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GIRISH KARNAD'S *TUGHLAQ* : A CONFLICT BETWEEN WORDS AND SWORD

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to examine the historical context and process of fictionalization of the actual facts of Indian history in the form of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq, one of the most controversial and eccentric rulers of India. It is a well known fact that the literary writer has to represent human life in action and thought within the constraints which history set before him. It is interesting to analyze how Girish Karnad has portrayed the social, political and economic conditions of that time and how Tughlaq, the protagonist, with his wisdom, strong character and firm policy of secularism struggled to stabilize the kingdom. How does Karnad achieve excellence in this play by combining the fact and fiction? How does he interpret the political and psychological conflicts of human history?

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Girish Karnad has not only created a niche for himself as a modern Indian dramatist but he has also taken the Indian drama to the international level. He wrote *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hyayvadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Taledanda*, *The Fire and Rain*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, and *Bali: The Sacrifice*. He draws from various sources the story of his plays for example, legends, myths, history and folk literature.

His play *Tughlaq*, ever since its publication, attracted the attention of the readers, critics and the theatre people alike. In this play Karnad has given a poetic treatment to the well known king and historical personality Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. Tughlaq as king was perhaps one of the most controversial of Indian rulers. As much as that for every faltering activity in mundane life his name became a metaphor. Even Tughlaq was aware that his citizens call him 'Mad Muhammad'.

Historical sources reveal that Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq succeeded Ghiyas-ud-Din- Tughlaq in 1325 A.D. as the ruler of India. He was a scholarly man proficient in many branches of learning. He introduced many administrative measures and his decision to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad was much criticized. Karnad was fascinated by this personality as it is evident by his comment:

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 ever 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 idealization as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, and his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt that 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. (*Tughlaq*, Intro viii)

This declaration of the dramatist may lead us to consider *Tughlaq* as a political allegory but it would be an injustice with the masterpiece as it offers layers of interpretation and meaning. Karnad had picked up a historical figure and had given an intellectual, psychological and emotional re-orientation in such a way that the play was an immediate success on the stage and it greatly appealed to the readers also. Sigmund Freud explains that it is the individual's 'central reality' that determines and shapes the person's choices. According to him, "The central reality for any individual is the internal one and the socio-cultural and political systems have no independent existence but are collective response to or defenses against the turbulence of the inner world" (Freud 113). It is in these conflicting forces *Tughlaq* is caught and struggled till the end of the play.

In the beginning of the play we find *Tughlaq* as the most idealistic and open minded ruler who orders to carry out a suit against his own government. Thus the Brahmin Vishnu Prasad files a suit and his claim is found just and he is returned not only his confiscated land but is also given a job in "the Civil Service to ensure him a regular adequate income" (*Tughlaq* 03). This decision of *Tughlaq* is far ahead of his times and baffles the people at large as the old man reacts, "What folly is this! May Heaven guide our Sultan" (*Tughlaq* 03).

In the beginning of his rein, when he is in Delhi, he is a man of high ideals. When he talks to his stepmother about his worries about the future and welfare of his state, he says:

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! (*Tughlaq* 10)

But at the same time he is conscious of his words and he is well aware of the fact that unless and until he commands the love and respect of his citizens his words will remain hollow. He is such an extraordinary man that even his staunch critic Imam-Ud-Din appreciates his qualities:

You are one of the most powerful kings on earth today and you could spread Kingdom of Heaven on earth. God has given you everything – power, learning, intelligence, talent. Now you must repay His debt. (*Tughlaq* 20)

Tughlaq knows it fully well that it is the confidence of the people that makes the king powerful and not his aggressive practices. Again he is the king whose ideas about monarchy are much ahead of his times. As he says :

Am I a king only because I am the son of a king? Or is it because I can make the people accept my laws and the army move to my commands? Or can self-confidence alone justify it? (*Tughlaq* 38).

Yet this man cold- bloodedly and mercilessly kills whosoever comes in his path. He is alleged to have killed his father and brother in order to come into power and then to maintain that power he has to eliminate a number of people. Towards the end of the play *Tughlaq* understood fully well that "Not words but the sword – that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission" (66). He further says the deaths of people were not futile, "They gave me what I wanted – power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to recognize myself".

Thus the play presents Muhammad-Bin-*Tughlaq* as one of the most paradoxical figures. He is wise and foolish, kind and cruel, judicious and impulsive at the same time. He started his tenure as a highly idealistic and visionary king but to maintain his position his idealism was shattered to pieces and he became a slave to power and ambition.

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