

## Tippu Sultan – In the eyes of people of Coorg

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### ABSTRACT

This document gives an Analysis of life of Tippu Sultan in the perspective of people of Coorg (Kodagu), a district in Karnataka state, India on the basis of History of Coorg. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss various aspects of life of people in Coorg as seen in the pages of history during the time of Tippu Sultan. An analysis of Social and Political Life of people in Coorg has been done with an emphasis on caste system, tribal life and religious beliefs of people during this time to throw light on the personality of Tippu Sultan especially in the matter of Forcible Religious Conversion.

**Keywords:** Coorg, Kodagu, Kodava, Forcible Conversion.

### INTRODUCTION

Among the kings of India who opposed the suzerainty of the British, Tippu Sultan of Mysore occupies the prime place. He assumes an important position not only in the history of Mysore but also in the history of India as brilliant general, a matured administrator, shrewd politician and a man of virtues.

### DETAIL AND DISCUSSION

The rise of Tippu Sultan is a critical phase in the history of modern India. The British had just begun their efforts to establish their hegemony over India. Sensing the political intensity Tippu was convinced that the British were his staunch enemies and hence did all efforts to thwart their plans. He waged three wars against them and finally was killed while trying to retain his independence. He is a winger person in the history who died in battle field while fighting the enemies. His valor, war strategy and leadership qualities were appreciated by the European generals which speak of his greatness as a ruler.

However, such a vibrant picture of Tippu's personality cannot be seen as far as Coorg history is concerned. The reason being Tippu had inflicted serious wounds in the minds of the people of Coorg. Though he has been depicted in the history of India as either a tragic hero or a hero, he is a villain as far as coorg history is concerned. That is precisely because in the eyes of the people of Coorg Tippu is cruel, criminal, selfish and an opportunist.

This contradiction in his personality has led to confusion among historians. The purpose of this write up is to record some of my observations about Tippu's dual personality.

There is absolutely no difference of opinion regarding Tippu as a great administrator and a fighter. But whether he was a communal or a blind follower of Islam is a question which haunts everyone when we deal with the history of Coorg. Therefore, it is apt here to turn our attention towards the opinions expressed by some of historians and intellectuals.

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Western writers like Edward Thomas and G.T. Garret in their writings have complimented Tippu for his gallantry, administrative skill and zeal for reformation, interest for innovative ideas, scientific and clinical approach in dealing with the problems. According to historians like Dr. Shiek Ali and Kabir Kauser Tippu respected all religions and never indulged in forced conversion. This opinion has been endorsed by litterateurs' ties like Girish Karnad and H.S. Shivaprakash.

In support of their argument, these writers cite the examples of the grants made by Tippu Sultan to Sringeri Math, gifts given to Sri Ranganathswamy Temple at Srirangapatna and non-muslim officers holding high positions in Tippus's army.

Keeping aside this view of Tippu, it is imperative to draw our attention towards the following issues while picturing Tippu's personality from the perspective of the people of Coorg. Those who argue Tippu as a communal who indulged in forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam and also his love for 'Jihad' narrate the following view in support of their argument:

On careful examination of the Indian history, Tippu may be compared with Aurangzeb who was a religious bigot. During his 17 years of rule Tippu caused irreparable damage to Hindu temples and also converted Hindus to Islam much against their wish. If Tippu were a religious tolerant why did he damage Hindu temples? Why did he indulge in forcible conversion? And why did he call the non muslims as kafirs in confidential letters?

In one such letter written on January 19, 1790 to one of his accomplices Badruz Juman Khan he writes: "Do you know about my recent victory in Malabar? I have converted over 4 lakh Kafirs to Islams. Now I have decided to fight against the cursed Raman Nair. I just want to convert him and his entire population to Islam".

It is this approach of Tippu that led to his downfall. Raja Raman Nair not only puts up a brave fight but also seeks the support of the British which resulted in the III Anglo-Mysore war. Lord Cornwallis allied with Dharmaraja of Tiruvankur. Further, with the alliance of Maratha and Nizam of Hyderabad Cornwallis invaded Mysore province from different directions. As a result, Tippu was forced to leave Bangalore and retreat to the fort of Srirangapatna. Ultimately he had to surrender in 1792.

In order to avenge his defeat and get back those provinces which he had lost, he had to win the sympathy of local Hindus. We cannot rule out the fact that Tippu made grants to Sringeri math during this time. Several writers have analysed the letters written by Tippu.

Leela Prasad in his book, "Poetics of conduct: oral narrative and moral being in a south Indian town" and Surendra Nath Sen have expressed their opinion in the following manner: "The time when Tippu made grants to Sringeri Math during 1793 was very critical as he was hunted by his enemies. It became inevitable for him to regain the confidence of Hindu subjects at least temporarily. On the other hand, he also enticed the Marathas towards superstitious beliefs by performing homa and other rituals by Hindu priests and thereby caused fear among them."

To support his argument, we need to look at Tippu's belief in astrology. There were many astrologers in his court and Tippu used to fix proper muhurth for wars and invasions: V.R. Parameshwaran Pillai records such a belief in the following words. "Tippu had lot of faith in astrology. After the humiliating defeat in 1782, the astrologers of Tippu had predicted that he would become Badshah of South India, if he defeated the British. On their advice, Tippu started making gifts to Math and other temples. These gifts were made not out of his love and honour for Hindus, but with an eye to become the Badshah".

As far as Coorg is concerned we get certain instances where in Tippu dealt cruelly with the people of Coorg. Even today we can find the remnants of the Hindu temple which were destroyed by his army

at Mavukal hills near Thithimathi. Similarly, there are many temples which have been ransacked by Tippu. The Jamma Mapilla community is still flourishing in Coorg which is evident to his forcible conversion.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> Anglo-Mysore war, Tippu captured thousands of people from Kodagu and converted them to Islam in Srirangapatna. Some among them escaped and returned to their native places. Veera Rajendra of Coorg helped such people by giving them small pieces of dry land. The number of such people was about twelve thousand according to ‘Rajendra Name’. Those who returned after conversion were supported by Mapillas of Malabar. Though originally they belong to Kodava Community they came to be recognized as Jamma Mapillas following Tippu’s invasion. This community is found even today in places, Nalvathokkalu, Beguru, Chenivada, Mythadi, Kottoli and Kolakeri.

There are many instances to show that these Jamma Mapillas were basically Kodavas. They also have ‘Inmane’ like the Kodavas. Also they use cultural symbols like Dudi (tabala), weapons like Odikatthi and Piche Katthi. Similarly, they also have family names like other Kodava communities. For example: Jamma Mapillas belonging to ‘Alira’ family are found in Beguru village near Ponnampet.

They also have Pallikad (protected forest) like ‘Devkad’ of other Kodava Communities. Palli happens to be their place of worship. However, they are declining their Kodava antecedent. Instead, they are tracing their links to Kerala. Hence the Mapillas are in a state of fix as they can neither claim as Hindu nor admit themselves as Muslims. Tippu Sultan is responsible for this kind of predicament.

Another example is that Tippu appointed a pathan to plunder the wealth of local Kodavas. The pathan used to loot the wealth along with the soldiers. The local who were fed up with his atrocities killed him on a hill near Polibetta in Veerajpet Taluk. Tippu who came to know of this captured locals and punished them severely. He constructed a masjid in memory of such a thug in Polibetta village. That masjid is named after Pathan Baba and the local muslims conduct urus every year. These things prove that Tippu was more interested in promoting his follower Pathan rather than responding to the problems of local people.

If Tippu had been a patriot, he would have taken the support of Nizam of Hyderabad, Marathas and the local Kodavas in driving out the British. Why did he take the support of French and Khalifa? Why did he cunningly attack the local people who were gathered in Devatta Prarambu playground? Why did he appoint Frenchman Monsent Lali as incharge of Kodagu? All these questions raise serious doubts.

There is no doubt that Tippu was an excellent administrator. But it is difficult to conclude whether he was anti-Hindu or religious tolerant or a blind follower of Islam.

Tippu had devoted most of his time for the propagation of Islam and elimination of Kafirs. He had written to the king of Afghanistan Zaman Sha, the translated version of which has been recorded by writer Kabir Kousal. It reads: “We have to fight unitedly against the enemies of our religion. Waging religious war is my ambition”. Going by the gist of the letter it is clear that he was more interested in encouraging his nawabs and soldiers rather than his love for his religion.

After the victory of Mangalore war he converted thousands of Christians to Islam. Those who declined were dragged to Srirangapatna where they were subsequently subjected to harassment.

Similarly, he put down the rebellion of Nairs and forcibly converted them to Islam. This clearly tells that Tippu indulged in forcible conversion to all those who came in his way of Digvijaya. Even today, we find such Christian families in Dhakshina Kannada district and Nair communities in Malabar region. Considering all these, we may come to the following conclusion.

## CONCLUSION

My opinion is that Tippu was neither a patriot nor anti-British. He was also not anti- Hindu or religious tolerant. He was not even a staunch follower of Islam. He was an opportunist and a shrewd administrator besides being a statesman. We cannot simply attribute patriotism to him just because he opposed British. Though he opposed British, he developed friendship with the French. It is pertinent to know that the French had been defeated by the British in Europe and hence they could not establish their colonies in India firmly. They would have established their colonies in India had the British not come here.

If he were to be a staunch follower of Islam, Why did he consider Nizam of Hyderabad as his enemy as the latter was also a Muslim? That clearly shows that conversion was one of the strategies adopted by Tippu to suppress his opponents. To conclude, Tippu was not only an astute politician but also a matured statesman.

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