

A HISTORICAL TELEOLOGY IN COLONIAL TAXONOMY OF GIRISH KARNAD'S THE DREAM OF TIPU SULTHAN

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ABSTRACT

History has always fascinated Girish Karnad like myth and folklore in his creative imagination. For him history is no longer a static background for a play; rather it is timeless, alive, absurd and mysterious in its entirety. History provides him with the elements of a psychoanalysis, political praxis and revolutionary concepts with a shift from socio-political possibilities to pessimism. By writing historical plays he suspends the disbelief of the audience and readers, and generates a new penchant for the protagonists in it. Rewriting history in the job of a historiographer he rather uncovers and discovers it in the contemporary consciousness. For him history not only appears full of events but also of ethics, discourse, universal law and ideologies as tools to liberate a society or the mankind from slavery, bondage and perils. By projecting the historical personalities and events in his dramatic oeuvres he has expressed his concepts as an objective chronicler and transcendent commentator. In the job of an investigator of a parenthesized period he has discovered the living plasmas of these dead heroes debating over them in painful speculations. Karnad's historical plays are research oriented both on individual protagonists and on contemporary social, cultural, political and economic conditions of Indian society. Analyzing definite periods in Indian history and the then prevalent situation he gives a detailed picture of the past for its relevance in the present. Karnad never claims as a reformist but his plays on Indian history convey a covert zeal to homogenise the Indian society. His historical plays – Tughlaq, Tale Danda, and The Dream of Tipu Sultan are first written in kannada and then translated and trascreated into English. Although each of these plays deals with different periods of Indian history from twelfth century to nineteenth century an attempt has been made to critique them not in order of the chronology of their composition but in sequence of the incidents and events that they present. Karnad's The Dream of Tipu Sultan is his third historical play after Tughlaq and Tale Danda based on the historicity of eighth century India. The play exposes the status of Tipu, his psychology, and the stuggle for peace and strategic resistance of this great personality when the princely kingdoms in india were struggling for their individual hegemony, and the British were consolidating their empire. In the dramatization of Tipu's dreams karnad has projected the historical materials in his conscious endeavor without any prejudices, preoccupations, obsessions and conceived canons. Analysing history in the postcolonial prespectives point of view into the then socio-political paradigms. In the job of historiographer and in the self of a dramatist Karnad has carnivalised the dreams and daunlessness of this great personality in a rhetorical and hypothesizes Tipu from colonial imperatives. Analysing Tipu's patriotic past and the needs of his present in a rational and realisitc way, Karnad has assessed Tipu 's right to self-assertion, war stratagem, desire for his kingdom's sovereignty, and his diplomacy for trade and peace. At the same time Karnad project Tipu's personal emotion, love for family and love for his subjects, secular attribute, far-sighted outlook which was akin to the Nehruvian outlook in the twentieth century and dreams for a prospective nationalism in his struggle for freedom from colonial humiliation and exploitation. The play on the one hand projects the imperial victor's contaminated self that pollutes the ideological pollens of imperial politics and a rhetoric of psychological and emotional duress of Tipu in his existential essentialism on the other.

KEYWORDS: *History, psychoanalysis, political praxis, socio-political, prejudices, preoccupations, obsessions and conceived canons.*

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Karnad had his 'obsession' with Tipu which he had inherited from A.K. Ramanujan's unfinished novel in English on the subject. From Ramanujan he had come to know about Tipu's secret diary in which he had recorded his dreams. In 1987 Karnad located a copy of this diary at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library. In 1990, he was among the public figures voiced his strong support for Sanjay Khan's tele serial *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*, on the grounds that Tipu needed to be given his due as a major figure in Karnataka history, a visionary, and a patriot. The historical portrayals of Tipu Sahib or British Valour in India put on at Covent Garden, London, 1791 and folk ballads on Tipu in Karnataka had also inspired him to make the play stage worthy. With these historical materials Karnad could understand India's colonial problems, the overdosed ideology of this philosopher-king, and the chess-board politics among the British, Marathas, the Nizam and Tipu. Karnad points out how the alliance of the evil had checkmated this powerful King. In the historical givens and historical totality Tipu's invincibility, authority, figural dimension and ambitious dreams are portrayed without any ideological aberrations and in a dispassionate distance. The play is a tragedy of a person as well as a notion, and Tipu is represented as the worst victim of the Anglo-French conflict and as the nexus of Indian princes with the British that made a steady headway towards the apocalyptic approach of British imperialism in this subcontinent.

The thought of writing a play on Tipu came to Karnad's mind when he was commissioned by the BBC for a play, in 1996, in honour of India's celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of her independence. While its Kannada version was staged in the precincts of Tipu's Summer palace, Daria Daulat in Seringapatam to commemorate Tipu's two-hundredth death anniversary, in May 1997, its English version was broadcast on 15 August 1997 to make the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence, perhaps in an attempt to caution the Indian nation states to remain aware of the dangers of foreign interference in India's affairs. The play is about the beginning of British colonialism in India, its crucial stages of military expansion and an Indian emperor's inescapable psychodrama. It dramatizes Tipu's fabled persona as the Tiger of Mysore in a historical reconstruction demonstrating his dreams- partly narrated and partly enacted long with his interpretations. The playwright narrates Tipu's four dreams in elegiac tone. Tipu shines as a proto-nationalist who resists English man's schemes to rob his land and believes in Englishman's belief in the destiny of their race, and will to die in faraway places for the dream of England. In colonial historical parenthesis Karnad reconstructs Tipu's ambition for nation building; rational, calculating, pragmatic and ruthless British generals and their racist contempt; hostile Hindu and Muslim allies like Nana Phadnavis and Nizam of Hyderabad in their 'traitorous' collaboration; and others like prominent historian Kirmani, his family members and military officials. Karnad conceived the thought in his understanding of the late eighteenth century socio-political milieu of India in a cartographic imagination in which everything was exhibited as it were, in the painting at memorial complexes or museums. Karnad's sole aim, in this play, is to highlight Tipu's visionary zeal, political strategies, battlefield manoeuvres, modernizing impulses and the populist trade and commerce policies. In the dramatization of his protagonist he has achieved the artistic merit of the play. Tipu was a great visionary, dreamer and utopian nation-builder. As a premature utopian of Indian nationalism he loses his political haemoglobin by interrogating the British imperialism in counter-hegemonic activity. In portraying him Karnad strictly adheres to the historicity without distorting the facts. In the context of the play a comprehensive layout is made on geographical regions, and the periodization of the Anglo-French conflict in the backdrop. Presenting him in the vortex of a major transitional moment in Indian history, "Karnad also casts his protagonist in multiple and contradictory roles-as a beloved ruler, legendary warrior, loving father, and visionary dreamer, but also as the Machiavellian schemer who plots with the French against the English, the defeated soldier who enters into humiliating treaties with the enemy, and the gullible commander who is eventually betrayed by his own side. The towering dimension of Tipu's stature is assessed in his political ideology, philosophy, and in his diplomatic relationships with the neighbouring kingdoms and foreign countries. Tipu was restless but not foolishly callous like his Indian counterparts when the West was establishing its strongholds, to dominate the East. Dramatising this dreamer's vision, humanism and dynamism, Karnad projects Tipu as a casualty of history for his zeal for nationalism and his strategy to tackle his enemies. He appears to be grieved for Tipu's decimation by his peripheral adversaries and British adversaries and British advantages to override him. Tipu's failure as a nation-builder and dreamer lies in his tightrope walking between bargaining for peace and batoning the enemies. Tipu Sultan was called by his volatile English enemy Arthur Wellesley "the tiger of Mysore" (14). The British even after his death had not dared to chop off his whiskers as this tropical tiger had made them restless with bravery, diplomacy and idealism. A serious researcher of history may neglect the relevance of his tie with the French to strengthen his ideological state apparatuses in his contemporary ambience but it is adjudged as a great strength of this dreamer.

In England's territorial ambition the two British Governor Generals –Lord Cornwallis and Arthur Wellesley-had accused him dubiously as ambitious, disloyal and betrayer of friendship. In a dispassionate perspective it can be said if the British signed the Treaty of Versailles with the French to sort out their difference in Europe and Afro-Asian countries for the safety of their extended empire, it is merely a colonial bias to label Tipu's alliance with France a betrayal of faith. His passion for galvanizing his Sultanate with all amenities and successful foreign like the relationship shook his intolerant neighbours like the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad with apprehension. It is obvious that Tipu had borne the envy of his neighbours as his late father Haider All had made restless by occupying parts of their territories. But tipu had tried his best to satisfy them without adding salt to their injury and without insulting the spirit of his father. Tipu was secular in spirit, modern in thought, much above than the thinking of his Indian counterparts and very defiant in his dreams for his reasonable vectors. While negotiating for peace he was never neglecting the interest of his state. He had appointed a Hindu Brahmin, Poornaiya, as Finance Minister, and had high respect for Hindu pundits, seers and astrologers. There were even many Hindu soldiers in his army. He believed superstitiously in Hindu astrology and propitiousness of stars and planets. On his way back from farrukhi near salamabad he was mystified by the stone eyes of the female idols in a dilapidated temple, and turned to poornaiya with the proposal, "we'll have the temple repaired, the walls rebuilt so that these seekers after god are not disturbed"(19). Tipu's respect for other faiths and foreign envoys was expressed in his offering them situations in his Diwan-i-Aam and Diwan-i-khas, and had made him popular at home as well as abroad. The Hindu seers, like the seer of the monastery of Srigeri, had offered them the blessings of Goddess Sharada. Tipu's dreams situate him in a difficult position in history. It is true that Tipu's awakening is a premature outburst of India's mass awakening for independence. But his time was critical from the point of view of a socio-political transition when the West was slouching over the East, and the apocalypse of imperialism in its claustrophobic omnipresence was slowly devouring this subcontinent. He was the first Indian king to explain the British that they were not the only messianic harbingers of civilization with the gifted power to prescribe limitations for the Indian princes rather like a Marxist anti-imperialist he challenged the imperial cause expressing his obligations to his subjects through his societal preoccupations and developmental projects. From time to time England was sending efficient Generals famous for their hawkish diplomacy, to consolidate their empire in India and they succeeded in decimating a powerful sultan like Tipu, and expelling the French from India for good. From each failure the British were learning a new lesson. Tipu had perceived that the English succeeded in India not only because of their superior weapons and warfare, but because of their ability to play off members of the native ruling elite against each other. Thus forging the facts, events and the life and career of this great warrior as the historical materials into his play Karnad has made *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* a great success. The play appears to be a historical teleology in colonial taxonomy. Karnad has attempted his best to defend Tipu's marginalized status in his patriotic past and needy present in post-colonial perspective dousing all colonial bias. Karnad's historical plays are essentially the products of the historical texts, both official and unofficial, objective and subjective, and about dominant and subaltern. In the historical reconstruction Karnad has his self-evolution in the understanding of its personages and incidents. He introduces history in his dramatic praxis in order to express a positive concept incident. He introduces history in his dramatic praxis in order to express a positive concept on Indian society and polity. Each of his historical plays presents his obsession with India's secularism, nationalism and patriotism. He knows that Indian history was written by the British but it evokes suspect in Indian mind. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is a complex poetic rehabilitation of Tipu. In the portrayal of this legendary sultan Karnad presents India's first anticolonial resistance, and crisis in polity due to his internal dissensions and presence of powerful alien adversary. In the presentation of a major transitional moment in Indian history, politics and culture he estimates Tipu's dreams and modernizing impulses to shape Mysore in the 'new idea' of Europe. The play carries the same potential like that of *Tale-danda* and *Tughlaq* in dealing with our contemporary problems that make history relevant even in the twenty-first century.

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