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## **GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAY "TUGHLAQ" AS A HISTORICAL PLAY**

### **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to study Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* as a historical Play. The play revolves around the 14th century historical figure of Muhammad Tughlaq. Karnad deals with history of that time in the play. He was deeply impressed by Tughlaq's character. The play is obviously a historical play with a fine blending of fact and fiction in its narrative. In the play Karnad followed the traditional sources of the life and times of Tughlaq. He studied deeply the facts related to Muhammad Tughlaq before writing *Tughlaq*. He deviated from history when it becomes necessary for him from artistic and technical point of views. In *Tughlaq*, Karnad delineates the last five years of the reign of Tughlaq. Karnad is one of the greatest dramatists of modern India. His play *Tughlaq* is his masterpiece.

**Keywords:** Tughlaq, Girish Karnad, Ain-ul-Mulk, Historical.

### **Introduction:**

A historical play seems to be a contradiction in terms. History requires truth to the events of the past, but art require imagination and concentration on needs of art. In other words that the writer of a historical play, must use the facts of history with discretion to suit the needs of his drama while maintaining overall truth to history. He has to deviate from the facts of history, and even introduce new characters in the interest of dramatic effectiveness. This is what Karnad has also done in the present play. Girish Karnad closely follows historical sources in this respect.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* is a historical play. It is based on the life and history Muhammad Tughlaq who ruled over quite a large part of India with Delhi as its capital in the beginning. But historical facts alone are not enough to make a story a work of literature. Only historical facts alone are not enough to make a play interesting and history requires truth to the events of the past. Art requires imagination. In other words, a writer of a historical play enacts the structure of his drama on some facts of history but along with this he uses the fact according the need of his drama. Sometimes he deviates from the facts of history. He also introduces new characters for dramatic

effectiveness. In Karnad's Tughlaq we find a fine blending of fact and fiction. In the play Karnad followed the traditional sources of the life and times of Tughlaq. He deviated from history when it becomes necessary for him from artistic and technical point of views. In Tughlaq, Karnad delineates the last five years of the reign of Tughlaq.

Karnad's delineation of Tughlaq is based on historical sources. He sketches him as an embodiment of idealism, scholarship and Hindu-Muslim unity. In the first scene of the play Tughlaq is depicted as a generous Sultan. He accepts the judgment of Kazi in which he is held guilty of confiscating Vishnu Prasad's land. Now he returns his land and also gives him five hundred silver coins as compensation. The Brahman is offered a post in the civil services so that he may have a regular and adequate income.

As far as Tughlaq's *idealism* and liberalism are concerned Karnad's portrayal of Tughlaq is true to history. In the opening scene, the old man who represents the orthodox peoples criticizes Tughlaq's liberal and rational policies. In his opinion, the Sultan is being criticized by an infidel which is an insult to Islam. The young man defends the liberal attitude of the Sultan. He appreciates his devotion to Islam. The young man says to the old man that now he prays five times a day because it has been made obligatory by the Sultan. If he misses his prayer, he will be punished.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* is great a scholar as historians describe him. He tells Sheikh Imamuddin, that it is difficult for him to get himself free from Greek influence. He says, I still remember the days when I read the Greeks- Sukrat who took poison so that he could give the world the drink of gods. Karnad also holds Tughlaq guilty of Patricide and fratricide, Tughlaq's real mother also believes that he killed his father and his brother. Karnad does not sketch Tughlaq as repentant for his evil deed of killing his father and brother. He has also shown Tughlaq's heartlessness and wanton acts of cruelty. Historical records prove that Tughlaq was filled with remorse over the killing of his father. In order to atone his crime, he got his father's name inscribed on the coins he issued immediately after his succession to the throne.

Tughlaq's decision of changing his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is a historical fact known to all students of history. Generally, it is considered Tughlaq's rash decision. It is a turning point in his carrier and it causes inexpressible suffering to the common people. Historic evidence also proves that Tughlaq took the drastic step to shift the capital for effective administrative control of south. The contemporary historians' emphasis on mass exodus, which Girish Karnad also presents in Tughlaq, is not correct. In fact, the upper classes comprising nobles, courtiers, Sheikhs,

Ulema and the elite were shifted to Daultabad. The general Hindu public remained unaffected by this project. In order to prove that Sultan Tughlaq was a devil, Karnad greatly alters the historical facts of the rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk. Depiction of Ain-ul-Mulk's revolt in Karnad's play is not based on historical fact. In it he very much deviates from history. Karnad is inclined to prove that Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq was an evil genius. He has, therefore greatly altered the historical facts of the revolt of Ain-ul-Mulk. Karnad makes Tughlaq weak.

One other important administrative measure which is generally considered the result of the Sultan's whim was the introduction of copper coins. In Tughlaq's time the silver dinar was the medium of exchange. Tughlaq replaced them by copper coins. Baranis view that the Sultan's extreme generosity had depleted the treasury and it was a device to face the crisis of bankruptcy is not all true according historical facts. Girish Karnad highlights the failure of this experiment of the introduction of copper coins only to emphasis the Sultan's failure and he makes no comment on his farsightedness.

There can be no doubt in the fact that Tuglaq is the result of Karnad's deep study of medieval history after Ishwari Passed. Karnad also went to other historical authorities on medieval India. He read ziaud-din-barani's Tariph-i-Firuz-Shahi, Bodoni's Tariph-i-Mubarakshani, Ibn-i-Buttuta's Travels. It is interesting to note that Karnad is not a slave to historical accounts. He deviates from historical sources whenever he feels it necessary for artistic and dramatic purposes. Karnad follows the conventional accounts in creating the atmosphere of mutual distrust, frustrated idealism, corruption, unrest and communal intolerance not only the circumstances but also the personalities of the major characters are in keeping with the historical account.

Tughlaq is the central character in the play. Historians had already said much about Tughlaq's scholarships, religious tolerance and poetic gifts. Karnad closely follows historical sources in the presentation of these qualities. He portrays Tughlaq as a generous and charitable Sultan in the very first scene. He accepts the Kazi's judgment graciously in which he himself is held guilty of confiscating the land of a Brahmin, Vishnu Parsad. The Sultan is shown making a grant of 500 silver dinars to the Brahmin and also giving him a post in the civil service. The Sultan also invites non-Muslim scholars for discussion. He used to have discussions with Muslims, Hindus and Jain scholars. This shows the liberal attitude of Sultan in case of religion.

In many other aspects, Karnad uses history very effectively. He affects alteration of the facts to suit his artistic design. He refers to numerous problems faced by the Sultan both natural and manmade. It is just to highlight the idea that Tughlaq was losing his grip over the thing. The various problems like lawlessness, corruption, rebellions and draught etc. are highlighted for the same purpose. The dramatist aims to present a particular picture before the reader eyes to suit his dramatic design. In Karnad's Tughlaq Najib is a powerful character. Even the Sultan seems to be influenced by him. Later on the Sultan's step-mother gets him killed in order to save the Sultan from leading him astray.

In history Najib is not a very important character. Girish Karnad portrays him as the evil genius of the Sultan in order to justify his aim which is to find a parallel in Tughlaq's administration of the India of 1960. The characters of Aziz and Azam are the creation of Karnad's imagination. They have been introduced to provide us with humour and laughter as well as to exhibit the failure of Tughlaq's administration. Karnad has erected the structure of Tughlaq's plot on the biased and partial views of Barani and orthodox historians.

### **Conclusion:**

Prof. M.K. Naik points out that Tughlaq is a historical play on the life of Sultan Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq of the 14th 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 the 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. So it is to be concluded that the play Tughlaq is a classic play as well as a famous historical play.

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