



## Presentation of Tughlaq by Girish Karnad

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### Abstract

Tughlaq deals with the ambiguous stand of the idealist Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, the well-known king in Indian history and offers “a psycho-political study of the protagonist of the play – his historicity, motives, vision and struggle to assert himself as the Sultan, as also how he takes his own downfall.” As an idealist and visionary, a rationalist and forward looking emperor Tughlaq tried to introduce his kingdom into an egalitarian society. Tughlaq began to make efforts to bring about harmony between the two communities, justice and equality for the welfare of his people.

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Girish Raghunath Karnad is an Indian Actor, film director writer playwright and Rhodes Scholar, who predominantly works in South Indian Cinema and Bollywood. He rose as a playwright in the 1960s, marked the coming of age of modern Indian playwriting in Kannada, just as Badal Sarkar did in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi. He is a recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India. For four decades Karnad has been composing plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He has translated his plays into English and has received acclaim. His plays have been translated into some Indian languages and directed by directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B.V. Karanth, Aliyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan, Amal Allana and Zafer Mohinuddin. He is active in the world of Indian Cinema working as an actor, director and screen writer, earning awards along the way. He was conferred Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Govt. of India and won four filmfare awards for best director - Kannada and the fourth of the important issues that Karnad presents in Tughlaq is the speaking rift between political aspirations and its genuity and truth. Karnad comprehends this about the historical circumstances that chased Tughlaq, himself.

When I read about Mohammad - bin - Tughlaq, I was charmed. How fabulous this was, I thought. Tughlaq was a brilliant individual yet is regarded as one of the biggest failures. He tried to introduce policies that look today to be farsighted to the point of genius, but which earned him the nick name "Mohammad the Mad" then. He ended his profile in violence and puzzles.

This is perceived in different aspects throughout his Tughlaq's characterization. Karnad renders a vision where the reality and aspirations hit. How this plays out in the mind of the political ruler becomes one of the central issues of the drama. Karnad himself has connected (Enact, June, 1971) on this :



What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king even 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 crealty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction - the twenty year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel.

The play has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughlaq's chracter, the dominating figure in the pray :

Muhammad : I pray to the Almighty to save me from sleep. All day long I have to worry about tomorrow but it's only when the night falls that I can step beyond all that. I look at the pleiades and I think of Ibn-ul-Mottazz who thought it was an ostrich egg and Dur-rumma who thought it was a swallow. And then I want to go back to their poetry and sink myself in their words. Then again want to climb up, upto the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people : 'Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let's laugh and cry together and then, let's pray. Let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with - ours now ! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come! I am waiting to embrace you all !"

Another justification regarding the transfer of capital from Delhi to Daultabad, by Sultan :

Don't I know it. I still remember the days when I read the Greeks - Sukrat who took poison so he could give the world the drink of gods, Aflatoon who condemned poets and wrote incomparably beautiful poetry himself - and I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran. They tore me into shreds. And to be whole now, I shall have to kill the part of me which sent to them. And my kingdom too is what I am - torn into pieces by visions whose validity I can't deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greeks in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led zarathestra or the Buddha. (Smiles) I'm sorry. But it can't be done.

Muhammad Tuglaq was impartial to both Hindus and Muslisms. The tax imposed by the earlier sultans was abolished by Muhammad to show that he has no ideology to impose "jiziya tax" based on religion. Great interested in being generated by a cause which is being heard by the Kazi-i-Mumalik at the time. Some land of a Brahmin was confiscated by Government officials, and now the Brahmin has brought a law suit against the state. The impartiality of the Sultan is thus on trial. Soon a court official comes and announces that the Brahmin has won the case. The confiscated land would be returned to him and 500 dinars would be paid to him as compensation. In addition he would also get a government job in the civil service of the country.

Although the theme of the play is from history - Karnad's treatment of the theme is not historical. Take, for instance, the use Karnad makes of 'prayer' in the scene where the Muslim chieftains along with Sheikh Shams-ud-din a pacifist priest, conspire to murder Tughlaq while at prayer. The use of prayer for murder remind us of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer, which is most dear to Tughlaq is vitiated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source. The whole episode is ironic - It involves Shihab - ud - din, an idealist who has but great trust



in Tughlaq's rule and in himself ultimately betrayed by Ratan Singh who master - minds the entire plan of murder for his own ends.

The intrigue here not only enhances the theatrical interest in the play, but is a dramatized projection of Tughlaq's tortured, divided self.

M.K. Naik says, "Tughlaq is a historical play on the life of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India. 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 godless. His two close associates - Barani, the scholarly historian, and Najib, 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 fooled him. Karnad himself has suggested that he found Tughlaq's history contemporary ----- however, Tughlaq fails to emerge as tragedy, chiefly because the dramatist seems to deny himself the artist's privilege to present an integrated vision of a character full of conflicting tendencies."

Tughlaq is a historical play, but while writing it Karnad himself was struck by the parallelism between the reign of Tughlaq and contemporary history. Tughlaq was a powerful personality, but he disintegrated within a short span of twenty years, and the mood of disillusionment that set in corresponds well with the mood of frustration at the end of the Nehru era. At every step the play reflects the chaos, disillusionment and corruption that followed the Nehru era, and this is one of the most important reasons of the popularity of the play. Tughlaq's character is used only as a background to portray what is happening today.

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