Sultan gave donations to renovate it and sent his general SeyadMohmad to give protection to the Sankarachariyar of Sringeri. The temple at Melkote still has gold and silver vessels with inscriptions indicating that they were presented by the Sultan. Tipu Sultan also presented four silver cups to the Lakshmi Kanta temple at Kalale.

Keywords: legitimacy, persecution, radical, Sringeri letters, Tipu Sultan

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Nation is greater than the greatest of us all

- Tipu Sultan

As a devout Muslim ruler in a largely Hindu land (Mysore), Tipu Sultan's religious legacy has now become a source of religious and historical controversy. It is not surprising that Tipu Sultan faced problems in establishing the legitimacy of his rule. He was torn between reconciling his desire to be seen as a devout Islamic ruler and the need to be pragmatic. Tipu cherished the welfare of both the Muslims and the Hindus in his state. He had a yearning love for freedom from the British yoke. When he realized that his country was going into the hands of European free booters, Tipu Sultan staked his might, matchless bravery, burning zeal, immense wealth, beloved children, even his own precious life and laid them all at the altar of India's defense. When the Emperor of India and other petty suzerains were comforting themselves in the luxurious atmosphere or enjoying sexual pleasure under the British protection in their seraglios, Tipu Sultan was busy in adopting both defensive and offensive measures against the impending danger to the freedom and honour of his beloved country India¹.

Tipu Sultan was radical in more than one sense. He was the first to ban consumption of alcohol in the entire state, not on religious grounds. He didn't worry about the decline in income due to it. He was praised for this act by Gandhi. He was the father of missile technology. He was the first to introduce sericulture in the Mysore state. He introduced the system of getting the produce direct from the farmers and selling them in rations. He insisted that every four miles should have a school. He was also an environmentalist. He established the biodiversity garden Lal Bagh. He confiscated the property of upper castes, including Mutts and distributed it among the shudras. Tipu Sultan has an unforgettable place in the history of India's struggle for freedom. Tipu after a feeble resistance in the field retired into Seringapatnam and when his capital was stormed died fighting bravely in the breach 1799. In the recent times the Tiger of Mysore who ruled in the 18th century has become a cause for political slugfest and violent protests. William Dalrymple a noted historian in his article for the Guardian, "An essay in imperial villain -making" says that Wellesley in his campaign of vilification against Tipu, portrayed him as an aggressive Muslim monster who divided his time between oppressing his subjects and planning to drive the British into the sea. Dalrymple also added that the recent work by scholars has succeeded in reconstructing Tipu Sultan as one of the most innovative and far sighted rulers of the pre-colonial period.

MarkandeyKaju, the former Chief Justice of India wrote in his blog that the Editor of Mysore Gazetteer Prof. Srikantaiah has listed 156 temples to which Tipu regularly paid annual grants. Tipu Sultan has mentioned that 'Religious tolerance is the fundamental tenet of the Holy Quran' As a Muslim ruler in a largely Hindu domain, Tipu Sultan faced problems in establishing the legitimacy of his rule and in reconciling his desire to be seen as a devout Islamic ruler with the need to be pragmatic to avoid antagonizing the majority of his subjects.

His religious legacy has become a source of considerable controversy in the subcontinent. Some group proclaim him a great warrior for the faith or Ghazi, while a large number of groups revile him as a bigot who massacred Hindus.

II. IDEAS OF WRITERS ON TIPU SULTAN

Brittlebank, Hasan, Chetty, Habib and Saletare argues that stories of Tipu Sultan's religious persecution of Hindus and Christians are largely derived from the work of early British authors such as Krik, Patrick and Wilks who were the agents of the British East India Company. Irfan Habib and Mohibbul Hasan argues that these early British authors had a strong vested interest in presenting Tipu as a religious bigot. On his tomb at Seringapatnam it is recorded "Tipubawajah din Muhammad ShahidShud" (ie) Tipu on account of the faith of Muhammad was a martyr⁵. Tipu Sultan recovered possession of all the territory held by his father in Kanara and Malabar. Before returning to the upper country he signalized his zeal for the faith of Islam by driving out of the coast region no fewer than 30,000 of its Christian inhabitants who were forcibly deported in Mysore.

All the Chief of Malabar who had assisted the British government during the war were included in the treaty of peace with Tipu Sultan in 1784 and Tipu engaged not to molest them. But this promise was ill kept. For in a few years Tipu again drove most of the Rajahs and their families from the country by his insane attempt forcibly to convert them to the Mohamedan faith. Many inhabitants perished during the persecution of the Hindus by the Sultan in the Malabar year 964 (1788-89). The English versions of what happened were intended to malign Tipu Sultan and to be used as propaganda against him. The English men who wrote the history of Tipu were those who were imprisoned by him in the first two Mysore wars. Even the Muslims who wrote the history of Tipu got pension from the British. So the history of Tipu was destroyed.

Contradictory to the above many historians prove that he was a religious tolerant ruler. "Who are my people? All of them – Yes those that ring the temple bells and those that pray in the mosque – they are my people and this land is theirs and mine". These words of Tipu prove that he was farsighted ruler. Dr. K.N.V. Sastri of Bangalore in his article. "The Muzarai system under Mysore Maharajas" mentioned that the temples in South Indian polity were active centres of religious and social life in their respective areas and rulers vied with one another in making gifts and creating endowments for the proper functioning of the temples in their dominions. Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan did not disturb this unique system. Haider Ali said to his son at Arcot only two months before his death in 1782 AD. "Mysore in our motherland. Do not forget it. One of the duties in connection with your work as 'Regent' should be to protect cows and Brahmins and look upon the temples and mosques with equal regard".

ChikkaDevarajaWodeyar had described his kingdom as "service to Lord Vishnu" which Tipu Sultan translated as Khuda-dad Sarkar. KrishnarajaWodeyar II had referred to his state as "Dharma Samsthana" in his letter to Sringeri Swami in 1759 AD which Tipu described as "Sarkar Ahmadi" in the letter to the same pontiff in 1791-92. Tipu Sultan who resumed inam (rent-free) lands, did not touch the temple lands maintained out of the Mysore state funds".

III. TIPU SULTAN'S RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE TOWARDS TEMPLES

The following circular order issued by Tipu in 1790-91 to all his District officers is a proof of the tolerance of the sultan and the testimony how personally he was interested in the neat and clean administration of the Hindu temples of his kingdom. It was as follows, "The temples are under your management: you are, therefore to see that the offering of the gods and the temple illuminations are duly regulated, as directed out of the government grants. The offerings are to be subsequently distributed among the poor, but they ought not be partaken of by the Pujaris. You are to take care that the money and provisions belonging to temples are not stolen; and you are further to prepare a list of all the jewels of the temples, stating their respective weight, etc., enter the same in the Daftar accounts and the diary; and hand over the jewels under your seal to the charge of the temple Parpattegar. You are to allow (the temple authorities) to use the jewels during the festivals and them carefully preserve them in the temple under your seal. This procedure will prevent the pujaris from stealing the jewels of the temple.

A certain amount of money is set apart and given out on interest for the purpose of conducting the worship, etc., of the gods; and this money being paid to the temple is called Pudevatt money. You are to enter both the principal and the interest in the temple accounts, and also to preserve in the temple the document executed by the person who received the money on interest. You are to order both the Pujaris and the Parpattegars to make use of the jewels, cloths, etc., during the car festivals, and then to preserve them as before. A newly appointed Parpattegar should receive a list countersigned by the retiring Parpattegar, of all the temple jewels, furniture, etc., before the latter is relieved of his duties".

It is thus proved that Tipu Sultan was neither the intolerant bigot nor the furious fanatic. H.H. Dodwell agreed with the view of Surendarnath Sen, author of the studies in Indian History that Tipu Sultan was not a bigot.

IV. APPOINTMENT OF HINDUS TO HIGH POSTS

Following the policy of his father, Tipu appointed Hindus to posts of highest ranks in his state. ShamaIyengar was the Minister of Post and Police. Krishna Rao was his Chief Treasurer. Purnuja held the post of MisAsaf. On diplomatic mission he sent Appaji Ram and Srinivas Rao to the Peshwa at Poona. Sujan Rai and Mulchand were his Mukhtars (charge d' affaires) in the Mughal court at Delhi. Tipu's principal private secretary was Suba Rao. All these show that the Hindus in his administrative machinery were more loyal and faithful to the Sultan than the Muslims.

From the Sringeri letters it appeared that the sultan enjoined the Asaf of Bednur to send a palanquin for the goddess and another for the Jagadguru. There are also evidence as grant deeds and correspondence between his court and temples and Tipu Sultan having donated jewellery and deeded land grants to several temples. However, records indicate that between 1782 and 1799, Tipu Sultan issued 34 "sanads" (deeds) of endowment to temples in his domain, while presenting many of them with gifts of silver and gold plate.

In 1791, Maratha horsemen under Raghunath Rao Patwardhan raided the temple and monastery of Sringeri Shankaracharya, killing and wounding many, and plundering the monastery of all its valuable possessions. The incumbent Shankaracharya petitioned Tipu Sultan for help. A bunch of about 30 letters written in Kannada, which were exchanged between Tipu Sultan's court and the Sringeri Shankaracharya were discovered in 1916 by the Director of Archaeology in Mysore. Tipu Sultan expressed his indignation and grief at the news of the raid and wrote;

"People who have sinned against such a holy place are sure to suffer the consequences of their misdeeds at no distant date in this kali age in accordance with the verse: "Hasadbhikriyate Karma ruladbhir – anubhuyate" (People do (Evil) deeds smilingly but suffer the consequences crying)".

He immediately ordered the Asaf of Bednur to supply the swami with 200 rahatis (fanams) in cash and other gifts and articles. Tipu Sultan's interest in the Sringeri temple continued for many years and he was still resting to the Swami in the 1790 CE. B.A. Saletare has described Tipu as a defender of Hindu dharma, who also patronized other temples including one at Melkote for which he issued a Kannada decree that the Shrivaisnavya invocatory verses there should be recited in the traditional form.

V. DONATIONS TO TEMPLES

During his period 90% alms was given to the Hindus. When the Marathas plundered Sringeri Mutt, killed the Brahmins and took the golden statue of Sarathadevi, Tipu Sultan gave donations to renovate it and sent his general SeyadMohmad to give protection to the Sankarachariyar of Sringeri. During the invasion of Tipu Sultan in Malabar, the Brahmins of the Guruvayur temple hid the statue on fear of him. Tipu realizing their fear reinstalled the statue and gave donations for the temple. When problem arose between Hindus and Muslims he was neutral. In the Hindu religious rally held in Srirangapatnam many Muslims were attacked. The incident was brought to the knowledge of Tipu by an Islamic scholar Peerlatha. When Tipu enquired the incident and found that the Muslims were responsible, he punished them. When Peerlatha threatened to leave the country if he did not support the Muslim, Tipu Sultan replied, if that was his wish let him go.

There are some letters found by Rao Bahadur Narsinhacharya, the Director of the Department of Archaeology of Mysore in 1916, containing the information that Tipu Sultan wrote to the Swami of Sringeri enquiring about his health and sometimes he sent shawls, valuable cloth and gifts for the goddess and the pontiff as well. Had Tipu been a bigot and furious fanatic, he would never have addressed a Hindu swami as Jagadguru.

The temple at Melkote still has gold and silver vessels with inscriptions indicating that they were presented by the Sultan. Tipu Sultan also presented four silver cups to the Lakshmi Kanta temple at Kalale. He donated the sacred tray for the Kandeswara Swami Temple in Karnataka. The bottom of the tray was embedded with nine gems called Navarathna. Tipu Sultan also presented twelve elephants for the Narayanaswamy Temple at Melkot. In the ceilings of the Narasimha temple the figure of Tipu Sultan can be seen along with mythical figures. The temples were given an annual pension of 90 Pagodas. To the temple of Nanjundeswara in the town of Nanjungud, Tipu Sultan gave a greenish Linga. Even now the linga is for public view. To the Ranganatha temple at Srirangapatnam he gifted seven silver cups and a silver camphor burner. This temple was hardly a stone's throw from his palace from where he would listen with equal respect the ringing of temple bells and the Muezzin's call from the mosque.

The Narasimha and the Gangadhareswara temples in the fort and near the palace of Tipu tell us that he allowed Hindus perfect freedom of worship. While engaged in the third Anglo-Mysore war Tipu ordered the construction of a temple in Kancheepuram and granted a huge sum for its building materials and for distributing daily alms not only to the pajaris of the temple but to all the Hindus who would go there for performing

religious rites. There are many sanads of the maintenance allowance of temples issued by Tipu Sultan. Some of them were written in Kanarese while others in Persian.

When the Sultani forces launched an attack on the fort of Dindigul, he ordered them to start mortar shieling from behind because the Rajas temple was situated in the front. During his conquest of Malabar, when the Muslim soldiers attempted to set the temples situated over there, on flames not only did he prosecute them rather gave orders for the repair of the temple with immediate effect. In 1789 when he was in Travancore he asked for some utensils from the Varkonathan temple in Raichur for his soldiers. While returning them, he presented the temple with a magnificent candle stand. Once when two Hindu sects Wadgilai and Tankalai began to fight amongst themselves in connection with a feud over observing certain religious practices in a temple in the city of Maillkot. Tipu himself mediated as per the wish of both the sects. Later on he issued orders to the priest to supervise over the temple personally to insure that the two sects don't start of a quarrel again.

Muhammad Abdullah Bangalori has described in his book that Tipu had granted stipends to 60 temples in a Taluqa in one of southern districts of Kerala. The Guruyarya temple alone was given a cultivable land of 625 acres as reward. The tax-free pieces of land which Tipu had donated to the temples and Brahmins of Malabar have been described by Mohibbul Hasan in his book Tareekh-e-Tipu Sultan.

1. 195 acres of land for the Trikenteswar temple in the Umsoom town of Calicut.
2. 504 acres of land for the Guruyarya temple at Poonani.
3. 73 acres of land for the Manwar temple Chelum town.
4. 212 acres of land for the Truwanchku-Sulam temple of Poonani.
5. 135 acres of land for Nambodirpad temple in Poonani.

The swami of Pushpagiri was authorized to realise the revenue from Golapalli. Moreover, a priest named Ramcharnami of Anjanika temple in Ganjikota was also given a big 'jagir' in Karpa. Furthermore, he gave a large 'jagir' to a Brahmin Maharaja Hariipa of Balfort in 1794 as reward.

The common word is that Sultan had been cruel towards the Christians too, although the reality is that he had shown the same generous and benevolent attitude towards them as he had shown towards the Hindus. Even if he took revenge against someone, it wasn't on account of his religious or sect rather because of his rebellious nature which he had to face every now and then. During the second battle of Mysore in 1782, the Christians belonging to South Kinara (Mangalore) assisted the British in secrecy, helped General Mathews for occupying Badnur and also helped him monetarily in this regards. When Tipu learnt about it he punished them severely. Most of the conspirators were either sent to Cochin or Goa. Not only did he give the captives full rights to practice their religion but also wrote letters to the Viceroy of Goa asking him to send some members of the clergy to lead the prisoners. The churches which were damaged in war were repaired out of government expenses. At the request of the French he built a church, the first in Mysore. He also permitted the Christian traders from Armenia to establish trade and commerce in the Sultanat-e-Khudadad. Tipu Sultan also sheltered the Christians who had fled from Goa even after losing half of his sultanate in 1792.

VI. CONCLUSION

Even as Tipu Sultan's legacy weathers a political hailstorm in Karnataka it cannot be denied he was a farsighted ruler. If he had been a religious zealot he would not have introduced a missile technology, banned liquor drinking and be a good environmentalist. For the last three years the birthday of Tipu Sultan is celebrated as a government function. There is opposition from the Hindutva groups. The facts given by the British that Tipu Sultan was a persecutor of the Hindus is now taken as fact by the RSS groups. The legacy of Tipu cannot be kept within the region of Mysore. It must be revered and given due importance in the near future for the Tiger of Mysore and the missile man who was the first to lay down his life fighting against the British.

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