

Representation of History in Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*

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Abstract:

Two sides of a coin is a symbolic representation of history by historians and historical playwrights. Both seek erudition in the subject and discover the recorded facts. Both endeavor in exposing the past to the contemporary generation and ease the research of scholars but in terms of the degree of freedom in writing the history, the historians are restricted to represent history only on the basis of profound evidences and witnesses. They have no purpose to entertain the readers as well as have no propensity to satirize or laugh at historical characters. They have to forward the mirror image of the recorded past without bringing any kind of allusions. On the other side, the historical playwrights have got a higher degree of freedom in representing history to the audience. For example they may modify the elements of history; they may blend the chronology or may discuss an incidence in a stretched manner. They can also convey a didactic message to the society through the representation of the historical character or have the privilege to satirize him also. Sometimes they indicate their purpose of constructing the historical character in the contemporary society by bringing some allusions. They may also add some fictional events or character in order to romanticize or entertain the audience.

Although the historical playwrights have an ample freedom in writing historical plays yet they should not distract the audience from the core of the subject borrowed from history. They should maintain history as indispensable subject and treat it seriously while representing it to the audience otherwise they may pour some imaginary or fictitious ideas as an entertainment.

*By following the above theory, my paper attempts to analyze how historical playwrights have applied history in their plays and to what extent they maintain the coherence between the historical truths and its literary representation and I confine my study on Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, the play based on Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore in the late eighteenth century. So, this paper analyzes the representation of the historical character Tipu Sultan and how he has been fictionalized in literature.*

Key words: Allusions, Didactic, Historians, Historical Playwrights, History, Tipu Sultan, Mysore.

After the success of *Tughlaq* as a famous historical play in 1964, Girish Karnad wove a new historical play - *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997) which is based on the story of monarch Tipu Sultan of Mysore (India), who reigned from 1782-1799. This play brings the focus to the dreams which were seen by Tipu Sultan and had been great inspiration for him as they inspired him to endeavor against wrongs, evils, hypocrites and obviously the British and also persuaded him to raise wars against them. This is why he is hailed as 'Freedom Fighter' who got inspired by his 'real dreams'.

Tipu Sultan was a great warrior who spent more than half of his life on horseback. He had perfidious hatred for British and fought many wars against them but at the same time he also admired their uprising technologies and administrative methods. He never justified Divide and Rule Policy amongst different religions and caste. He said:

The Quran requires you to say to people of scripture. We believe in that which has been revealed into us and revealed into you: our God and Your God is one and into him we surrender. We hold this God – given law dear to our heart, based as it is on human dignity, reason and brotherhood of man. With reverence we have also read the Vedas of the Hindus. They proclaim their faith in universal unity and express the belief that God is one although. He bears many

names. (tipusultan.net/what1.htm)

These positive aspects of Tipu Sultan fascinated Karnad and led him to write on his life when the BBC commissioned him to write a play to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Indian Independence in 1996. He favored writing on Tipu Sultan and in order to support his work, he said that Tipu Sultan has been misrepresented in history books and he is called a fanatic. But these words were actually promoted by the British who had a bitter treachery against him. He said:

Sultan was the only one who had perceived a threat to the country from the East India Company. . . He was a thinker and visionary, who represented the best of Karnataka. Unfortunately, he has been misunderstood by the people of his own country and a lot of Untruths were spread about him. (The Hindu, 13 Sep, 05).

No doubt, Karnad takes a separate theme in the modern and globalized world. He even justifies his decision of writing on the history of Tipu Sultan and provides ample proofs for this. But the point which is to be taken into consideration is that whether he is able to narrate the real history of Tipu Sultan in the play. Does he corroborate the facts of recorded history accordingly? Does he rank his plot up to the level of the real history or does he merely implant an artificial concept in the chronicle of Tipu Sultan to make it an entertainment? These questions will be dealt with in the course of this article to analyze the play as a historical play.

Since we are analyzing the treatment of history of the Mysorean ruler in Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* in this article, a comparative account of the monarch Tipu Sultan and the fictional Tipu Sultan are undertaken and in order to avoid the confusion between these two characters, we will represent the former as Tipu Sultan and latter as Tipu ahead for the convenience in the study.

When we talk about the analysis, then we first focus our

attention on the dreams which were seen by Tipu Sultan because the whole play is centered on his dreams. These dreams were inspiration for Tipu Sultan. They motivated him to peer through the rights and wrongs and to justify the right one. These dreams are the sources which inspired Tipu Sultan to fight against his enemies bravely and those who attacked his nation.

Karnad uses some of the dreams seen by Tipu Sultan and applies them to his play. He tries to show that these dreams are the predictions which take shape of reality but antithetically in Tipu's life, these are only narrated through Kirmani in the play. In the very first scene, Karnad talks about his dreams which were recorded by Tipu in a letter and were handed over to his loyal employee Kirmani before his death. But, after his death, Kirmani betrayed him and reveals about his dreams to Colonel Mackenzie:

I forget all about the letter, naturally, with all that followed. Next day, I found it in my pocket. Reluctantly, I broke open the seal. Inside was a paper on which he had recorded the dream he had had the previous night. His last dream with that m history ends. Yours begins. (Pause). (9)

There are many dreams recorded in the real history which were seen by Tipu Sultan and they explored meaning through them. In fact, he introduced a book as *the dreams I have had and am having*. Once he dreamt of an animal which looked like a cow but striped like a tiger and did not possess hind legs. This dream symbolizes that Britishers are cows, but roar like tigers however due to the absence of hind legs; they can't get victory against Tipu Sultan. Thus, they would be defeated. In another dream, he dreamt of the Idols came to life and sought for salvation. He then got a derelict temple repaired for their salvation. In another dream, the tower of a temple collapses during a festival. He then rushes there and enquires about the safety of the people. He also dreamt of the divine spirits which assist him in winning over the British with the help of the

Marathas and the French.

Karnad applies some of these dreams in the play. For instance, he takes his dream of Idols and creates a proper scene. Tipu visits a temple with Poornaiya, the Finance Minister and finds some idols in moving states. He gets staggered. He asks them, "who are you?" They reply that we are idols and we seek our salvation. Tipu says to them in pity:

So be it ladies keep yourselves occupied with thoughts of God.
Come, Poornaiya. Let's go. We'll have the temple repaired, the
walls rebuilt so that these seekers after God are not disturbed.
(Sc - 4, 19).

In another dream, he sees the Marathas as a young woman dressed in male attire. This dream has significance to Tipu Sultan, when he wakes up in the morning and realizes that the Marathas have actually tricked him:

You have tricked me. You've inveigled the *padshah* into giving you audience, into taking to you. Get out of here! Out! ... After consulting my closest advisers, I interpret this dream in the following fashion. May it please God, though these Marathas are dressed in male attire, they will in fact prove to be women?
(Sc - 6, 29-30).

In a dream, Tipu dreams of defeating the British with the assistance of his employees like Mir Sadiq, Poornaiya, Nadeem Khan, and Qammaruddin, who in reality deceived him. Karnad beautifully portrays this dream. In the background of the music each person is in a cheerful mood. Tipu is willing to celebrate the defeat of the British with the help of his employees and says to all:

Muizzin, Fath Muhammad, Abdul Khaliq, call the entire *zenana* out. Invite them to the ramparts sea the white plague departs. Let's all watch a new era down. Then we'll go to the garden and see the pegu loses bloom. (Sc - 16, 64).

"That was Tipu's last dream" (64) Kirmani reveals his dreams

to the British and says that after that he dies in the war because his own employees betrayed him.

Apart from these inspiring dreams, Karnad introduces one more dream in Scene-13, where Tipu feels lonely and depressed. His father Hyder Ali appears in his dream and blames Tipu for bartering his sons to the British because he could not dare to hit the right nail on their head. When Haider asks Tipu:

“You are scared of them”. (51)

He replies suddenly:

No, I 'm not. No, if it was only for money, they would betray each other. But there's never any treachery against their own kind- no back stabbing. They believe in the destiny of their race. Why can't we? (Pause) When our fort was besieged by Cornwallis. I knew several of my officers had already started secret negotiations with him. I even knew who they were. My trusted officers. Yet I couldn't expose them without bringing the whole edifice down. I had to keep saying they were the true pillars of my kingdom that I depended on their loyalty to me and my family - and hope for the best. Hope that when the moment came, they wouldn't stab me in the back. But the English fight for something called England. What is it? It's not a religion that sustains them, nor a land that feeds them. They wouldn't be here if it did. It's just a dream, for which they are willing to kill and die. Children of England! They have conquered our land, plundered its riches. And now they have started taking away our children. Mine — (51-52).

Karnad through the dreams of Tipu shows his potentiality and keen interest to drive out the British from his nation. He shows Tipu, the fictional character a patriot and valiant as what real Tipu Sultan was.

There is one more thing which can be discerned through the dreams of Tipu, the fictional character that these make beliefs are contrary to the realities around him. Karnad here briefs the real history of Tipu Sultan through these dreams. The realities around him were very harsh unlike his hopeful

dreams. For instance Tipu Sultan dreams of the Marathas as his friends, although they were his enemies. In fact due to the deception made by the Marathas to Tipu Sultan, half of his kingdom was surrendered to the British. Karnad picks up these details from real history and uses them in the fictional work. He shows Tipu's dreams, his success in major fields, and even his destined failures which are different from his dreams.

If we talk about his success and his failures together, we discover that Tipu Sultan was a great warrior and he never got scared to fight against wrong. For instance he from his youth was fully engaged into the continuous wars until his fall in the fourth Mysore war. The purpose of these wars was to eliminate the British from the nation and to establish a prosperous, flowering and tranquil state.

Tipu Sultan was seventeen years old in the first Mysore war which was resolved in 1767 when Tipu Sultan presented Haider's negotiations with the Nizam and got his father won. Tipu Sultan obtained the ratification of the Treaty of Alliance between Nizam and Haider. Even Nizam got impressed by his diplomatic work and conferred on him the title of *Nasib-ud-daula* i.e. fortune of the state (Hasan, 11)

By the time of second Mysore war, Tipu Sultan had gained lots of experience in diplomacy as well as in warfare. In Mysore — Maratha war of 1769-1772, he recovered the territories which the Marathas had occupied. During the second Mysore war, (September 1780) he inflicted crushing defeat on Colonel Baillie near Polilur, Baillie was imprisoned. Out of 86 European officers 36 were killed, and 3820 were taken prisoners of whom 508 were Europeans. In December 1781, Tipu had seized Chittur from the British. The English could not resist this humiliation and toiled hard from 2nd March 1784 to vanish Tipu's power (Hasan, 15).

The Nizam and the Marathas also fought with Tipu Sultan from 1785 to 1787. The second Mysore war came to an end in April, 1787 by the Treaty of Gajendragadh. Tipu Sultan

was highly disappointed by the experience of this war because both the Marathas and the Nizam shook hands with the English in a powerful confederacy against Tipu Sultan for the Third Mysore war also.

Third Mysore war was a hidden attack on Tipu Sultan at night. Lord Cornwallis was successful in trespassing from six miles into Srirangapatna on 6th February, 1792 with Marathas and Nizam. This war was a serious blow to Tipu Sultan as he had to make peace by surrendering half of his kingdom, and paying three crore as indemnity, he bartered his two sons Muizzin and Abdul. He had to release all the prisoners those who were captured since from the time of Haider Ali (Fernandes, 147-148)

Karnad touches the wire of these wars in his play and brings these issues into the limelight. For instance in scene-seven, Colonel Malet visits to Nana Phadnavis and offers him to raise war against Tipu. Nana doubts his terms. He asks Malet then. "You signed a treaty of friendship with Tipu Sultan Khan Sahib not so long ago at Mangalore."(31)

At this, he replies: "The treaty of Mangalore was forced on us" (31) He defends his nation and tries to blame Tipu for the cause of second Mysore war.

In scene - eight, Kirmani narrates third Anglo - Mysore war to the British, He Says:

In 1790, Lord Cornwallis invaded Mysore. The Nizam and the Marathas launched parallel attacks. After a seesaw war that stretched over two years, with no end in sight, Cornwallis reached the foot of the fort of Seringapatam, saw the futility of trying to capture it and retreated disheartened... But on their return journey, the English forces ran into the Marathas with their abundant supplies. The two joined forces attacked Srirangapatam. Tipu was forced to sue for peace. (37)

Karnad shows how Tipu settles old scores after he lost in the third Mysore war by agreeing on four conditions. In scene — nine, Poornaiya utters all the conditions to Tipu. When the

fourth conditions of bartering the sons come, Poornaiya does not speak. Tipu then takes the paper from him:

All right then. I'll read it out myself. Hand me the paper
(Reads) The last condition; two hostages to be handed over to the English to be kept with them until the terms of the treaty are agreed upon, signed and sealed. (Pause) Two of my sons.
(41)

And the voices make noise. Some say that it is outrageous; some say that this is barbaric. There is angry protest in his chamber. Tipu after a long silence comments:

This is the new language that has come into our land: English. This is the culture of that language. English Boys of seven and eight as hostages of war. (42)

The fourth Mysore war has a strong impact on Karnad's play. It is the last war of the Mysorean ruler - Tipu Sultan's life. After the third Mysore war, Tipu Sultan got his sons back, he regained his power. He increased his contacts with the French, the Turks and the Afghans. Napoleon also intended to assist Tipu Sultan.

But, Unfortunately Napoleon was defeated at Accre in Syria and was forced back to France. On the other side, in 1793, Sir John Shore became General in place of Cornwallis and in 1798, Lord Wellesley became Governor-General. Wellesley fought against Tipu Sultan and won the war. He presented some conditions in front of him. One is that Tipu Sultan will surrender half of the kingdom. Tipu Sultan will pay twenty lakh pounds to English within six months. They will keep his two elder sons and four honest employees in the custody of English. Tipu Sultan did not accept these conditions and fought bravely in the war (Moon, 288). He was shot dead by a soldier. His two sons were taken as prisoners in Calcutta.

Fisher speaks of the history of Tipu Sultan in his history book *Indirect Rule in India*:

Finally ignoring Tipu Sultan's belated and qualified

acceptance of such an envoy, Wellesley ordered the poised armies of the company loosed into Mysore. These armies smashed their way into the Mysore capital. By May 1799, Tipu Sultan lay among the piles of dead defenders of that capital. (Fisher, 404)

Tipu Sultan's unfortunate death has been shown in the play too. In scene-fifteen, Tipu worriedly responds to the conditions which were sent to him. He says:

And now they have asked for four of my sons as hostages and half my kingdom again- half of the half they left me last time. (Pause) By the time the next governor general takes over. I'll be left with half street and none of my sons. (Pause) Shall I accept? (Pause) And don't say, Poornaiya, that you had warned me. I knew the English wouldn't like my extending my hand to the French. So what? Shall I Spend the rest of my life looking with anxiety at the English for smiles of approval or frowns of displeasure? Today I am the only one in India who won't bow and scrape before them. So they want to humiliate me. I'm told England is buzzing with stories of what a monster I am and how I need to be subdued. (Pause) Shall I allow myself to be subdued? (Pause) The English make impossible conditions. They expect me to reject them. I could throw their whole strategy into confusion by accepting these terms? Shall I be subtle and accept?" (60)

And, finally he denies the conditions and gets ready for the war against the British and says that the future is ours. Without knowing the fact that English has already surrounded the fort of Seringapatam.

Kirmani in the last scene narrates Tipu's end as:

"That was Tipu's last dream. That afternoon he was killed in battle. . . .The battle of Seringapatam was lost before it had begun." (Sc. - 16, 64)

Karnad makes best use of the wars in the play. He briefs about all the wars but he is unable to make us realize that wars actually take place into action and two oppositions fight. He

does not give dramatic effects to the wars in the play. No doubt, there are the scenes which are devoted on the real history, but none of the scenes displays proper elaboration of the war except scene — two that shows the post war effects. In this scene, as the fourth Mysore war ends, the soldiers eagerly search out the demise of Tipu Sultan. A soldier shouts after finding the corpse of Tipu: “Colonel, I think we’ve found him careful. That one with the gold buckle on his belt. Lift him out.” (14)

Despite giving full account on these wars which took place in Tipu Sultan’s life, Girish Karnad elucidates more about Tipu Sultan’s interest in the innovations in various fields and his alliance with various nations. Tipu Sultan wanted to introduce the technological substances in India. He wanted to develop a strong army, navy equipped with advanced technology to invade Europeans.

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam pays homage to Tipu Sultan during the Hazrath Tipu Sultan Shaheed Memorial lecture organized by the Al-Ameen Educational Society in Bangalore on 30th November 1991. He is amazed by his rocket technology system:

Rocket technology engulfed me for two decades since my visit to Srirangapatna in 1960. The question continued to haunt me “How Tipu Sultan would have led to the world’s first war rocket?” what environment was responsible for the birth, of such a technological innovation in our country. In August 1974 I received a paper presented by Frank H. Winter of National Air and Space Museum Washington USA, titled “The Rocket in India from ancient times to the 19 century.” This highly ‘Agni Astra’ from Vedik hymns to Tipu’s war rocket with eighteen class references. (<[http://www.google .com](http://www.google.com)>)

Tipu Sultan also had keen interest in trade mainly of sandalwood and ivory trade. He even brought the silk industry from China.

Kamad is influenced by Tipu Sultan’s passion of developing India as a developed land and this influence is clearly seen in the play.

Tipu addresses the conference and praises the apples which were brought from Kashmir. He then, talks about the silkworms and eggs:

So where were we? Ah, Yes! To the list drawn up for our delegation, add silkworms and eggs from the island of Jezeriah Diraz near Muscat We need glass. We need guns. We need cannons. Shall we keep buying them from abroad? Even for that we need money. And shall we be content with the pittance we get by taxing our businessmen when we have ivory and sandalwood freely available? Can an individual trader deal in Sandalwood? For centuries we begged and borrowed silk from the Chinese. And every one predicted disaster when I got a few eggs from China. And now we have a flourishing industry of our own. (Sc - 5, 21)

Tipu also explains the functions of Thermo - meter to all in the same scene. On hearing about it, Poornaiya reacts excitedly:

“Pardon me, sir, but can such a thing be possible?” (25)

“I look forward to seeing this wonderful instrument, your Majesty.” (26)

Tipu plans to include a gardener and varieties of trees, flower and bushes to be brought along. A doctor, a surgeon, a smelter, a carpenter, a weaver, a blacksmith, a locksmith, a cutter etc are included in the list to be brought from France.

Even in his dream, he makes believe that the emperor of China has sent him a white elephant and some horses as a token of his friendship in scene-four. Karnad successfully interprets this dream in the words of Tipu:

In the meantime morning dawned and I rose. My interpretation of the dream is that God Almighty and our prophet will make me another Alexander and the many faiths in my kingdom will depend upon me for protection and succor. (20)

Before coming to the next analysis, we shall recall the phrase “Honesty is the best policy”. The employees worked under the

service of Tipu sultan as true as steel, betrayed him after his death Poornaiya, his most trusted employee also deceived him. Stein remarks Poornaiya as:

In 1792-93 and again in 1799, when Séringapatam was finally captured and Tipu killed, the Company received substantial help from scribal, commercial and gentry groups inside Mysorean territory itself. Indeed, following Tipu's death and the restoration of the Hindu dynasty that Haider had replaced, financial administration of the kingdom was left in the hands of Tipu's own dream, the *brahman* Pumiah, who shortly afterwards received the reward of a substantial *jagir* for his services to the English. (Stein, 210)

Kirmani betrayed him. The Marathas, the Nizam assisted the British to vanish Tipu Sultan. In fact this was the only reason which laid Tipu Sultan to his death bed.

Karnad has not lost the chance even to reflect its fine imagery in the play. Kirmani a disloyal servant to Tipu in the play says to the British:

Mir Sadiq conduct of the war was so openly treacherous that his own troops lynched him. Nadeem khan, the Qilledar, had ordered a pay parade for his troops at the very moment of British assault, thus taking them away from the battle front, Poornaiya slipped with alacrity into the post of Prime Minister under the new regime. Qamaruddin was by his side. The battle of Seringapatam was lost before it had begun. (64)

But, after some years, British destroyed their powers also. Fisher records the history in his book *Indirect Rule in India* and says that after the conquest of Tipu in 1799, British defeated the Marathas in 1818.

Thus, this history proves that honesty is the best Policy lest it would bring disaster to the disloyal also. But, here Karnad skips to describe about the perishable stage of his disloyal servants after his death. He does not talk about what happens to them after they had participated in Tipu's assassination. Even Marathas, Nizams are not shown in details

after the death of Tipu. However he gives a very short statement about his sons in the postscript that is:

When India became independent in 1947, the families of Maharajas who had bowed and scraped before the British masters were granted sumptuous privy purses by the Government of India while the descendants of Tipu Sultan were left to rot in the slums of Calcutta. (65)

Apart from these limitations, we find more spaces in the play which are not filled by Karnad. As we have mentioned earlier that Karnad is unable to picture the wars as they are recorded in the history. In fact he blends the chronology of wars which were held between Tipu Sultan and his enemies and bewilders the readers to convey his objective in the relevance of wars. But, no doubt, he successfully presents the Verbal — Wars. If a reader is acquainted with his history perfectly, then he would not have problem to understand the play.

One more limitation is noticed in the play that Karnad does not show the direct communication of Tipu with his rivals except in scene - twelve, where Tipu communicates satirically to the Maratha Hari Pant and warns them about their pathetic fate. He says to Hari Pant:

Rubbish; Cornwallis has saved me because without me in South India, you Marathas would become too powerful. You are being carefully contained. No, don't reply. And please don't come out of the tent to see me off. I shall find my way. This is still my land. Only one word of caution, Hari Pant. Make sure it's not your children next time. (55)

Karnad presents only narrating history by showing the communication held between his employees and the British. Kirmani narrates Tipu's history to Colonel Mackenzie. Tipu does not talk to his enemies personally. He does not give him an opportunity to warn the British, the Marathas and the Nizam except the scene mentioned above. If it were there, then the play would have had more fine dramatic imagery.

Karnad shows Tipu's generousities, humanity and liberality, his living dreams and his important decisions but *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* as a whole, details only external history. It does not picture the exact situations and events. We can favour the opinion of Dr. Ramachandra Deva, a playwright who says that *The Dreams of Tiu Sultan* limits itself to efficiently dramatizing the external details of history, and not its inner contradictions. But Tipu's life was so colorful and engaging, then even an efficient dramatization of details provided by the history has made it very readable.

Although, he presents external history embodies of silver tongued dialogue, he in fact presents Tipu Sultan as his best. He presents him as the greatest individual in Karnataka. He says that Tipu Sultan is the only person whom he can sense as not an intellectual but an intelligent person. He has a sense of vision to see what's happening around him and how to reform it. Karnad says that for him he is the greatest Kannadiga. (The Hindu, 13 Sep.2005).

Thus, Karnad presents history and its important figure with a substance and leaves certain events which could have been stretched at their best. He intends to present his dreams that have paradoxical effect in his life. This is why he has not titled the name of the play as the *Wars fought between Tipu Sultan and his Rivals* or *The Rivals of Tipu Sultan*, but *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* has been ascended by Girish Karnad.

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