



## GIRISH KARNAD'S OVERVIEW AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE HISTORICAL VISIONARY MOHAMED BIN TUKLAQ AS A CONTEMPORANEOUS POLITICAL LEADER IN HIS PLAY TUGHLAQ.

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### ABSTRACT

*Girish Karnad's Tughlaq is a representation of one of the most important but nevertheless neglected periods of Indian history, the reign of the fourteenth century Mughal emperor Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq remains till date one of the most turbulent periods of history. This is the first and most significant play in the post-independence period to have engaged with the Sultanate period in Indian history, this period brought an end to the golden age of classical Hinduism and introduced Islam as a dominant force. This is one of the most important phases of Islamic imperialism in India, but it remains neglected in the national imaginary because of the attention given to the later Mughal and British imperialism. Thus the life of the people is governed and corrupted by the interaction of the saints and the politicians. It's a kind of parallelism even from the time immemorial. Karnad is a keen observer and thus he is able to find analogy over the themes irrespective of the times.*

### INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* is a representation of one of the most important but nevertheless neglected periods of Indian history, the reign of the fourteenth century Mughal emperor Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq remains till date one of the most turbulent periods of history. This is the first and most significant play in the post-independence period to have engaged with the Sultanate period in Indian history, this period brought an end to the golden age of classical Hinduism and introduced Islam as a dominant force. This is one of the most important phases of Islamic imperialism in India, but it remains neglected in the national imaginary because of the attention given to the later Mughal and British imperialism.

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Karnad's *Tughlaq* is a significant intervention in history, as also a site for the development of a creative analogy between the past and the present. The contemporaneity ascribed to a historical situation makes the play unique. Through the technique of establishing analogy between the past and the present, Girish Karnad heightens the relevance of the play for the present time. The play does not merely present a picture of the past, but highlights its implications for the present. An analogy is developed between Tughlaq's reign in the play and the political situation of the Nehruvian era. This analogy and its appropriateness make the play unique in terms of contemporary relevance. Even after years of its first publication, the play continues to be perceived as being contemporary.

One of the critical issues that Karnad addresses in *Tughlaq* is the striking gap between political aspiration and its reality. In one of his interviews Karnad comments: —When I read about Mohammed bin Tughlaq, I was fascinated. How marvellous this was, I thought. Tughlaq was a brilliant individual, yet is regarded as one of the biggest failures. He tried to introduce policies that seem today to be farsighted to the point of genius, but which earned him the nick name "Mohammed the mad" then. He ended his career in bloodshed and chaos. There is a consistent conflict between reality and what is assumed to be the ideal state of affairs. Tughlaq's uncompromising idealism is strongly critiqued. As the drama opens, Tughlaq implores his subjects to observe a system of imparting justice "without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed." Karnad's depiction of Tughlaq as one who sought to put aside religious differences in the hopes of embracing secularism is a powerful issue in the drama. Tughlaq states early on that he wishes to see unity between Hindus and Muslims as a significant part of his vision: "Daulatabad is a city of Hindus and as the capital, it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom." The impracticality of his aspiration collides with reality as Tughlaq fails in his vision. It is because of such a condition that Karnad exposes his propensity to failure. This sense of analogy that attaches itself to the play is significant when set against the condition in which it was written.

In 1964, India had been less than two decades removed from Partition and Independence. The result was a nation where direction and transformative vision was hard to establish. A nation born from Gandhian principles was still hopelessly locked in sectarian violence and communal hatred, the very elements that Karnad's *Tughlaq* desires to overcome in the drama. The theme of political aspiration being limited by temporal reality is a significant one in both the drama and the historical condition in which it is written. Tughlaq's initial judgment rendered upon a Brahmin that he "should receive a grant of five hundred silver dinars from the state treasury... and in addition to that... a post in the civil service to ensure him a regular and adequate income" is a reflection of how a transformative political vision might not necessarily be received well by the public. This theme of political transformation stumped in the face of temporal reality is a significant part of the drama. It is reflective of the India that Karnad sees in front of him, a stunning realization between the gulf between what is and what

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can be. The chaos and fragmentation that results out of a vision steeped in genius becomes a part of both the ruler's narrative and the nation's history.

Rulers and politicians use religion as a medium to befool the common man. They pollute religion by misusing it for fulfilling their dirty political motives. But religion cannot be used to serve the end of those who are in power because it preaches morals and expects morality from the people. It stands for virtue, goodness, righteousness and moral conduct while politics thrives on intrigue, craftiness, dishonesty and deceit. Tughlaq's notion of religious tolerance prompts him to emancipate Hindus from the payment of *jiziya* or tax. This vision of his is not properly understood and appreciated by his citizens, who strongly oppose such a move. His policies and methods of political action were well ahead of his time, and therefore received severe critique from his contemporaries. They were formulated with the far-sighted vision of establishing a secular kingdom, but were instant failures as they failed to relate to the immediate reality of the subjects.

What Karnad shows in *Tughlaq* is that the idealist and his idealism do not go hand in hand with a politician and his politics. The idealist is only a misnomer and he has to face challenges, which he tries to curb down in his own crafty manner. But the idealist Tughlaq fails in producing any lasting result. What he gains, as he tells, is:

“Not words but the sword – that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission and —power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself”(66).

All his idealism is shattered in the game of politics and thrown to the winds. Even Barani, the best of his advisors, asks Muhammad, who is a man of great learning,

“You are a learned man, Your Majesty, you are known the world over for your knowledge of philosophy and poetry. History is not made only in statecraft; its lasting results are produced in the ranks of learned men. That's where you belong, Your Majesty, in the company of learned men. And further, Your Majesty, there was a time when you believe in love, in peace, in God. What has happened to those ideals? You won't let your subject pray. You torture them for the smallest offence. Hang them on suspicion. Why this bloodshed?”(98)

The murder of the Sheikh leads to the intrigues of the courtiers and other idealists of the kingdom. This happening unites the Hindus and the Muslims altogether to rise against the craftiness and tyranny of the Sultan. Shihab-ud-din, the most trusted of the friends of Sultan is persuaded to attend the meeting of the intriguers and at last to stand against the Sultan. Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim tells Shihab-ud-din that he is attending the meeting to save Islam not to “get mixed up in the treacherous games of politicians.... But Allah isn't only for me,... while tyranny crushes the faithful into dust, how can I continue to hide in my hole?”(32).

The play *Tughlaq* is noted for its symbols. Four symbols like prayer, sleep, the game of chess and the rose are used to heighten the effect of the play. As P. Bayapa Reddy remarks: —At

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the micro level, prayer symbolizes the religious idealism of Tughlaq. At the macro level, it connects man's unconscious need for divine protection and guidance in an hour of anguish. In the beginning prayer is made compulsory but later it is banned for a few years and again it is revived. It is reduced to a mockery when the Sultan's life is threatened at the time of prayer. Sleep 'on one level represents the need for rest in man's life. At the macro level it becomes symbolic of peace, which eludes man often. The rose is a symbol of the aesthetic and poetic susceptibilities of Tughlaq. It later on becomes a symbol of the withering away of all the dreams and ideals of Tughlaq. At the macro level, the game of chess is an ordinary game which is popular in India. It also symbolizes a political game in which an ordinary washer man checkmates the most intelligent and clever politician. Through this symbolist technique, the playwright has succeeded in creating the right political atmosphere.

*Tughlaq* is of great interest as it combines religion and politics of an idealist and visionary Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq. It intends to show that idealism of the ruler will fail and will ruin the idealist. The concepts like secularism, equality and unity in a country like India are very much ahead of the times. In India people still are led away by the saints and religious heads. They believe more their religious leaders than a politician. The fiery speeches of the religious saint swing people this side or that side for the vote. People still are befooled by them as they were during the reign of Tughlaq. Thus the life of the people is governed and corrupted by the interaction of the saints and the politicians. It's a kind of parallelism even from the time immemorial. Karnad is a keen observer and thus he is able to find analogy over the themes irrespective of the times.

True follower of religion, commits numberless murders to retain his monarchy. He commits patricide, fratricide and wipes off the religious and political leaders like Imam-ud-din and Shihab-ud-din for his kingship. He tells the cause of murdering them to his Step Mother in a simple way: They couldn't bear the weight of their crown. They couldn't leave it aside so they died senile in their youth or were murdered.

When Step-Mother accepts that she has murdered Najib, Muhammad does not accept this truth. But when she argues, It was easier than killing one's father or brother. It was better than killing Sheikh Imam-ud-din, Muhammad replies, I killed them for an ideal. Don't I know its results? Don't you think I've suffered from the curse? My mother won't speak to me.

"I can't even look into a mirror for fear of seeing their faces in it" (65). Muhammad is torn in finding peace in his own kingdom that "has become a kitchen of death" (65). There is only one punishment for treachery, he tells his Step-Mother, it is death. And for killing Najib he orders even his Step-Mother whom he loves more than anyone else to be stoned, dragged and killed.

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