



Article : Modernity in Girish Karnad's The Dreams of Tipu Sultan

Author : Shri. Shivaji Shankar Kamble [P.V.P. Mayavidyalaya, Kavathe Mahankal, Sangli]

Modernity is one of the most invaluable values and important insignias of society and literature. Infact, it is a process of change, evolution and development. But it should be based on rationality, a progressive thought and should aim at achieving a decent standard of living of all the people. It means that modernity means a way of life and a mode of thinking. However, each society as a small replica of vast universe, wants change and transformation, which, can not be achieved by emphasizing the traditional way of life, nor it can be acquired merely by blind beliefs, adaptation or borrowing things from the west or elsewhere. Therefore, it requires change in action, opinions, beliefs, conventions, modes of thinking, social behaviour, social structure and other values. Thus 'change-continuity' lies at the core of any modern society.

As a culture-specific phase of history of any society or nation, modernity scrutinizes the traditional thoughts, values or institutions and fights against superstitions, narrow world-view, backwardness of society and other evilsome aspects of socio-cultural values. This does not mean that modernity is a replacement of the old by the new but it is a realization and revelation of progressive thought. In this regard, Kumar, Sukrita Paul remarks, "Modernity is a moment of realization and revelation of progressive thought experienced as much in the past as it may be in the present" (2002:156). On the other hand, Sharma, K.L., the Vice-Chancellor, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, elaborates the term modernity in his *Foreword to Rethinking Modernity* and says, "Modernity emanates from radical experience, from the constraints of morality and utility, religion and science. Modernity provides a critique of subjective rationalism. Rational speech and action are the core elements of modernity at any given time and place" (2005:11). On the whole, modernity is a new value system. It is more a way of life and a mode of thinking which elevates the dignity and achievement of individual. It can not be achieved and should not be transplanted but it must be shaped according to past traditions and present circumstances. Thus modernity is a genuine course of social change which implies innovations.

Jnanpeeth Awardee, Girish Karnad is one of the most outstanding dramatic genius of the Post-Independence period. His yeoman-service in the field of new drama gives him an unflinching place in the annals of Indian drama like his contemporary playwrights namely, Badal Sircar (Bengali), Mohan Rakesh (Hindi) and Vijay Tendulkar (Marathi). His historical play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is a master-piece. This play is an honest attempt of Karnad for removing all the untruths and misunderstanding about the 'cursed hero' of Indian history – Tipu Sultan. Infact this play resurrects him as a modernizing monarch whose mind was fraught with high ideals, hopes, projects, missions and visions which he wants to use them for the regeneration of his subjects. Indeed Tipu is a representative of modernity and his modern outlook throws light on contemporaneity. Verily, Karnad presents this great man with a new perspective who was, indeed, far ahead of his age.

This play is not mere a record of historical account of Tipu's inner life but it is a representation of his innovative, radical and progressive ideas which greatly influenced social, political, economic and religious aspects of his age, including his own personal life. His vigilance about his children's education is one of them. Infact Tipu knows the value of education; therefore, he is very alert about it, particularly about his own children's education. When Tipu is preparing to send a delegation to France for commercial and political purpose, his son Fath Haider wishes to join it. At that time, Tipu advices him that he should concentrate on his studies in order to get new and latest knowledge of the world. He illustrates the importance of education with his father – Haider Ali's example, who was an illiterate, foul-mouthed and that was enough for him to rule. But his son Fath Haider belongs to different and challengeable age which was full of problems and difficulties. So Tipu thinks that his son must prepare himself for the different life and world and it could be possible only through education. Indeed, education can bring radical change in one's life. Definitely it provides knowledge for facing the worldly problems. Therefore, Tipu asks his son to concentrate on his studies instead of going on France tour. This approach of Tipu is, decidedly, modern one.

Even Tipu is a far-sighted ruler and father, who took his children with him while administrating. He desires to give them the practical lessons of administration, therefore, involved children in the important decision-making process. This effort of Tipu clearly shows that he wants to develop his children's mind with progressive and enlightened thoughts with the experience of practical things. No doubt, he wants to train them for making a strong, knowledgeable, experienced and able ruler for future. Such approach of Tipu is modern one. In this

regard, Tipu says, “It’s time they started learning about the world” (Karnad, Girish:2005:22).

Tipu is a devotee of new, scientific and innovative ideas. He readily accepts the novel ideas for the welfare of his subjects. Infact his goals and ideals are high which he wants to use them for the generation of his people. Therefore, he launches upon a series of innovations for the promotion his people. He encourages industry, agriculture, trade and commerce for the said object, which gave Mysore State the glory, sound economy, prosperity and respectable place in Indian history. Indeed Tipu is an altruist ruler. Decidedly he tries to make his state modern on the basis of European model. So he introduces many schemes in his kingdom like reorganization of a Board of Admirably, issue of new coinage, ban on the use of liquor, reform of the calendar, experiments in commerce, changing names of cities and towns, novel revenue and judicial regulations. All these novel schemes presents Tipu as an apostle of modernity who had modern sensibility and vision.

Tipu has a great interest in trade. He promotes trade and commerce in his state. He desires to make his state a ‘trading nation’ on European model. He establishes a trading company in order to get economic prosperity through trade and commerce. He encourages people to export many goods like pepper, chillies, sandlehood, cardamom and rice. He establishes factories in foreign countries at Muscat, Pegu, Cutch and Jiddah. Even he establishes trade relations with China, France, Turkey and Iran. He too, sets up factories at Seringapatam, Bangalore and Chitradurg. All these things display that Tipu had a commercial view like Britishers. He wants quick progress and economics. He says, ‘John company-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’ (Karnad, Girish:2005(2004):26).

Tipu has modern sensibility. He knows that to depend on other nation for goods is nothing but a slavery. Infact, he wants to become his state as self-sufficient state. When he is sending a delegation to France, he orders them to bring everything including new techniques, inventions, machines etc. He further asks Mir Sadiq to bring silkworms and eggs from the island of Jezeriah Diraz near Muscat alongwith the five or six men who would rear up and look after the worms (P.21). Even Tipu desires that his Government should step in trading agency for sake of money. He thinks that money is essential for buying the glass, guns and cannons. There is no wiseness to buy these things from abroad. He does not want to beg and borrow silk from Chinese like a poor person. He knows that his land is

rich and full of ivory, sandalwood and forests and we didn't get anything if we sell these things to an individual trader.

Tipu has commercial bend of mind. He has already brought few eggs of silks from China and flourished own industry. Now they are getting sufficient silks. He does not want to live like traditional, stupid and unprogressed Marathas and the Nizam who were totally unknown about the existence of English and Europeans in this world.

Tipu is an ambitious ruler whose desire was to change the face of India. So he wants to import things and persons from abroad. He asks Osman Khan that he should return with ten thousand French soldiers and French craftsmen who could make guns, cannons and pistols (P.24). It means that Tipu wants to make himself well-equipped with the latest weapons. To develop, increase and to show the superiority of military powers to others is his main aim. Therefore, he wishes to bring many things and persons from abroad. Then he makes a provisional list of professionals which included a doctor, a surgeon, a smelter, a carpenter, a weaver, a blacksmith, a locksmith, a cutter, a watchmaker and new varieties of trees, flowers and bushes etc. alongwith them two gardeners from Versailles to look after Lal Bagh Garden. Indeed the catalogue of things shows that Tipu wanted to bring every item of his interest including thermometer.

Tipu is business minded. He looks business opportunities in every aspect. He has already sent a delegation to Istanbul last year under the chair of Akbar Ali Khan to meet His Holiness the Caliph of All Islamic Nations for the said purpose. This trip gets a sensational success. He knows that there is a great demand for ivory, sandalwood and other products in Turkey, Arabia and Iran. Even the Imam of Muscat has fallen in love with the sandalwood and spices of this country. So Imam of Muscat asks Tipu to build a factory for his products there (P.24). All these instances show Tipu's interest in business, trade, industry and soldiers. He knows that Europe makes herself wonderful due to new ideas, inventions and machines (P.25). The scientific approach of Europeans has resulted in rapid progress in every field. That's why Tipu wants to observe all these things in India in order to make India like Europe. And it is possible only then when India would possess the passion for trade like English. It is called vision of progress of Tipu. In this regard, Sudhir Grace Says, 'He (Tipu) wanted to open the doors of Mysore to new inventions, trade and commerce but without compromising on his independence and sovereignty of his state. He made growth and dynamism the foundation of his economic and commercial policies. He embarked on a bold economic policy, which included measures to modernize Mysore's industries, to introduce new ones

such as cannon founding, paper-making, glass manufacture and ship-building. In addition to heavy industries Tipu saw the value of luxury such as pearl culture, silkworms and import of fine asses from Arabia' (2006:315).

3. Tipu is an ardent patriot. He loves his land very much. He never compromises with his ideals unlike the other rulers of India. To accept foreign help for saving their kingdoms was the main aim of these rulers including the Marathas and Nizam. English slavery is willingly accepted by them. On the contrary, Independence and sovereignty of the state is the most important value or doctrine of Tipu's life. He has already seen the danger from English. This is the root cause of his oppose to English. To expel English from India becomes his ardent desire and first priority. So he starts making an active preparation for the said purpose, particularly, after the big defeat in the third Mysore War from Britishers. In this regard he builds up close contacts with the outside world, particularly with the French. 'Tipu had high hopes, with French aid the drama of American War of Independence could be repeated in India' (B. Sheikh Ali : www.tipusultan.org/writ.him accessed on 14.2.2010). Even he sends envoys to Persia, France and Afghanistan. The purpose is to seek help from them in fighting against the English. At the same time he tries to make unity of the Nizam and the Marathas. But he cannot get positive response from them. No doubt, Tipu has friendly relations with the French, Zamam Shah of Afghanistan and Abdul Hameed of Turkey. In this regard, B. Sheikh Ali says, "But Tipu's relations with the French, the Afgans and the Turks indicate his grand designs to distress the English" (www.tipusultan.org/writ.htm accessed on 14.2.2010). On the other hand, his dream of union of the Marathas and the Nizam remains unfulfilled. It is important to note that he never makes allies with foreigners against any Indian power. But he only tries to use foreign help for expelling the English. And he uses the foreign contacts for this purpose. To be honest, Tipu's foreign contacts are an emblem of modernity.

4. Tipu is the first Indian ruler who tried to make his state a Republic. So he develops trade and commerce and encourages his people to follow the path of progress and science like the Europeans. He builds up factories in foreign and also develops industries in his state. His vision is to make his people progressive and prosperous. Many efforts have been done to make his subjects happy by him. Even he tries to give economic stability to his state. No doubt, he makes many economic

experiments, improvements in his administration, destroys the conservative feudalistic system and develops industries in his state. Infact his main object is to make his state an Utopia. He sincerely tries the best in this direction but his untimely death resulted in not fulfilling his dream of Republic. This is a rare and exquisite example of Tipu's modernity.

5. Tipu is prudent ruler. He sends his children as hostages to Lord Cornwallis for the common weal. He knows that there is no danger to the lives of his children. But he realizes another danger that English will teach their language and culture to them. This language has its power to turn the little children into the war of prisoners. He firmly determines that he must have to free his children before they could learn English language and mix up with that culture. In this regard Tipu says, "The danger is : they'll teach my children their language, English. The language is which it is possible to think of children as hostages. All I can to do is agree to their terms and conclude the treaty in a hurry before my children have learnt that language" (P.43). To accept the dependence of language and culture means to mortgage one's own individuality. It is the frightful wicked wheel. But Tipu is self-respecting King. So it is unbearable of such type of encroachment on Indian language and culture for him. Regarding this Hanur Krishnamurthy says, "Later, the Muslim rulers who settled in India fought the British. Among them, Tipu holds a special place. Infact, it was natural for Tipu to resist the English infiltration during that period. Historical records of that period reveal that not only did Tipu oppose the increasing use of English language and culture, he also identified himself with Kannada culture" (2006:304).

In sum, modernity is a new value system, which implies innovations. It is nothing but a moment of realization of progressive thought but aims at a decent standard of living of all the people. And such modernity is reflected through the various actions, missions, ideals and projects of Tipu Sultan, the 'Tiger of Mysore'. Indeed, Tipu does not want to accept slavery in importing things from abroad, therefore, encourages people to export things. Even his foreign contacts with various countries, establishment of factories in foreign countries, forming trading company etc. are some worth-mentioning examples, overclouded with his modernist vision and sense.

References :

Grace, Sudhir (2006) *On the Wings of His Dreams : Re-viewing the Legend and History of Tipu Sultan*, in Girish Karnad's Plays : *Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Mukherjee, Tutun, Pub. by Pencraft International, Delhi.

Hanur, Krishnamurthy (2006) *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan at Mysore*, in Girish Karnad's Plays : *Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Mukherjee, Tutun, Pub. by Pencraft International, Delhi.

Karnad, Girish (2004) *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan and Bali : The Sacrifice*, Fourth Impression 2005, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Kumar, Sukrita Paul (2002) *Androgyny in Search of Modernity : Fiction and Reality*, in *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, ed. by Chandrakala Padia and Others, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.

Sharma, K.L. (2005) *Foreword*, in *Rethinking Modernity*, ed. by Gupta Santosh, Kar Prafulla and Mukherjee, P.V., Pencraft International, Delhi.

Webligraphy :

B. Sheikh Ali *Profile of Tipu Sultan*, www.tipusultan.org/writ.htm accessed on 14.2.2010.