

Quest for Cultural Values in the Play *Tughlaq* of Girish Karnad

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Abstract

*Despite its rich regional heritage Indian drama is now struggling for survival on account of the monster globalization which is spreading the fire of materialism that has consumed related aspects of theatre, natakmandli, nautiki, tamasha, etc. It is gasping for oxygen and there are a few dramatists who are still conscious of saving its life by providing much needed material. Girish Karnad is a contemporary dramatist who has given it a new orientation and meaning. It is he who has popularized the Indian art and culture in the west and hence becomes a brand ambassador of Indian drama in English. R. K Dhawan praises him highly for his contribution and declares: "He has given the Indian theater a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English, and has played leading roles as an actor in Hindi, and Kannada art films, commercial movies and television" (Dhawan: 13). He has made history lively and realistic through his plays. It is his dramatic imagination that turns a tedious substance into an exciting one. Plays like *Tughlaq*, *Tale Danda* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* are based on history.*

Keywords: Globalization, Indian drama, Theatre, Natakmandli, Nautiki, Tamasha

In this paper we focused on Karnad's drama *Tughlaq*. *Tughlaq*'s principal claim lies on the fact that it is one of the most successful attempts made in India to produce a genuine history play in English. *Tughlaq* is not merely a historical play; it is something more than a study of historical events. The play provides an interpretation of human character in its width and depth and delves



out the quest for cultural values. Karnad librates it from the limits of time and space and gives it a substance of universality.

Muhammad Tughlaq was highly ambitious and wanted to be remembered by the future generations as one who made history. He cherished a beautiful dream in his heart from his childhood. He built the fort at Daultabad when he was 21 years old. He personally supervised the placing of every brick in it and hoped that one day he would build his own history brick of brick; "I shall build an empire which will be the envy of World."

In order to realise his dreams, he passionately begs for people's support and participation but his intense call is turned down by completely hostile and inhuman attitude of his friends and subjects.

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:.... I beg you, I'll kneel before you, if you wish but please don't let go of my hand.

Tughlaq, when he finds no concrete, positive response from the people he turns away from the sympathetic views towards people and develops cruelty and ruthlessness. For the execution of his ordinance he adopts many more political calculations.

The authority of power, either in king, monarch or any form of governments tries to establish and run the administration on certain values. In the process the faces change but forces don't. Power generates from social, economic, intellectual and political spheres. Muhammad Tughlaq, who has ambition to rule over others, derives strength from political power. Thus, the predicament of Tughlaq has been the predicament of every conscientious and well meaningful ruler in all ages, in all human societies and in human nature itself.

Karnad has made a successful attempt at introducing politics and religion in Tughlaq. Muhammad *Tughlaq*, the protagonist of the play, is an idealist aiming at Hindu-Muslim unity, at secularism and also at building a new future for India. In the play, Muhammad Tughlaq and his enemies appear to be idealists, performing in the opposite. He has divine aspirations but he is lost in deft intrigues through politics.

In the beginning the discussion between the old man and the young man highlights the religious policy of the monarch. The old man feels that Tughlaq was leading the country downward. It doesn't suit the Sultan to make a fuss about his being human and getting kicked by an infidel. It is an insult to Islam. But the young man thinks that the country is in safe hands. The sultan is very near to the people. He is not afraid to be humane and is a true representative of Islam. He is not an 'Insult to Islam' but a king who has made a law that the Muslim has to pray five times a day. The *Quran* is allowed to be read in the streets and every religion is to be equally respected. In fact, Muhammad Tughlaq followed the policy of religious tolerance, brotherhood and Hindu-Muslim unity. He was perhaps the first Muslim sultan who realized the necessity of bringing Hindus and Muslims together to rule peacefully a vast country like India, and initiated sincere efforts to develop cultural values in the form of communal harmony.

Muhammad is an idealist and wants Hindu-Muslim unity and equality in the land. Everybody is equal in the eyes of law. Aziz nab come forward to prove equality between the Hindus and Muslims. A Brahmin named Vishnu Prasad has filed a suit against the Sultan-that his land was seized illegally by the officers of the state. He wants just compensation for the loss of the land and the deprivation resulting there from. The claim of the Brahmin is considered just by the Kazi. His Majesty is guilty of illegal appropriation of land. The Kazi has further declared that in return for the land and in compensation of the privation resulting from its loss, they said Vishnu Prasad shall receive a grant of five hundred silver dinars from the state treasury and a post in the civil service to ensure him a regular and adequate income. In fact, it is a rare act on the part of the sultan in establishing a new cultural value in the country.

Muhammad takes a new step to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. He transfers the capital of his empire from Delhi to Daultabad. The political reason behind his decision to transfer his capital is that he knows that a revolt is brewing in Delhi and has deliberate intention to weaken the power and strength of the nobles. But how skillfully, he tackles the situation and argues that Delhi is too near the border and it can never be free from the threat of invasions. At the same time, the most important fact for him is that Daulatabad is the city of Hindus and as the capital, it will symbolize the bond between the Hindus and the Muslims which he wishes to develop and strengthen in the kingdom. Thus, as an idealist and for apparent reasons, he wants to build an empire which will be the envy of the world.

In Tughlaq, Karnad shows the rise and fall of the efficacy of prayers, various stages of prayer passes through in the life of the ruler and the people Muhammad himself admits to Barani:

I had wanted every act in my kingdom to become a prayer, every prayer to be come a further step in knowledge, every step to lead us nearer to god.⁵

He wanted to make prayer a means of uplifting the morale of the people and create peace and harmony in the state. In Tughlaq the beginning of prayer, its growth, death and rebirth are of symbolic of life which is corrupted at the very source and how it has to meet death and be born again. Perhaps, Muhammad did not want Sayyids and Ulemas and Sheikhs to dabble with politics and so when they did, he put them behind bars. This is clear in his statements when Aziz begs with the Sultan for his life and says; “When it comes to washing away fifth, no saint is a contest for a dhobi.”⁶

The idealist’s politicians create more chaos in the country than prosperity and do not work for welfare of the people. Karnad does depict that politics and ambition to rule idealistically on

the foundation of religion cannot go together. The politician who is basically a crafty intriguer has to shun religion ultimately and do not pretend to live on it for long. Howsoever loud the ruler may shout that his stands. Quran and its tenets, he has to face revolt in the state and in his heart of heart too. He cannot hide his two faces and cannot make his double talk understood by the people at large. He has to pay the penalty. The case of Tughlaq is no exception. When he imposes prayer and abolishes Jaziya from the infidels and transfers the capital from Delhi to Daultabad, there is confusion in the populace and religious leaders rise against him.

However, Tughlaq knows the art of projecting an image of impartial figure to the public. He wants not only to be good to the people but also to do well to them. Tughlaq claims that he never worries about his enemies. His only concern is about his people. At the same time the other Sultans of Delhi, according to him were not like him.

On the other hand Tughlaq tries to prove that he is nearer to common people and does not maintain distance. He tells the world that he is faithful, religious and modest. He asks the people to laugh and criticize him. They are entitled to lodge a complaint even against his Majesty. In other words, Tughlaq envisaged a new culture of justice and value in his empire.

Further, Tughlaq in order to realize his quest, circulates the copper coins along with the silver dinars.

Tughlaq is very much influenced by the Greek Philosophers like Plato and Socrates and therefore wants to achieve a balance between opposite principles. Besides, he suffers from the delusion of grandeur and acts the role of a god like Lord Krishna or that of a prophet like Jesus without having the omniscience or omnipotence of God.

Girish Karnad known as India's jeadrifl living playwright. The most prominent and renowned media personality, a writer of native tradition, is at his best as a dramatist. A gifted actor, he acts

in both Kannada and Hindi Commercial films; Produces and directs off beat Kannada and Hindi films (Sanskarain Kannada, Utsav in Hindi) and also popular serials for Doordarshan. He defends freedom of expression and entertainment in films with equal vehemence. Karnad's contribution to art, culture, theatre and drama has brought him immense popularity and has enriched the Indian literary scene.. Though modern his plays uphold the traditional values also. Karnad, a bilingual writer writes his plays first in Kannada and then renders them into English which qualify to be a part of Indian-English drama. His English versions of Kannada plays are better than the originals. He sought into prominence with the publication of his plays. Tughlaq, which is Karnad's second Kannada play and now widely recognized as a classic, first appeared in 1964 and was a great success on the stage. This play alone has established Karnad as a noted dramatist. Although the theme of the play is from history—there are many such plays in Kannada where Karnad' streatrntent. of the -theme. Not historical. It throws light on the life, nature and psyche of a medieval monarch Sultan Mohammad Tughlaq, whose reign is considered to be one of the spectacular regimes of History. Karnad delve deep into legend and made it a vehicle of a new vision. The concept of alienation is not quiet new and it has been in vogue in philosophical, theological, sociological and psychological writings for a long time.

Karnad's *Tughlaq*, is the first in "New Drama in India"— a series which is outstanding in contemporary Indian plays. This play explores the paradox of the idealistic king Tughlaq who does not have a single moment of peace and rest, as he is always suspicious of the motives of the people close to him. The number of imposters, betrayers, rebels and treacherous people around him never lent him any real support. The people thought him mad and the Amirs termed him tyrannical. He, a formidable ruler who would not let anybody or anything come in his way of power and the answer to his resistance is his sword. Tughlaq is an usurper having come to the throne after getting his father and brother murdered during prayer time, having committed heinous crimes and his unpopular schemes created many foes for him, and the transformation of the character of the ruler from a sensitive and intelligent ruler who sets out to do his best for his

people ends up into pieces. This was due to both his idealism as well as his shortcomings within him which led him to further alienation.

Tughlaq, as is seen that despite of all his efforts he is not able to win the confidence of his people around him and he fully realizes the tragedy of his predicament which is visible in scene six, Muhammad: But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven't even opened their eyes to the light of today? (39)

Tughlaq's alienation from his people is responsible for the failure of his schemes. He feels that if people fail to understand his schemes then he too fails to foresee their reactions. He not only proposes a change of capital involving at the administrative level but also of the people, lock, stock and barrel and overlooking the emotional attachment of the people to their native soil.

Conclusion:

Thus, Karnad in his play presents Tughlaq as an alienated personality whose experiences social, interpersonal, alienation and self-estrangement. The other characters are also seen where they experiences alienation, which serves to highlight Tughlaq's predicament. He is alienated from the society in which he lives) and in his quest to prove his superiority he forgets that he himself is a living being. He wants to be different from other and in this he dehumanizes himself and intensifies his alienation.

References

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