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ELEMENT OF HISTORY IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *TUGHLAQ*

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ABSTRACT

If we turn the pages of History, we find that Ghazi Malik Tughlaq was the real founder of Tughlaq Empire in Delhi. He was appointed the Governor of Punjab under Alavddin Khilji by virtue of his intelligence, tact and faithfulness to Emperor. The last ruler of Khilji dynasty was so weak that he could keep up his family rule intact. A slave named Khusru took his place but he, too, could not keep up due to his inefficiency and faithfulness. There is some confusion among historians about the date of his accession but on the basis of extant records it may be said that Tughlaq's accession took place in Zil Hil 724/ November-December 1324 and his coronation forty days later, i.e. in A.H. 725/January 1325. Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* is certainly a historical play. Girish Karnad says in the interview with Rajinder Paul "Kannada had produced no good historical plays; none that was in any sense significant. So I thought why not. It was a challenge. I went through a potted history book and came across Tughlaq." (Enact 54 page 2.).

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It deals with the most important phases in the life of a medieval Indian ruler, Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq. "The protagonist of Karnad's play is Muhammad bin Tughlaq, a brilliant but spectacularly unsuccessful fourteenth-century Islamic sultan of Delhi known popularly as Mad Muhammad. Karnad's primary historical source is the *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi* (1357), a chronical history whose author, Zia-ud-din Barani." (Tutun Mukherjee page 98) Girish Karnad got fascinated towards this queer Sultan through the historical works of such eminent historians. "My subject was the life of Muhammed Tughlaq, a fourteenth century sultan of Delhi, certainly the most brilliant individual ever as ascend the throne of Delhi and also one of the biggest failures." (Author's Introduction page 7). Girish Karnad wrote two other historical play. They are *Yayati* and *Hayavadana*. K.R.S. Iyengar says:

"In all his three play-be the theme, historical, mythical or legendary- Karnad's approach is -'modern', and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements." *Indian Writing in English* (735)

Mohammad-Bin-Tughlaq ruled in India in the 14th century. After three day of the assassination of his father Ghias-ud-din Tughlaq, Juna Khan alias Ulugh Khan ascended the throne of Delhi at Tughlaqabad in 1325. He

assumed the title of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq but no merry making was done on this occasions. On the other hand the Sultan wore black garments as token of mourning due to the death of his father and brother. After forty days of mourning he proceeded to Delhi and his coronation ceremony was performed in the Red Palace of Balban. Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq had four brothers-Mubark Khan, Nusrat Khan, Masud Khan and Mahmood Khan. Out of them, Mahmook Khan was killed and buried along with his father at Afghanpur. Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq was the most competent among his brothers. He had vast experience of army and administration. He had friendship with many nobles and was already having control government. He was therefore declared heir to the throne of Delhi. Historians are of the view that Mohammad Bin Tughlaq was behind the murder of his father and brother, but it has not been proved.

However,Sultan Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq holds a specific place in the history of Medieval India. His reign is significant from several points of view. During his reign the direct rule of Delhi sultanate was established in most of the south and it was the zenith of his career from the point of view of territorial expansion. At the same time the disintegration of the sultanate began because of the Utopian schemes of the Sultan. However, none of the Sultans possessed so many virtue and merits as Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq. The character and personality of Muhammad Tughlaq was so complex that it has been very difficult for the historians to give a correct estimate of his character.

After his coronation Muhammad Tughlaq laid out some ambitious plans and executed them. Although most of his schemes failed into to, yet they provided a mirror to the greatness, liberality and feeling of public welfare of the Sultan. His schemes also throw light on the worthiness and ambitions of the Sultan and his devotion to the Sultanate.

Firstly, he intended to make some reforms in revenue system and made several declarations and issued ordinances. Among the steps in this direction, was the increase of tax in Doab. According to Amir II, "Look at what's happening in Delhi .Just look at it!you can't take step without paying some tex or another . There's even a tax on gambling. How are we to live ?You can't even cheat without having to pay tax for it ." (Three Plays page 174)

Another scheme was the transfer of the capital. Muhammad Tughlaq declared to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. "I am taking a new step in which I hope I shall have your support and cooperation . Later this year the capital of my empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad." (Three Plays page 149). Because he thought that it was quite difficult to control the whole sultanate from Delhi. Since Daulatabad was situated in the middle of the Sultanate the issue of transfer was seriously taken up by Tughlaq. Muhammad says:

"My empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you well know its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important father is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslim and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom".(Three plays page 149)

Having decided the transfer of the capital, Muhammad Tughlaq ordered all the people to migrate to Daulatabad. The distance between the old and new capital was about 950 kilometers. The sultan tried to provide all possible facilities to the people. He got the roads repried and constructed guest-houses on both the sides of the road, every two or three miles. The Sultan spent a lot of money in the execution of this plan. The imperial court and establishment was shifted to Daulatabad along with nobles, scholars and saints, so that Muslim culture could flourish there.

But when there was torally different in Daulatabad then realizing his mistake, Muhammad Tughlaq painfully revoked his order and ordered the public to move back to Delhi. Again, thousands of people died on the way. Thus the glory of Delhi perished.

"The merciful sultan had made perfect arrangements. But do you know, you can love a city like a woman? My old father had lived in Delhi all his life. He died of a broken heart. Then my son Ismail. He was six

years old- would had been ten now! The fine dust that hung in the air, fine as silk, it conversed him like a silken shroud. After him his mother. (*Three Plays* page 193).

The age of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq is also considered a very significant epoch in the history of India coinage. He introduced various reforms and improvements in manufacturing, valuation and types of coinage. The introduction of token currency was most significant innovation of Muhammad Tughlaq in the history of medieval Indian coinage. From the very date of his accession. Tughlaq spent a lot of money on giving rewards and grants to noble and people. He also emptied the treasury in surprising the rebels, conducting military campaigns and facing famines and droughts. So he needed huge amount of wealth. Hence in 1330, the bronze coins were struck and it was declared that they should be treated at par in value with the silver coins. For some time scheme of token currency continued properly but soon the people began to feel the difference between the intrinsic value of the bronze coins and silver coins. Eventually everyone began to store silver and gold coins and the market was flooded with counterfeit bronze coins. Muhammad says, "It's is a question of confidence. A question of trust! The other day I heard that in China they have paper currency-paper, mind you- and yet it works because the people accept it. They have faith in the Emperor's seal on the pieces of paper." (*Three Plays* page 182)

But when the houses of Hindus were turned into mints then Sultan declared the bronze currency illegal and ordered the people to exchange their bronze coins with silver coins from the royal treasury. History tells that Tughlaq was a man of highest accomplishments. He was great scholar, idealist and a visionary.

In matter of religion, he had a liberal and tolerant attitude. In fact the credit of establishing a secular kingdom in India goes to him. Tughlaq says to the people "Justice works in my kingdom –without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed." (*Three Plays* page 149) He was really the originator of the liberal policies of Akbar. He was not a blind follower of the words of Ulemas. He never accepted any proposal of the orthodox Muslims without putting it to the test of logic. The Ulemas had monopoly in departments of Justice and law, but the Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq suspected their monopoly and never consulted them on political or religious matters. Thus the position of Ulemas was reduced to that of the general populace. The Ulemas, therefore, became bitter critics of the sultan. Tughlaq regularly invited non-Muslim scholars for discussions. He discussed many things with Muslim, Hindu, Jain scholars. Due to his liberal religious attitude, even the contemporary historian and theologian Zia-uddin-Barani considered Tughlaq a non-believer in Islam. The author of *Masalik* writes:

"The Sultan is highly learned. He knows the Holy Book by heart and also the *Hedayah*. He has mastered philosophy and logic and is a fine calligraphist. Himself no mean poet, he appreciates the excellence of poetry and holds with Persian poets and criticizes their productions." (*Ishwari Parasad* page 311)

Karnad closely sticks to history in his portrayal of Muhammad Tughlaq and his Kingdom, though there are certain deviations. In the very opening scene he portrays Tughlaq as a generous and charitable king. Tughlaq is shown to accept the Kazi's judgement graciously in which he is held guilty of misappropriating the land of the Hindu Vishnu Prasad. Tughlaq also sanctions him a grant of five hundred silver dinars and a post in Civil Services. In the crowd, the old man, representing the orthodox class, criticizes vehemently Tughlaq's liberal and rational policies. Old man says:

"And get kicked by an infidel too. It's an insult to Islam." (*Three Plays* page 147)

But the young man, who represents the liberal, says:

"That's precisely the point. Not even once a week, I bet. Now you pray five times a day because that's the law if you break it, you'll have the officers on your neck. Can you mention one earlier Sultan in whose time people read the Koran in the streets like now? Just one?" (*Three Plays* page 147)

The humanism and idealism of Muhammad Tughlaq has been very well projected by Girish Karnad in his play. In the scene two, Tughlaq speaks about his visions before his step mother thus:

"Let us laugh and cry together and then, let's pray let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and out 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 notions. Come! I'm waiting to embrace you all! But then now can spread my branches in the stars while the roots have yet to find their hold in the earth? I wish I could believe in recurring birth like the Hindu but I have only on life, one body, and hopes, my people, my God are all fighting for it."(Three Plays page 155)

Historians tell that Tughlaq was a great lover of learning, particularly Greek learning. This is also evidenced in Karnad's play. Tughlaq speaks about his inclination towards great philosophers.

"I still remember the days when I read the Greeks Sokrates who took poison so he could give the world the drink of god, 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. You are asking me to make complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha".(Three Plays page 165)

Tughlaq was said to be guilty of patricide and fratricide. "He thinks that he alone can rule his kingdom ideally. So he gets his father and brother assassinated in a contrived accident and inherits the kingdom."(J. Dodiya page 69). Karnad also mentions this fact in this play. The third man in the first scene says that he has heard that the Sultan is guilty of killing his father and brother. "And he said the Sultan's guilty of killing his father and brother, he said. He said so many other things too –about Islam and what's happening to it. It was the most inspiring speech I've heard."(Three Plays page 150). Even his step mother is convinced that Muhammad has done so. However, history tells about the feeling of remorse and repentance which Tughlaq nourished over the murder of his father, but has not suggested any such feeling in the heart of Tughlaq. "Look at my own mother –she won't talk to me now –not because father died but because my brother died in that accident. He was more amenable to her whims and he would have made a better king for her. So she believes I killed them."(Three Plays page 158)

Karnad refers to the shifting of the capital and its disastrous effects on the common people. In Scene Eleven Third Man says, "Roads are lined with skeletons. A man starved to death right in front of his eyes. In Doab, people are eating barks off the trees, he says. Yes, and women have to make do with skins of dead horses."(Three Plays page 208). In the very opening scene Tughlaq declares his intention of the shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. But the shifting of the capital was done in stages, first of all the royal persons, Amirs, Maliks, Ulemas, etc. were shifted. Before shifting the people, the Sultan purchased houses for them in Daulatabad. All the possible facilities were made available to the people on the way. Even Barani who opposed the idea of shifting the capital wrote that the Sultan gave liberal gifts to the people both at the time of their departure and at the time of their arrival at Daulatabad. But Girish Karnad does not highlight the liberality of Tughlaq. He projects the act of shifting the capital as only the whim of the Sultan.

About the mass exodus also there are controversial views. Most of the contemporary historians emphasize that there was mass exodus. But this is not totally correct. The shifting was done only in stages as has already been noted earlier. But Girish Karnad follows the views of historians Tughlaq says to Najib:

Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a for night. I was too soft, I can see that now, They'll only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.(Three Plays page 185-186)

It appears that Girish Karnad highlight only the failures and weakness of Muhammad Tughlaq. It is a historical fact that Muhammad Tughlaq wanted to bring about integration among Hindus and Muslims by shifting the capital. Muhammad says, "But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom." (Three Plays page 149)

Girish Karnad has largely based his view of Muhammad Tughlaq on the opinion of Barani rather than another historians.

In the reference of the token currency also Karnad has given a biased view. The step of issuing copper currency was not a strong step taken up by Tughlaq. Such currency had successfully been issued in China and Iran also. Tughlaq had to take this step on account of the shortage of silver and the heavy burden on the royal treasury on account of his increasing expenditure on the Army because of several rebellions. But unfortunately the experiment of Tughlaq failed miserably and consequently the national economy was shattered. But the Girish Karnad has portrayed this event merely to project Tughlaq's utter failure. Then Karnad has not shown any sympathetic attitude towards Tughlaq. Karnad has also portrayed Najib as a very important character in the play. In history he is not an important character. But in the play he has been portrayed as an evil genius of Tughlaq. It is because of this that Najib is got murdered by the stepmother. Likewise, the episode of Aziz and Aazam is also included by Karnad in order to provide dramatic relief. This episode also helps to project Tughlaq's administrative failures.

On the whole Girish Karnad has taken a partial view of the character of Muhammad Tughlaq. He has altered several aspects of the region of Tughlaq, perhaps with a view to making the play more relevant in the present Indian context. It should not be forgotten that this play can be seen as a political allegory in the modern Indian context. The changes that Karnad has made in the play are intended to make the play relevant in the contemporary interest. The play is the product of the sixties when after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, the country was passing through a phase of disillusionment. "Karnad has done his best to create the atmosphere of mutual distrust, frustrated idealism, orthodox and convention ridden faith, communal intolerance, religious bigotry, treachery and sedition, rampant corruption, soaring prices, natural calamities-plague and famine, Sultan's unmitigated blood thirstiness and his final disillusionment." (Satish Kumar, Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* page 69)

Hence some alteration on the part of Karnad are obvious and relevant. Anyway the play remains a historical drama. "Muhammad Tughlaq is a well-known king in Indian history—known more for his wickedness and insane policies than for anything else. Girish Karnad has immortalized this character in his play titled *Tughlaq*." (J. Dodiya page 127). In this connection 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 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." (262-63)

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