

Religious Policy of Tipu Sultan: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract:

The religious philosophy of Tipu Sultan has not been examined in a truthful and objective manner by the historians who have developed caste based prejudices in India. Tipu was a great patron of Hindu religion and provided financial assistance to several Hindu and other religious institutions and activities. He recruited a good number of Hindu officials to manage the revenue, defence and other branches of administration. He carried out the administration of Mysore state with due respect to nationalism and secularism. Several Hindu scholars have observed that Tipu had endeavored his best for the unity of the Muslims and the Hindus. He had used the state power for social reforms. He carried out social reformation on the basis of humanity and rationality. There are several historical evidences which prove that Tipu had tolerated the practice of Hindu religion within his own territory and became popular with all his subjects. Tipu's religious policy assumes great significance in the present times since the ruling class has posed series of threats to secularism, pluralism, humanism and other values of life.

KETWORDS: Religious, Philosophy, Secularism, Pluralism, Humanism

Introduction

Tipu Sultan fought against European colonialism and heralded a new innings of national freedom in India. Sirajuddaula of Bengal and Tipu Sultan of Mysore had seriously worked for the ouster of British forces from India. He had to face both internal and external enemies simultaneously to safeguard the national unity and integration. The religious philosophy of Tipu Sultan has not been examined in a truthful and objective manner by the historians who have developed caste based prejudices in India. There are ample historical evidences which demonstrate the fact that Tipu Sultan had great zeal and determination to use state power for social reforms. The religious philosophy of Tipu Sultan and his constant endeavors for communal harmony are examined in this article on the basis of qualitative research methodology.

Patron of Hindu Religion

The Editor of Mysore Gazetteer Srikantaiah has listed 156 temples to which Tipu regularly paid annual grants. There is such evidence as grant deeds, and correspondence between his court and temples, and his having donated jewellery and deeded land grants to several temples. Between 1782 and 1799 Tipu had issued 34 Sanads (deeds) of endowment to temples in his domain, while also presenting many of them with gifts of silver and gold plate. Tipu's close relationship with Shringeri did not begin with the sack of Shringeri by the Marathas but had begun much earlier in 1785 AD when Tipu issued a 'Nirupa' — Decree regranting the Shringeri Matha with a new 'patte' or 'document' which confirmed that Shringeri would continue as time-honored 'Sarvamanya' and free from all trouble.

The Brahmins enjoyed perfect peace and tranquility being endowed with Inam lands and Aagraharams and where everyone including even Hindus could procure unfettered and unstinted justice in every matter and where commerce flourished and agriculture advanced unhampered (Taylor, 1788).¹ Tipu appointed Krishna Rao, Shamaiya Iyengar, RangaIyengar, Purnaiya, Moolchand, Sujan Rai, Subba Rao and other Hindus as senior officers in the administration and allotted vital portfolios to them as a true national.

Between 1782 and 1799 Tipu Sultan issued 34 sanads (deeds) of endowment to temples in his domain, besides presenting valuable gifts to the temples. B.A. Saletare, T.T.Sharma, Channabasappa, Patil Puttappa, Chandrashekara Patil, Marula Siddappa and other eminent scholars have pointed out that Tipu Sultan was a defender of the Hindu dharma and patron of secularism in the country.

The religious philosophy of Tipu Sultan can be analyzed in relation to the Nairs of Malabar, Coorgis of the Karnataka, Christians of Canara and Mahadewis (Capper, 1853).²

The reactionary feudal aristocracy of Malabar and Coorg should not be torn out of context to explain that Tipu had a 'religious mission' nor the captivity and expulsion of the Canara Christians was an act of religious persecution (Sen, 1930).³ Tipu had punished the people who had conspired against him and acted as the agents of British colonialism. He carried out the administration of Mysore state with due respect to nationalism and secularism.

Tipu had created grants for the maintenance of Hindu and Muslim religious institutions. He had provided financial assistance generously to Shringeri mutt, Melukote temple, Srirangapatna temple, Nanjangud temple, Chamarajanagar temple and other religious centers. He had also reinstalled the displaced image of Sharada temple. His correspondence with the Jagadguru of the Hindu mutt at Shringeri, the protection he gave to it and money, gains and clothes presented to it and the steps he took to set right the ravages caused by Hindu Maratha raiders are found in the archival records. His letters to Seringeri Mutt testify his deep respect for Hindu religious establishments (Sen, 1930).⁴

Negative Portrayal of Tipu

The historians who are wedded to fundamentalism in India have not lagged behind their western counterparts in projecting Tipu Sultan in a negative manner. Such negative portrayal was carried out to defend British rule and Brahminical history in India. It is a highly disgraceful and pernicious propaganda carried out by this unholy nexus of historians against a great champion of communal harmony like Tipu Sultan. The British historians had carried out a campaign of vilification against Tipu since he was their sworn enemy in India. Tipu was one of the most innovative and far-sighted rulers of the pre-colonial period.

Hindu Scholars about Tipu

Tipu is one of those unfortunate Indian rulers who became victim to the prejudiced accounts of the Western writers and their Indian echoists. My recent visit to the ruins of Seringapatam, Tipu's capital and my critical study of various accounts treating of him, combined with careful enquiry into popular stories told about him, have made me so convinced, that I could not resist demonstrating to the world that Tipu is in reality no religious fanatic, but a broad minded benevolent ruler, animated with highly noble ideals of religious toleration and national unity. As a Hindu, I was first impelled to go to the temple of Sriranganatha. There, I found the idol, tower and compound wall, all in good condition. I heard also the people telling that the temple was ever immune from the dastardly attacks of the Muslim. I found in the beautiful palace named 'Daria Daulatabagh' so profusely and pompously decorated with delightful ivory paintings on the armies of Hindus and Muslims, fighting with the English, a common national foe. The brick made and curved spring-bridge seemed to me to be an eloquent testimony to his noble ideas of striving hard for the welfare of his subjects, one and all. Indeed, it was an integral characteristic of a Sovereign, imbued

with the progressive ideals. Tipu is said to have presented a big drum to the temple of Sree Narasimhaswamy of Melukote, a Hindu sacred place in his own kingdom. We also learn that Tipu spent greatsums of money for reestablishing the idol of Saraswati of Sringeri when the original idol was uprooted by Maharatta invaders about 1790. We also learn that Tipu had a staunch belief in the efficacy of Hindu rites like Japams, when he implored one Gopala Joshi to tell the Guruof Sringeri to perform *Sathachendi Japam* and the like for the destruction of the foes of the Mysore State. Further, his reply to Ghazi Khan saying that as ruler of a state, he ought to award the same equanimous treatment to one and all of his subjects, whether Hindus or Muslims, is really more surprising. Now, it is necessary to support this conclusion of mine, with the evidence of history (Chetty, 1932).⁵

A Muslim tomb called Babayya Durga, situated at Penukonda in Anantapur district was built by Tipu. Babayya after whom the name of the tomb goes was a Muslim saint cosmopolitan like Kabir of the North, and Sheik Mahammad of Maharashtra in his religious views. He endeavored his best for the unity of the Muslims and the Hindus and it seems he was popular with both the communities. Tipu was a cosmopolitan in his religious views that strove his best for the reconciliation of both the recalcitrant communities as a mark of which noble view he built this tomb for that great Muslim exponent of the same. The inscription in Urdu built in the rest house before the Kannambadi dam shows that Tipu intended to build this dam long ago and laid its foundation on such an auspicious day when the Sun, the Moon and the Stars were in good position. The inscription in the temple in Coimbatore District mentions the names of Tipu and his father along with those of the great Vizianagara kings, of the Nayakas of Madura and other great Hindu sovereigns. This shows that Tipu was not a destroyer of Hindu temples like Aurangazeb but at least a ruler of religious toleration if not a supporter of Hindu worship like the Hindu kings. The serial numbers of Tipu's cyclic years as recorded onmany coins revealed that Tipu's policy was greatly influenced by the Hindu systems in existence. The appointment of Purnaiah and Krishna Rao as Finance Minister and State Treasurer shows the magnitude of the confidence he reposed in the honesty of the Hindus. That, moreover, Tipu was a great statesman that strove for the unity of Muslims and Hindus is obvious to all unprejudiced eyes from the fact that he left the fort in the joint custody of Sayyad Sahib and Purnaiah in 1799 during his final issue with the English. Tipu was aware ofthe true motives of the western traders being expansion of Christianity and territorial aggrandizement. He did not think of forcible religious conversion to Islam and the only instance of conversion of the Malabar Hindus was due to other than religious reason (Chetty, 1934).⁶

Social Reforms

Tipu Sultan had great zeal and determination to use state power for social reforms (Khan, 1951).⁷ He had banned liquor, prostitution, human trafficking, human sacrifice and half nudity of Malabar women and other inhuman practices consciously. Tipu wanted to cleanse the society in Mysore state and administer social reforms by using state power. He never waited for the people to wage a religious war against these inhuman tendencies and practices. He carried out social reformation on the basis of humanity and rationality.

The British and Indian historians deliberately built up a negative framework on the religious policy of Tipu Sultan and branded him as an ‘intolerant bigot’. Professor Mohibbul Hasan made an attempt to demolish this framework on the basis of authentic historical instances and evidences (Khan, 1951).⁸ Tipu Sultan has been portrayed as an inhuman tyrant by the British historians like Mark Wilks, Kirkpatrick, Beatson and others (Thomson, 1966).⁹

There are twenty nine nirupas or letters belonging to the reign of Tipu Sultan and they are in the possession of the Sringeri Math. The nirupas are symbolic of a bridge of understanding between two cultures and two communities. On various occasions, he sent gifts to the goddess Sarada and the Swami. The policy of Tipu Sultan towards the Melukote Temple is based on a Sannad which is in the possession of the Parakala Mutt in Mysore city. The Nirupa is evidence which helps us to correct the distorted image of Tipu Sultan (Shivanna, 1989).¹⁰

Religious Policy of Tipu

The very purpose of developing such a framework as religious policy to analyze and understand Indo-Muslim kings should be challenged. In the dynastic personalized histories that the British wrote such a theme was a convenient method to make devils out of humans and to frame them up as one liked. Such depiction was necessary for propaganda and for establishing and stabilizing British rule in India. It is true that the Sultan had a great zeal and determination to use state power for social reforms. Stories of forcible conversions, mass circumcisions, temple destructions, confiscations, cow killings and religious persecutions were very skillfully knitted and finally a verdict was proclaimed that Tipu Sultan was intolerant bigot (Azam, 1993).¹¹

Tipu never practiced religious discrimination, nor was he for class domination of the Muslims. He was not an idol breaker or a temple destroyer. On the contrary, he saw to it that all the Hindu temples flourished in his Kingdom by extending to them active encouragement and financial support (Pande, 1993).¹² Tipu was a generous patron of several Hindu temples, including the Sri Ranganatha temple near his main palace at Srirangapattana.

Tipu had received a complaint from a *Faujdar* regarding the marriage between the Hindu man and a Muslim lady even though it was not permitted in the *Shariat*. Tipu simply admonished the official and sent direction not to interfere in or meddle with the personal affairs of the people. He also strictly instructed the official that it was their duty to safeguard the life and property of the people and ensure law and order. There are ample evidences to establish the truth that Tipu had encouraged inter-religious marriage since he was an educated and enlightened ruler.

Tipu was an enlightened ruler and was secular in outlook. Tipu Sultan had given grants for the maintenance of Hindu temples in Mysore state. Tipu had issued jagirs and cash gifts for the maintenance of temples. Tipu had not engaged in any mass-scale conversion since he was pre-occupied with the defence and development of Mysore State. He had punished the Hindus of Coorg, the Christians of Mangalore and the Nayars of Malabar who tried to undermine his authority by joining the British. He did not spare the Mopillas of Malabar or the Mahadayi Muslims or Nawabs of Sawanur or Nizam who were not true nationals. Tipu's approach towards socio-religious issues was egalitarian. He abolished the custom of human sacrifice to Kali Temple (Mysore), banned the use of liquor and the cultivation of bhang, dried leaves of which are highly interacting made prostitution and took measures to safeguard the honor and modesty of the women in Kerala. Tipu was not a religious bigot even though he was a devout Muslim (Pande, 1996).¹³

Tipu's attempt at forced conversion leading to the alleged suicide of 3,000 Brahmins to escape it, as noted by a Sanskrit scholar of Calcutta University, has been dismissed as unfounded by a scholar politician (Pande, 1996).¹⁴ Tipu had tolerance towards Hindu and other religions. His portrait in full regalia hangs on the walls of a Hindu temple of Lord Narasimha at Sibi near the city of Bangalore (Brittlebank, 1997).¹⁵

Tipu had built his palace in Srirangapatna very much close to Ranganatha Temple and showed equal respect for the ringing of temple bells and the call of mosque Masjid-Ala.

He had also offered to elephants to the Melukote temple according to the epigraph dated July, 1785. Tipu patronized the temples of Srikanteswara and Sri Ranganatha (Chetty, 1999).¹⁶

Secular Outlook of Tipu

Tipu did not discriminate against non-Muslims and employed Hindus and other religious groups of people in the state service regardless of religion, region, creed and other extraneous factors. All these factors disprove the malicious propaganda carried out by the vested interest the Tipu was a religious bigot. There are plenty of evidences of his religious tolerance. Tipu Sultan, after donating money and jewelers to the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, urged the swamiji, through a notification, to pray for the well-being of all citizens. Tipu built his summer palace next to a temple in Bangalore since he had a secular outlook. Tipu's coins had inscriptions in Devanagari and Kannada. Some of his coins even had images of Udupi Krishna and Sringeri Sharada. Coins minted by his father, Hyder Ali, had the images of Shiva and Parvathi. He is even credited with having started a new calendar system, under which the year began with Ugadi. He was also well-versed in the Bhagavad Gita, an important religious scripture of Hindus (Saletoore, 1999).¹⁷

Hindu temples had been sites for the contestation of royal authority well before the advent of the Muslims in India and thus Tipu's desecration as well as endowment of Hindu temples followed the pattern of Mughal conduct for purely political (and not religious or iconoclastic) reasons (Panikkar, 2000).¹⁸

Tipu had cultivated cordial relations with the Sringeri Matha, a prominent Hindu religious center in South India. The Marathas had rided the Math and had thrown away the idol of goddess Sharade as a mark of disrespect to the people of this region. Tipu was a ruler with a secular mindset and provided liberal financial assistance to the Sringeri Matha. A.K. Shastry writes about Tipu Sultan's relations with the Sringeri Matha. There are 47 letters relating to Tipu in the personal possession of the present *Jagadguru -Bharati Tirtha*. Many of these letters are addressed to the *Jagadguru* in the name of *Bismillah*. The records are sealed, signed and the text is in Kannada. Tipu requested the *Guru* to offer prayers, three times a day, to Lord Isvara, for attaining welfare of the Government, the people and the kingdom. The letters reveal the nature of the Sultan's relations with the Sringeri Math. These letters are important not only because they reveal Tipu's deep affection for the Mutt

and the then Shankaracharya but also because they portray the conviction of Tipu about Hindu-Muslim amity (Shastry, 2010).¹⁹

Tipu had also presented 12 elephants, Jewells, gold and silver vessels to Narayanaswamy temple at Melukote. He contributed a silver cup and installed the famous ‘Padshah Linga’ made of green jade in Sreekanteshwar temple at Nanjangud. He had gifted seven silver cups and sliver incense burner to Shri Ranganatha temple at Srirangapattana. He had provided donations to Shri Venkataramana temple at Tirupati. He had generously contributed funds for the maintenance of various religious centers such as Ekambreswaraswami Temple (Conjeevaram), Anjaneyaswamy temple (Gandikote), Narasimhaswamy temple (Gattupet), Channakeshavaswamy temple (Manchur), Prasanna Venkateshwara temple (Matur), Sri Ranga temple (Pervali) and other temples. He also provided moral and material support to the Syrian Christians and the Armenian Christians and Mysore Christians as a mark of policy of egalitarianism. But, Tipu had also punished the Canara Christians and Mahadwis Muslims since they had conspired against him under the law of sedition.

In fact, Tipu Sultans Calendar was based on the 60 year old cycle of the Hindus and adopted the solar year and the thirteenth intercalary month.²⁰ Mahatma Gandhi had appreciated the liberal religious policy of Tipu Sultan in 1930 in his ‘Young India’. It reads: “Tipu made lavish gifts to Hindu temples, and also to the temples dedicated to Shri Venkataramana, Shrinivas and Shri Ranganatha located in the vicinity of Tipu’s palaces still bear testimony to his broadminded toleration, and indicate that great martyr at any rate for a real martyr he was in the cause of liberty – was not disturbed in his prayers by the Hindu bells calling people to worship the same God whose devotee he was”. Tipu was an enlightened and egalitarian Sultan religiously also according to the views of great statesmen like Gandhi.

Tipu did not consider the Hindu rulers of Maharashtra, Coorg and Travancore or the Muslim ruler Nizam as impediments. He was critical of British imperialism and called upon the local rulers to get rid of from colonialism. He did not harm the Raja of Cochin or anyone for that matter who surrendered and pledged loyalty to him. He performed the Hindu rituals and upheld secular values. He had appointed a large number of Hindu officials and soldiers in the bureaucracy and army since he had no disrespect for Hinduism. Tipu had punished the people in South India who had joined hands with the British and betrayed the nation for selfish ends without caring for their religious background.

There are several historical evidences which prove that Tipu had tolerated the practice of Hindu religion within his own territory and became popular with all his subjects. He had made numerous charities and endowments to several Hindus and Hindu institutions. He granted several villages to the Hindus for building up Hindu temples, mutts, in the territory. He also granted permission for the construction of a mosque on the side of a Hindu temple. Tipu had encouraged the religious institutions to organize fairs, festivals, processions, worships and other formalities. He was sincere in his motives when he made gifts to Hindu temples and other religious institutions. He used to maintain a regular correspondence with the religious heads. The numerous letters that are derived as historical evidences prove beyond doubt that Sultan Tipu was certainly a great benefactor of one of the most renowned places of Hindu worship (Gurusiddaiah, 2010).²¹ Tipu had placed his country above his own self even in the matter of prayers. People have indeed reason to be grateful to him for the prompt measures he took to resuscitate the cause of Hindu dharma in the great seat of Shankaracharya, when it was eclipsed by political calamity.

Tipu was a great nationalist and many Hindu temples in Kerala received huge grants from Tipu Sultan. He granted about 669 acres of land to the Guruvayoor temple and provided annual grants in cash. He was a benevolent Sultan who never imposed any religious tax on Hindu temples. It is interesting to note that out of sixty two grants referred only five were to mosques or Islamic religious personae. The remaining fifty seven were made to various Hindu temples and religious personae (Jineesh, 2015).²²

Tipu Sultan was a secular ruler. He was a model king in the entire country. A section of people criticize him out of prejudice. Tipu was an able fighter who used ‘weapons of the West’ against their inventors, which at times were superior to the East India Company’s old matchlocks. Tipu Sultan had a large number of Hindus in the bureaucracy and military mainstreams. There were no instances of forcible conversion of Hindus into Islam during the regime of Tipu, observed Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister of Karnataka in the anniversary of Tipu (Dutta, 2015).²³

Tipu had broken the caste based monopoly of the upper castes in Kerala. He crushed the casteist forces and liberated the socially and economically backward sections of society as a champion of communal harmony and social justice (Balachandran, 2015).²⁴ ‘Sarvamanya’ meant that the territory under its jurisdiction was tax free and it would enjoy all rights with regard to taxation and law within its territory (Katju, 2015).²⁵

Tipu's generosity to temples, Sufi dargahs and mosques, as well as the great Math at Sringeri, is well documented, primarily through inscriptions and institutional records. He punished the Hindus, Muslims and Christians for intriguing against him. Interestingly, during the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, many of them served under Arthur Wellesley (Brittlebank, 2016).²⁶

Tipu combined tolerant inter-religious traditions, liberal and secular traditions, anti-colonialism and internationalism. He could do this as he had strong roots in Sufism, which is not explored much by historians. He was the first to ban consumption of alcohol in the entire State, not on religious grounds, but on moral and health grounds. His tolerance is reflected in his annual grants to no less than 156 temples, which includes land deeds and jewellery. He was also instrumental in constructing the first ever church in Mysuru. Tipu continues to exist in the political discourses but one cannot just bury Tipu in the annals of history, argues Muzaffar Assadi (Yashoda, 2017).²⁷

The Government of Karnataka celebrated the Tipu's birthday throughout the state and paid rich tribute to Tipu Sultan who sacrificed his life for the sake of nationalism. Tipu Sultan strongly resisted British colonialism and sought the assistance of several foreign powers—including the French. Tipu Sultan also stood by Hindu – Muslim unity and fraternity. He generously contributed funds and facilities to Hindu temples and promoted secularism in Mysore state (Punj, 2017).²⁸ Tipu constructed and developed certain monuments which brought in a vision of egalitarianism by extending a good experience to all.

The British had followed a negative propaganda technique to nullify the commitment of Tipu Sultan for communal harmony and national integration. It was done with a view to instigate the local rulers against Tipu Sultan and weaken his struggle for the emancipation of India from British colonialism. Dalits and other excluded sections of Indian society had to embrace Islam as a means of emancipation from the oppressive forces in Hinduism. Religious conversion was inevitable for the neglected sections of Hindu society. Tipu would have succeeded in the complete Islamization and avoided the third and fourth Mysore wars if he had neglected secularism.

Tippu Sultan has received great attention by historians than any of the contemporary or pre or past rulers. Scholars have portrayed Tipu as a secular ruler who vehemently opposed the foreign rule in South India. Tipu had strong ambition of making a complete

kingdom, a Sultanate, in South India. He considered the British power an obstacle in widening the kingdom. Tipu was a secular ruler who contributed funds for the maintenance and development of Hindu religious institutions. The coastal belts of Malabar had experienced mass conversion to Islam during the period of Tipu. The coastal people, who were considered lower caste people of Hindu religion and lived a very pathetic life, had converted to Islam and Christianity as a mark of protest against caste system and caste based oppression.

CONCLUSION

The religious legacy of Tipu Sultan has become a source of considerable controversy in the subcontinent. Some historians claim that he had an egalitarian attitude towards Hindus and was harsh towards them only when politically expedient. The portrayal of Tipu Sultan as a religious bigot is disputed, and some sources suggest that he in fact often embraced religious pluralism. Tipu's religious policy assumes great significance in the present times since the ruling class has posed series of threats to secularism, pluralism, humanism and other values of life. He had commanded the loyalty, respect and support from his subjects. He never interfered with the socio-religious life of the people as a ruler. He was a great patron of all religious groups and called upon his subjects to fight against the British and save the Indian sovereignty. His government was not led by any kind of theocracy even though he was a devout Muslim. The historical evidences and archival documents reveal that Tipu Sultan had accepted secularism as a way of life.

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