

Tughlaq By Girish Karnad

Plot:

'Tughlaq' is Karnad's second play written in 1964; the play was originally written in Kannada and then translated in Kannada by Karnad himself. It is all about the life of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq who has ruled in India in 14th century. There is a lot of controversy among the historians about the character of Tughlaq but Karnad has presented this man as a man of opposites. The central theme of the play is the complexity in the character of Sultan Tughlaq, who has both the elements good as well as evil. He is a visionary man as well as man of action. Other characters also present Tughlaq's dual personality; his close associates Barani and the scholarly historian Najib are practical politician like him.

From the very first scene we come to know about the complex personality of Tughlaq, he can be considered as a learnt and an intelligent man. He has abilities to learn and curiosity to know and he is master in playing chess, he has the knowledge of 'Quran' more than any sheikh, and also a good reader who has read Greek, farcical and Arabic literature. Tughlaq wanted his life as a garden of roses, where even thrones also give delight; his imagination expresses his sense about literature.

The character of sultan Tughlaq can be compared with Christopher Marlow's "Dr. Faustus" who has same hunger of knowledge and he had a tragic end and same tragic end Tughlaq has also faced. He wanted to make a new India, and for him it was very difficult but he is ready to explain what people don't understand,

"How he can explain tomorrow to those,

who have not even opened their eyes

to the light of today."

But then even i remember few things like Tughlaq changed capital from Delhi to Daultabad, and from there again to Delhi.

Tughlaq written by Girish Karnad in 1964, is his best loved play, about an idealist 14th-century Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughluq, and allegory on the Nehruvian era which started with ambitious idealism and ended up in disillusionment.

Karnad shows the evolution of Tughlaq from an idealist to a tyrant lusty for power and fame, something anyone, any Indian for that matter can relate to easily especially people who are familiar with the Nehruvian Era of Indian politics.

Girish Karnad's play Tughlaq explores the character of one of the most fascinating kings to occupy the throne in Delhi, namely, Mohammed-bin-Tughlaq. He ruled for 26 years, a period of unparalleled cruelty and agonising existence for his subjects.

He's fascinating because though he was one of the most learned monarchs of Delhi, and had great ideas and a grand vision, his reign was also an abject failure. He started his rule with great ideals — of a unified India, of Hindus and Muslims being equal in the eyes of the state (he abolished the onerous tax *jizya* on the Hindus) and the Sultan being the first among equals.

He understood the value of money as not deriving from its intrinsic worth but from the promise behind it, and introduced copper coins. Yet in 20 years his reign had degenerated into an anarchy and his kingdom had become a "kitchen of death". Girish Karnad's play explores why this happened.

The play was immensely popular at the time it was produced (1964). India had, within the same span of nearly 20 years (a mere coincidence?), descended from a state of idealism to disillusionment and cynicism, and hence the play found a chord that resonated in the minds of many people at that time. The issues posed by the play remain relevant even today, not only in a political sense, but also for organisations.

The play recaptures the significant events starting shortly after Tughlaq's ascension to the throne: his proclamations of idealism, his calling upon his people to be a part of the building of a new empire, of prosperity, peace and amity. But he ascended the throne by dubious means, killing his father and brother during prayer time, though no one was sure. This led to a lack of credibility among his followers from the time he ascended the throne — no one believed what he professed. The play outlines his clever plots to eliminate his opponents and his surviving an assassination attempt by his own courtiers. This was a turning point in his life: he decided to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, ordered every single subject to move from Delhi, banned prayer altogether, and imposed unspeakable cruelties on his subjects. The miseries of the people during the journey, the corruption that was huge and endemic, and Tughlaq's progressive alienation and isolation from his people are dramatically portrayed. The play ends with scenes of utter chaos and misery in the kingdom, and Tughlaq being left alone, having been abandoned by those who survived him, that is.

Major Characters in the Play

Tughlaq- In the play, Tughlaq emerges as a headstrong and idealistic ruler. He is vulnerable, and constantly admits his mistakes and allows himself to be punished publicly. He moves his capital to Daulatabad because it is a city dominated by the Hindus. This move will further the cause of togetherness and communal unity. Through this character, the idealism of the Nehruvian era is commented upon. Guilty of parricide, Tughlaq is often on the defensive when he is questioned of his crime. His uncompromising generosity and sense of social justice embraces all religions and treats them in an impartial fashion. This character is a device that represents a scathing critique of the nationalist notion of communal harmony and religious co-existence, the very ideals that were valorized before independence but later turned in to an anti-climax with the partition of India.

The opening scenes reflect the idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of this character. He contemplates to equate the value of copper coins with silver dinars. In order to establish himself as a worthy ruler, he exposes himself to public scorn and invites public condemnation. He hastens the process of his own nemesis through a series of badly contrived measures at projecting himself as a tolerant and efficient ruler. His irrational and erratic methods are severely criticized by his courtiers and citizens. He emerges as a shrewd contriver and a mercilessly ambitious ruler. He is responsible for the assassination of Sheikh Muhammad, his severest critic, who accuses him of parricide and of being un-Islamic. He stabs Shihab-ud-din when he tries to conspire against him. He is doomed because of his own follies and failures, and becomes an insensitive murderer. The height of his insanity is reflected in the later episodes of the play. He later becomes a divided self, and suffers from inner turmoil and contradictions. His ultimate isolation in a world turned alien gives a tragic dimension to the play. Tughlaq might be perceived as an over-ambitious alien emperor, who aims to rebuild new cities and empires, subjecting the culture of a people to colonial strain. Each scene represents the progressive degradation and dehumanization of Tughlaq, leading to his tragic downfall.

Step-mother—The step-mother of Tughlaq constantly appears in the earlier scenes of the play. She is torn apart by conflicting emotions, her over-riding concern for her son is in contradiction with her awareness of the fact that he is guilty of parricide. She appears troubled, and confides in Najib, the courtier and politician. She is consistently projected as an embodiment of rationality and concern. She later murders...in order to save her son from ultimate ruin. Tughlaq orders her to be stoned to death for the unwarranted act.

Aziz—Muhammad is very manipulative, witty, imaginative, secretive and ruthless, Aziz provides his ironic parallel. Like him, from the very beginning Aziz is clear about what he is to do in future (when he reaches his destination). In pursuit of realizing his dream to be rich by hook or crook, he manipulates the decision of the government giving compensation to those whose land has been confiscated by the state. He is a Muslim but in order to get the compensation he disguises himself as a Brahmin. Thus he punctures the balloon of the king's welfare policies. If Muhammad is confident that everything will be settled after he reaches Daultabad, Aziz is also confident of his plans. He tells Aazam, —There is money here. We will make a pile by the time we reach Daultabad. If Muhammad has disguised his true self and poses to be a very religious and benevolent king, Azis is disguised as a Brahmin (though he is a Muslim washer man). Ironically, he appears as a Brahmin and ends up as a special messenger to the king. He becomes an instrument in exposing the cruelty and corruption prevalent in Muhammad's regime when he refuses to help a woman with a dying son in her lap and asking for help for his medical aid. Aziz expects money from her knowing full well that her husband is bed-ridden and she is helpless. Asked by Aziz why he doesn't let her go to the doctor, very stoically he says, It is a waste of money. I am doing her a favour. For Muhammad and Aziz politics holds a common interest. Aziz's comments about politics are ironically true: Politics ! It is a beautiful world- wealth, success, position, power-yet it is full of brainless people, people not with an idea in their head. When I think of all the tricks in our village to pinch a few torn clothes from people if one uses half that intelligence here, one can bet robes of power. It is a fantastic world. Like Muhammad he also makes use of religion and caste for his personal gains. He knows that even if the Hindu woman is not allowed to leave the camp, she can't complain against him

as she takes him for a Brahmin. Complaining against a Brahmin to a Muslim, according to a Brahminical dogma, will send her to hell which she never desires. Furthermore, he is cruel like Muhammad in taking life of someone. He kills Ghiyas-ud-din and starts dancing after that which shows that he has no regrets of any sort after killing someone. His singing and dancing over a dead body reminds us of the neurotic self of the emperor. After killing Ghiyas-ud-din and putting on his robes he asks the horrified Aazam, —How do I look, eh? The great grandson of the Khalif. Laugh, the fool you laugh. Celebrate! What are you crying for? . . Dance, dance. . (sings). When he is to present himself before the king, he aptly defines himself, 'I am your majesty's true disciple. Indeed, Aziz appears as his shadow' or the other Muhammad'. It is perhaps because of this parallelism between them that Muhammad pardons him even for his grave misdeeds.

Aazam- He is a close friend of Aziz and his partner in the play. Both of them are vagabonds, and live mostly by robbery and deception. Aziz is undeniably the more cunning of the two. Aazam's actions are staged on a smaller scale, and Aziz's actions have larger ramifications. They constantly comment upon and analyse the policies of the Sultan and provide a variety of perspectives on the political climate of the play.

Najib- He is a politician and a shrewd contriver, a Hindu, who later embraced Islam. In most of the scenes, he is seen advising the Sultan on matters of political action and diplomacy. He is an advocate of ruthless political expansion and domination, and presents a perfect contrast to Barani, the historian. In the words of the Sultan —he wants pawns of flesh and blood. He doesn't have the patience to breathe life in to these bones... He represents the more rational aspects of Tughlaq's self and is a constant companion in terms of royal political affairs.

Sheikh-Imam-ud-Din- He is a maulvi and probably the harshest critic of Tughlaq. He openly proclaims Tughlaq to be un-Islamic and invites his hostility. He gives public lectures and condemns Tughlaq as guilty of parricide. He tries to influence the general public through his inflammatory speeches deriding the actions of the Sultan. He is later murdered in a cleverly crafted plot of the Sultan.