

Camilla Diana B H

Assistant Professor

St. Xavier's college for Women

Aluva

India

Email-dianaharold13@yahoo.com

### Exploring the Untold History in Girish Karnad's Play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*

#### Abstract

*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is a play written by Girish Karnad. The play deals with the 18<sup>th</sup> Century ruler of Mysore, Tipu Sultan. Karnad emphasizes the fact that Tipu Sultan was a ruler who was misrepresented in History. It showcases another side of history that was not chronicled by the British Historians. In this work Tipu Sultan is projected as a visionary and a person ahead of his times. It actually displays the petty mindedness of British rulers who couldn't tolerate an efficient ruler like Tipu Sultan. Tipu was a soul who wanted to take his nation to a superior heights but people couldn't match his ideas and thus got a controversial image. Karnad has opted an amalgamation of history and characteristics of a dream play in conveying a legitimate identity to the play. This research paper endeavors to analyze the retold history portrayed by Karnad in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*.

Key Words: History, Dream, Tipu Sultan

#### Main Content

Girish Karnad renowned Indian playwright, author and a versatile actor was born in the city of Bombay. This Jnanpeeth Awardee, who belongs to the post-Independence era, mainly pens in Kannada. His works include *Yayati*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Taledanta*, *Hayavadana* etc. Folklore, mythology, history and complexities of contemporary life becomes the representative themes of his works. In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* Karnad tries to highlight the last days of Tipu Sultan and tries to convey a counter history hidden by the western hegemonic agenda.

*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* or *Tipuvina Kanasugalu* is a play written by Girish Karnad in 1997. It deals with the life of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore during the 18 century. The play is beautifully presented through the perspective of Indian Court historian Kirmani and British Oriental scholar Colin Mackenzie. The play is more than a history experience. Author

portrays Tipu Sultan as a dreamer, a visionary and a man ahead of his times. He unfolds the real Tipu Sultan which is hidden from the history. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* was originally written for BBC to celebrate the fiftieth year of Indian Independence.

The play starts with a conversation between Kirmani and Mackenzie and moves the action to the year 1799, the year British seized Srirangapattanam and killed Tipu Sultan. In this play Karnad takes into consideration the fact that Tipu was literally a dreamer. Tipu used to record his dreams which in turn motivated him.

In one of his dreams he visions of his visit to a dilapidated temple with his finance minister Poornaiya. When he enters the temple he sees that the idols in the temple becomes alive and starts talking with the ruler. On his conversation with the idols Tipu comprehends that they are seeking for salvation and wants the temple to be rebuilt. Tipu replies with empathy “Come, Poornaiya. Let’s go. We’ll have the temple repaired, the walls rebuilt so that these seekers after God are not disturbed”. (19). Here we see a tolerant leader who is all prepared to seek the prosperity and happiness of his subjects

In another dream, that happens before the day he is prepared for an attack with Marathas. There he sees women clad in men’s attire and Tipu realizes the hidden fact that Marathas has actually cheated him. Tipu says “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?” (30).

Tipu’s father Haider Ali also appears to him in his dream and expresses his dislike for sending his two sons to the British. Here Tipu Sultan makes a conversation with his father and states he is not petrified of the British but disturbed by the fact that his own people has started supporting them. Tipu Sultan says “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.”(51)

Tipu’s last dream is an optimistic one where he gets a news that British has retreated from India but in reality he was killed in the Anglo Mysore war that happened on the very next afternoon. The gravity of the situation becomes evident that Nadeem Khan, Mir Sadiq, Quamaruddin and Poornaiya were rewarded by the British.

The four Anglo Mysore wars had a huge impact on Tipu’s life. The first two wars Tipu was victorious but the third one had a shocking impact on Tipu. As a result he has to send his two sons to British as ransom. Even though Tipu Sultan regained his power he was murdered in the fourth battle as he was betrayed by his friends. Tipu’s death is narrated in the lines as

“Colonel, I think we’ve found him careful. That one with the gold buckle on his belt. Lift him out.” (14)

Through the dreams and the description of the Anglo Mysore wars Karnad is actually creating a counter history hidden by the British. He pictures the real Tipu. Karnad was not focusing on portraying the chronological historical details but was keen to present the real Tipu Sultan. Karnad sees Tipu as a sagacious person. He was having a modernist approach in every facets of life. He wanted to take his kingdom to a greater height. Karnad depicts that Tipu even requested from the French king for a doctor, a carpenter and a watch maker in his kingdom. It was during his time the toy making industry flourished in Chennapatna. He eagerly encouraged sericulture in his kingdom. He was perspicacious to such an extent that he wanted to introduce thermometer in his realm. Tipu says “Thermometer! It is quick silver in a glass tube. When placed in the hands of a sick man, the quicksilver rises to a certain number of degrees and indicates the height of his disorder. That helps the hakim decides on the treatment” (25)

Tipu Sultan is also famous for his strategies in trade. He understood that the economic progress of a country entirely depends on trade. He saw how the British came to our land empty handed and leaving the nation with hands filled with treasures. Tipu says “how they came to this country, poor, cringing, and what they have become in a mere fifty years. They threaten us today. It’s all because of their passion for trade” (26). Thus he made trade relations with various parts of the world. This made British envious and doubtful regarding Tipu Sultan’s move and decided to evade him from the country. They joined hands with Marathas and Nizams and took a move against Tipu.

Girish Karnad says Tipu is misrepresented in History. The image was so distorted because his identity was largely created by the British. *The Hindu* reported on 13 September 2005 about Karnad’s view on Tipu Sultan. Karnad says, "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)

The authenticity of the work is gained by employing historical figures, Kirmani and Mackenzi as narrators. Karnad also focused on the famous ‘Note Book of Dreams’ by Tipu Sultan as a scaffolding in writing this play. Karnad has opted an amalgamation of history and characteristics of a dream play in conveying a legitimate identity to the play. He unveils a ruler who was misunderstood by the people almost for 200 years. Tipu was a soul who wanted to take his nation to a superior heights but people couldn’t match his ideas and thus got a controversial image. His true image was not known or deliberately ignored by everyone.

Through this play Girish Karnad was actually constructing a counter discourse against the one created by the British.

#### Acknowledgement

The researcher is indebted to the library of St. Xavier's college for Women, Aluva

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