

TIPU SULTHAN: BEYOND THE FABRICATED STORIES

Ed. HUSSAIN RANDATHANI

Tipu Sultan, the eldest son of Haider Ali, was born on December 10, 1750 at Devanhalli. Right from his early years he was trained in the art of warfare and at the age of 15 he used to accompany his father Haider Ali, the ruler of Mysore, to different military campaigns. In Addition, he also learnt different languages, mathematics and science. Tipu Sultan had a fascination for learning. His personal library consisted of more than 2,000 books in different languages. He was an extremely active man and worked hard for the welfare of his subjects. He took over the kingdom of Mysore after the death of his father in 1782, who died of a carbuncle in the midst of a campaign against the British. He continued fighting the British and defeated them in 1783.

Being an arch enemy of the British and their allies, the British historians and those who followed them branded Tipu as fanatic inflicting cruelties up on Hindus and Christians of the conquered regions and converting them into Islam or annihilating them. It is true that he was inimical to his enemies as all the rulers and most often towards the Nairs of Travencore and the Christians of Mangalore and the British who fought against him. When he became victorious in the battles he captured them and punished them either with death or imprisonment. Many of them were banished from the country. Those prisoners who were willing to convert were freed and appointed in various posts in the army or administration. But, when peace was brought and enmity came to an end, Tipu extended his justice to all irrespective of their faith and caste, appointing high castes in importance posts. The British who fought with Tipu brought a number of false stories against him, of killing Hindus and Christians and forcibly converting them. But we find no instances of religious rivalry from the part of Tipu in his dominions. On the other hand he provided grants and endowments to the temples for their maintenance and renovation. A study of the primary sources, particularly his letters, farmans and orders, it becomes crystal clear that he was a modern ruler with a secular outlook and a man with reforming zeal. The British not only asked his commanders to disfigure the Sultan, but also forced even his relatives to give false statements about him after they were arrested and confined. Even Kirmani, his close associate also had to write against him under pressure from the authorities. That is how the Sulthan was depicted as fanatic and cruel.

Tipu Sultan was a farsighted person who could foresee East India Company's design to get entrenched in India. He therefore negotiated with the French for help and also sought assistance from the Amir of Afghanistan and the Sultan of Turkey. The British were scared of Tipu's growing strength and after their defeat in 1783 they formed an alliance with the Nizam of Hyderabad and Marhattas. The French, however, deserted Tipu after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The British availed the chance with the help of the Nizam and the Marathas, and started the third Anglo-Mysore war in 1790.

As long as the British fought alone, Tipu always defeated them. But he could not come over their diplomacy, conspiracy and intrigue. Thus he was defeated in his capital, Seringapatam, and was forced to sign a humiliating treaty on March 22, 1792. As a result

he had to concede half of his kingdom and pay an indemnity of 33 million rupees to the British and their allies. The alliance between the adversaries was soon broken and in 1795 the British, after defeating the Nizam, once again turned their attention towards Mysore. After the treaty at Seringapatam, Tipu Sultan did not waste his time and made extensive preparations against the British. He had rebuilt his war machine in the shortest possible time with the help of the French. The British regarded it as a violation of the treaty. This led to the start of the fourth Anglo-Mysore war in 1798 with the help of the Nizam. The French were unable to provide the needed support to Tipu Sultan. Tipu Sultan retreated to his capital and continued fighting till he breathed his last in May 1799. Tipu Sultan is buried at a mausoleum that he himself had built, along with his father Haider Ali and his mother Fatima Begum.

Tipu Sultan was a great patriot and like his father realized the danger of letting the British becoming stronger. Although much of the period of his rule was given to war with the Marhattas, the Nizam and the British, he made his state secure and peaceful with benevolent rule. He was an enlightened ruler who treated his non-Muslim subjects generously. He built a chain of excellent roads and constructed tanks and dams to promote agriculture. He introduced new industries, promoted trade and commerce on a large scale. Tipu prohibited the production and distribution of liquor and other intoxicants in Mysore. He also built and fortified numerous forts and many palaces, which were demolished by the British after his death. Bangalore Summer Palace still survives and is a remnant of his grand rule.

In 1791, during the third Mysore war, the invading Maratha army under Persuram Bhau caused a lot of damage to Sringeri, plundered the temple property and even displaced the sacred image of the goddess Sharada. The Swamiji of the temple left the place and went to Karkala in Dakshina Kannada District. The swamiji informed Tipu about the Maratha raid, and sought his help for consecrating the sacred image of the Goddess. Tipu responded immediately to the request, and wrote to Sri Shankaracharya, the swamiji of the temple expressing such sentiments of respect for Hinduism as to disprove any charge of intolerance leveled against him. **He furnished the Swamiji with funds for reinstalling the displaced image, ordered the Assaf (Collector) of Bidnur to supply both cash and other articles and expressed his grief at the unfortunate incidents, which resulted in the damage to the holy place.** In one of these letters Tipu quoted a Sanskrit verse, meaning that people commit wicked deeds smilingly but they would repent for them later weepingly. **Tipu requested the swamiji to pray for the prosperity of the State and for the destruction of its enemies.** After the idol was installed Tipu received the prasada and the shawls which swamiji had sent. and in return he sent his gifts of cloth and bodice for the goddess and a pair of shawl to swamiji. In another record it is mentioned that Tipu sent two palanquins, one for the goddess and the other for the Swamiji. These letters express great respect to the holy place and to swamiji which completely falsify the British propaganda that Tipu was a bigot and persecuted the Hindus. Nor was this treatment confined only to the period when Tipu was at war with the Marathas, but extended all through his regime. At another time when there was no war, Tipu addressed to the Swamiji as Jagadguru and asked him to pray for the welfare and happiness of all the people.

Sringeri was not the only holy place, which received the patronage of Tipu. 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. To the **Lakshmikantha temple** at Kalale in Nanjangud taluq of Mysore district, he gave four silver cups, a silver plate and a silver spittoon. To the **Narayanaswamy temple** at Melkote he presented gold and silver vessels besides an elephant and a few jewels.

The **Srikanteswara temple** at Nanjangud was presented with a jewelled cup and a few precious stones together with a greenish linga which was installed by his orders. Within his own capital, a stone-throw from his palace stood the famous **Ranganatha temple** which still stands to-day, to which he presented seven silver cups and silver camphor banners. Earlier in 1774 when a portion of it was damaged in a fire it was rebuilt within a month. Tipu listened with equal respect to the ringing of the bells from the temple, and the call of Azan from the mosque. There were two other temples near the mosque, the **Narasimha temple** and the **Gangadhareswara temple** where daily pujas were performed which were never interfered with. He fixed an allowance to the temple at Rayakottai. By paying 10,000 huns he ordered the completion of the temple of Gopur in Conjeevaram whose foundations had been laid in 1780 by Haider. As Haider died before the completion of the temple, Tipu not only ordered its completion but also participated in its opening ceremony. When a dispute arose in Melkote in matters of some religious implications he offered his good offices to settle the issue to which both parties agreed and he solved the problem to the satisfaction of both. Thus the attempts of a few British historians to depict Tipu as intolerant are highly erroneous Tipu was just and fair to all his subjects. **His appointment of numerous Hindus to high offices disprove the wrong view that he was a sectarian.** Purnaiya was the minister in charge of the important Department of Revenue and Finance. Krishna Rao was the treasurer, Shama Iyengar was incharge of law and order and police. Narasing Rao and Ranga Iyengar held key posts in Srirangapatna, Srinivasa Rao and Appaji Ram were the main diplomats who negotiated peace and war with external powers. Mool Chand and Sajjan Rai were his chief agents at the Mughal court in Delhi. Nagappaiah, a Brahmin was the faujdar of Coorg. His civil list is full of the names of Hindus who held important posts in the state.

Hindus were entrusted with responsible jobs in the army as well. Hari Singh commanded a wing of cavalry. Sripat Rao was appointed with Roshan Khan to contain the rebellious Nayars in Malabar. Shivaji, a Maratha, held the command of 3000 horses and defended well Bangalore against the attack of Lord Cornwallis in the Third Mysore war. **Tipu encouraged the Armenian Christian merchant to come and settle in Mysore, and provided them with all facilities to promote mutual trade.**

Tipu recruited people to services strictly on the basis of merit, and on no other considerations. **In one of his letters, he clearly says that irrespective of caste, creed or**

colour, God confers power on those who are worthy of his trust. He imposed strict restrictions on those Muslim saints who aimed at attracting followers to their own ways of religious thought. He stopped some of those customs which the Muslims practiced during the month of Muharram. **He introduced prohibition in the state by which all his subjects, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, were prevented from taking liquor.**

An important aspect of Tipu's policy which clearly brings out the secular and progressive character of his administration was his deep interest in the revolutionary ideas of France which percolated his court through the French officers. **A Jacobin Club of extreme revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity was formed at Srirangapatna by the French soldiers commanded by M. Dompert, who was in Tipu's service.** There were 59 members in this club, one of whom was Tipu himself. **This club came into existence on 5th May 1797,** the fifth year of the French Republic. The object of this club was to impart instructions in constitutional principles of democratic nature and for framing laws conformable to those prevailing in the Republic of France, which had enunciated lofty principles of human rights. This indicates to what extent Tipu had gone to absorb liberal thoughts, Ripaud was chosen as the president of the club and Tipu was just a member. While accepting its membership he declared, "**Behold my acknowledgement of the standard of your country, which is dear to me, and to which I am allied; it shall always be supported in my country, as it has been in the Republic, my sister !**"

Having said this Tipu planted the tree of liberty surmounted by the cap of equality. It is surprising that despite his full awareness of the absolute and unlimited power he possessed he called himself "**Citizen Tipu**" which is an acknowledgement of his growing consciousness within him that a ruler is a servant of the people

Tipu was far ahead of his times, the charge of religious intolerance levelled against him appears absurd. This charge is leveled by the English, who had suffered imprisonment at his hands because of their inveterate hostility towards him. But they forgot the fact that the sufferings of the English prisoners, however intense they might have been, were only the sufferings of those who had attempted to destroy him. It should be remembered that his harshness towards his enemies was based on political grounds and not religious. This fact could be known by the conditions he stipulated in his proposed treaty of alliance with French, which declared "**I demand that male & female prisoners as well as English as Portuguese, who shall be taken by the republican troops or by mine, shall be treated with humanity and with regard to their persons that they shall be transported at our joint expense out of India to some place far distant from the territories of the allies**". Such thoughts surely indicate his humane veneer within even to those who were his inveterate foes. Such a person could hardly be harsh on his own subjects, no matter to what religion they belonged.

If he crushed the Hindus of Coorg, the Christians of Mangalore and the Nayars of Malabar, who were all hands in gloves with the English to Subvert his power, he did not spare the Muslim Mopillas and Mahadevi's in the interest of Law & Order, and to

improve the conditions of his state. He attacked the Nawab of Savanur, threatened the Muslim ruler of Kurnool and was more hostile towards the Nizam and the Nawab of Carnatic than towards the Marathas. His harshness at times was politically motivated and was not at all based on religious factors. Tipu's sense of respect for Hindus could be guessed by the fact that he would not attack the Dindigal fort from the rear, as a temple was there. When it was suggested to him that Purnaiya's loyalty was suspect, & that the Brahmin community was undependable, he quoted a quranic verse which forbade the blaming of the whole community for the fault of one. When an officer reported to him that a Hindu had married a Muslim girl, he reprimanded the officer and warned him not to raise such personal issues.

He never allowed any sectarian element to enter into his administration, for he was well aware that in a state of overwhelming majority of Hindus, any intolerant policy would lead to disastrous consequences. During the several wars he fought, no person of Character, rank of influence ever deserted his cause or went over to the other side. His religious policy could be summed up by his own code of law wherein he declared, "... to quarrel with our subject is to war with ourselves. They are our Shields and our buckles, and it is they who furnish us with all things. Reserve the hostile strength for our enemies."

Gandhiji wrote, in *Young India* that Tipu was an embodiment of Hindu-Muslim Unity. No Indian friends who did not enjoy the confidence of his own people could have fought three desperate wars with an European Power. He was popular with his army & his people. He was greatly interested in Sufism, the liberal trend in Islam, which just believed only in the unity of God & the unity of Man. He held the Hindu saint, Sadhus and Gods in high esteem. He consulted Hindu astrologers. He fed the Brahmins and bore the expenses of the Hindu ceremonies.

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On coming to power Tipu realised that a new political development had taken place in the country, and it had completely upset the traditional balance of power in the land, and if that balance was not restored, the National identity would be lost. He realized that the true intention of the British was to crush the Independence of Indian ruler, and reduce him to the position of a pensioned Nawab or Raja

Long before the events of 1857, when a spirited uprising attempted to throw off the English, and before the formation of the Indian National Congress which set the pace for National Movement, Tipu struggled hard to rouse a consciousness of his neighbours to the impending danger to Indian Independence from the English.

Tipu tried to enlist the support of Indian powers, particularly the Marathas and the Nizam. When the response was not encouraging he focused his attention to external aid either from France or Turkey or Iran or Afghanistan. His embassies to Constantinople and Paris, his cordial relations with the French, his correspondence with Napoleon and Zaman Shah of Afghanistan were all for the single purpose of his confrontation with the English. As a result of this, his Kingdom, otherwise small in size, extent and resources, was drawn into the vortex of world politics, and gained the stature of global importance. His name would put to fright naughty children in England. His Ambassadors would receive red carpet reception in Paris, Constantinople and Kabul. Mysore had become " The terror of Leadenhall street" the head quarters of East India Company in London. His commercial depots were dotted all over in West Asia. He raised the prestige of Mysore sky - high.

Under Tipu's leadership the Mysore army became European army had no longer any effect on them. A lad of 17 yrs, Tipu made such a surprising dash on Madras in 1767, that the entire English council, who were all members of the Madras Government, sought refuge in a ship. He fell with such fury on Colonel Bailey in 1782, that the entire English army was either cut or taken prisoners. Bailey himself languished for long in prisons of Srirangapatna. a model and a school of military science to Indian powers. The dread of an European army had no longer any effect on them. A lad of 17 yrs, Tipu made such a surprising dash on Madras in 1767, that the entire English council, who were all members of the Madras Government, sought refuge in a ship. He fell with such fury on Colonel Bailey in 1782, that the entire English army was either cut or taken prisoners. Bailey himself languished for long in prisons of Srirangapatna. The hero of Buxar, Sir Hector Munro, who had defeated three rulers at Buxar-Shah Alam, Shuja-ud-daula and Mir Qasim-and who had paved the way for the consolidation of British Power in India, was forced to throw off all his guns into the tank of Conjeevaram and run for life to Madras, when Tipu chased him. Similarly the entire detachment of Colonel Braithwaite was captured, and Braithwaite himself was kept for long captive in Srirangapatna. General Medows, and Lord Cornwallis were harassed for two long years in the third Mysore War.

It was only an All India Confederacy of the Nizam, the Maratha and the English together with an Surreptitious entry into Srirangapatna in the dead of night that enabled the confederates to beat Tipu in 1792. Even Arthur Wellesley, the duke of Wellington, who later became the conqueror of Napoleon, was harassed greatly in 1799 and was forced to join the camp of General Harris. Another significant aspect of his life was his awareness of the realities of the 18th Century world. He felt, whereas Europe had made tremendous progress in terms of inventions and discoveries, explorations and voyages, new learning and renaissance, India had lost even the parameters of past glory. He analysed the factors why it was so, and found that the cross-fertilization of new ideas had met with a natural death in our land. That was why he corresponded with the French, appreciated their modern and revolutionary ideas, became a member of the **Jacobean Club**, Planted the tree of liberty outside his palace, called himself " **Citizen Tipu** " and adopted western techniques of warfare and system of administration. Only one type of authority, despotism, had choked the nervous system of Indian body politics. Cast rigidities had paralyzed the social system. Too strong a tendency for each principality to assert its own authority had fragmented the land. Tipu attempted to alter this situation and build up loyalties to a larger state. His concept of a nation-state, his sense of responsibility to the needs of the people, his elimination of feudal intermediaries, and his building up of a standard system of law, and efficient system of administration were all modern ideas far ahead of his times. It stands to his credit that these ideas were subsequently adopted by those who bitterly fought earlier against him. Tipu's sharp mind quickly perceived the fact that the European Mercantilism was essentially a system of political power. Its aim was to suck the wealth of other nations through exchange of goods at exorbitant rate of profit. The merchandise of the East was sold in Western Market a hundred times more than what was paid for. Very quickly Europe started living on Asia, Africa and America. Tipu observed this phenomenon and tried to alter it.

Political differences apart, he had great respect for western science, technology, discipline, organization and system, He revamped the entire civil and military structure on the Western line. The dominant impulse was his passion for change, particularly the change of mind. His own mind had undergone a metamorphic change. He wanted to change the mind of others too. The change he wanted to bring about was a simple concept that life was not worth living unless it be a life of liberty and dignity. Without this liberty man was like a bird kept in a cage. Tipu's mind was agitated that the British were fast making the whole of India, a great prison house. He desired to liberate his compatriots so as to make them feel the freshness of free air, and the sweetness of a dignified life. The British caught him in the process of opening the flood-gates of this prison, and shot him dead.

Tipu Sultan was a fascinating figure of 18th century, who offered his blood to write the history of free India. He had a vision and a mission in life. The vision was to make his people enlightened and prosperous, and mission was to liberate his land from the yoke of the colonials. His short but stormy rule is significant because of his view that only that life was worth living which would unfold the drama of human freedom, not only political

freedom, but also social freedom, economic freedom, cultural freedom, and freedom from want, hunger, apathy, ignorance and superstition. His definition of State itself was organized energy for freedom.

Tipu struggled all his life first to gain political freedom from British hands, for which he used all his means, energy and power, not sparing even his life. He would say the life of a lion for a day was far better than the life of a jackal for a hundred years, and that death should be preferred to dishonor. The British had never been confronted with a more formidable, determined and inveterate foe, who never compromised his ideals and never deviated from his goal. Even in his dreams he was engaged in a bitter fight against them. His regime began in the midst of war against the English, and ended in the midst of war against them. He was the only ruler who had the distinction of dying in a battle field for the liberty of the land