

Tughlaq And His Contemporary Significance

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ABSTRACT- *Tughlaq* is based on the life and story of Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq - the most controversial ruler of the Delhi sultanate. *Tughlaq* is defined as a historical play because the chief protagonist is a character taken from history and the play documents a series of past events that took place during the reign of Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq. *Tughlaq* can also be considered as a political play as it represents the reign of a king and his various moves to unify the Hindus and Muslims, and establish a just kingdom in Delhi.

KEYWORDS- Secularism, Contemporary conflicts, imperialism

Girish Karnad is one of the significant playwrights and is regarded as one of the pillars of the Renaissance Indian theatre. His works are based on Mythology and History. But, he has given them a contemporary resonance in plays such as *Tughlaq*, *Yayati* and *Hayavadana*. His plays question stereotypes and the common notions and beliefs about different topics. Karnad initially wrote in Kannada and translated most of his plays himself.

The first scene of Girish Karnad's second play, *Tughlaq*, published in Kannada in 1964 when he was 26 years old and later translated by the playwright into English, begins with a conversation between an old and young man. "Old man: God, what's this country coming to! /Young man: What are you worried about, grandfather? The country's in perfectly safe hands — safer than any you've seen before." The play, in 13 scenes, woven around the life and times of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the 14th century sultan of Delhi, an authoritarian but idealistic king who disintegrates into failure in a span of 20 years, is eerily contemporary.

The king wanted to build a secular state, moving his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, a Hindu-majority city; his ideas about the economy were new but he turned into a whimsical tyrant who couldn't control the kingdom any more. When it came out, writer U.R. Ananthamurthy felt it

reflected the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country. But it was as relatable during subsequent moments of crisis in our history as it is to the present.

Religion! Politics!-All sorts of hangers-on mill around the court — a Muslim dhobi (Aziz) disguised as a Brahmin (Vishnu Prasad) will turn the king's welfare measures on their head and feast on the spoils. As Tughlaq works towards "greater justice, equality, progress and peace," he announces the move from Delhi to Daulatabad, much to the bewilderment of the people. The old man whispers, "Who do you appeal to against such madness?" It is this madness that Aziz and his pickpocket friend Aazam exploit, and others too. A voice of reason saying, "Religion! Politics! Take heed, Sultan, one day these verbal distinctions will rip you into two," goes unheard. The king plays chess, as affairs of the state heat up. His advisers include the shrewd politician, Najib, and the gentle historian, Barani, but will Tughlaq be able to stand up to his harshest critic, the maulvi, Sheikh Imam-ud-din? At the new fort in Daulatabad an old man and a young man speak, foretelling the future. "Young man: What a fort! What a magnificent thing! ...No army could take this. Old man: No, if this fort ever falls, it will crumble from inside."

In the play, the symbols have a myriad of origin as well as forms. He used symbols to represent universal thoughts and emotions. His use of various symbols in the play such as Chess, Aziz and Aazam, Prayer, Python, Daulatabad, Rose and birds like Vulture add greater emotional and associative significance.

In the Oxford University Press edition, Ananthamurthy writes in the introduction that the play is more than a political allegory: "It has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughlaq's character, the dominating figure in the play." It relates the character of Tughlaq to "philosophical questions on the nature of man and the destiny of a whole kingdom which a dreamer like him controls," making it a universal story for the ages.

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