

A Recreation Of History In Girish Karnad's Tughlaq

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Abstract: *This paper aims at exploring the fact that the contemporary Indian society and culture is a reflection of its folk tales, myths and historical legends. This has been done by examining Girish Karnad's Tughlaq as a historical play.*

Tughlaq which was published in Kannada in 1964, is Karnad's second play and it deals with the complex and paradoxical character of Muhhammad-Bin-Tughlaq who ruled over India for twenty six years and contributed a lot to shape its destiny particularly at that time.

The purpose of the present paper is also to deal with the theme of the search for identity. The Sultan was a visionary and an idealist who wanted to shape his kingdom and administration according to his heart's desire. But he failed, so in order to search his identity, he recourses to the ruthless murder of his opponents and then he was found disillusioned and frustated.

In the end, the paper highlights on contemporary social and political situations in India where there is a general atmosphere of mutual distrust, frustated idealism, communal intolerance, religious bigotry, trechery, sedition and corruption can be seen whose seeds had been sown by Tughlaq in the 14th century.

The appeal of the play is perennial because it artistically deals with paradoxes and opposites which are innate human nature at all times.

Girish Karnad is a many sided personality. He is a noted stage actor, playwright, film actor, television artist and a creative figure. Karnad's plays reflect the contemporary Indian and social and cultural life with the use of folk tales, myths and historical legends. Karnad's plays are particularly concerned with the psychological problems, dilemmas and conflicts experienced by modern Indian men and women.

This paper is an attempt to the study of Karnad's *Tughlaq* as a historical play. Girish Karnad who translated his two plays *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadan* into English is a first rank dramatist in Indian English literature. He was highly influenced by the trends in Kannada literature. Karnad took legend, history and myth for the plots of three plays written by him.

Tughlaq, which was published in Kannada in 1964, is Karnad's second play. *Tughlaq* is a historical play which deals with the complex and paradoxical character of Mohammad-Bin Tughlaq. Tughlaq ruled over India for twenty six years.

Tughlaq's accession took place in Zil Hij 724/November-December 1324 and his coronation forty days later, i.e. in A. H. 725/January 1325. He died on 21 Moharram 752/20 March 1351.

Karnad make some deviations from history, which he thinks essential for dramatic purposes. In Karnad's *Tughlaq* the king Tughlaq ruled for five years out of 26 years of Tughlaq's reign. This is necessary from the point of view of dramatic precision and condensation. Karnad ingeniously creates the atmosphere of mutual distrust, frustated idealism, communal intolerance, religious bigotry, treachery and sedition and corruption, Tughlaq's unmitigated blood thirstiness and his, final disillusionment.

Tughlaq as historical play deals with the theme of search for identity. The sultan is visionary and an idealist, who wants to shape his kingdom and administration according to his heart's desire. In scene one he states "To me this moment burns heart's bright and light up our-path towards greater

justice, equality, progress and Peace, no just peace but a more purposeful life"(3).

In this play the reader finds the orthodox section which shows the historical background. Tughlaq fails to search his identity, so in order to search his identity, he recourses to the ruthless murder of his opponents, he is disillusioned and frustrated.

Sultan Muhammad- Bin-Tughlaq holds a specific place in the history of medieval India. His reign is significant from several points of view. Girish Karnad also puts this character in the main role of the play. He has been projected as a very complex character. In the play, he is a bundle of opposites as M.K. Naik points out: "Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan, who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel devout and callous" (262-63).

Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq ruled in India in 14th century. Karnad closely sticks to history-in his portrayal of Muhammad- Bin-Tughlaq and his kingdom, though there are certain deviations. In the very opening scene he portrays Tughlaq as a generous and charitable king. He is shown to accept the Kazi's judgement graciously in which he is held guilty of misappropriating the land of the Hindu, Vishnu Prasad. Karnad found Tughlaq's history contemporary. U. R. Anantha Murthy says that: "...It is a play of the sixties and reflects no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism into the country"(482). Karnad himself writes about the contemporaneity of Tughlaq:

What strikes me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi... and one of the greatest failures also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feelings that only he had the correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction-the twenty years period seemed to me very much a striking parallel. (viii)

Tughlaq is decidedly a landmark as a historical play in Indian English Literature. The play describes the political situations of the sixties, and at the same time reflects the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru Era of idealism.

The humanism and idealism of Muhammad Tughlaq has been very well projected by Girish Karnad in his play. In the scene two, Tughlaq speaks about his vision before his stepmother thus:

Let us laugh and cry together and then, let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with now. Let us be the light and cover the earth with greenery... (Sc. ii 10)

Tughlaq was a careful student of religion and philosophy. He had deep knowledge of various forms of religious attitudes including atheism. He was pre-eminently a rationalist and he subjected every religious postulate to deep searching and enquiry.

Karnad follows history in making Tughlaq guilty of patricide and fratricide. The third man in the first scene says that he has heard that the Sultan is guilty of killing his father and brother. Even his stepmother is convinced that Muhammad has done so. However history tells about the feeling of remorse and repentance which Tughlaq nourished over the murder of his father. But Karnad has not suggested any such feeling in the heart of Tughlaq.

Girish Karnad gives us historical evidence about Tughlaq's decision to change the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. But because of this decision the common man suffered a lot, specially the Muslims. In the very first scene only he announces his decision to change his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. Explaining the reason for it he says:

My empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you well know its peace is never free from invaders. But from me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslim and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom. (Sc. i 3-4)

Historical evidences also prove that Tughlaq took the drastic step to shift capital for effective administrative control of the south. Secondly the people of Delhi used to write insulting and abused letters to him and they used to throw them into the council hall in the cover of darkness. So he made his mind to lay Delhi waste. Historian Isami says that Tughlaq does not have trust on the people of Delhi and so in order to curb their rights he wanted to shift the people of Delhi to Daulatabad. It implies that the Sultan's attitude towards his subjects was revengeful and unkind. The Amirs and Sayyids decided to kill him at prayer time in scene five of the play. The reason behind changing of capital is that Tughlaq wanted to weaken their power and to curb the rebellions in south. It was an administrative strategy. He convinced every citizen of Delhi to leave for Daulatabad. Anyone who will not follow his order will be severely punished. Tughlaq wants every person to vacate Delhi for Daulatabad without any objection.

Modern historians have made efforts to prove that the Daulatabad scheme was implemented into stages, keeping in view the convenience of the people. At a distance of every two miles along the road from Delhi to Daulatabad, the Sultan Constructed halting stations and changed the whole uninhabited area into a habitation. First all the aristocrats, the Sultan's mother, Amirs, Maliks, Ulemas etc shifted to Daulatabad. The Sultan was so considerate that before shifting the people of Delhi he had purchased houses for them. Facilities of travel and conveyance provided for the migrants. Even Barani who was against the Tughlaq's decision wrote that the sultan "made liberal gifts to the people both at the time of their departure and at the time of their arrival at Daulatabad. The Sultan skillfully and carefully planned the new capital. Girish Karnad does not highlight the greatness of Tughlaq's heart and presents his transferring the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad as the work of a cruel king.

About the journey from Delhi to Daulatabad also there are long discussions. Tughlaq was a cruel and bad king according to other historians also. Karnad's Tughlaq who is portrayed as a abused cruel king says: "Najib, I want Delhi

vacated immediately. Every living being in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight" (Sc. vi 44).

No doubt Karnad's Tughlaq is a historical play, but it is clear that Karnad only highlights the failures and weakness of Tughlaq. It is a historical fact that Muhammad Tughlaq wanted to bring about integration among Hindus and Muslims by shifting the capital. The Historian Prof. K.A. Nizami observes:

In its remote consequences the Deccan experiment of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq was a remarkable success. The barriers which had separated the North from the south broke down and though the extension of the administrative powers of the Delhi sultanate into the Deccan did not prove successful, the extension of its cultural institutions did in fact succeed. (278)

Karnad's Tughlaq also displays the practice of a king. As in history Tughlaq starts the use of token currency, Karnad's Tughlaq also issued copper currency. The intentions of Girish Karnad in writing the play are evident. It is for the character and personality of Muhammad Tughlaq that the play came into existence. Tughlaq is the only character who keeps all the thirteen scenes in one single thread. Karnad's Tughlaq is certainly a history play like Shakespeare's Richard II, and Marlowe's Edward II, but whereas the latter two plays were acceptable to their period only; the former has been fascinating for the modern audience while writing this play,

Karnad was fully conscious of the parallelism between the reign of Tughlaq and the contemporary Indian scene. Karnad's Tughlaq is a historical play and as a historical play its place in Indian English drama is unique. It is an enjoyable play and it has been a great success on the stage. Its appeal is perennial because it artistically deals with paradoxes and opposites which are innate human nature.

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