

NEGOTIATING THE INTERPLAY OF BINARIES IN KARNAD'S THE DREAMS OF TIPU SULTAN

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ABSTRACT

*Karnad, a renowned Indian writer, has attempted to revisit history to present an alternative narrative in *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. He has incorporated various binaries to depict human behavior and the relation between the colonizer and the colonized. The present study aims at exploring the binary constructions represented in the text employing the Saussurean idea of binary oppositions and their interplay within the text. The data have been extracted and analysed using the technique of Textual Analysis to look at the opposites and explore the way they have been constructed as interdependent to enhance the meaning of each other. This research finds that the writer has represented binaries to construct meaning within the play. Each binary contrasts the other while together they help in enhancing and clarifying the existing tensions and conflicts.*

Introduction

Contemporary Indian writers have introduced many innovations in fiction in terms of techniques and themes. They have incorporated history and myth as well as various dramatic methods like exhibiting a narrative with multiple time settings, masks and dream sequences. Karnad is a distinguished Indian dramatist, actor, poet and translator. He has earned international acclaim as a playwright, talented director and a man of great achievements. He has employed devices of historical myths and folklores not only to revisit the past but also to compare it with the present and predict the future. Karnad uses past stories to present new consciousness about human life with all conflicts and problems. His play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2006) is not only a historical piece of writing but also reflects the political and cultural situation. He comments on the present times with the help of history and mythology and relates them with contemporary themes. His writings reflect the challenges of the contemporary political and social scenario. His plays highlight his imaginative abilities, his perspective on history and his thoughts. He brings together the past and present as well as juxtaposes the themes of modernity and tradition to illustrate the continuity of human life and perspective.

Framework

The present study applies the Saussurean theory of binaries to the play. Binary opposition is a pair of interconnected terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning. It is a system where two contrasting ideas or terms are juxtaposed against each other to highlight and explore the ideas and various nuances present within a language or a text. In structuralism, these distinctive terms are important part of language structures. The idea originated in the Saussurean theory of Structuralism. According to him, the binaries give meaning to units of language and make a complimentary composition. To understand one, the other is needed. Saussure takes language as a "system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others" (1974, p. 114). Binaries are complimentary as they also create hierarchies that help in clarifying the opposition present in a pair. Sometimes one takes precedence over the other and helps in reinforcing the meaning. "Language is a type of algebra consisting solely of complex terms. Some of its oppositions are more significant than others" (p. 112) and that is "the functioning of linguistic oppositions" (p. 122). Saussure asserts that, in language, a particular term may only be understood with its opposite such as the entire system is based on differences. An object is identified by its unique characteristics when contrasted with another one.

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He is of the view that a concept can be defined negatively that is by its relation with the other concepts or terms of the system, not by its positive content. In literature, binary opposition is a very significant element of language. As its whole mechanism is based on the differences of oppositions that they imply and this is what the structuralists focus on in their works. The relations between the binaries within a text accentuate meaning by emphasizing the interplay between the oppositions that the writer wants to highlight. Human behavior is categorized based on binary opposition. For example, in colonial discourse, the differences are made clear through the binary between the colonizer and the colonized which underlines the prejudice and discriminatory approach towards the colonized emphasizing it further. The authors use binary creations to expose the differences between individuals, groups and cultures "structuring and differentiating operations by which things are made to signify" (Culler, 1975, p. 849).

Objectives of the Study

This research paper explores the binary construction in Karnad's play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. It focuses on examining the way binaries are established, and prove helpful in constructing meaning as well as enhancing the thematic patterns within a text. It also seeks to examine and analyze the use of the binaries.

Research Questions

To reach the above-mentioned objectives, the following research questions have been devised:

1. How have the positions of the binaries within the play been employed?
2. Why are the binaries incorporated and juxtaposed against each other?

Analysis

The Dreams of Tipu Sultan revolves around the life history of a ruler, Tipu Sultan. It is about the last historical days and moments of the great warrior. Mir Hussain Ali Kirmani and a British scholar Colin Mackenzie narrated the story. Tipu is a significant figure in Indian history but the record of his dreams is not known to all because he concealed it even from his close companions. Karnad has employed dream sequences in the play to illustrate the personal life and political vision of Tipu Sultan intending to allow a new perspective of history creating a space for alternative history as opposed to the so-called objective mainstream narrative. Karnad presents Tipu in the play as an authoritative figure as well as a wise strategist aptly dubbed the 'Tiger of Mysore' (p. 14). Tipu has been portrayed a curious individual who is open to new ways rather than holding a stagnant traditional view rejecting change. He acknowledges the importance of the citizens and workers. His sense of duty and care for the welfare of his people make him a compassionate ruler. Under his supervision, his system is disciplined and well managed in comparison to other states. The play is focused on Tipu's dreams which appear to foreshadow his life and future as well as how he interprets them. Through the play, Karnad offers an outlook on his personal life and the dreamy sequences are employed to offer insight into Tipu's personality which is undoubtedly deeper than being viewed as a warrior alone. Karnad's narrative humanizes Tipu in readers' estimation and they find themselves sympathizing with his plight. The dream sequences in the play act as a leitmotif. The dreams figure as a focal point within the play drawing our attention to their influence on Tipu's decisions as well as actions. The play stimulates to excavate as well as reexamining history and traditions.

One of the most significant dreams of Tipu Sultan is to make the British leave the country and for this, he needs the help of other princes and Marathas. He wishes the Marathas to unite against the British to thwart their imminent attempts of conquest. Unfortunately, he remains unsuccessful in his strategy due to the selfishness of the Marathas and the princes. Tipu appears to be a prescient and far-sighted personality as portrayed within Kirmani's narrative. However, the readers encounter a contrasting evaluation of Tipu as dictated by objective British history. Karnad deftly portrays a paradoxical situation where he illustrates Tipu as a visionary who has the foresight to gauge the future of the nation yet remains oblivious to the consequences his decisions may bring about leading to his downfall.

Karnad has made use of binary opposites to show human behavior, the colonial differences, the discrepancies between dream and reality and the contrasting emotion of loyalty and betrayal. He also brings to light the integration of modernity as contrasted with tradition simultaneously. These contrasting ideas illuminate human personalities and experiences. Karnad displays a thin line between reality and dreams. The narrative is fluid and the accounts of McKenzie and Kirmani are intermeshed with the dreams of Tipu seamlessly. Karnad has incorporated these binaries in order to present a panoramic view of ideas such as truth, objectivity and history as well as human relations. These terms are interlinked and highlight the various distinctions within a text. One of the very important binary concepts is 'Other', the difference between us and them. According to the post-colonial concept, the otherness creates an opposition between the colonizer and the colonized. This difference sets up the relationship between the two, the imperial power and the colonized indigenous through the process of othering. The idea of 'otherness' separates the self from the other as in the play the British view the Indians as the other. Similarly, for Tipu and Indians, the British are the others who portray the inherent differences and hatred between the two. The concept of 'other' applies to both sides such that both the colonizer and colonized hold the emotion of enmity against each other.

While the binaries display two alternating narratives, they coexist to yield a whole truth. The interplay of binaries exposes human behavior and the existing friction and clarifies the meaning of the binary structures. The conversation of the soldiers while finding Tipu's dead body further clarifies the animosity existing between the self and the other: Soldier 2 states that "The description seems to fit most of these bastards" (p.10). Soldier 3 replies that it is ridiculous as they kill such devils and they "shift their bodies through the night. Like scavengers" (p. 11). He further says that if they find the dead body of the bastard, they "should let him rot in the sun—feed him to the dogs" (p. 11). Wellesley understands his soldiers' feelings. Therefore, he tells them that he can sense his feelings. Indian's view of their leader is understandably different from that of the British soldiers. Nadeem says that he has to perform his duty for the Sultan as he had seen him "fighting like a man possessed" (p. 13). Responding Wellesley's comment about Tipu's escape, he states, "That wouldn't be like him" (p. 13). He avers that they would find Tipu like his title the "Tiger of Mysore". He claims that he is a man of honor and integrity akin to the British concept of chivalry who prefers to die fighting than surrendering before the English. In the play, Tipu acknowledges the threat the British pose to their land and wishes to not only resist their power but also fight against them by becoming just as strong by accepting and adapting to their modern ways and state of the art war tactics. He declares not to sit like the stupid Marathas and the Nizam who perceived as if the British were never there. Ghulam Ali adds they that would be "the envy of the world" (p. 23).

Tipu has the idea of the difference in intentions and manipulation of the British and the French. He realizes the growing power of the former in India and wants to ally with the French but on his conditions. He comments, "If the French don't wake up, the English will gobble up the whole of India. The French here have become listless. The King must prod them, and kick them if necessary into activity. Louis and I could sign a Treaty of Perpetual Alliance. Then if ten thousand French soldiers could march under me—under me...I give the orders...we could change the face of India" (p. 24). Later on, when he talks about the laziness of his people, he clearly shows his anger, "We let foreigners come in and rob us of our wealth! Today the Indian princes are all comatose, wrapped in their opium dreams. But someday they'll wake up and throw out the Europeans...it's them or us" (p. 36). Later on, he challenges to thrash the Niaz and the British so much that they will remember him forever. Thus, the contradiction exists between the two on both sides. The chat between Nana Phadnavis and Charles Malet indicates the doubt the locals hold for the strangers and the manipulative ways of the British. Malet starts that they do not intend to confront any Indian prince; "We are completely satisfied" (p. 30). The use of 'we' makes them feel distinguished amongst the people they are dealing with. Nana clarifies "We Marathas too have signed a Treaty of Perpetual Peace with Tipu Sultan and we have more regard for our word than the English seem to have for theirs. I would prefer to deal with the vakils of Tipu Sultan...they at least do not take me for a brainless weather vane" (p. 32). He openly rejects Malet's idea of fighting with Tipu say that he should fight against Tipu Sultan but he would not as he has no grudge against him. Though, in the end, the English succeed in their cunning manipulative ways, Nana's way of talking shows the apparent hostility between the Indians and the British.

The dream and reality are interwoven together such that reality seems lost in illusion and illusion appears akin to reality. These contrary binaries work together to enhance the interplay of one another. "The real glides into the dream world and back so seamlessly that in the closing scene, you almost believe that Tipu has won the Fourth war of Mysore until the scene shifts back to Kirmani saying that was Tipu's last dream" (Umachandran, 2004, p.5). The play depicts dreams simultaneously as reality, overlapping the visible with the invisible in such a way that the one reveals itself and at the same time enhances the other. In Tipu's mind, the binary opposition of tradition and modernity coexist such that both are seen as beneficial at some level. Tipu wishes for his people and state to be strong yet he does not believe in abandoning his traditions to flourish. Karnad illustrates Tipu as a man who is eager to learn and appreciates Western technology and ways of progress. Due to this, he sends his delegations to different countries like China and France to establish good relations with them and import their technical products and their technicians into his state. He is impressed by their technology which becomes the reason for his desire of strengthening his kingdom. He wants French experts in different fields to come to Mysore and work here so that his state can flourish successfully by acclimatizing to modern ways. He believes, "that's what makes Europe so wonderful-it's full of new ideas-inventions-all kinds of machines-bursting with energy. Why don't we think like them?" (p. 25). His mind is always focusing on the difference between foreigners and his people and how to follow new ways of bringing profits in trade. He wavers between nationalist ideas and the love for India and praise for the British mode of life and their passion for money and trade. He realizes that the English are successful in India due to their clever political tactics. As he says, "Think of the John company-how they came to this country, poor, cringing, and what they have become in a mere fifty years. They threaten us today." (p. 26). At the same time, he wishes his people to know the fact and struggle to save their resources and produce revenues by trading: ". . . we let foreigners come in and rob us of our wealth! Today the Indian princes are all comatose, wrapped in their opium dreams. But someday they'll wake up and throw out the Europeans...it's them or us" (p. 36).

Karnad presents a significant contrast in Tipu's thinking and feeling about the British. He shows appreciation for their undying affection for their nation and how they are ready to face every situation in a new land. This passion is found missing in the Indians. But along with this appreciation, he dislikes their politics, particularly holding his young son hostage. He seems to display ambivalence for the British. In a dream where he is conversing with his father, he expresses his admiration for English and their commitment and reveals his fears too. He states: ". . . I see myself in them ...they don't give up. Nor would I. Sometimes, I feel more confident in them than in my own people...they believe in the destiny of their race. Why can't we? What is it? ... It's just a dream for which they are willing to kill and die. Children of England!" (pp. 51-52). Although he feels their passion and aligns himself with them in their nationalistic ideas, he feels angry and disgusted with their politics. They take his sons as hostages which he considers a threat because he fears that his sons will learn their language of violence. According to him, "the danger is: they'll teach my children their language, English. The language is in which it is possible to think of children as hostages" (p. 43). This indicates the opposition to his ideas that he appreciates their passion and nationalism but he does not like their tactics in politics.

We may conjecture Tipu's suffering from a state akin to an identity crisis caught between two cultures. While he does not fully subscribe to the British culture he seems to hold a certain amount of admiration for their modern ways. This results in a clash between the binaries of tradition and modernity. If Tipu were to subscribe fully to the British culture, he is found experiencing a sense of betrayal to his land the likes of which Kirmani confesses to feeling. Similarly, Tipu would appear as a stagnant mind who shuns change and modernity for his traditional ways. Tipu's attitude is ambivalent as it is of hatred and respect. He considers them his teacher and puts them equal to his father. "I've had two teachers in my life. My father, who taught me war, and the English who taught me trade. They taught me that the era of the camel is over, that it is now the age of the sailing ship. And they dislike me for being such an adept pupil" (p. 35). His two feelings interplay in the play and enhance one another. This binary is related to the rational and emotional sides of his personality in which one sometimes overpowers the other. Further, the play depicts two types of tigers; real and mechanical. The binary between the two is that of the reality of Tipu's life and mental dilemma. The toy tiger is his interest in the technology of the West as well as the violence against the British. The real one is Tipu's strength where he can still make his enemies fearful. In the end, Mackenzie states, "The tigers of the palace were shot dead while the mechanical tiger was shipped off to

London" (p. 64) which appears to be in sync with the reality where the real tiger which symbolizes Tipu Sultan was killed while the mechanical toy symbolizes the modern ways, technology and tact of the British which they would not allow to fall in the hand of the Indians.

This historical play is a combination of history and fiction which gives the account of a ruler who fought for his country but he could not achieve the deserving acclaim. Along with the historical facts, Karnad focused on the fictional side of Tipu's dream to redeem his dignity as a leader and as a person. History has many facets as the two perspectives of Kirmani and Mackenzie show that recorded history is never objective. In historiography, there comes a contrast between objective and subjective attitudes towards the facts. Objectivity is hard to achieve as each individual has his perspective and loyalties which influence his version of history. While Mackenzie aims at a more objective panoramic view of history allowing space for alternative narratives, both Kirmani and Mackenzie represent the subjective conceptions of history as they have dissimilar positions individually, culturally and socially. One wants to know history while the native has loyalties to his land and people. The play begins with the discussion where they show their views throwing light on ideological differences between native consciousness and western perception. For Kirmani, the work of a historian for British is not easy because "it hurts. There's no healing. True, the blood and the tears dried up a long time ago. But the wound remains fresh" (p. 7). The reason for this sense of betrayal and loss comes from being close to Tipu. Kirmani finds it difficult to be objective but Mackenzie stresses, "you are also a historian. You need to develop a certain objectivity" (p. 7). As Abdullah (2017) remarks, "Western conception of historical objectivity is more of a myth that aims to legitimize the colonial point of view by imposing its logic over events which it sequences and structures to come up with a narrative that proclaims its authenticity rather than establish it" (p. 127). Kirmani replies that "dispassionate distance" (p. 7) is not possible. Karnad shows the two attitudes in historiography and how they affect the real facts. He deconstructs the Western mainstream narrative through subaltern narrative and presents "cultural diversity of historical representation along with the guilt and melancholia experienced while establishing a connection with the past" (p. 128). The playwright uses a new way of representing history in such a narrative that draws on dreams, dialogic exchange and presentation of the past and present alongside. This is how the structure works against any stabilized historical formations.

The British attempted to defame Tipu through their version of reality as is clear through the conversation at the beginning of the play. Mackenzie blames Kirmani for being Subjective because he is "far too obsessed with his death" (p. 8). In reply, Kirmani points out the difference between different versions of reality. "Not his death. The way he was destroyed" (p. 8). The British spread their views and factual details about him but still appear to be interested in an Indian's narrative;

"Mackenzie: Every bit of evidence we've gathered proves he asked for it.

Kirmani: Yes. For you, he's made up of bits of evidence, bits of arguments that prove that your side was right. And that's what I don't understand. You have your version of history, all worked out. Why do you want my side?

Mackenzie: I am interested in the other side. You could say that that's how we Europeans are brought up." (p. 8)

Abdullah (2017) puts this in this way that Mackenzie was concerned about the voice of the other, the voice which should be controlled and dictated a voice that "simply re-asserts his epistemic postulations" (p. 131). This shows that there are always multiple perspectives about history so along with their side; they want to know the other side too. This conversation cancels out the idea of objectivity. That is why Karnad uses Kirmani as his mouthpiece in a fictional account to reconstruct Tipu's personality which was tarnished by English. This new image is depicted through his dreams which indicate multiple interpretations of reality and illusion and the Sultan's fears about his people. Memory also plays an important role in history writing as Kirmani's version is based on the recollections he has about Tipu. Narrating his memories makes his part subjective and non-factual because he cannot forget his emotions and attachment to Sultan. So the events in the play are a mixture of Western and Eastern private versions that oppose one another. He feels guilt and melancholia as he says he has been serving Tipu and his father but now he is doing the same for

them, his enemies. He considers himself a traitor. He raises question if it does not worry him as he was worried. He feels guilty. He thinks he is untrustworthy. I spent my life serving him and his father. And now I work for you, his enemies. What does that make me? A traitor? Am I trustworthy anymore? Doesn't that worry you? It worries me" (p. 8). This betrayal disturbs him. Details do not bother him but his failing memory seems to amount to betrayal for him. His version turns out to be subjective because the records were destroyed by the British. His narrative is a way of reconstructing an individual history for the master who is interested in the other. The use of dreams is to oppose the reality of the man who puts all his efforts to fight for his people. All four dreams have diverse explanations for different incidents that would happen; few hints at the future events in reality while one puts the dreamer in a state of illusion. They exhibit a man with and without a crown. For example, in one, Tipu meets two women in a depilated temple which hints at his wife's death and, in the other, he meets a man in woman disguise from which he realizes the weakness of his people and Marathas who are weak and cannot support him well. It proves right later. But the last dream puts the leader in an illusion in which he sees his victory which turns out to be his death. Kirmani views it as Tipu's last dream. He was betrayed by his companions who later received many benefits from the British. So defeat is shown in disguise of triumph and treachery wears the mask of loyalty. So dreams can often be misleading.

Conclusion

Karnad controls the meaning to "perform a subsequent act of reinterpretation" (Bhalla, 2007, p. 195). He, in the play, demonstrates the opposition between Europe and non-Europe, us and they, the colonizer and the colonized and illusion and reality. "Dream and reality are mixed to create history not as it was but as we wish it to be. The play questions and creates its historiography, where history and myth are inter-mixed and inter-changed" (p. 196). He presents history with the use of legend and memory because they all add up to create a meaningful structure within the text. He digs deep into historical context through his subjective consciousness. This reconstruction of the historical events and facts highlights the difference between facts and fiction and how they are intermixed within the play creating a subjective restructured history different from colonial versions. Karnad imaginatively uses this combination to portray an alternative narrative. The use of binaries is to highlight the inherent differences in human relations and how these contradictory terms reflect the mentality and thinking of people on both sides. Karnad has incorporated these oppositions to depict a clear sight view of ideas such as truth, objectivity and history. He has shown that these terms are interconnected and bring to light the various discrepancies within the play.

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