



MADMAN OR A MACHIAVELLIAN? A SCHEMATIC ANALYSIS OF TUGHLAQ IN GIRISH KARNAD'S TUGHLAQ

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ABSTRACT

This research paper lays its eyes on Girish Karnad's most-spoken-about character Tughlaq. The paper revolves around the character of Tughlaq who keeps his subjects, subordinates and foes alike guessing with his shift in temperament. His Machiavellian and sometimes eccentric qualities are also kept under the scanner in this research work. This article brings out instances where Tughlaq is at the top of his game making people around him go crazy with his not so stable mannerisms.

Keywords: *Tughlaq, Machiavellian, Idealism, Madness, Indian Literature, Girish Karnad.*

Girish Karnad

Girish Karnad was born on 19th of May 1938 is an Indian playwright, author, actor, and director whose films and plays are written largely in Kannada. His most famous works include *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), and *Nagamandala* (1988). In 1992 Girish Karnad was awarded Padma Bhushan for his contribution to arts by the Indian Government. He was also the recipient of highest literary prize of India Jnanpith Award. *Tughlaq* which is now the point of discussion in this research article is one of his most loved plays and the most peculiar of his protagonists.

Lot has been said and written about Tughlaq. Considered to be one of the most idealists of Kings the world has ever witnessed yet one of the worst failures of his time *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad has managed to strike a chord with the audience from its very first

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performance. Girish Karnad has sketched a maverick of a character who always keeps his opponents and friends on their toes. *Tughlaq* may well have its political innuendos of the era but the character of Tughlaq is something which invites discussion, and it will invite discussion for the times to come.

The unreliability of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq is explained by the Hindu who claims that a Hindu being ill-treated by a Muslim ruler is agreeable according to him, but what makes him uneasy is a Hindu being viewed as a human by a Muslim ruler. That is not something that has happened in the past where Hindus were treated more or less like dogs. This humane treatment of Sultan gives rise to speculation, and the Hindu smells that Sultan has motives behind his act which is shown in the following lines. “Look, when a Sultan kicks me in the teeth and says, ‘Pay up, you Hindu dog’, I’m happy, I know I’m safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, ‘I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being’ — well, that makes me nervous.” (2)

Tughlaq stresses more on, justice, equality, progress and peace. He envisions a greater life for his people, ‘a more purposeful life’ as he says. He wants his people to come together, join hands and help him bring peace and prosperity to the nation. There is no separation in the name of religion, caste, creed, wealthy, poor, strong and weak according to him. It’s all about support, cooperation and wellness. “May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace — not just peace but a more purposeful life.” (3)

Tughlaq’s plan of moving his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad looks more of a strategic move to be at the central Daulatabad than being at the edges of Delhi which is prone to attacks by the enemies. And Delhi is more of an easy target according to Tughlaq. Tughlaq says that it is to strengthen the ties between Muslims and Hindus he proposes the shift in capital but it looks otherwise keeping in mind the nature of the Sultan. “But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen my kingdom.” (3-4)

To his Stepmother’s query Tughlaq answers that he is not worried about his enemies, who they are and what they can do to him. He claims that he doesn’t mind dying but he worries about the plight of his people and he cannot imagine how they will survive without a ruler like him. He comes across as an exaggerator way too much in the forthcoming lines. “I am not worried about my enemies. I’m only worried about my people.” (11)



The unpredictable nature of Muhammad Tughlaq is explained by his Stepmother to the Historian, Barani. She seeks his help in tutoring Tughlaq as he is unstable and that worries her the most. She wants the sober and level-headed Barani to counsel him in the matters of administration. Stepmother is not so sure who to trust in these matters other than Barani which can be seen clearly in the lines quoted below. “But he is so impulsive — and when he gets into one of his moods I don’t know what he’ll do next. (Pause.) You are a sober man, Barani, level-headed and honest, and he needs friends like you. I just wanted to ask you. . . . Oh, God ! It all sounds so stupid.” (17)

Muhammad Tughlaq’s chameleonic transformation is visible in the lines that follow. “Do you think I would have gone to the trouble of arranging this meeting if I didn’t want my people to hear you? I don’t want my people to be dumb cattle, Sheikhsahib, and I do not claim to be omniscient myself. I am quite willing to learn from you---even eager” (19) Tughlaq who was once apprehensive of Sheikh Imam-ud-din changes color in a fraction and says that he is open to learn from a man of his stature. He adds that he wants his people to learn from Sheikh as his subjects celebrate him as a saint. Tughlaq wants his people to be educated by a person like Sheikh Imam-ud-din. Tughlaq seems to be fascinated by Sheikh or so he says to Sheikh. Sheikh Imam-ud-din is spellbound with the varied plans of Tughlaq, he always seems to have plan B, if plan A doesn’t work out. He realizes that Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq is seen as the cleverest person for a reason. No one gets an idea of what he is going to do next or what he is capable of. All that one understands that the Sultan is unreliable. “You know, Sultan, I’m just beginning to understand why they say you are the cleverest man in the world.” (24)

“He said he liked it, then looked harder for a couple of minutes and said: ‘No there’s a flaw here,’ And he actually showed me where I had gone wrong! Think of that! I had spent days on that wretched problem and he spots a flaw within half a minute. I had to forgive him.” (27-28) Tughlaq’s reason for letting Ain-ul-Mulk is he solves the chess problem Muhammad was trying hard to solve for days. Tughlaq thinks he has solved the puzzle, Ain-ul-Mulk points out the flaw and solves the puzzle. Tughlaq is overjoyed with that feat of Ain-ul-Mulk and forgives him. This might appear as the lamest of reasons that one can give for letting go an enemy, but it has its diplomatic advantages in the course of Tughlaq’s long run as a Sultan. Ratansingh opines that he has never before seen a person like Tughlaq who murders a man with ease and nourishes the feeling of feeling guilty. Tughlaq comes across as an entirely new species that is so tough to decipher which is expressed in the lines. “I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt.” (28)

“Yes, behind the scenes, it's true the Sultan invited the whole of Delhi to hear the Sheikh. Yet, on that very afternoon, soldiers went from door to door threatening dire consequences if



anyone dared to attend the meeting.” (33) With these words of Sheikh we see how cunning Muhammad Tughlaq actually is. Tughlaq who earlier said he was very eager to listen to Sheikh Imam-ud-din with the whole of Delhi actually sent his men door to door asking them to stay indoors threatening them their lives if they dared to against his orders. We get to see how cunning a schemer Muhammad Tughlaq is through these lines.

After stabbing Shihab-ud-din to death mercilessly Tughlaq spins a tale saying that Shihab-ud-din died a martyr death trying to save Sultan from being murdered by the nobles. Tughlaq announces that there will be a public funeral and Shihab-ud-din will be given the title of a martyr and a loyal nobleman for his services to Tughlaq’s kingdom. The meticulous planning of Tughlaq can be seen in the lines that follow. “I have hopes of building a new future for India and I need your support for that. If you don’t understand me, ask me to explain myself and I’ll do it. If you don’t understand my explanations, bear with me in patience until I can show you the results. But please don’t let me down, I beg you. I’ll kneel before you if you wish but please don’t let go of my hand.” (40)

The rhetoric Tughlaq uses is too distinct and polite to be mouthed by a king who usually orders and commands respect through his actions from his subjects rather than plead or beg with his people. He pleads his people saying that it is for their welfare that he works tirelessly for. Tughlaq requests the crowd to keep faith in him and says that he will deliver the desired output. He says that he is ready to pay heed to his people and their problems. He creates the image of a ‘people’s king’ in the forthcoming address of his. “Make a public announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and that the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. Say that the Sultan was saved by Shihab-ud-din who died a martyr’s death defending him. The funeral will be held in Delhi and will be a grand affair. Invite his father to it and see that he is treated with the respect due to the father of a loyal nobleman.” (43)

“Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I can see that now. They’ll only understand the whip.” (44) Tughlaq who was pleasant and patient until now suddenly feels the need to vacate Delhi as the situation has turned tense after the murder of Shihab-ud-din. Tughlaq thinks that he has been patient with his people for a long time now and orders that Delhi should be vacated within a fortnight with no further death and with no one to be left behind. “But our prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled. There will be no more praying in the kingdom, Najib. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished. Henceforth let the moment of prayer walk my streets in silence and leave without a trace.” (44) Tughlaq had in mind that prayer was the way to reach God but feels that prayer is too corrupted to rely



upon. He announces that there should be no prayer and people who pray will be punished. Tughlaq has made his decision to leave Delhi, and to leave behind the act of prayer too.

Tughlaq argues that he isn't guilty of any wrongdoing and he can't be held on account for something ill that has happened in his kingdom. He strongly believes that he has something to give for his people. Tughlaq wants to be part of history and he believes that he has to make it to history well before everything comes to an end. "But for that I'll have to admit I've been wrong all these years. And I know I haven't. I have something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history, but I have to do it within this life. I've got to make them listen to me before I lose even that!" (56)

"It's only seven years ago that you came to the throne. How glorious you were then, how idealistic, how full of hopes. Look at your kingdom now. It's become a kitchen of death — all because of him. I couldn't bear it any longer." (65) Tughlaq's Stepmother believes that he came to throne with lots of dreams and plans. He had ideals and strong beliefs of making his empire the best in the world. Stepmother realizes that Tughlaq has now transformed this place no short of a bloody-zone. His kingdom is no more than a battlefield where men are butchered like cattle. Stepmother says that she cannot see all that is going on Tughlaq's kingdom.

"They gave me what I wanted — power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself What did your little murder give you?" (66) Tughlaq claims without the killings and the murders that he has committed he would have not gained power, strength to act, shape his thoughts and recognize what he is capable of. He is certain that the killings and murders that he has committed have made him what he is right now. He also raises the question of what satisfaction did his Stepmother have by killing Najib. "The others died unjustly. You deserve to die---" (67) Tughlaq Confesses that many died due to him during his regime 'unjustly' but the only person who is about to receive a just death is his Stepmother, and that is for killing Najib. Najib is the only go-to person who Tughlaq relies upon in his entire kingdom. His murder by Tughlaq's Stepmother comes as a shocker for Tughlaq who orders his soldiers to tell Nayab Vizier to stone her to death in public. Muhammad Tughlaq who was earlier murdering people the way it pleased through his treacherous ways has come to the point where he repents and regrets for the crimes that he has committed as a king. His hands are bloody and he is guilt-ridden. He begs forgiveness and surrenders at the feet of the almighty. Tughlaq wants to cleanse his dirty soul and exterior which was once so pure when he was a young boy. Everyone around him has either left him halfway through or dead. He sees god as the only person who can save him from drowning.



PUNE RESEARCH

ISSN 2454-3454

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

VOL 4, ISSUE 3

UGC Approved Journal No 48520 (Arts & Humanities) ENGLISH

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