

KARNAD'S TUGHLAQ: A Blend of Politics and Religion

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ABSTRACT

Girish Karnad is an important Kannada dramatist whose work has not been voluminous but is significant contribution in terms of technique and treatment. Girish Karnad belongs to that generation of writers who came to age after India became independent of British Rule. This generation of writers had the responsibility or reconciling the cultural past of India with its colonial past, the influence of the western modes, through the indigenous cultural traditions. These writers carried out various experiments in order to achieve their objective and adopted novel modes to embody their artistic vision

KEYWORDS: Conflict, Renaissance, Religion, Doomed Ruler

Girish Karnad is the most important Indian English dramatist writing in the post-independence era. He has discussed various themes in his plays such as transfer of responsibility, conflict of doomed ruler, man's eternal desire to achieve completeness, marriage from male point of view, problem arising out of mixing of caste and religion, danger of knowledge without wisdom etc. Girish Karnad is often called a Renaissance Man having historic vision and modern interpretation. The present research paper is intended to focus on the theme of socio-religious conflicts in *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad.

Karnad made a successful attempt to introduce politics and religion in *Tughlaq*. Tughlaq, who is the chief protagonist of this new drama, is an idealist aiming at Hindu-Muslim unity, at secularism and also at building a new future for India. He is learned man and is known for his knowledge of philosophy and poetry all over the world.. The politician who is basically a crafty intriguer will have to shun religion ultimately and cannot pretend to live on it for long. However loud the ruler may be, he should stand for the Koran and its tenets; he will have to face revolt in the state as well as within himself. He cannot hide his two faces, and cannot make his double talk understood by the people at large. He will have to pay the penalty. Religion cannot be used to serve end of those who are in power. It will defy politics because religion preaches morals and expects morality from the people whereas on the other hand, politics thrives on craftiness, insidiousness, intrigue and deceit. The case of Tughlaq is no exception. When he declares prayer is compulsory and abolishes Jiziya from the infidels, and wants the transfer of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, there is a revolt in the populace. The religious leaders rise against him and are imprisoned by cunningness and craftiness of Tughlaq. They are wiped completely from his path.

Sheikh Imam-ud-din, whose courage and integrity was known throughout India, at the invitation of the Sultan, comes to Delhi to address the people, but gets disappointed to find no place at the meeting to hear him. He tells Sultan that he can quote scores of transgressions by him who is a scholar of great eminence. The sultan failed to understand the Koran. He could have sought the advice and interpretation of the Sayyids and Ulema. Instead he puts them behind bars in the name of justice. The Sultan replies, "They tried to indulge in politics. I could not allow that. I have never denied world or God, Sheikh sahib, because it's my bread and drink." The Sheikh prophetically tells Sultan that the verbal distinctions between religion and politics will rip him into two. And so does it happen. Muhammad is form within himself. The Sheikh is flattered by the Sultan and is requested by him to be his envoy to implore Ain-ul-mulk of Avadh to be at peace in the name of religion and to save the blood of the innocent Muslims, which will be shed in the war between Sultan and Ain-ul-mulk. The Sheikh felt delighted to be the emissary of the Sultan for peace. He looks gorgeous and exactly like Sultan. When the belligerent armies race each other, the Sheikh stands up on his royal elephant to say something. Just then a trumpeter on the side of the Sultan sounds the charge. The battle is on and the Sheikh is killed.

The murder of the Sheikh leads to intrigue of the courtiers and other idealists in the kingdom. The Hindus and Muslims try to unite against the craftiness and tyranny of the sultan. Atrocious vengeance like that of Titus Andronicus is sought. Ratan Singh, the adopted brother of Shihab-ud-din persuades Shihab the most trusted of the Sultan to attend the meeting of the intriguers, and the Amirs or Sultan and the religious saints of the kingdom who have been horrified at the imprisonment of Sheikh Haidrari, at the exile of Sheikhhood and the murder of Sheikh Imam-ud-din.

In the play, *Tughlaq*, Karnad makes use of symbolism and allegory to touch upon contemporary history and reality. The beginning of prayer, its growth and death and rebirth are symbolic of the fact that is

corrupted and at the very source; it has to meet death and to be reborn. Politics deprives the man of prayer which alone can save.

This play, which combines religion and politics of an idealist, is of great interest to the people of India. It aims at showing that idealism of the ruler will fail and will ruin the idealist. Secularism, equality and unity in a country like India are the concepts very much ahead of the times. The people of India still are led away by the saints and religious heads who muddle with politics which is game of seesaw. Still the Muslim saints like Bukhari of Delhi and the Imam of Garib Nawaz of Ajmer go round talking about the parties they propagate for. People believe them more than they do a politician. They are swung this side and the side by their fiery speeches and vote for or against the rulers. Life of the people is interrupted by the interaction of the saints and politicians. People suffer as they suffered during the reign of Tughlaq.

The greatest truth that Karnad has brought out through his *Tughlaq* is that religious saints cannot wash away filth from society. Aziz, the dhobi masquerading as a saint, when exposed pleads with the Sultan, for his life and says '*when it comes to washing away filth; no saint is match for a dhobi*'. Only the people can. Also the idealist politicians bring more chaos in the country than prosperity and welfare of the people. The forces remain the same, the faces change; Hence the reliability and popularity of Karnad's Tughlaq.

Karnad mentions some facts of history and places them in the midst of imaginary incidents and situations to dramatize history in order to be contemporaneous interest. During the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq, the Hindus and the Muslims did not trust one another. The Muslim called the Hindus bloody infidels who deserved to be kicked. And the Hindus suspected the Muslims and could hardly believe that a Muslim ruler was going to see them prosper and to exempt them from taxes without having his own benefit in view.

Despite the best efforts of Muhammad to bring the Hindus and Muslims together and unite them in one bond of brotherhood, he failed. This fact of fourteenth century still holds good. Gandhi, the idealist, made attempts to unite Hindus and the Muslims. Nehru followed Gandhiji's footsteps. As a Prime Minister, he wanted the two communities to be two bodies with one soul, but he failed. There were Hindu Muslim riots in post-Independence India and deep rooted suspicion, doubt and distrust diseased the blood in the veins of these communities. Still we doubt the sincerity and loyalty of the Muslims for Indian Territory and the Muslims too look with suspicion the goes on in India which to them is Hindu India.

Karnad makes Tughlaq an idealist and establishment that is politics idealism does not pay. It is bound to fail, especially when the idealist is impulsive. Tughlaq is very intelligent and works very hard for the people. He does not even go to bed.

But this learned and talented Sultan is very impulsive. He cannot tolerate opposition. By the means which appear to be straight, he puts down dissension and wipes away the dissenters from his path of glory. Sheikh Imam-ud-din is his greatest critic. He rouses the people of Kanpur with his fiery speeches. He tells them that Sultan is guilty of patricide and fratricide and that he is a great transgressor of Islamic tenets. The audience goes wild and burns down half of Kanpur. The Sultan comes to know of the people's rising and invites Imam-ud-din to Delhi to address his people and to analyze the Sultan's administration and show where the Sultan has inadvertently taken wrong measures – measures harmful to the country and the faith. The Imam is caught in the trap. When he comes to Delhi, he finds no audience to listen to him. Tughlaq has maneuvered people's staying behind at the point of bayonets. The Sheikh is depressed. He is flattered by the Sultan and requested to be the envoy to the Nawab of Avadh to plead for peace in the name of Islam. The Imam puts on royal robes and looking very much like the Sultan rides the elephant to the scene of battle where all of a sudden a charge is sounded and the battle begins. The Sheikh is killed. Later Tughlaq murders Shihab with his own hands; he orders his mother to be dragged and killed for murdering Najib, the Sultan's most trusted Lieutenant. These murders, in Muhammad's own words, gave him what he wanted – power, strength to shape his own thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize himself. All his idealism is shattered and thrown to the winds.

In *Tughlaq*, Karnad puts forward some of the historical facts: the burning of Kanpur, the revolt of the Nawab of Avadh, Fakr-ud-din's revolt in Bengal, the uprising in Deccan and the Malabar. Ehsansha's declaration of independence and Bahal-ud-din Gashtasp's collecting the army against the Sultan, the burning with of Ain-ul-Mulk and Shihab-ud-din later. All these incidents support the fissiparous tendencies in India at those times which are similar to the attitudes of the people Kerala in the South, of Bengal in the East, Kashmir in the North and of Punjab in the West. The people in the South wanted a linguistic state, it was given to them; in the North the Punjabis demanding Khalistan are vocal from without and within and have been the cause of the murder of our beloved Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Who does not know the cold war is going on between the rulers of Bengal and Andhra Pradesh and those of the Centre? How is the India of today different from that of Tughlaq days? Only the people and personages have changed; the forces and the causes for fight and movements haven't. The struggle to gain power and to perpetuate it is the basic fact that remains unaltered. The fight of individual against another individual has been substituted by the fight between one group and the other to secure the power to rule.

Karnad has succeeded in mixing history and fiction to give the feel of life of the fourteenth century which is quite relevant to the contemporary reality in India. Through Tughlaq, he has shown not just the form but coiled intestines of history. Tughlaq was surrounded by the Amirs who were most stupid. They were in collusion with the king in robbing people and punishing them for being robbed. They did not advise him correctly; nor did they carry out his plans honestly. Karnad has satirized a nobleman, an Amir who was a courtier, a very important clog of the government machinery. In *Tughlaq*, Aziz says to Aazam.

“You are stupid. So you’ll

make good nobleman – an

Amir.” (GirishKarnad,

Tughlaq p.58)

Therefore, more heart and hard touch method is needed to understand the whole analysis of the themes of GirishKarnad’s plays. Thus, we are in a juncture to say that his plays live for longevity by touching the stones of history.

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