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Representation of History in Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*

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History is represented in literature because the author has a message to give to the society through it. S/he represents it in order to comment on some discordancy taking place in the contemporary society or any improper action taking place that needs an alarm of didacticism. History has always been a source of adaptation, learning and modification of the past tradition, culture, of the rules of kingship or governance. It teaches us the right way of living or otherwise to mend ourselves by learning from the blunders of the past. This style of history is picked by Girish Karnad, the noted Indian English playwright who penned *Tughlaq* a play which is based on Mohammad bin Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi and the son of Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq who reigned over the throne from 1325 to 1351.

Karnad has written on the monarch Tughlaq because he had felt that there was an opprobrious monitoring of the nation during the time of Jawaharlal Nehru's reign. The latter made some maniacal blunders that affected the nation at length in spite of the fact that he always hoped for the contrary. The same aspirations were of Mohammad bin Tughlaq who dreamt of successful capital but it always remain heavily loaded with repercussions. Karnad expresses this opinion in the play's Introduction:-

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 idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt 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 (Introduction, 8)

So, this is crystal clear that Karnad had Nehru in mind when the plot of *Tughlaq* was written and it served as an allusion to the Nehruvian Era but the point which is to be taken into consideration is that whether he is able to narrate the real history of Tughlaq in the play. Does he corroborate the facts of recorded history accordingly? Does he rank his plot up to the level of the real history or does he merely implant an artificial concept in the chronicle of Tughlaq to make it a genre only? These questions will be dealt with in the course of this article to analyze the play as a 'historical play'. And, in order to analyze the aspects and images of Tughlaq and deviations which are constructed in the play, we will have to compare the history of Tughlaq available in the history books and the history presented by Karnad in his play entitled *Tughlaq*. It will enable us to speculate the text with certain questions like is the text real history or is it fictional history? Are any distortions brought from history? If so, then what types of distortions are there? How has he treated the history in the play? How has he represented it to us? How do we look at the

histoire of Tughlaq being presented in the play? These issues will be discussed in this article. In this discussion, we will have confusion in the name of real Tughlaq and the Sultan presented by Karnad. So, in order to avoid this confusion, we will write real Tughlaq as 'Muhammad' and latter as 'Tughlaq' or 'the Sultan'. This distinction will not be considered in the dialogues taken from the text and the references used below.

GirishKarnad in his short play of thirteen scenes covers the mature stage of Tughlaq's kingship in Delhi and Daulatabad. Although he does not write his biography but covers many aspects of it like the attitude of Tughlaq, his judgments, his decisions, his commands, and his managements. He considers many issues which recognize Muhammad as 'Mad Muhammad' who had an extraordinary intellect, bright knowledge and was well versed in Quran and Hadith, had knowledge of Persian and Arabian languages, and well versed in using similes and metaphors. He had good command over Mathematics and Medicine. He had brilliance in writing. Despite all these extra-ordinary brilliancies, he met failures in his life. He could never achieve the appreciations of his kingdom. Society was unable to understand him and his decisions. He, himself sometimes doubted his own judgments. He could not understand the results of his own made decisions which his kingdom had to follow in any circumstances. Neria Harish Hebber, an M.D. calls him 'Maniacal Genius'. And, this Maniacal Genius is portrayed by Karnad in the play who can also be hailed as the villain protagonist.

Muhammad was an experimenter and it was an easy task for him to experiment on the innocent population of his kingdom because he had the power in his hands. Naikar calls him as an experimenter in this way:

It is therefore; better to call Tughlaq an experimenter than a tragic hero. As the population of his kingdom, however large in quantity, is not equal to him in power and therefore becomes an easy victim for his political experimentation. (Naikar, 174)

However, none of the experiments was successful in his life in spite of the fact that he was full of dexterity. For instance, he had an active interest in experimenting with coinage. He wanted to change AlauddinKhalji's system of revenue collections in grain which had assured food for soldiers. He wanted to undergo the system of coin collections in the revenue system. But, after some time he realized that the stock of coins and mintable silver was not adequate for this plan. He did not drop his plan. He issued the copper currency to take the place of the gold and silver *tankas*. He also brought brass currency along. This resulted in the production of prodigious quantities of forged copper and brass coins in the mints located at every corner of his kingdom. In this way, trade was highly affected. Entire revenue system went into a heavy loss. The plan got shattered. Seven years later, he discontinued it and paid gold and silver to the people in exchange of copper coins in order to stop counterfeiting of these coins. It was a mad step taken by him which Karnad highlights in the play. In scene-six of the play, Tughlaq says that from next year, there would be copper currency used in his empire along with silver dinars. He gives a reason for this.

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 (39)

In scene-ten, Karnad draws our attention to this action once again. Here, his step mother calls it as a sheer folly.

But this is sheerfolly! The Vizier says there are five hundred carts out there and they are all full of counterfeit coins. Are you going to exchange them all for silver? (63)

At last when the Sultan realizes his folly, he repents on this mad action and confesses it to his step mother in the same scene.

What else can I do? I said the new copper coins would have the same value as the silver dinars. Now I can't go against my own orders....There's nothing else for it. I should have expected this but didn't - that was my fault. If I don't withdraw the coins now, the whole economy will be in shambles. It's in a bad enough state already (63)

Muhammad reigned from 1324 A.D. to 1351 A.D. In this short span of twenty six years of reign, he dreamt of an expanded sovereignty. He wanted to reign on the whole sub-continent. This dream took him to take a decision that is a shift from Delhi to Devagiri later named as Daulatabad in Maharashtra in order to extend the empire in the South as well. This action led to several deaths of common masses. It produced an anger and frustration in people. This plan was culminated in a big failure as he felt that he could not keep watch on northern region and many innocents died in this move. Thus, finally, he decided to move his empire back from Daulatabad to Delhi. Burton Stein, a Professorial Research Associate in History at the School of Oriental and African studies, London comments on this action taken by Muhammad in *A History of India*:

This bold move produced chaos in both the former and new capitals, and in their hinterlands, especially when Muhammad himself decided that the move had been a mistake and ordered a return to Delhi - or what remained of it. (Stein, 140)

Karnad picks up this weakness of Muhammad and gets it typed in the very first scene in the play. When Tughlaq tries to convince people about his greatness and kindness that he is being impartial to all and believes in true justice, he wants his empire to have a bright and prosperous life. At the same time, he announces to the people:

My beloved people, you have heard the judgment of the Kazi and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom - without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace - not just peace but a more purposeful life....And to achieve this end 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. (03)

The crowd reacts in bewilderment while Tughlaq smiles. Soon after the people show their reluctance to shift, but Tughlaq repeats his order aggressively to his Vizier Najib in scene - six:

Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. 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 should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now. (44)

But, in the last scene, Karnad shows Tughlaq as in repentant and despondent mood as he realizes his mistake of shifting his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. He orders Barani, his most trusted employee:

There is only one place to go back to now. Delhi. Back to Delhi, Barani, I have to get back to Delhi with my people. (84)

One more prominent issue is also brought by Karnad in the play is that Muhammad did not levy tax *jizya* (a poll tax which was levied on non-Muslims by his successors) on Hindus. It could have been his purpose of divide and rule. Karnad brings this issue in a conversation being held amongst the crowd of people in Tughlaq's empire in scene - one. A third man says to other people:

All this about the Hindus not paying the Jiziya tax. That's against the Koran, You know. A Mowlvi told me that – (01-02)

Adding one more folly, Muhammad increased the payment of the tax in Doab, a fertile land in order to get more grown crops from the fertile lands there. But, unfortunately the drought took place in Doab in the same year and poor people were unable to get production of the crops in ample amounts. Despite this fact, these innocent people were forced to pay the levied tax. Karnad refers to this issue also, but in very brief. In scene - eight, he is worried, torn spiritually. He says to Barani:

Yes. And there's been another uprising in the Deccan. In Ma'barEhsanshah has declared himself independent. Bahal-ud-din Gashtasp is collecting an army against me. The drought in Doab is spreading from town to town - burning up the country ... (55)

Muhammad was the son of a slave soldier Ghiyas-ud-din in AlauddinKhalji's kingdom. Ghiyas-ud-din murdered Sultan NasiruddinKhusro Khan of Khalji dynasty in 1320 A.D and ascended from 1320 A.D.-1324 A.D. Then, his son Muhammad succeeded his father and brother by murdering them. In this way, he inherited a vast empire. Karnad in scene-one gives an image of Tughlaq as a murderer of his father and brother. The crowd discusses about the patricide and fratricide done by Tughlaq. Among the crowd, third man says to other people:

All right, don't trust my word. But do you think a man like Sheikh Imam-ud-din would lie? Well, he said in clear loud words that it was murder. And he said it publicly-I was there! (5)

In scene-ten, he confesses to his step mother when she tries to prove that killing a Vizier is not a great sin as compared to killing a father and son and others as well. He answers on this point like this:

I killed them - yes - but I killed them for an ideal. Don't I know its results? Don't you think I've suffered from the curse? My mother won't speak to me - I can't even look into a mirror for fear of seeing their faces in it. I had only three friends in the world - you, Najib and Barani. And now you want me to believe you killed Najib. Why are you doing this to me? (65)

No doubt, Karnad brings many prominent aspects of Muhammad into the play. He also brings the portrayal of other historical characters like his step mother, the historian Zia-ud-din Barani and Muhammad Najib - the vizier of Muhammad, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, Shihabud-din etc. Many male characters are brought forth in the play by Karnad but one woman weighs equal to all male historical characters in the play. This is Tughlaq's step mother. Karnad shows her nice, caring, worried and sympathetic for Tughlaq. She loves him immensely. She cares for him a lot. She asks Barani personally to not to leave him, to be with him in every problem:

It is not that. It's just that I don't like so many of his advisers and friends. (Suddenly) Please promise me not to leave him - ever whatever he does. (17)

Karnad shows all her good aspects. But, in scene - ten, she is sentenced to death by her own beloved son because she had killed the vizier Najib. She had a confidence that her son will not punish her in any case even if she takes a daring step against the wish of the Sultan. She answers him when he asks who the murderer of Najib is:

You frighten me, Muhammad, you really do. Please stop this. Muhammad - please - for my sake: Won't you? I appeal to you All right. I killed him. I had him murdered. (65)

But, she faces her death because she is a woman and she has no right to kill a man like Najib who was Tughlaq's pal.

Another historical character from history is Zia-ud-din Barani, a great scholar, who was an orthodox follower of the Holy Koran. So, he did not like Muhammad's deviation from the law of Koran. Muhammad went against the *Ulema* and this was not liked by Barani. Nonetheless he was very caring for Muhammad. He was Sultan's well-wisher. We also find in the history books that Barani wrote a lot on the actions taken by Muhammad. When he initiated the copper and brass coinage, Barani states that every home of Hindu was transformed into mint and Hindus of various regions manufactured laths and crores of coins in their mints. When Muhammad increased the tax in Doab, his soldiers forced innocent people to pay tax. They did this despite the fact that they were unable to pay tax due to the drought which took place in Doab in the same year. Those people who tried to revolt against this, were killed brutally by them. Barani comments on this:

Thousands of people perished and when they tried to escape, the Sultan led punitive expedition to various places and hunted them like wild beasts. (Kameshwar, 73)

Barani is an important historian or we could say that he is an important character in the play. He is portrayed as an extreme well-wisher of Tughlaq by Karnad. He warns the Sultan

against shrewd Aziz who is in disguise of Ghiyas- ud-din Abbasid:

By all the history I know, I swear he will stab you in the back. This is sheer folly. He is a thief and a murderer and Your Majesty knows he won't keep trust. Once he has power in the Deccan, his ambition will know no barriers. He is bound to find unlimited scope for his villainy there. He is bound to rebel against the Sultan. How can you not see that, Your Majesty? (83-84)

To an extent, Karnad portrays the historical figure Barani in the play the way he is portrayed in the real history by historians.

Another character is Muhammad Najib, a crafty politician; He was Hindu by birth but converted himself into a Muslim. Karnad also highlights this point in the play when Najib tries to evoke the Sultan against Sheikh Imam-ud-din, Barani bitterly tells him "Your Hindu childhood has distorted your attitude beyond repair" (14) in scene - two. Karnad shows Najib as a crafty politician. In scene-two even Tughlaq calls him a devil when the latter suggests that Sheikh-Imam-ud-din has a striking resemblance to Tughlaq. He says "You are a devil, Najib. (16). At the end, Karnad gets Najib murdered by Tughlaq's step mother because she considers him to be evil and a curse for the Sultan. She shows her extreme annoyance against Najib to Barani in the scene - two, when Barani is bothered about his influence on the Sultan. She says with sudden violence: -"I know. I am watching. I'll wait for a few days. If he goes on like this, I won't wish his fate even on a dog!" (17)

Tughlaq as a historical play is influenced by many historical characters but Karnad also stirs the effects of tragic history with the comical effects. He pours two comic figures Aziz and Aazam out of his own imagination as *Akara* and *Makara* of a Natak play in Kannada. According to their tradition, a Natak play comprises of a serious plot blended with comic scenes in which *Akara* and *Makara* are the comical characters. Malvika Pathak, a research student at the Department of the Study of Religions at SOAS says "Not only does Karnad strive to make the past relevant; he also tries to incorporate traditional dramatic techniques." (www.google.com)

We can say that these comical characters disrupt the history of the historical play but they also play an important role in displaying the effects and the aftermaths of the laws enacted by the Sultan. For instance, when Tughlaq tries to be liberal and kind to Hindus equivocally, Aziz, the highly imaginative man comes in a disguise of Vishnu Prasad, a Brahmin and files a suit against the Sultan for the unlawful confiscation of the land. Soon after this, he attains five hundred silver dinars and a job in civil service in winning the case against the Sultan. This is how he befools him. These imagined figures are merged in the play in order to show the poignancy burdened on the common people due to Tughlaq's insane decrees. For instance in scene-seven, a Hindu woman cries for her ill child to take him to the doctor during her shift from Delhi to Daulatabad. She requests Aziz to let her take her child to the doctor, but he refuses mercilessly. This shows that extreme pains are bestowed to the innocent people by Tughlaq and obviously by his shrewd employees.

In another scene, Aziz advises Aazam, an innocent fool to not to steal coins but make forged copper coins by which they will become rich within few days. Here, Karnad shows that how common man like Aziz takes advantage of Sultan's awkward enacted laws.

One striking point which to be noticed is that Aziz kills Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, assumes his disguise and befools the Sultan in this way. When the Sultan comes to know about this fact, Aziz fearlessly confesses by comparing himself to Tughlaq:

I admit I killed Ghiyas-ud-din and cheated you. Yet I am your Majesty's true disciple. I ask you, Your Majesty, which other man in India has spent five years of his life fitting every act, deed and thought to your Majesty's words? (82)

Karnad tries to prove that how a common man like Aziz cunningly and wisely wins over Tughlaq's flair. Aazam is even used by Aziz in his purpose of gaining wealth, success and power. Even, he praises himself in front of Aazam:

You are a hopeless case, you know Pathetic! You've been in Delhi for so many years and you're as stupid as ever. Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world - politics! My dear fellow, that's where one future is - Politics! It's a beautiful world - wealth, success, position, power - and yet it's full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head. 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 - get them! It's a fantastic world! (Sc - 7, 50)

The most ironical humour in this play is that Tughlaq appoints him as an officer in his kingdom even after knowing about this fact that Aziz killed Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, a saint and had assumed his disguise in order to fetch his position. He says:

Don't overdo it. It's time for the prayer. Remember, you are still his Holiness Ghiya-ud-din Abbasid and you have to be there to lead the prayer. Be off now. (83)

Karnad develops humorous scenes with the help of these imaginative characters which intend to give serious messages too. This is how he brings comical mood in the tragic play. But, the disappointing point is this that Karnad highlights only Tughlaq's mad innovations, even through the comical mingling in the play. He emphasizes only on the mad inventions of Tughlaq throughout the play. He does not give reasons behind his purpose of ordering these kinds of decree to his empire. He does not highlight the circumstances under which Tughlaq devises his decisions. There might have some genuine reasons which forced him to take these decisions at a pinch. For instance there are certain reasons for settling on Daulatabad from Delhi, being recorded in the history.

There was a fear of the attacks of Mongols in Delhi. On the other side Daulatabad was very far from the limits of Northern area. So, it was free from the fear of the attacks of Mongols. This reason made him to settle on Daulatabad his whole empire. Some historians say that he

wanted to expand his kingdom in the Southern region; this is why he did so. Dr. Mehadi Hussain says that due to the lack of the strength of Muslims in the South, he did so. Apart from this, the change of the capital strengthened the feelings of national integration and love in the natives of different regions about which Karnad does not talk in the play. Karnad does not highlight his positive outlooks and highlights only his weaknesses that caused the ravage of his empire.

If we talk about his experimenting with coinage system then there are certain genuine reasons recorded in the history for it. It is said that there were lack of precious silver, gold in his revenue in order to cover up this crisis; he backed to square one with copper and brass coins. Barani says that Muhammad wanted to strengthen the military sources. He required money for this purpose. Due to this reason he initiated this work. He also says that Muhammad had a generous attitude towards people. He spent lots of money on them. In this way, his revenue was decreased promptly. E.W. Thompson says in his book *Indian History*:

He was a prince who excelled in all the accomplishments of his age. He was well read in Persian poetry and philosophy and wrote an exquisite hand. He meant well by the people and devised many plans for their benefit, but he was headstrong and wanting in judgment and could not brook failure or opposition. He knew no way to win obedience save by savage punishments that alarmed and shocked even an age accustomed to cruelty. His very virtues, the love of learning and generosity, brought him into difficulty; for his lavish gifts to scholars and poets, together with his reckless expenditure on the army, emptied the treasury. (Thompson, 133-134).

Basically, Muhammad's implantation of copper and brass coins was not a wrong innovation. He was inspired by the paper currency which was used in China. His implantation of this coinage system, in fact, would not have been a failure, if he had prohibited the counterfeiting of these coins because it was an innovative idea to cover up the lack of money in his kingdom. Naikar remarks on this in his article 'Tughlaq as an Experimenter':

His desire to introduce copper currency on par with silver dinars is, of course, evidence of advanced economic arrangement. But the fault lies in his ability to see the possibility of misuse of the new currency. (Naikar, 173)

Muhammad is called 'Mad Muhammad'. But, when we sink in ourselves in his histoire, we will analyze that he was very generous to poor people including those who suffered a lot due to the natural calamities like drought. It occurred many times in Gujarat, Doab and Southern parts of India. Even Black Death or Plague took place in these regions. Muhammad did many aiding tasks for the relief of the people of these regions. He decreased the levied tax, Wells were dug up. Financial support was given to them and many other aids were supplied to them along. So, after knowing these qualities of 'Mad Muhammad', can we not say that he can also be called as 'Generous Muhammad?' Unfortunately, these qualities are not mentioned by Karnad in the play. He emphasizes only on the unique policies which were made by the 'brain trust' Tughlaq which unfortunately resulted in the failures and caused suspicion and frustration amongst people. For instance in scene-six, When Tughlaq announces that he is going to introduce copper currency on par with silver currency to advance his kingdom's economy. An Amir whispers to

the next man and says “I told you he’s mad!” (39) Karnad, nowhere in the text makes the people call him a generous monarch. He is highly critical of Tughlaq or we can say Muhammad. He portrays his foolishness and his violent action only. He portrays Tughlaq or Muhammad according to the terms of Barani who says that the Muhammad played with the shedding of blood of innocent people. Even, in the play, Barani says to Tughlaq:

Your Majesty, there was a time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What has happened to those ideals? You won’t let your subjects pray. You torture them for the smallest offence. Hang them on suspicion. Why this bloodshed? Please stop it, and I promise your Majesty something better will emerge out of it (Sc-8, 56).

It cannot be denied that Muhammad due to his staggering innovations and experiments led him and his kingdom to the incorrigible condition. Although his innovations were not made for his comforts only, they were also made for the benefit of his kingdom yet he was unable to win the love and faith of his kingdom. Sonal P. Chandervaker concludes about Tughlaq in her essay ‘GirishKarnad’s Tughlaq: A Doomed Dreamer’s Dilemma’ as:

He knew very well that without the support of his own people he could never reach the stars. Despite all his selfless efforts he was unable to win the confidence of his own people. (Dodiya, 76-77).

This loss of faith and love among his kingdom, in spite of his extreme labour to bring harmony in his nation, has made him the ‘Mad Muhammad’. Therefore if Karnad has portrayed Tughlaq as a maniacal is justifying in spite of the fact that he does not give reasons for his mad actions. The play as a historical play is also justifying because it deals with the political situation of the fourteenth century of India though only external- showing Muhammad who had the power of dictatorship, of making the decree, of changing them and of slaughtering the innocents. This is what Karnad has shown in the play through ‘the game of chess’- Tughlaq as a political warrior uses pawns of the chess by considering them as his rivals and slaughters them dexterously without consulting his honest and the closest employees. In this way he becomes ‘Mad Muhammad’ where he desired to be an ideal for his kingdom. Urmil Talwar in his article ‘The Protean Self’ justifies *Tughlaq* as a historical play:

Tughlaq (1964), Karnad’s second play, was an immediate success in Kannada and later in English (1970). He uses the historical character of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, the fourteenth century Sultan of Delhi, to depict the divided self, who is torn between the ideal and the real. In his desire to be an ideal secular humanist he begins to manipulate, treat men as pawns in a political game of chess, resort to cruelty and bloodshed and ends up as a frustrated human being. This fractured plural self of Tughlaq reflects the contradictions and discrepancies in the Indian value system. (Talwar, 216-217)

The whole play chapters and verses the political aspects, experiments by the brain trust, and the losses inflicted upon innocents. It proves that Tughlaq has become a blue funk for the

people. He meets failure by his improper innovations, whatever reasons are there and brings so many corpses by his wrongful and insane acts. This play brings historical outermost facts of Muhammad who is called Muhammad bin Tughlaq or 'Mad Muhammad' or 'Muhammad the Bloody' not 'Genius Muhammad' or 'Muhammad the Genius' because he brought only distraught in his kingdom instead of his right intentions. What C.P. Rajesh says in his article Treatment of Evil in the Plays of Karnad is right:

“In *Tughlaq* evil is manifested through violence, bloodshed, murder, bribery, impersonation and treachery. (Dodiya, 51)

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