



## **TIPU SULTAN AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Tipu derived the concept of 'egalitarian society' from the French Revolution. Tipu contributed immensely for the welfare and progress of the downtrodden communities in Mysore state. Tipu adopted the role of a social reformer in his zeal to promote the welfare of his people. The revenue regulations demonstrate Tipu's concern for the poor peasants. Tipu abolished feudalism, beggary, prostitution, human trafficking, human sacrifice, alcohol consumption and other social and economic evils. He was a strong defender of social justice since he was positively affected by American*

*Revolution and French Revolution. He adopted novel system of the administration of justice and achieved the goal of inclusive development in Mysore State. Tipu had followed the standard system of administration for the development of the farmers, artisans, workers and other disadvantaged sections of society. He was a cross-religion icon who stood by social justice centered administration in Mysore state.*

### **Preamble**

Tipu derived the concept of ‘egalitarian society’ from the French Revolution. He used the state power to bring about social reforms and ensure social justice to the oppressed communities. He was aware of the medieval features of Malabar society which created social and economic divisions and deprived the depressed classes. He prohibited drinking of alcohol, domestic work, forced labor, human trafficking and other unhealthy practices. In the early of his reign Tipu’s attention was directed not only to the increase of the revenue of the state but also to the prosperity of his kingdom. Tipu was fully aware of the need for transformation of state and society which was the most promising means to resist colonization and remain independent. Tipu contributed immensely for the welfare and progress of the downtrodden communities in Mysore state. He had the vision of uniting secular forces to defeat divisive forces. The role of Tipu Sultan as a champion of social justice and promoter of collective welfare is analyzed in this article on the basis of qualitative research methodology.

### **Social Reformation**

Tipu adopted the role of a social reformer in his zeal to promote the welfare of his people. He never compromised his ideals, never deviated from his goal, and never submitted himself to the authority of any foreign power. He banned the use of

alcohol and other intoxicants in his kingdom. Several regulations were introduced by Tipu to protect the peasants from the oppressive acts of revenue officials. He also provided some incentives to improve the cultivation. The peasants were not only free from the oppression of the revenue collectors but were also encouraged to bring the waste land under cultivation. He took care in distributing the different varieties of land among the old and new peasants equally. He introduced the cultivation of both food grains and commercial crops to improve the status of peasants. The method of payment of revenue in kind had benefitted the peasants. The revenue regulations demonstrate Tipu's concern for the poor peasants (Crisp, 1792).<sup>1</sup>

Tipu forbade prostitution and the employment of female slaves in domestic service and he also tried to stop the practice of polyandry in Coorg and Malabar. In some parts of Malabar women did not cover themselves above the waist, Tipu decreed that no woman should go about naked. He abolished the custom of human sacrifice which was practice in the temple of Kali Devi near Mysore town (Khan, 1951).<sup>2</sup>

Tipu established a trading company probably with the intention of making Mysore a capitalist country. People of meager income were also allowed to buy shares in it. High dividends were given to persons investing small amounts. He had adopted this measure to encourage and help the feeble, the helpless and the destitute. Tipu carried on commerce and banking activities which benefitted the poor and needy. State shops were also established in every taluk and definite prices were fixed for the purchase and sale of goods and services. Factories were also established in the state. Even though the state monopoly was imposed on a few commodities; the common

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<sup>1</sup>. Crisp, Burrish (1792) *The Mysorean Revenue Regulations*, Translation from Tippoo Sulatun, In *The Possession of Colonel John Murra*, Calcutta, pp.8-52.

<sup>2</sup>. Khan, Mohibbul Hasan (1959) *History of Tipu Sultan*, The Bibliophile Ltd, Calcutta, pp.92-99.

people were not affected. The ports were developed in different places to expand overseas trade (Gopal, 1971).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Gopal, M.H. (1971) Tipu Sultan's Mysore, An Economic Study, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, India, p.24.

## Total Prohibition

The Memorandum of Tipu, 1787 further states: “Total prohibition is very near to my heart. We must think of the economic well being and the moral height of our people and the need to build the character of our youth”. The Prohibition Decree (Regulations No.101) states: “In the villages of your district there are Fakeers’ booths, many of these Fakeers share a practice of administering intoxicating liquors and herbs to the inhabitants and passengers; you are to lay strict injunction upon such Fakeers as have already got fixed booths, to refrain from this mischievous practice; and whoever shall notwithstanding persevere therein is to be expelled from the country; you are also to suffer any more Fakeers booths to be erected in the villages in future”.

With his uncanny insight into human nature, he realized that he could survive to carry out his grand strategy with the goodwill of his subjects over whom he ruled. He did assert his imperial power against orphan girls being sold to temples, against prostitution and polyandry as in Coorg (Kareem, 1989)<sup>4</sup> Tipu struggled all his life to provide better conditions to his people on the basis of democratic values (Ali, 1993).<sup>5</sup>

Tipu had the discernment to perceive what is so generally hidden from the eyes of rulers in a more enlightened state of society, that it is the prosperity of those who labour with their hands which constitute the principle and cause of the prosperity of the state. His country was accordingly the best cultivated and its population the most

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<sup>4</sup>. Kareem, Abdul S (1989) Tipu Sultan’s Quest for Harmony, In. B.Muddachari (Ed), Souvenir, Seminar on National Integration with Special Reference to Tipu Sultan, University of Mysore, Karnataka, India, pp.89-98.

<sup>5</sup>. Ali, Sheik B (1993) Editor’s Note, In B.Sheik Ali (Ed), Tipu Sultan: A Great Martyr, Prasaraanga, Bangalore University, Karnataka, India, p.vii-ix.

flourishing in India, while under the English and their dependencies, the population of Carnatic and Oudh, hastening to the State of deserts, were the most wretched upon the face of the earth (De, 1993).<sup>6</sup>

### **Elimination of Feudal Forces**

Tipu had formulated a progressive agricultural policy which eliminated the feudal forces and intermediaries in the process of agriculture. He had denied the farming rights to government officials and protected the farmers against any oppression by the dominant powers. He had also evolved agricultural production pattern on the basis of distributive justice and development. Tipu wanted the state to be the ultimate benefactor. Tipu showed his egalitarianism by taking steps for fair and efficient land management, a just settlement of the land revenues and protection of the ryot from exploitation. He encouraged commercial agriculture, such as the growth of the indigo, cotton and mulberry plantations (Pande, 1993).<sup>7</sup>

Tipu had developed inclination towards the health and happiness of his subjects. He showed special interest in Unani Medicine. Tipu Sultan was very solicitous for the health of his subjects and he prescribed medicine for them. The letters of Tipu Sultan also depict his keen interest in the development of the system and his deep knowledge about Unani system of medicine. The Selected Letters of Tipu Sultan

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<sup>6</sup>. De, Barun (१९९३) Tipu Sultan's Significance in Contemporary Indian History, Tipu Sultan, a Great Martyr, Bangalore, p.४९.

<sup>7</sup>. Pande, B.N (१९९३) Tipu: A Democrat and Humanist, In. B.Shaik Ali (Ed) Tipu Sultan A Great Martyr, Prasaraanga, Bangalore University, Karnataka, India, p.२२-३२.

reveal Tipu's knowledge pertaining to various fields including medicine (Khan, 2002).<sup>8</sup>

And what is the tradition of this proud land which we call Hindostan? Its entire architecture, from the Taj Mahal of recent times to the ancient Sanchi Stupa of 2000 years ago, was built by free and devoted men. I mentioned this to you because I received a letter from the Governor of Malabar that in his province are excellent workmen whom he has put to work without payment on Government buildings. Knowing of my project to extend the Darya Daulat palace, he has offered them to me. To him I shall say that this Palace commissioned by my father with love shall not be sullied by labour forced from unwilling hands. I shall also order that for all their past work on public buildings, those workmen shall be paid and that henceforth none in my kingdom shall permit or order such forced labour.” – from Tipu Sultan's address to the Council of Ministers in 1789. Tipu introduced policies of austerity by the elite, as part of regenerating productive activity and restoring living standards of the working population. While winning over the hearts and minds of the majority of his people, Tipu seems to have lost the support of several members of his own ruling establishment. While Tipu ordered them to cut down their consumption and adhere to more modest ways, the British offered them fat bribes in return for treachery. Treachery of his own officers brought about Tipu's downfall in the end (Kaur and Udayan, 2008).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>. Khan, Shariq Ali (२००२) Tipu Sultan's Contribution to Unani Medicine and Health Care System, In. Aniruddha Ray (Ed) Tipu Sultan and His Age § A Collection of Seminar Papers, The Asiatic Society, Kolkatta, pp.१८०-१८९.

<sup>9</sup>. Kaur, Surkhraj and Udayan S. (2008) Myth and Reality of Tipu Sultan, Ghadar Jari Hai, July 20, www.ghadar.in.

Tipu had enabled all communities to enjoy the ownership of land. In Malabar, the downtrodden communities were not allowed to own the lands even though they were basically cultivators of the land owned by Nambodaris and the Nairs. He was aware of the ill effects of feudal system and social system which had prevailed in Malabar region. He facilitated the ownership of land to the tillers regardless of their social status. He had used land grants as instruments of State Policy. The women were not allowed to cover the breast by the inhabitants of Malabar. Tipu prevented this inhuman atrocity against the women by enforcing strict laws with an iron hand. He had accorded high priority for social justice and gender justice as an enlightened and humanitarian ruler. His social and economic reforms had far reaching implications. The advent of Tipu in Kerala marked the beginning of the end of the feudal system of administration and its replacement by a centralized system. The feudatories, mainly the Namboodiri Brahmins and Nairs, lost their grip over their lands and were compelled to leave to more secure places like Travancoore, creating a great political vacuum. The Mysoreans introduced a new and comparatively progressive land revenue system from which the intermediaries were exempted. In his passion for reform and modernity, some have even seen parallels with the radicalism of the Paris revolutionaries (Ismail, 2010).<sup>10</sup>

The Mysorean regime in Malabar inaugurated most welcome changes in the socio-political institutions in and economic structure of the country. The feudalistic social and political structure of Malabar was completely swept away and modern

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<sup>10</sup>. Ismail, E (२०१०) From Progressto Polemics: The Administrative Strategies of Tipu in Malabar, In. R.Gopal (Ed) Tipu Sultan: The Tiger of Mysore, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Mysore, pp.२२७-२३१.



trends in these spheres were introduced (Sharafuddeen, 2010).<sup>11</sup> Indeed during Tipu's reign there were many instances of punishments and removal of officers, tax farmers and Jagirdars for their alleged oppression and tyranny over the people of certain parts of the country (Venkataraman, 2010).<sup>12</sup> Tipu had prevented the sale of spirit and banned the liquor shops to improve the health and economic status of his subjects. He provided grants to the orphans, widows and other disadvantaged sections (Mahadevi, 2010).<sup>13</sup>

### **Land to the Landless**

Tipu also maintained a 'no-caste bar' in his army and allotted land to the landless cultivators. The political initiative of Tipu's policy of empowering the oppressed communities changed both the economy and society tremendously (Sadashiva, 2010).<sup>14</sup> Tipu Sultan was aware of the inevitable consequences of polyandry and other social evils. He protected the masses from liquor addiction and helped the marginalized sections of society to get rid of poverty, injustice and exploitation in Malabar (Raju, 2010).<sup>15</sup>

Tipu was radical in his approaches as an administrator. He was the first to ban consumption of alcohol in the entire State, not on religious grounds, but on moral and health grounds. Tipu practically represented multiple traditions. He combined

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<sup>11</sup>. Sharafuddeen (2010) The Mysore Interlude and its Impact in Kerala, In. R.Gopal (Ed) Tipu Sultan: The Tiger of Mysore, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Mysore, pp.232-234.

<sup>12</sup>. Venkataraman, G (2010) Mysore under Tipu Sultan: Some Aspects of Revenue Administration, In. R.Gopal (Ed) Tipu Sultan: The Tiger of Mysore, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Mysore, pp.926-929.

<sup>13</sup>. Mahadevi (2010) Humanitarian Values in the Administrative Reforms of Tipu Sultan, , In. R.Gopal (Ed) Tipu Sultan: The Tiger of Mysore, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Mysore, pp.263-269.

<sup>14</sup>. Sadashiva, K (2010) Tipu's Policy of Empowering the Oppressed Communities, In. R.Gopal (Ed) Tipu Sultan: The Tiger of Mysore, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Mysore, pp.264-268.

<sup>15</sup>. Raju, Nirmal (2010) Tipu Sultan as a Humanist and Social Reformer, In. R.Gopal (Ed) Tipu Sultan: The Tiger of Mysore, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Mysore, pp.269-270.

tolerant inter-religious traditions, liberal and secular traditions, anti-colonialism and internationalism. He accorded high priority for social justice since he had strong roots in Sufism. He was greatly influenced by Sufism which swears by social justice and human welfare.

Tipu implemented total prohibition to save the precious lives of his subjects. He distributed land to the landless backward sections of society and implemented the land reforms regulations before national independence in India. He accorded priority for the eradication of beggary and prostitution and rehabilitated the disadvantaged sections of society on the basis of humanism. He was a strong defender of social justice since he was positively affected by American Revolution and French Revolution.

Tipu Sultan abolished Paligari system and enabled the farmers to own the land and overcome the age old exploitation of land owners. Tipu Sultan also allotted the uncultivated land to whoever wanted to cultivate it and they should not be taxed until they grow the cultivation. Tipu Sultan ordered to maintain the main highways and erect trees on both sides of it. The boundaries of the villages and the plants bordering them were also maintained on the basis of afforestation. Tipu was greatly influenced by the democratic rule in France and adopted democracy as a way of life in Mysore state. He firmly believed that the prosperity of the state was based on the trade and administrative activities. Tipu Sultan started several factories and home industries to make the people prosperous.

### **Economic Justice**

Tipu had started orphan homes all over his kingdom to enable the old people, women and children to live honorable under the patronage of state. He enforced a

Royal decree to eradicate slavery. Tipu Sultan was always keen in bringing reformations, which is the most prominent factor of his kingdom and it was a born gift in him. No doubt Tipu attained a special position among all the emperors before him in this regard (Haroon, 2013)<sup>16</sup>. The social justice oriented administration of Tipu Sultan has been aptly summarized by the scholar on the basis of the original Persian work entitled '*Sultanat E Khudadad*' authored by Mahmood Khan Mahmood.

Tipu was not a religious bigot. His actions must not be seen as being motivated by the religious or the communal, but the political. He had condemned the Hindu and Muslim rulers who had aligned with the British. He also fought against fellow Muslim rulers like the Nawabs of Savanur, Cuddapah and Kurnool, and the Muslims of Malabar and the Mahdavis since they were not true nationalists. He had generously contributed for the Hindu religious institutions and demonstrated his concern for communal harmony and peaceful co-existence in Mysore state. Tipu was not happy with the social conditions of the day. There was wide disparity between different castes. The rigidity of the caste system was intensely high at the time. As far as land relations were concerned, the *jagirdari* system was prevalent. In Kerala, for example, there were communities where women did not cover the upper part of their bodies. Tipu was concerned about the inequalities in society. Tipu abolished this inhuman practice created by the vested interest (Sayeed, 2015).<sup>17</sup> Tipu's religious tolerance is reflected in his annual grants to no less than 156 temples, which included land deeds and jewellery.

<sup>16</sup>. Haroon, Anwar (२०१३) Kingdom of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, Translated from the Persian work, Sultanat E Khudadad, Mahmood Khan Mahmood, Xilbris Corporation, USA.

<sup>17</sup>. Sayeed, Vikhar Ahmed (२०१५) On the life and times of Tipu Sultan, Interview with Prof. Sheik Ali, Frontline, December ११, Chennai, India, [www.frontline.in](http://www.frontline.in)

Tipu banned prostitution and the use of intoxicants, because he felt these were harmful for his people. He was the first ruler in the East who endeavored to apply western method to his administration, and who was not suspicious of Western science. Realizing the importance of trade and commerce, he assumed the role of chief merchant of his kingdom, established factories both at home and abroad, and opened trade relations with a number of foreign countries. Tipu Sultan introduced a novel concept, as far as South India is concerned, in agrarian management. Every ryot was made responsible for the land which was under his possession.

### **State Socialism**

Tipu was a great champion of social justice and state socialism. Tipu was against privatization of economy. He distributed land to the landless peasants who hailed from the marginalized sections of society. He developed industrial sector under the state capitalism and ensured great accountability to the people as a ruler. Tipu had strong ideological commitment and demonstrated absolute creativity in the service of ideology. He abolished beggary, prostitution, human trafficking and all other exploitative tendencies as a progressive ruler and champion of socialism.

Tipu had tried to uproot the British and in the event fell victim to treachery of his own comrades and got martyred. He was a secular, progressive and enlightened forward looking leader. He implemented several progressive measures to bring about social transformation in Mysore state. He strictly ensured the state control of trade, commerce and industries. He implemented the land reforms and enabled the tillers to enjoy the ownership of land in accordance with the principle of social justice. He abolished the forced labor and established centers for the rehabilitation of women and children. He prohibited the sale and use of tobacco and liquor and saved

many precious lives as an angel guardian of social justice. He adopted novel system of the administration of justice and achieved the goal of inclusive development in Mysore State.

Tipu Sultan had promoted movements for reformation of agriculture, women empowerment and to fight atrocities against Dalits, according to A.K.Subbaiah, veteran leader (Shilpa, 2017).<sup>18</sup> Tipu advocated that under his Kingdom the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. He practically combined economics with ethics and ensured state capitalism to protect the interest of his subjects. He was a great trustee of public welfare and implemented several welfare measures which benefitted the weaker sections of the society in Mysore state.

### **Conclusion**

Tipu had followed the standard system of administration for the development of the farmers, artisans, workers and other disadvantaged sections of society. His economic experiments, industrial plans, trade initiatives, agriculture development approaches, cooperative management activities and other nation building endeavors proved that Mysore state had grown as a model state in the country. The people of Karnataka revere Tipu Sultan as a model ruler who practically humanized the process of development despite his continuous pre-occupations with wars and crises. He was a cross-religion icon who stood by social justice centered administration in Mysore state.

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<sup>18</sup> . Shilpa, P (2017) Kodavas have nothing against Tipu Sultan: AK Subbaiah, Deccan Chronicle, Bangalore, India, November 20, [www.deccanchronicle.com](http://www.deccanchronicle.com)

1. Ali, Sheik B (1993) Editor's Note, In B.Sheik Ali (Ed), Tipu Sultan: A Great Martyr, Prasaraanga, Bangalore University, Karnataka, India, p.vii-ix.
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