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## ***Tughlaq: A Political Allegory***

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### **Abstract:**

The play is more than a political allegory. It has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughlaq's characters, the dominating figure in the play. All the other characters are dramatized aspects of his complex personality, yet they also exist in their own right. In history, Muhammad has been a disputed character. He was an idealist and a very learned man but at the same time intriguing and treacherous character. He was sincerely devoted to the good of his subjects. Tughlaq had to face a number of revolts and rebellions during his reign. Various forces in different parts of the country had brought disintegration to his empire and the king finds himself helpless. He is so frustrated that he does not know how to suppress or solve them. The same is the Indian political scene. The provinces are crying for independence and self-rule. Various revolts and movements have been started by different groups and even petty problems have endangered the national unity. The provinces have been divided. This similarity is very striking between the two periods.

Thus the play is a powerful political allegory. Karnad unhesitatingly points out the flattery, inefficiency and corruption between the two periods.

**Keywords:** irreducible, ambiguities, frustrated, disintegration, intriguing, political allegory.

Allegory is a symbolic formation that carries both literal and abstract levels of meaning. It is an expanded combination of metaphors, symbols and personification where events and characters have an implied significance beyond the evident meanings. Allegory is an effective way of communicating a moral or spiritual message in a pleasant and palatable form. In an allegory physical conflict and fulfillment assume a metaphysical quality. All great novelists from

Cervantes to Bunyan, from Melville to Hemingway, from Tolstoy to Dostoevsky, have used the allegorical mode of narration to highlight the deeper aspects of contemporary reality. Among Indian English novelists the best exponents of the allegorical mode are Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Girish Karnad. "A political allegory is a story, fiction, drama or a painting, that on the surface tells one tale, but has a hidden political meaning underneath. An allegory becomes political if it covers a political event or situation by producing a subtle commentary using other symbol."

The play is more than a political allegory. It has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughlaq's characters, the dominating figure in the play. All the other characters are dramatized aspects of his complex personality, yet they also exist in their own right. Some critics have made detailed analyses of the play, paying special attention to the symbolism of the game of chess, the theme of disguise, the ironic success of Aziz whose amazing story runs parallel to Tughlaq's and the dualism of the man and the hero in Tughlaq, which is the source of the entire tragedy. Tughlaq is primarily a history play highlighting the political condition and wide spread corruption and social disintegration of India during those days. It also throws light on the fact that although Tughlaq a very wise and well-read man, failed in his ideals and turned to be one of the most tyrannical rulers, yet he always honestly intended to do good to the people. Karnad in his own words says that, "What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The act 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...."

While portraying all these situations, Karnad has reproduced the conditions in the politics of India during the sixties, the so called post-Nehru era. On analyzing the play minutely, we will certainly realize a parallel between the conditions in the reign of Tughlaq and those of the modern India. Perhaps Karnad himself was not conscious of what he was doing as he said, "I did not consciously write about the Nehru era. I am always flattered when people tell me that it was about the Nehru era." In fact, there are some features which enter literature and after the composition is complete, the writer is astonished to note the striking parallel. Perhaps the same happened with Karnad's Tughlaq. It was natural for a dramatist like him as he was very well aware of the prevailing contemporary conditions. At the same time, it is also a fact that Karnad

has no where laboriously tried to introduce the contemporary politics in this play, but it creeps into its structure by itself. Consequently the play is a powerful political allegory. The national disintegration, political corruption, dishonesty and conspiracies, all are quite similar between the period of Tughlaq and the India during the sixties. The ideals of Tughlaq though certainly useful for the uplift of the nation, were shattered by his own folly as well as because of his corrupt officers responsible for their implementation. The same happened with the ideals of Nehru, particularly after his death. The people failed to understand the depth of Nehru ideals as Tughlaq could not be followed or understood by the common man. This is why the emperor is determined to make the people understand him. At the end of the play, there is great frustration and disintegration in the life of Tughlaq himself as we find in Indian politics after Nehru.

In history Muhhamad has been very a disputed character. He was an idealist and a very learned man but at the same time intriguing and treacherous character. He was sincerely devoted to the good of his subjects. The parallel which strikes the readers in the very beginning of the play is the communal problem. The Hindus and the Muslims have completely lost mutual trust. Tughlaq is trying his best to bring about hindu Muslim unity and establish the reign of equality and justice for all. But even this constructive step failed to create trust among them. The Muslims consider it anti Islam and against the dictates of Koran. They have grave objection to the abolition of the Jizia tax which according to Koran, is their right, on the other hand, the Hindus feel that in this step there is some intrigue and that the Hindus and the Muslims can not be united. This is what is actually happening in India at present. There have been communal riots all over the country from time to time on the question of religious differences. The old man says , “It’s an insult to Islam”. Sheikh Imamuddin also seems to object this step when he tells the Sultan that he has violated the Koran scores of times and that he must have consulted the Ulemas. The Sultan was the first Emperor who did not allow the saints and other religious persons enter in politics. He had to keep religion and politics separate from each other. Shihab-ud-din defends the Sultan’s act of imprisoning and exiling the sheikh by telling, “they dabbled in politics” Muhammad also tells Sheikh Imam-ud-din, “they tried to indulge in politics-I could not allow that”.

In history, Tughlaq was a humanist and an idealist and the historians unanimously agree with it. Karnad has also portrayed this aspect of his life very successfully. We find him praying

again and again to God to enable him fulfil this task. He tried to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity which has been so perfectly revealed in the Vishnu Prasad episode. He talks to the people in very moving words. The same sincerity is realized in his word when he asks “come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys”. The Hindus and Muslims fought and killed each other so much that in the same city, their establishments were confined to particular areas. All the efforts of Gandhi and Nehru both proved futile as those of Tughlaq and the trust between the two could not be created.

The life and reign of tughlaq is the best example of the principle that politics and idealism are two poles apart and they can never go hand in hand. In spite of Tughlaq being a powerful monarch, and making every possible effort to materialize his ideals, he miserably failed in the end. His ideals were very noble, he established democratic principle of equality and justice to all without any distinct of creed and religion. He decided to change the capital from Delhi to Daultabad to make the best in the world. Tughlaq wishes for the unity between the Hindus and the Muslims stating, "Daulatabad is a city of Hindus and as the capital, it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus..." Even while taking the decision of moving his capital from Delhi to Daultabad, he had made adequate arrangements for the comfort of the people and the history is its witness. Karnad has stressed this point everywhere in the play. Barani is deeply impressed by this humanitarian aspect of his personality. When he notices a change in the behaviour of the Sultan, he painfully asks him. “Your Majesty, there was a time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What had happened to those ideals?” He had planted the rose garden in the palace with the same romantic notion. The most significant incident during the reign of Tughlaq was the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daultabad. The historians differ on the reasons behind this step. Karnad has widely studied all of them. Since the historians extend various opinions, Girish Karnad has included most of them in the play. The Sultan declares that Delhi is situated at the border of the kingdom and is not safe from foreign invaders. So, for the prosperity of the empire, the capital must be in the middle of the kingdom. Some historians believe that the people of Delhi were sending anonymous letters to the Sultan to insult him and Muhammad wanted to punish them. Both these reasons have been exploited in the play. The Sultan tells the people, “Delhi is too near the border and as you know well its peace is never free from the fear of invaders”. Later he declares to Najib in great anger, “Nothing but an empty

grave yard of Delhi will satisfy me now”. Some other historians believe that Daultabad was a city with large Hindu population and Muhammad wanted to spread Islam there. So the Sultan ordered this change in the name of bringing Hindu Muslim unity. Infact Daultabad was such a centre from where Muhammad could well control all the southern provinces also. Karnad has portrayed only the treacherous aspect of this incident and has left out what Muhammad had done to help the people. He provided them every facility during the journey and after they had reached Daultabad. This Karnad did to create the tragic atmosphere in the play and to project Muhammad as only a treacherous King. Moreover according to history this mass change took place in phases. Here also the historians differ. Some say that even a lame man left behind was dragged to Daultabad and there was nothing but cats and dogs in Delhi, While some others disagree. Karnad seems to have taken only one side of the action when he orders Najib, “I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living being in Delhi will leave for Daultabad within a fortnight”. The plot of the play seems to have been based more on the history of the period by Barani who has stressed the tyranny of the Sultan.

Another important historical decision of Muhammad was the issue of token currency in the empire. Here also Karnad does not seem to be impartial. Historically in China and other countries. This was not something new in India. But Karnad had presented this incident as a whim of Sultan. In reality, it was introduced because the costly metal was running short and owing to different activities, a larger money was needed. He shows the Sultan repenting on this step. There were cart loads to be exchange with silver coins. In history we are told the token currency did not bear royal stamp and so it failed. The traders had refused to accept it. So Tughlaq was obliged to withdraw it.

The general political atmosphere of the country at present is just like that of the conditions during the days of Tughlaq. The officers had turned thoroughly corrupt. Bribing was common feature from the lowest to the highest. The comic episode occurs in scene nine in which Aziz speaks to Azam : If you remain virtuous throughout your life no one will say a good thing about you because they won't need to. But start stealing and they will say: “what a nice boy he was but he is ruined now”Aziz is earning money in this way in the transit camp on the Delhi-Daulatabad road. Like him the politicians have become heartless. Aziz knows that the woman is too poor to pay anything yet he asks her for bribe and tells, “ I've told you what can you can do. I

could try and bribe my senior officials, but you'll have to pay for it." Political intrigues are the marked features of India in the sixties and the reign of Tughlaq. Everybody was intriguing against the other. The dishonesty and insincerity among the officers has been the greatest obstacle. They do not reach the common man, the money for the execution is embezzled even by the top officials and everything fails. The chief reason of the failure of Tughlaq's token currency is the carelessness and corrupt practices among the officers. Karnad has hinted at the folly of the politicians and has proved in this play that politics is the best refuge for the rogues. Aziz is very clever in this field. He makes best use of the opportunities and rises quickly. He tells Aazam, "If one used half that intelligence here one can get robes of power. He bitterly remarks, "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." Here we feel and if not Aziz but Karnad himself is expressing his dislike and anger against the foolish, uneducated and corrupt politicians of India.

Tughlaq had to face a number of revolts and rebellions during his reign. Various forces in different parts of the country had brought disintegration to his empire and the king finds himself helpless. The king had met the greatest failure in the annals of Indian history. Karnad writes:

"And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in early sixties, that India had also come very far in the same direction the twenty years period seemed to me very much striking parallel".

He is so frustrated that he does not know how to suppress or solve them. In great disappointment he asks Barani, "what should I do, Barani?...I have tried everything. But what cures one disease just worsens another." In Deccan, the revolt has been started again. Ehsan Shah had declared himself independent. Bahal-ud-din is already collecting army against him and Doab is suffering the miseries of drought. The same is the Indian political scene. The provinces are crying for independence and self-rule. Various revolts and movements have been started by different groups and even petty problems have endangered the national unity. The provinces have been divided. This similarity is very striking between the two periods.

Thus the play is a powerful political allegory. Karnad unhesitatingly points out the flattery, inefficiency and corruption between the two periods. In this play Tughlaq history is mixed with politics and the history in a dramatic way to show that political leader can use

politics to promote their self-interest, powers and position. They don't think and do for the welfare of the people.

Therefore, the allegorical pattern and note of symbolism seems to be employed to make his historical play relevant to the modern conditions of India.

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