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## Mythological and Historical Past in Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*

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**Abstract:** *The present papers deals with historical events in Girish Karnad Tughlaq. It focuses on the Indian medieval history, myths and historical legends. There is a discussion between the old man and the young man regarding the political situation of the country wherein present rule contradicts with the past. Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of Sultan who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout the goddess.*

**Key words:** history, Mythological, historical, past, punishments, frustration and politician

**Introduction:** Girish Karnad's plays reflect the contemporary Indian society, cultural and social life through the use of folk-tales, myths and historical legends. Indian Drama has from its origin borrowed heavily from the country's mythological and historical past. *Tughlaq* and *Tale Danda* are the two primarily historical plays in which Karnad employs history to comment on the pathetic and corroded state of Indian modern day politics. Girish Karnad closely follows historical sources in this respect. In the opening scene the old man represents the orthodox clerical class which vehemently opposed Tughlaq's liberal and rational policies. History is the source of these plays. The special genius of Karnad lies in the unerring instinct with which he seizes upon the scattered facts of history transmuting its ore through the channels of his own ardent imagination into the subversions of themes and techniques in his plays refined and beautified. History is the record of past events, an enquiry or research which deals with all aspects of man's life, a narrative of the deeds and thoughts done in the past of civilized men. Errors are depicted through a variety of events in history and it retraces the transition of man's life from barbarism to civilization.

Karnad is writer with an intrinsic strength and originality of outlook that places him easily among the most distinguished dramatists of the era. '*Tughlaq*' is Karnad's second play originally written in Kannada in 1964. Alque Padan see persuaded Karnad to translate it into English. On stage Tughlaq was an immediate

success. In 1965, it was first produced in Kannada and about the same time in Hindi by the National School of Drama.

Productions in Bengal and Marathi too followed. In 1970 there was an English production in Bombay. The play has been fostered by many and arrested the attention of the audience and fascinated the on-lookers for its rich eloquence. It has depth and variety. The popularity of Karnad's '*Tughlaq*' is due to its being a piece of fact and fiction. Karnad is essentially a dramatist and not a historian. He achieves the apotheosis of the historic *Tughlaq* in the region of drama. His play reflected the political mood of disillusionment in the sixties.

*Tughlaq* stumbles are in the scenic extravagances of his style which discloses only hypocrisy. Though he tries to prostrate his goodness and impartiality between the Hindus and Muslims by cancelling the jeziya tax imposed by the Islamic male, yet his subjects do not perform canonical and blind obedience. There is a discussion between the old man and the young man regarding the political situation of the country wherein present rule contradicts with the past and likewise both the young and old man hold contrasting opinions about the Sultan. As no intellectual cunning could have done *Tughlaq* with his stupidities invites contemptible characters like Aziz disguised as Vishnu Prasad to foil his schemes and be the prominent cause for his downfall.

The assembly is addressed by Tughlaq and he manifests that he accepts the charges put forth by Vishnu Prasad and promises to abide in accordance to the dictates of the Kazi-i—Mumalik and hence lively expresses the administration of justice in the near future also. The claims of the Brahmin from Shiknar that the officers of Tughlaq had illegally confiscated his land are compensated with a grant of five hundred silver diners from the state exchequer and assigning a civil post to provide him sufficient assistance.

In *Tughlaq* politics is played in the name of religion. Imam-ud-din is forced to go as a peace maker in the attire of the Sultan to Ain-ul-Mulk. Heavily armed soldiers follow him to the battle field. The Sultan plotting against him manages to kill without any suspicion through the hands of Ain-ul-Mulk's army. Najib and Barani speak about the dual nature in *Tughlaq*. Najib has a mind full of conspiracies and intrigues where as Barani depicts the better part of Tughlaq. The step mother is suspicious of the nature of Najib and charging him of corrupting the mind of his son towards the end of the play is responsible for his death. When Tughlaq comes to know about it he orders the guard to take her to prison. Petrified and baffled the step mother looks at him and he orders her to be stoned to death. This scene in *Tughlaq* depicts that poetic justice has been done because in search for the culprit regarding the murder of Najib Tughlaq had harassed the Amirs and troubled terribly whoever he had suspected.

Another minor character who suffers in the hands of Tughlaq is Shihab-ud-din. A confidant of Tughlaq and the prince of Sampanshahr Shihab-ud-din is invited by the Sultan to look into the affairs of the state in his absence. Tughlaq was marching for Kanauj with his army. Shihab-ud-din is constantly fed with the wrong-doing of Tughlaq to which he finally agrees. The Amirs, Sayyed and Ratansingh the adopted brother of Shihab-ud-din finally succeed in including him in the conspiracy to kill Tughlaq during prayer time. Together they hatch a plot

to murder Tughlaq during the time of prayer. Tughlaq a crafty person as he is pretends to know nothing of the surrounding while he is in the discussion with the Amirs and Shihab-ud- din. The issue is the matter of token currency and shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. Shihab-ud-din on behalf of the people proposes to cancel the policies to be implemented by Tughlaq.

Tughlaq tells Shihab after the prayers that he was fore warned by Ratan Singh about the conspiracy and shows the letters. Angrily he stays with his dagger with such ferocity that all are horrified. He orders that every Amir involved in this revolt should be caught and beheaded, their bodies be stuffed with straw and hanged in the palace yard for a week for the people to see.

In the opening scene he announces his decision to change the capital of his empire from Delhi to Daulatabad which arouses havoc. Later he strictly orders Delhi to be vacated immediately. Terror marks his words. He wants Delhi to look like a grave yard with no soul in it and it was at this juncture that he bans prayers in his kingdom. However, on the advice of Najib he agrees that prayers would be resumed on the arrival of Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, the descendant of the Khalifs. Till then whoever prays were liable for punishment. The exodus from Delhi to Daulatabad was a picture of untold sufferings. Thousands die on the way and cries of lamentation resound in the atmosphere. Crafty rogues like Aziz and Aazam hover around like watchful hawks eager to pounce on the suffering people. The introduction of copper currency in place of silver coin was a total failure. The rose garden which was a symbol of his hopes and aspirations becomes a place of dumping useless copper coins which symbolized his destruction at all levels.

Driven to frustration by his impracticable policies *Tughlaq* deals with the last phase of the historical figure known to be a fool for the fourteenth century people and a remarkable genius for the contemporary world. Speaking of the modifications in Karnad 's play *Tughlaq* R.K. Dhawan compares him to Shakespeare: "Again, like Shakespeare, Karnad presents the historical events and complexities of the time with perfect objectivity of a true historian, throwing upon them the beautiful coloring of art." (Dhawan, 16). Through the subversive themes in *Tughlaq* Karnad went beyond many of the dramatists however, in exploring not only the fate and the psychology of individuals but also how their plight reflected the nature of existence itself. Thus in 'Tughlaq' the protagonist, Tughlaq, confronts his realization that his mad whims will not fulfill his political ideals.

*Tughlaq* is introduced through the secondary characters at the commencement of the play as a staunch believer in Islam who has passed the law regarding compulsion of offering namaz. "Now you pray five times a day because that's the law and if you break it, you'll have the officers on your neck." (*Tughlaq*, Scene One, 6). Immediately his actions of negation of the holy book are focused." All this about the Hindus not paying the jiziya tax. That's against the Koran,..." (*Tughlaq*, Scene One, 6). In the light of Islamic laws one has to obey the compulsion of five times prayer a day otherwise one has to undergo stem physical punishments. One of the rules goes to the extent of slaying that disobedient person. This law is applied to a person who accepts Islam. A letter of appeal is to be sent to a non-Muslim to accept Islam; if he refuses he has to pay the jiziya tax. Karnad

claimed for imaginative vision, an inner veracity, a power of penetrating to the root of things presents Tughlaq mixing politics with religion to depict contemporary issues. Parasuram Ramamorthi observes:

“The correspondence between Tughlaq and Mrs. Indira Gandhi during the emergency are highlighted in Prasanna’s production in the late 70’s. It is, as we know, a costume play and a play with nearly fifty characters and the echoes of religion and politics, mixing of religion and politics are sounds heard today in Indian politics,” (Ramamoorthi, 5-6). The failure of the capital shifting naturally added to the sense of frustration in the country and Karnad has portrayed this in his play with modifications. “Later this year the capital of my empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad.... Only those who have faith in me may come with me. With their help I shall build an empire which will be the envy of the world.” (*Tughlaq*, Scene One, 7-8).

Kirtinath Kurtkoti’s observation Sadanand Kanavalli translates thus: “The theme of the play, like human life, is as ancient as it is fresh. The problem the play present is man’s beastliness in aspiring for divinity. The problem is not discussed as polemics, but it is manifested through characters and situations. And this is the strong point of the play.” (Kurtkoti, 50).

The Delhi to Daulatabad episode is considered to be the most devastating one. Sparks flew everywhere. Karnad has modified it with an extraordinary mixture of outrageous fable and genuine protest on the part of the travelers. The Delhi-Daulatabad issue travels throughout the play causing disaster and strong protests everywhere. In scene one when Tughlaq mentions his intentions of the shift people are stunned and the effect produced on the minds signaled nothing but conspiracies, espionage, murder and bloodshed.

They started calling him mad and blamed for murdering his own father. “And he said the Sultan’s guilty of killing his father and brother,” (*Tughlaq*, Scene One, 9). In history the facts run through Agha Mahdi Husain’s depiction in the following manner. “Rai Bindraban, the Hindu historian of the region of Aurangzeb comes to the same conclusion as others like Muhammad Bulaq, author of the *Matliibu’ t-Talibin* who mention lightning as the cause of the fall of the palace and exonerates Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq from all blame.

“Sujan Rai another Hindu historian of the seventeenth century is of opinion that Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq came to grief because of his quarrel with Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya. This is also the opinion of Husan Khan” (Mahdi Hussain, 83). In scene two Karnad introduces the threats to Tughlaq namely Imam-ud- din, Ain-ul-mulk and Shihab-ud-din. An act of jealous treachery through an unexpected meeting organized by the Sultan in front of the Big Mosque in Scene Three changes the course of action of Imamuddin the fiery leader who provoked mobs in burning half of Kanpur. He ultimately emerges as a messenger of peace to Ain-ul-Mulk in accordance to Tughlaq’s words. “You can’t deny that this war will mean a slaughter of Muslims at the hands of fellow Muslims. Isn’t that enough for the great Sheikh Imam-ud-din? You have attacked me for inaction. You can’t turn away now when you are offered a chance. You can’t!” (*Tughlaq*, Scene Three, 30)

An ambitious man, Tughlaq, is determined, whatever it takes, to get whether by scheming or by trapping. He makes the Imam leave for the battlefield along with an army assigning Ratan Singh at the foremost, with attire which makes him look exactly like the Sultan. When the mystery of Imam-ud-din's death is unraveled people are stunned and hatch a plot. Historical evidences mention that Ratan Singh was the ruler of Chittor when the Sultan Alauddin Khilji attacked it. There is an assumption that Rana Lakshman Singh came to rescue of Rawal Ratan Singh, but both were killed Rawal Ratan Singh was killed in the siege (1303) of Chittor. In the play Karnad has subverted and portrayed Ratan Singh as the adopted brother of Shihab-ud-din. Tughlaq is known for his espionage in the play. Ratan Singh is employed as the spy who mentions the details of Imamuddin's death to Shihab-ud-din, takes him to the conspiracies of the Amirs and makes him indulge in it.

**Conclusion:** Karnad's plays, regardless of genre or subject matter, have been praised for their contemporary and their capacity for capturing the aesthetic senses of the audience and penetrating their consciousness. By combining historical facts with imagination he creates an atmosphere of fantastic recreation and here lies his unassailable greatness. His two close associates, Barani the scholarly historian, and Nazib the politician seem to represent the two opposite selves of Tughlaq while Aziz the wily time server appears to represent all those who took advantage of Sultan's visionary schemes and faded him. Karnad himself has suggested that he found Tughlaq's history contemporary. So, it is to be concluded that Tughlaq is a history and a historical play.

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