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Tughlaq: History Revisited

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In *Tughlaq*, Karnad has offered a serious fictional reappraisal of a figure ridiculed in history as well as popular lore which is a strategy of Postcolonial counter discourse. In Postcolonial theory, we see a challenge against grand narratives whose ideological implications have been scrutinized. The Colonial power is justified and maintained not only in terms of power based on technological superiority and military might but also through the ‘soft’ power of ideology. The efficacy of this power lies in what Ngugi wa Thiongo calls ‘colonizing the mind’ so that both colonizer and colonized think of the assumptions encoded in Orientalism as natural, inevitable and uncontestable. From Postcolonial perspective, Karnad has presented *Tughlaq* in such a manner that evokes sympathy from audience. In the play, *Tughlaq* is presented as a secular humanist who tried to rule over his people impartially and tried to lay foundation of such a kingdom where justice would work without any preference to religion, caste, creed and colour. Karnad scrutinizes the ‘official’ as well as the Orientalist narratives of history which have given a biased version of Indian history. He has given alternative revisionary history of Mohammed bin Tughlaq than the one given by Orientalist or his contemporary historians on the basis of which they have tried to either legitimize their British imperialism in India or ridiculed him as a mad Tughlaq. He is looking at past from the vantage point of present and is trying to make us understand the relevance of the past for the present. The play also invokes significant elements in modern Indian political and cultural experience that contemporary audience can apply to their own situations. Karnad also presents a full-blown version of the crisis of leadership and belief that occurs within a culture divided along various religions and sects. As Dharwadker (2006: ix) rightly says, “Karnad’s plays employ the narratives of myth, history and folklore to evoke an ancient or pre-modern world that resonate in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake the past in the image of the present”.

Linda Hutcheon is of the view that Postmodernism and Postcolonialism are alike because both undertake a dialogue with history. She observes that Postmodernism “questions, rather than confirms, the process of history... [and] this is where it overlaps significantly with the post-colonial” (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 218). In Postcolonial theory, the Postmodern critique of power-centered history has been used to understand the epistemological and cultural effects of European dominance over non-European societies in the post-Renaissance period. With the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and launching of the ‘Subaltern Studies’, the ‘Postcolonial Studies’ has not only questioned the autonomous status of history but also “stressed the complicity between the historical discourse and the colonialist strategies of cultural domination and self-legitimation because the production of the ‘official’ histories in the colonial world is almost the prerogative of the colonizer” (Dharwadker 2006: 219). Postcolonial writers have tried to reshape their history by using history as a narrative in their writings. This fictionalized representation of history always stands in a determinable ideological relationship to the power-centered history—confirming, repudiating or radically reshaping its message. This historical narrative can be regarded as an alternative form of representation.

We are aware of the fact that, like other colonial countries, India, too, was under the British colonial rule for more than a century. During this period, its inhabitants lost their voices and

wishes. They were subjected to harsh treatment; brutalities of that period are fresh in the collective memory of Indian people even today. Their actual history was buried underground and it was the ideologically manipulated and power-centered history that got recorded at that time. After India's Independence in 1947, Indian people were free to think about their past. The Indian intellectuals found a need to reshape their past and to link themselves to their pre-colonial past. The biggest challenge before them (intellectual people) was to connect the Postcolonial period with the pre-colonial one. They began a search for cultural roots which had been polluted during this imperial rule. In the meantime, various writers came on the scene and began to frame their writings. They began to foreground Indian culture in their writings by drawing from the rich plethora of Indian past. We see some important figures like Raja Roa, R. K. Narayan, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Sarojini Naidu and various other writers who enriched Indian English literature with their literary output.

In the genre of drama, too, dramatists came up with their plays which are now an important part of our literary tradition. Most of them have used Indian myths, folk tales and history as the source of their plays. Girish Karnad is also one among them. He has located most of his plays in Indian history, myths and folk tales; only few of them have been placed in contemporary reality. In *Tughlaq*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* and *Tale-Danda* history has been used and interpreted to suit his purpose. In the first two plays, history has been contested but in *Tale-Danda* history has been reinterpreted to portray the picture of the Indian culture.

Indian history is divided into three periods—Ancient, Medieval and Modern. In *Tughlaq*, Karnad goes back to the second phase of the Indian history because Tughlaq's reign also comes under this phase. In his portrayal of Tughlaq, Karnad has depicted the last five years of his reign. He came to know about Tughlaq, when he was going through the *Tarikh-Firoz Shahi* (The History of Firoz Shah Tughlaq 1891) of Tughlaq's court historian, Zia-ud-din Barani. In an interview, Karnad says:

When I read about Mohammed bin Tughlaq, I was fascinated. How marvelous this was, I thought. Tughlaq was a brilliant individual yet is regarded as one of the biggest failures. He tried to introduce policies that seemed today to be farsighted to the point of genius, but which earned him the nick name "Mohammed the mad" then. He ended his career in bloodshed and chaos. (Mukherjee 2006: 35)

The history of Mohammed bin Tughlaq is primarily the product of medieval Muslim and colonial British tradition of historiography whose ways of ideological implications have only recently begun to be scrutinized. Before the British came to India, there were Muslim kings who ruled over India for many centuries. When one turns to Indian history, one comes to know that there had been various wars among the kings and their kith and kin for the sake of kingship. From 1206-1526, there were five dynasties—the Slaves, the Khaljis, the Tughlaqs, the Sayyids and the Lodis—that ruled India. The British seem to have used these wars a tool to denigrate the Indian culture. Orientalist historians have treated the turmoil of the Muslim rule in India in such a manner which shows the necessity and superiority of the British colonial rule. Henry Elliot, in his preface to the *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India* says, "Though the intrinsic value of these works may be small... they will make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages occurring to them under the mildness and equity of our rule..." (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 105). Tughlaq has also been considered as an oriental despot by Vincent Smith, who observes that it is "astonishing that such a monster should have retained power for twenty six years, and then have died in his bed" (Smith 1914: 254).

Medieval Muslim historian—Zia-Ud-din Barani—defines “history as a form of knowledge essential for understanding the silent aspects of Islam and aims to educate Muslim Sultans in their duty to their faith” (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 248). In this frame work, Tughlaq became a repulsive subject because of his disregard for Quran in dealing with both Hindus and Muslims alike and his attempts to limit Islam’s influence in the political and judicial spheres of India. Barani has criticized Tughlaq for not following the principles of Islam properly; he has described him a ruthless and ambitious king. He has also lampooned him for establishing brutal laws and taking ridiculous decisions in order to keep himself in power. This gets reflected through two well-known Indian modern historians, Habib and Nizami (1970: 493) who say, “Barani makes a broad observation to the effect that [Mohammed bin Tughlaq] had lost implicit faith in ‘the revealed word’ and the traditions of the prophet”.

Karnad has tried to present an alternative history than the one propounded by Orientalists and ‘official’ historiographers alike. Retrieval of cultural past that may have a significant connection with the present—themes of communalism and power politics—and its treatment in the plays make it an explicit commentary on some of the vital and problematic issues of contemporary India. Karnad does not seem to accept the European view of Indian history. He has tried to rectify gaps, omissions and silences of the national historiography. For instance, paradigmatic qualities as a historical fiction and cultural vitality in Tughlaq lie in fact that it retrieves and makes current the relatively unfamiliar phase of Islamic imperialism in India, known as the Sultanate Period, which brought the classical Hinduism to its decisive end and introduced Islam as a dominant political and cultural force on the subcontinent. However, in the collective memory of contemporary Indians, it has been relegated to a marginal position because of the strong impact of the Moghul period and the British imperialism.

In Karnad’s portrayal of Tughlaq, we come across different interpretations of the events in the reign of Tughlaq. The play opens in 1327 AD, the time when Tughlaq (a Muslim ruler) was ruling over India. The image of monarchical rule in India is recreated as the location of the first scene in “the yard in front of the Chief Court of justice in Delhi” (Karnad 2006: 5) and India’s religious plurality is reflected in a “crowd of citizens—mostly Muslims—with a few Hindus here and there” (Karnad 2006: 5). In the very first scene, we see Tughlaq inviting his subjects to celebrate a new system, where justice works “without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed” (Karnad 2006: 7).

Karnad has tried to provide justice to this historical figure by making us understand that Tughlaq tried to rule in an impartial manner but the people around him failed to understand his best intentions. In the opening scene of the play, a young man says:

The country’s perfectly in safe hands—safer than any you’ve seen before... what’s the use of sultans who didn’t allow a subject within a mile’s distance? This king now, he isn’t afraid to be human. (Karnad 2006: 5)

Barani’s critique of Tughlaq as an anti-religious king is refuted by Karnad. Karnad portrays him as a deeply religious person who had given orders for regular prayers. One of Tughlaq’s subjects says to another:

[H]ow often did you pray before he came to the throne?... Not even once a week, I bet. Now you pray five times a day because that’s the law and 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? (5-6)

This gets substantiated also in the discussion among his treacherous fellows who wanted to kill him during the prayer time. Ratan Sing suggests them to kill him during prayer because “the sultan ...is a fanatic about prayer. He has made it compulsory for every Muslim to pray five times a day” (43).

Karnad has portrayed Tughlaq as a secular ruler who abolished jiziya—a tax on Hindus who lived under the Muslim rule—for the betterment of his people and kingdom. But, he and his secular ideas are not understood by the people around him because his ideals are far beyond the comprehension of his contemporaries and much in advance of his time. His concept of religious tolerance seems foolish to the Muslims and his very motives are not free from suspicion to the Hindus. The Hindus, too, like their Muslim counterparts, behaved as “ungrateful wretch[es]” (6). As one of his Hindu subjects says:

We didn't want an exemption! Look, when a sultan kicks me in the teeth and says, ‘pay up, you Hindu dog’, I'm happy. I know I am safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, ‘I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being’—well, that makes me nervous. (6)

This hints at the lurking suspension between the Hindus and Muslims during that period. The abolition of jiziya shows Tughlaq's religiosity and his attempts “for Hindu-Muslim unity and that he has no partiality for any particular community” (Sinha 2006: 56-57). His sense of justice is evident from the announcement that Vishnu Prasad—a Brahmin—“should receive a grant of five hundred silver dinars from the state treasury... and in addition to that...a post in the civil service to ensure him a regular and adequate income” (6-7). This person had filed a case against the Sultan for the misbehaviour of his officers who had taken his land illegally. During his reign, Tughlaq took a decision to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. About this shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, Husain writes:

[It] brought destruction to the capital city and misfortune to the upper classes, as well as decline of select and distinguished people... He devastated Delhi so much that in its inhabited areas, inns and suburbs not even a cat or dog remained... Many people, who had been living in their homes for years, and had been attached to their forefathers' houses for generations, perished on the long way. (Husain 2009: 109-110)

This reference to the atrocities on the people during the mass exodus is also presented by Karnad. But, we see that proper arrangements had been made by the government for the welfare and comfort of the people. Before the shift of the capital, an announcement is made.

The Merciful Sultan Mohammad has ordered—that within the next month every citizen of Delhi must leave for Daulatabad...All arrangements have been made to ensure the comfort of citizens on the way to Daulatabad. All the needs of the citizens, regarding food, clothing or medicine, will be catered to by the state. It is hoped that every citizen will use these amenities to the full and be in Daulatabad as soon as possible. (55)

Karnad looks at it from a distinct perspective. He observes that the Sultan shifted the capital because Delhi was prone to foreign invaders and its peace was never secure. Besides, Daulatabad was a city of Hindus and as a capital, it will integrate the Hindus and the Muslims. In the play, we see the Sultan making an announcement:

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 factor is that Daulatabad is a city of Hindus and as

the capital, it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom. (8)

Tughlaq is kind enough and requests his subjects to come with him. He says to them, “It is only an invitation and not an order” (8). He wanted the support of his people because he had a desire to “build an empire which will be the envy of the world” (8).

Karnad has presented him a humanist to such an extent that people are allowed to “file a suit against the sultan himself for the misbehaviour of his officers” (8) and he (the King) declares that “No one need have any worry... Justice will be done” (8). Karnad has provided ample evidences from which one comes to understand that when his best intentions are manipulated by his subjects as well as his near ones—Amirs, Syyadis and Ulemas—he turns out a tyrant.

Barani has also accused Tughlaq of killing many innocent Muslims. In this context, Munshi et al (1960: 82) say, “According to Barani, the sultan wantonly shed the blood of innocent Muslims, so much so indeed that a stream of blood was always seen flowing before the threshold of the palace”. Karnad does refer to the killing of Muslims but gives the reasons that they hatched a conspiracy of murder against the Sultan and they tried to kill him during prayer. It is Ratan Sing who thinks of the plan to kill the Sultan during the prayer time. He says, “The muezzin’s call to prayer will be the signal for attack” (44). When Sheikh Sahib asks other Muslims that it is a sin to “kill someone during the prayer” (45), the Amirs answer this by saying that “we can always make up. Do penance for it... Islam will benefit in the long run” (45). Karnad here satirizes the religiosity of the Muslims who wanted Tughlaq to use his throne for spreading Islam. Imam-Ud-din tells him:

The Arabs spread Islam around the world...They are tired now, limp and exhausted. But their work must continue...You could do it. You are one of most powerful kings on earth today and you could spread the kingdom of heaven on earth. God has given you everything—power, learning and intelligence. (27)

When his people betrayed his trust by resorting to treacherous deeds, he became ruthless in order to suppress their rebellions. The conspiracy to murder him during prayer upsets Tughlaq so much that he banishes the prayer in his kingdom. He says:

What hopes I had built up when I came to the throne! I had wanted every act in my kingdom to become a prayer, every prayer to become a further step in knowledge, every step to lead us nearer to God. But our prayers too are ridden with disease and must be exiled. There will be no more praying in my kingdom. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished. Hence forth let the moment of prayer walk my streets in silence and leave without a trace. (53)

Anyone who was found guilty of turning against the Sultan was put behind the bars or was killed. It was only the circumstances that made him a tyrant. We come to know through Barani (a historical character in Tughlaq) that “the people have been told that they have a right to criticize the Sultan, to voice their grievances openly” (19).

Tughlaq gets alienated from his society because of his idealistic thoughts which do not match with the mindset of his people. In this context, Shrivastava (2006: 76) says, “He is estranged from the society because he is a man ahead of his age and is not understood by the society around him because his ideas and ideals are far above and very different from an ordinary human being”. His idealism takes him away from his people and his attempt to put every act to the test of rationality brings disaster to his reign. His idealism gets reflected through his speech:

I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people, '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. (15-16)

The play exposes the paradox of the idealistic king, Tughlaq, who does not have a single moment of peace and rest. He is always suspicious of the motives of the people around him. The imposters, betrayers and treacherous people around him never lent him any real support. The people thought him mad and Amirs termed him tyrannical.

Another action that Sultan takes is the introduction of token currency along with silver dinars. Barani (a historian) explains that this step was taken because the treasury was drained by the Sultan in giving out royal awards. Munshi et al (1960: 71) say, "The contemporary historian Barani remarks that the Sultan's bounty and munificence had caused great deficiency in the treasury and he wanted a large amount of money for his ambitious plan to conquer the whole world". Karnad seems to agree with this step of economic reforms because China and Persia had already introduced paper currency and it worked well there. When Tughlaq is questioned about the introduction of copper currency, he says:

It 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. (49)

But, the people like Aziz and Azam took undue advantage of this action taken by Tughlaq and resort to the practice of producing counterfeit coins.

Through the creation of fictional characters, Aziz and Azam, Karnad has shown us how people of Tughlaq's age misused his innovative steps and made him a failure. In the first instance, when Tughlaq introduced his secular idea of providing justice to every one without any privilege to caste, creed and colour, Aziz—a Muslim washer-man by profession—disguises himself as a Brahmin and wins a suit against the Sultan himself, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. In his conversation with Azam, Aziz says:

Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world—politics! It's a beautiful world—wealth, success, position, power... When I think of all the tricks I used in our village to pinch a few torn clothes from people—if one uses half that intelligence here, one can get robes of power. And not have to pinch them either—demand them! It is a fantastic world. (59)

Aziz misuses Tughlaq's idea of impartial justice by taking bribes from poor citizens during a journey from Delhi to Daulatabad. He demands bribe from a mother who wants to take her dying son to a doctor. When Azam tells him that the woman will complain against you, Aziz (disguised as Brahmin) says:

I'm a Brahmin and she won't complain against a Brahmin to a Muslim officer. That will send her straight to hell. (59)

Karnad has shown us that people like Aziz created problems for people during their journey from Delhi to Daulatabad. When Tughlaq introduced copper currency, both Aziz and Azam became counterfeit coin makers. Aziz tells Azam:

The Sultan is going to introduce copper coins soon. And a copper coin will have the same value as a silver dinar...You are not going to pinch any coins, you are going to make them. Make counterfeit coins...If your fingers are getting restless, use them there. (59-60)

The play provides an in-depth interpretation of human character and delves out the quest for cultural values. Karnad has not glorified Tughlaq but has shown us various dimensions of this great personality in order to fill some gaps in the Indian history. Tughlaq was highly ambitious and wanted to be remembered by the future generations as one who made history. Anyone who came in his way was punished severely. When Imam-Ud-Din rose against him and tried to mobilize people against the Sultan, he lays a trap and gets him killed in a battle with Ain-ul-Mulk. As a vigilant and crafty politician, Tughlaq then laments his death. Barani in the play says:

I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then flagellates himself in remorse. (35)

Tughlaq is a well-read person in Greek philosophy, logic, literatures and mathematics. He thinks of providing solution to every problem. In order to realize his dreams, he begs for support and participation from his people. But his request is turned down by his friends and subjects. He requests his people:

Laugh at me if you like, criticize me, but please don't distrust me. I can order you all to obey me but tell me, how do I gain your full trust? I can only beg for it. (Pleading) I have hopes of building a new future for India and I need your support for that. If you don't understand me, ask me to explain myself and I'll do it. If you don't understand my explanations, bear with me in patience until I can show you the results. But please don't let me down, I beg you. I'll kneel before you if you wish, but please don't let go of my hand. (49)

Karnad seems to suggest that when there is no positive response from his people, Tughlaq turns away from his sympathetic attitude towards his people and develops strict strategies. The King says:

I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft, I see that now. They will only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should come from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty grave yard of Delhi will satisfy me now. (53)

Karnad does not use historical facts entirely but takes only parts of them which are useful to him. Tughlaq stands for the administrative reforms, for implementing the policy of Hindu-Muslim unity, recognition of merit irrespective of creed and caste, reorganization of administrative machinery and taxation structure and establishment of an egalitarian society in which all shall enjoy justice, equality and fundamental rights. He does not seem to like the influence of Islam in politics. When he is questioned about the killing of Shihab-Ud-Din and Imam-Ud-Din and going against the tenets of Islam, his answer is:

They tried to indulge in politics—I could not allow that. I have never denied the word of God, Sheikhsahib, because it is my bread and drink. I need it most when the surrounding void pushes itself into my soul and starts putting out every light burning there. (26)

Karnad has presented Tughlaq as a king who had firm faith in his abilities and a leader who does not want to give up his quest for the welfare of his people. He is presented as a person who experiments with innovative ideas. Tughlaq says:

I have something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history but I have to do it within this life. (67)

Karnad is not altogether praising Tughlaq. Depiction of his impatience, whimsical nature, overconfidence and idealism are also apparent in the play. He wished to fulfill his dreams at any cost. He fails to keep balance between idealism and practicality. He says:

No one can go far on his knees. I have a long way to go. I can't afford to crawl—I have to gallop. (27)

Karnad also refers to the taxation policy of Tughlaq. He had demanded more taxes from his people. The taxation policy was not altogether the tyranny of the king because he had done a great work for the development of his kingdom. This gets revealed through the speech of Shihab-Ud-Din who says:

He has done a lot of good work. Built schools, roads, hospitals. He had made good use of money. (40)

The Muslim Ulemas wanted him to “tax the Hindus” (40) because they believed that “the jiziya is sanctioned by the Quran” (40). Karnad traces the political failure of Tughlaq's reign to a complex ambivalence in the personality and intentions of the leader and to the narrow vision of the people. The play presents the full-blown version of the crisis of leadership and belief that occurs within a culture divided along the lines of majority and minority religions. Tughlaq is a secular humanist who refuses to impose a monolithic order on his people because Greek philosophers have instilled in him a vision of plurality. Tughlaq says:

My kingdom has millions—Muslims, Hindus, Jains. Yes, there is dirt and sickness in my kingdom. But why should I call on God to clean up the dirt deposited by men?.. And my kingdom too is what I am—torn between two pieces by visions whose validity I can't deny. You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha. I am sorry. But it can't be done. (26-27)

Karnad revives the paradoxical Tughlaq of history and occasionally constructs his dialogue verbatim from historical documents, creating a complex ideological connection between history, historiography and his own fiction. Indeed, the play intervenes actively in the controversy by presenting an explanatory psychological profile of its enigmatic hero and by debating the issues of cultural difference inherent in the historical debate.

At the second level, the play's world bears resemblance to the discourse of modern Indian political and cultural experience. It has a historic theme and contemporary relevance. Karnad (2007: 7) himself acknowledges: “In a sense, the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for Independence, and the coming to terms with cynicism and real politik”. The play in a way provokes one to look at history through the lens of contemporary times. The problems that confronted Tughlaq in the fourteenth century still exist in the current Indian political system. Karnad looks at the past from the vantage of present because the past prefigures our present. This fictional representation of past resonates in the present. Walter Benjamin observes, “[E]very image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Quoted in Dharwadker 2006: 220). It seems that our present gets staged in the past. Tughlaq's tragic tale is symptomatic of the inherited complex problem of the Indian society. It shows that

“mere idealism and unrelated understanding of time cannot only help a ruler in reaching the visionary heights” (Nayak 2011: 170). It also seems that the gap of so many centuries have changed nothing. We are actually where we started.

The play evokes certain issues about India’s post-Independence socio-political realities. Karnad like Tughlaq is turning to “tradition and history now and seeking an answer there” (48). The play shows us the circumstances when rulers do their politics on the dead people. Shihab-Ud-din is trapped and killed by Tughlaq because he tried to provoke people against the Sultan. After this incident, Tughlaq orders that there was a revolt in the kingdom and Shihab-Ud-din died as a martyr. He says:

Make an announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. Say that the Sultan was saved by Shihab-Ud-din who died a martyr’s death defending him. The funeral will be held in Delhi and will be a grand affair. (53)

Barani at this point says, “Oh God! Aren’t even dead free from your politics?” (53). It seems an attack on people who use religion as a weapon to achieve their selfish ends. Karnad retrieves the Indian culture by turning away from urban realism which most of the Indian dramatists foreground in their plays.

Karnad takes recourse to the Indian Natak Company tradition which influenced him during his childhood days. He has resorted to the tradition of ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ scenes in this play. In an interview, he says:

I deliberately chose a Natak company form for a historical drama. I tried to use the Parsi Natak stage craft of alternating “deep” and “shallow” scenes. A “deep” set is about four feet in depth and has a strip in the front for the interspersing scenes of comic exchange. The “shallow” scenes serve as the link scenes of comic exchange while the opulent settings for the “deep” scenes are being prepared. (Mukherjee 2006: 36)

Karnad has also used the folk drama device of the announcer and the company Natak convention of the comic pair in the characters of Aziz and Azam. In the production of comic pair of Aziz and Azam, he has turned to “the ‘Akara-Makara’ tradition in Kannad drama” (Chaturvedi 2008: 132). It is also a matter of fact that apart from Aziz and Azam, almost all the characters—Imam-Ud-Din, Shihab-Ud-Din, Najib, Tughlaq, Barani and Ain-ul-Mulk—are drawn from the Indian medieval history. The setting of the play is also Indian. Karnad has also recreated the ambiance of pre-modern Islamic Indian culture through costumes, movement, lighting, music, props, scenery and style of dialogue.

One can say that Karnad has re-enacted history to scrutinize the meta-narratives which have given a biased version of Indian history. He has given a revisionary history of Mohammad bin Tughlaq and has filled gaps in Indian historiography. In this way, he has challenged the Eurocentric perspective of India and made it possible for us to view the Indian history from a different perspective. In the fictional re-appraisal of Tughlaq, he has shown us the importance of the past in the present. We see a parallel between our past and post-Independent India.

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