

GIRISH KARNAD'S THE DREAMS OF TIPU SULTAN : A STORY OF POLITICAL POWER CONFLICT

Dr. Shibani Basu Dubey

Asstt. Professor (Department of PG Studies in English)

Mata Gujri Mahila Mahavidyalaya (Autonomous), Jabalpur

Abstract:- The play *The dreams of Tipu Sultan*, deals with the world of dreams secretly recorded by one of India's most famous warriors. The figure of Tipu Sultan has continued to dominate Indian and British imagination for over two centuries. Plays and novels about his tempestuous life and tragic end testify the same. What, however, is less well known is that this man, who spent a large part of his life on horseback, maintained a record of his dreams, which he kept concealed from his nearest associated. The Dreams of Tipu Sultan examines the inner life of this warrior, political visionary, and dreamer. The story follows the last days as well as the historic moments in the life of the ruler of Mysore through the eyes of an Indian court historian and a British Oriental Scholar. A personage Karnad describes as "one of the most politically perceptive and tragic figures in modern Indian history".

Introduction

The play *The dreams of Tipu Sultan*, deals with the world of dreams secretly recorded by one of India's most famous warriors. The figure of Tipu Sultan has continued to dominate Indian and British imagination for over two centuries. Plays and novels about his tempestuous life and tragic end testify the same. What, however, is less well known is that this man, who spent a large part of his life on horseback, maintained a record of his dreams, which he kept concealed from his nearest associated. The Dreams of Tipu Sultan examines the inner life of this warrior, political visionary, and dreamer. The story follows the last days as well as the historic moments in the life of the ruler of Mysore through the eyes of an Indian court historian and a British Oriental Scholar. A personage Karnad describes as "one of the most politically perceptive and tragic figures in modern Indian history".

Tipu (1750-1799) presented himself as a very complex and fascinating character- a great warrior who spend more than half his life on horseback, but also made the time to carefully record and preserve his fragile world of dreams; a man who hated the British and fought them all his life, but also admired them for their administrative methodology and trading skills.

Political power conflict in the play

Karnad's radio play, *The dreams of Tipu Sultan*, painted the character with all these complexities, moving back and forth between historical events and dreams that were as "real" to the dreamer as the events themselves. The Jnanpith-award winning playwright later rewrote it for stage, and it saw productions in both English and Kannada.

The story of Tipu Sultan clearly exhibits that the English were afraid of Tipu Sultan, the only person in South Indian, as they were very well aware of his capabilities and skill in handling the administration and the defense system of his kingdom. The play rescues Tipu from colonial perceptions and presents him refracted through history in a different perspective, that of independent India. More importantly the play is, in a collective sense, reclamation of history, a truth too close to our heart for it to ever fail as a play. When a historical figure as large as Tipu Sultan captures the imagination of a playwright of Girish Karnada's stature, the upshot is bound to be a masterpiece.

The play commissioned by BBC Radio in 1996 to commemorate to years of Indian dependence is undoubtedly one "Karnad's mode of bringing into play dreams and real incidents

(which are not so watertight, really) allows the playwright to go beyond dates and events, and explore the inner and outer worlds of a visionary who worked with a sense of building a nation." It's interesting that the opening scene of the play juxtaposes the Western and the Oriental ways of reading history ---- of Mackenzie, a stickler for facts, and Kirmani, a court historian, for whom Tipu's dreams also make for vital information. Karnad seems to read history from a position in between, incorporating both perspectives in measured doses. Incidentally, it was Late A.K. Ramanujan who drew Karnad's attention to the dreams Tipu recorded, the originals of which are now in the India House Library in London.

Karnad's choice of Tipu as his subject not only had to do with a 200 years-old history, but also with history as well live it now. "At the point of time, there was a great movement against. Tipu by the right wing fundamentalist groups, trying to picture him as a fanatic... Trying to paint an 18th Century man in terms of 20th Century prejudices."

It irks Karnad that the right wing groups talk endlessly about the conversions Tipu carried out, but black out the fact that he gave shelter to the Sringeri swamiji while the Marathas were plundering the place. "There is no doubt the he converted people in the coast and in Coorg. In that sense he here. They didn't convert because there is no conversion to Hinduism. But they raped, looted, burnt down fields, razed village to grounds... It's, in fact, equally ridiculous to condemn the Marathas because Sringeri had lots of money"

Karnad further points out that the Kannada text of the play has on its cover a mural of a temple near Mysore that shows Tipu being welcomed into the temple. There are also ballads in Kannada that sing glories of Tipu's generosity. Pointing out the notions of religious splits can't be arrogated to those who lived two centuries ago, Karnad says: "Remember that the Nizams fought Tipu."

But aren't we predating another 20th Century notion when we talk of Tipu as a

nationalist, as Karnad does in the play? In a dream sequence in the play, Tipu tells his father Hyder Ali: "... 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 they did. It's just a dream for which they are willing to kill and die..."(Act.I)

Karnad admits that nationality is a modern notion. He adds, "but let me say that of the 18th and 19th Centuries people who fought the British, he is one of the few who had sense of British as 'foreigners'... Tipu hated the British. He was the only man in the entire history who never allowed a Resident in his court."

And if one needs greater proof of his interest in the nation-building process, one only has to look at what Tipu did beyond the battlefield. "One of the reasons why the British destroyed him was because he was becoming strong in terms of trade. He nationalized the sandalwood and ivory trade. He brought the silk industry from China He looked for ports for trade".⁷

Through the play, there are references to Tipu's keen interest in upgrading trade, technology, agriculture, and taxation on the lines of the British system. In a touching sequence, Tipu tells his queen Ruqayya: "They dislike me for being so adept a pupil" (Act.II) Karnad attributes a lot of the prosperity of later Karnataka to the reforms Tipu carried out.

Karnad, in fact, sees Tipu as the greatest individual Karnataka has produced in the last few centuries. If he has to name three great moments in the entire history of Karnataka, he would pick the times of the Vachanakaras, of the Vijayanagar empire, and then of Tipu Sultan. "Look at the last 150 years. A state such as Maharashtra produced Tilak, Phule, Ambedkar... But in Karnataka there is no equivalent. The only person I can sense as not an intellectual but an intelligent man is Tipu. In him you see an effort to understand what's happening around him, to understand it, to reform it probably. With Tipu there is a sense of

vision... which I cannot see in any other individual in Karnataka after the battle of Taikota in 1565..."

Recalling the circumstances under which he wrote the play, Karnad says: "It's an interesting twist that I was actually commissioned by the BBC, for broadcasting in England, on Indian Independence."

The play sees the gap between the apparent present --- where Hussain Ali Kirmani, the court historian, and Colin Mackenzie, the Oriental scholar, are trying to reconstruct Tipu's life; the past --- how Tipu lived and what he aspired for ; and Tipu's dreams --- which he recorded, along with his interpretations of them, in a book.

Though he is writing of events that happened over two hundred years ago, Karnad's situations and dialogues have a touch of the modern world--- with many references to issues of trade, commerce and governance that continue to dog the world. The worlds of the British representative Charles Malet, when he urges the Maratha statesman, Nana Phadnavis, to join the English against Tipu to punish a man who is "the enemy of all mankind," have tones of George Bush urging the world to back his war on terror.

Karnad explains the Tipu's interests extend beyond the scope of trade, administration, war and politics to all things new, scientific and innovative. For a soldier who spent most of his life fighting many a battles and wars, Tipu was a man with a keen, enquiring mind and a desire to learn and move ahead. Throughout the play, Tipu's admiration for the Europeans is evident. Karnad brings

dreams and reality into play, without really defining the boundaries between the two. The real glides into the dream world and back so seamlessly that in the closing scene, one almost believes that Tipu has won the Fourth War of Mysore that the "English are fleeing, that the roses are blooming" (Act. V), until the scene shifts back to Kirmani saying that was Tipu's last dream. He died that afternoon, fighting the British and his men betrayed him.

Conclusion :

The sense of disappointment is acute proving that Karnad is a brilliant playwright who can sweep you along with his words and his imagination. The semi-matter-of-fact, almost hurried way in which Kirmani and Mackenzie sum up Tipu's last battle and the subsequent developments in India in the closing of the play is more powerful than stretched-out words detailing treachery and deceit could have been.

Tipu was a ruler but maybe he could not turn into hungry politician and evolve victorious. He wanted power but on Aristotelian terms. His dreams were bit but ultimately he died in the battle field proving the futility of his efforts to acquire power.

References :

- Shalini Umachandra, Literary Review, The Hindu Sunday, Dec 05, 2004.
- <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2005/20051204/spectrum/> visited on 1st May 2003.
- P. Gpichand & P.N. Suseela, Lecturers in English, Review by Rhoda Koenig Wednesday, 12 June 2002.
- Mandartalvekar Permalink: 7/10/2005 <<http://inkscrawl.blogspot.com>>