

RESEARCH ARTICLE



IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM IN TUGHLAQ

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ABSTRACT

Tughlaq is a tale of the crumbling to ashes of the dreams and aspirations of an over-ambitious, yet considerably virtuous king. It is contemporary in the sense that one can see flashes of Tughlaquesque attitude – callous yet well-meaning – in contemporary political structure too. *Tughlaq* is an intensely insightful play, which explores the forces that determine the seat of power. For this exploration Karnad makes a strategic use of symbols and allegory. *Tughlaq* consists of rich and complex symbolism and a subtle weaving of different motifs. There are four main symbols—prayer, sleep, the game of chess and the rose garden or rose. Karnad deftly uses these symbols to convey his point of view on politics and religion, and various other facets of human existence. The present paper makes an effort to explore how Girish Karnad makes use of symbols, metaphors, and images to convey the disillusionment of both the ruler and the ruled. The play itself is a metaphor; it is symbolic of the illusiveness of life. Close parallels can be identified between life and theatre. The paper also makes a reference to the use of various theatrical devices such as shape shifting and disguises etc. Karnad's language too is symbolic and highly suggestive of the ideas that he wants to express. The play draws upon history and myth for its setting and action but interprets them from a modern standpoint. Through a skilful use of symbols and other poetic devices Karnad brings to fore the disillusionment and despair that modern era is experiencing.

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Tughlaq, Girish Karnad's second play and perhaps his best known was written during his stay at Oxford, and captures the disillusionment of the people with the political scenario of the times. *Tughlaq* is a socio-political exploration of life and times of Mohammed-bin-Tughlaq and was published in Kannada in 1964. This play established Karnad as one of the foremost playwrights of India. It has been hailed as one of the best historical plays in contemporary Indian literature. Karnad adds nuances and layers of meaning to the basic historical framework by imbuing it with his rich imagination and cogent symbolism.

In its canvas and treatment, *Tughlaq* is both huge and contemporary. It is a tale of the crumbling to ashes of the dreams and aspirations of an over-ambitious, yet considerably virtuous king. It is contemporary in the sense that one can see flashes of now famous Tughlaquesque attitude – callous yet well-meaning – in contemporary political structure too. The play has a great plot, gripping characters, beautiful speeches and it certainly is inspired from history. Despite the ill-timed decision to shift the capital of India from Delhi to the Hindu city of Devagiri (rechristened as Daulatabad) to centralize administration and also to inculcate faith amongst the Hindus for his policies, the misjudgment of making copper coins equal in value to silver dinars, the shamelessness of designing the so-called conspiracy to kill his own brother and father at prayer hour; Tughlaq had the willingness to work for his people to ensure their happiness, the courage to take initiative in the direction of communal equality; and a keenly observing and ever-diligent mind. The disappointment in the end when he is not understood by his people and followers is only natural. And Karnad captures all this beautifully and poignantly in his inimitable style.

Tughlaq is an intensely insightful play, which explores the forces that determine the seat of power. For this exploration Karnad makes a strategic use of symbols and allegory. *Tughlaq* consists of rich and complex symbolism and a subtle weaving of different motifs. The theme of the play emanates, no doubt, from history, but Karnad does not deal it as such. It is a political allegory. And Karnad makes use of symbols to explore the political leitmotif. And these symbols are used to enhance the puzzling

qualities that emanate from the ambiguities of Muhammad's character. The symbolism in the play is also used to this end and is a part and parcel of the dramatic texture of the play. The use of symbols is the basic tenet of any literary work of quality. *Tughlaq* is no exception. A highly rich symbolism evocative of life itself abounds *Tughlaq*. Karnad employs various symbols to highlight his stance. In fact the play itself is a metaphor; it is symbolic of the illusiveness of life. Close parallels can be identified between life and theatre. Theatre imitates life and if theatre is an illusion and a vision, so should be life. However, the two cannot be said to be replacements for each other. There is a very thin line of demarcation between life and theatre and a playwright who can bring this distinction to the fore is a successful one. In this sense *Tughlaq* is one of the rare achievements of Indian theatre. While writing a play, a playwright must use certain images to suggest that the audience is undergoing a theatrical experience. In *Tughlaq* Karnad uses theatrical images to achieve this effect. Karnad seems to have used this play consciously to show that life itself, is a fleeting shadow sometimes, and it becomes difficult to keep hold of it as it is a dream. Perhaps this results in the so-called madness of Tughlaq which acts as a cushion for him. Nibir K. Ghosh feels that "*Tughlaq seems to have found both freedom and safety in his madness—the freedom of loneliness and the safety from being understood.*"¹

That the play has been used as a symbol is clear from the fact that Karnad makes repeated references to acting, theatre, and performance in *Tughlaq*. Muhammad behaves and speaks in the manner of an actor. His public appearance and even his private moments are reflective of the manners of an actor. He appears before the crowd properly heralded, and waxes eloquent. Not only does he use words like 'justice', 'peace' 'purposeful life' etc.; he also uses his sense of justice as an exhibit for people to view. After Muhammad has left the guard very revealingly disperses the crowd in the following words:

*"All right, all right, Go home! What are you waiting for? The show's over!
Go home....."*²(*Tughlaq*, p 151)

This scene clearly tells us that for the Sultan his own public appearance, his sense of justice, his future plans are all a part of the show. Even his own people for whom he is presumably doing everything are no more than an audience for him. Whole of the play thus becomes a symbol of the theatricality that life is getting reduced to. Perhaps Karnad wants to suggest through this play that even reality is unreal.

The play draws upon history and myth for its setting and action but interprets them from a modern standpoint. Karnad applies history to a modern set-up so as to present modern sensibilities. The symbolism in the play is also used to this end and is part and parcel of the dramatic texture of the play. The play abounds in symbols but Karnad uses four major symbols—prayer, sleep, game of chess and the rose, more specifically rose-garden as idioms of his expression.

Prayer is the most dominant and strongest of all. It stands for religion and idealism, and ironically enough it also stands for the misuse of religion, the corruption that religion is, and the mockery that it becomes when the game of death is sought to be played at prayer time. A petty thief masquerades as the descendent of the holiest of holy. Prayer is one ever-present symbol which represents the religious idealism of Tughlaq. It stands for that idealism of Tughlaq that is reduced to mockery when the Sultan's life is threatened at the very time of prayer. The Muslim chieftains and Sheikh Shams-ud-din, the pacifist holy man, conspire to kill Tughlaq, when he is at prayer. Earlier, it has been suggested in the play that Muhammad too vitiated prayer to kill his father and brother. Thus prayer, which should bring peace and trust, brings violence and loss of faith. Life, in fact, seems to be corrupted at its very source. At a deeper level prayer is a symbol of "*man's unconscious need for divine protection and guidance*"³ in an hour of extreme despair and anguish. Prayer becomes that haven or shelter where man can hide all his worldly misdeeds. The Sultan is deeply religious and he attaches a great importance to prayer. He makes it mandatory for his people to pray five times a day, as is postulated in the Holy Koran. But this symbol of divine presence is corrupted when even this sacred time is used for politics. First the Amirs try to assassinate the Sultan at the prayer time. Then after

nipping that rebellion the Sultan uses it to gain some political mileage. He has an announcement made that Shihab-ud-din while trying to save Sultan's life, laid down his own life, when in reality the Sultan himself had murdered him as a punishment for his involvement in the intrigue. This incident itself becomes a symbol of how nothing is sacrosanct in the game of politics and that there is something basically corrupt with Tughlaq's ideology. Anything and everything is valid and just. After this incident the Sultan wants Delhi to be vacated immediately and prohibits any praying in the kingdom. This becomes a symbol of the loss of faith. Life has lost its sap and vitality in Muhammad's kingdom which is symbolized by the absence of prayer

Sleep becomes the much needed and ever-eluding peace that the Sultan is hankering after and which perpetually slips away from Tughlaq. This sleep comes to the Sultan only towards the end of the play when he realizes that he has a companion in his madness and that is none other than the Omnipotent God himself. Sleep descends only when Muhammad realizes that his madness cannot be understood, and that he is essentially alone. Barani too has to go finally and the Sultan does not get any assurance from him that he will return. Tughlaq seems to be resigned to the fact that he will remain a grossly misunderstood man as there is a greater and unexplained madness, that of God himself. Sleep does come to him towards the end. However, whether peace also accompanies sleep is highly questionable.

The game of chess and the rose garden are two recurring images which are woven into the structure of the play. Both are metaphors of Tughlaq's alienation. Chess is a symbol of the game of politics. The game of chess stands for the political manoeuvres of Tughlaq. Politics is a game for him and he enjoys the moves. The intrigues that he plots are the moves of the game and the people become his pawns. Aziz, a *dhobi*, is the other player, who is also using people simply as pawns to achieve his ends. In this game "*Tughlaq emerges as a shrewd politician who has learnt the art of transforming every adverse situation to his advantage.*"⁴ This also symbolizes that men are mere pawns in Tughlaq's scheme of things. The game of chess, quite obviously, symbolizes the political gamble that

Tughlaq's entire life turns out to be. It also symbolizes that though Tughlaq can solve the most difficult problem in chess it does not guarantee a win in the game of politics also. In the process of this game Tughlaq becomes an estranged person and becomes a pawn of a vicious set of events which he is unable to control. The game of chess and the rose garden are two important symbols in the play. Tughlaq's game-like approach to life is brought out by the game of chess, wherein he treats other persons as pawns to further his own ends. Christine Gomez very rightly observes:

*" Chess symbolizes Tughlaq's game approach to life wherein he regards the other people as pawns to be manipulated for his own advantage."*⁵

This astute player is beaten only by Aziz at his own game. Aziz checkmates him. In fact he uses Tughlaq as a pawn.

Rose garden is a symbol of Tughlaq's idealistic aspirations, which as a dumping ground symbolises a frustration and failure of that idealistic vision. The Rose Garden eventually becomes a symbol of the chasm between man's expectations, and the practical reality. It is also a symbol of Tughlaq's complete alienation from his people in total contrast to his desire to be one with them. Azam explains the Sultan's alienation to Aziz:

*"You know there are heaps of counterfeit coins in the garden outside my window?.....
.....
..... On the night we came here, I was so nervous I couldn't sleep. So I was standing by the window, looking at those heaps. They looked like giant anthills in the moonlight. Suddenly I saw a shadow moving among them. I stared. It was a man wandering alone in the garden. He went to a heap, stood there for half an hour still as a rock. Then he dug into the heaps with his fists, raised his fists and let the coins trickle out. It was frightening. And you know who it was? Your Sultan. He does that every night—every single night—it's like witchcraft—"* (Tughlaq, p.212)

Tughlaq's alienation is complete and irrevocable.

The rose is a symbol of Muhammad's aesthetic and poetic nature and the rose garden is a symbol of the Utopia that he wants his kingdom to be. This very garden becomes the symbol of the withering away and killing of the poet in him by political manoeuvres. This also symbolizes the destruction of all his dreams and ideals. The rose becomes a symbol of Tughlaq's sensitive and creative leanings when he dreams of a rose garden in which every rose will be a poem. However, later on this very rose becomes the symbol of the withering away of all his dreams and ideals. And the Rose Garden becomes a symbol of the frustration of his idealistic aspirations. It reflects the unbridgeable gap between man's expectations and achievements.

These four symbols are woven into the structure of the play. They are images which constitute the main motif of the action of the play. Karnad also makes an overt use of symbolism. Muhammad, proposing to move his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad clearly says:

"Later this year the capital of my empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad..... Your surprise is natural, but I beg you to realize that this is no mad whim of a tyrant.....But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom." (Tughlaq, p.149)

Karnad's language here, as elsewhere too, is symbolic and highly suggestive of the ideas that he wants to express. The words 'mad whim of a tyrant' are highly evocative. They come as a foreboding to the forthcoming events. In Scene Two Muhammad is worried that he doesn't have the time to sleep and so he wishes away sleep. He confides in his stepmother:

"I pray to the Almighty to save me from sleep. All day long I have to worry about tomorrow but it's only when the night falls that I can step beyond all that." (Tughlaq, p.155)

The reader can guess that this Sultan is eventually going to lose his sleep. The Sultan wants to climb the tallest tree in the world and ask his people to confide their worries in him. Little does he realize that by climbing high he will lose his people. The death of Sheikh Imam-ud-din is also a symbol. In the Sheikh's death lies the death of Sultan's ideals. As the Sultan uses the life and death of the Sheikh for his own pursuits, in the same way his ideals will be used by the cunning to promote their own interests. In fact, in today's world there are no real ideals. Ideals are only the vehicles for achieving selfish ends. Aziz is symbolic of all those who thrive by taking advantage of the ideals. Such people never have any real faith in any ideals yet they profess to be highly idealistic. Aziz is a prototype of the present day politicians. He sees politics as a world of wealth, power, success, and position; which should be used to further one's own interests only. In a revealing remark he tells Aazam:

"Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world—politics! My dear fellow, that's where our future is—politics! It's a beautiful world—wealth, success, position, power—and yet it is 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!" (Tughlaq, p.190)

Aziz belongs to that category who believe that *"politics is used to promote the self-interest of the leaders but not the welfare of people"*.⁶

Karnad intersperses the play with intense symbols. Tughlaq's kingdom is in a state of discord. The howling of wild wolves and the bay of street dogs present this discord very aptly. These images also suggest the political rot that Tughlaq's kingdom has fallen into. The degeneration of the political setup is brought out. Christine Gomez feels that what is revealed is *"an outsider estranged from the universe, totally out of harmony with it"*.⁷ This

disharmony is brought out again and again in the play. Tughlaq had ascended the throne after getting his father and brothers assassinated. And he feels that these deaths brought about by him had not gone waste, because they gave him, as he himself says, *'power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself.'* (Tughlaq, p.204). What, however, Tughlaq does not say and admit is that these very deaths laid the foundation of the ultimate rot that his kingdom is eventually reduced to. Tughlaq feels that he killed for an ideal. What he forgets is that ends do not justify the means, and if means are corrupt, they can lead to only a corrupt end. The violence that he had started has spread its tentacles and has claimed the whole of his kingdom. Tughlaq can see it but he is powerless to control it. The rose garden is reduced to being a symbol of the corruption rampant in Tughlaq's kingdom. Muhammad had created the Rose Garden as a concrete and visible image of the Utopia that he wanted his country to be but it eventually becomes a dumping ground for the useless copper coins. Thus the utopia turns into a waste land.

According to P. Ramamurthi even disguise becomes a symbol in the play. It becomes a symbol of the role-playing that the comic sub-plot involving Aziz and Aazam indulges in. The sub-plot and the main plot converge at one point and Muhammad asks Aziz:

"Who are you? How long did you hope to go on fooling us with your masquerade?" (Tughlaq, p. 215)

In fact Muhammad is asking his own self, how long he can hope to go on fooling his people and also himself with his masquerade of high ideals through which he wants to effect a positive change in the affairs of his kingdom and the lives of his people. He knows in his heart of hearts that his ideals are, in fact, highly impractical. Aziz's quite successful picaresque journey in Tughlaq's reign is symbolic of the failure that Muhammad's high ideals have turned out to be. Also they symbolize the rot that Muhammad's reign has degenerated into consequently. Aziz has not only been used as a prop in the play, he has been made a symbol of Tughlaq himself. He is a symbolic representation of Tughlaq's

policies. Aziz uses disguise. Tughlaq also wears masks. However, the difference between Aziz and Tughlaq is that Aziz is deceiving others and he admits it. Tughlaq, on the other hand, is deceiving his own self and ironically enough he does not even know it or does not admit it even to his own self. In this connection P. Ramamoorthi observes:

*"There is a basic dialectics in Muhammad's personality; the visionary and the politician, the idealist and the realist."*⁸

Ramamoorthi calls the play a projection of Muhammad's 'divided self'. This 'divided self' of Muhammad symbolizes Tughlaq's incomplete kingdom. It is in this very context that U.R. Ananthamurthy in his Introduction to *Tughlaq* observes:

*"The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real: the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue. Tughlaq is what he is in spite of his self-knowledge and an intense desire for divine grace. He is aware of the irony of his life when Aziz, the only character in the play who has skilfully used all the schemes of Tughlaq for his designs, kills Ghiyas-ud-din and comes in his guise as a holy messenger of peace to purify the land and revive the banned prayer. The irony is deeply tragic. In the end Tughlaq and his kingdom are one in their chaos, and he knows it."*⁹

Muhammad's kingdom is a reflection of his own dichotomous personality. Thus the kingdom and the king symbolize each other. As Reddy puts it, "Through this symbolist technique, the playwright has succeeded in creating the right political atmosphere."¹⁰ Tughlaq is a humanist yet a tyrant, an idealist yet a crafty politician. The two aspects are clear opposites and naturally do not gel, hence the confusion that his kingdom is in. Muhammad's kingdom is in a state of unrest because the Sultan himself is in a state of unrest. In fact, he is at war with himself. Muhammad is basically a poet, and not a ruler. He reads the Greeks and is aware of the 'Greek in me' (Tughlaq, p. 165). He enjoys reading

Sadi's poems. He is a visionary who builds a utopia for his people in his visions. Muhammad is all the time waiting for a new future, a tomorrow, which will come. He tells the young watchman standing on the rampart of the forts in Daulatabad:

"Nineteen, Nice Age! An age when you think you can clasp the whole world in your palm like a rare diamond. I was twenty-one when I came to Daulatabad first, and built this fort. I supervised the placing of every brick in it and I said to myself, one day I shall build my own history like this, brick by brick.

One night I was standing on the ramparts of the old fort here. There was a torch near flapping its wild wings and scattering golden feathers on everything in sight. There was a half-built gate nearby trying to contain the sky within its cleft. Suddenly something happened—as though someone had cast a spell. The torch, the gate, the fort and the sky—all melted and merged and flowed in my blood-stream with the darkness of the night. The moment shed its symbol, its questions and answers, and stood naked and calm where the stars throbbed in my veins. I was the earth, was the grass, was the smoke, was the sky." (Tughlaq, p. 194)

However, ironically enough, the visions of this visionary fail miserably when they face reality. The fort which Muhammad built with the faith of the advent of a new tomorrow becomes the symbol of the rotten state of affairs. Muhammad wanted to create a golden history, yet he is witness to a history which is swallowing humanity in. The fort becomes a symbol of this rot. The road which Muhammad built to link his kingdom, and thus people, looks like a python ready to swallow the humanity. The tragedy and irony of Muhammad's life is that there is an unbridgeable gap between the vision and the reality.

The philosopher in Tughlaq comes to the fore every now and then and he speaks through symbols. To him every rose is "an image of Sadi's poems" (Tughlaq, p. 202) He realizes that his search

for peace has remained futile. Daulatabad has failed to give him peace that he is desperately looking for. He longs to abandon all his powers, his kingdom and go to Mecca to find peace. But he knows that even this wish of his is destined to remain unfulfilled. Also, he feels that he still has *"something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history"* (*Tughlaq*, p. 196)

Tughlaq is presented before us as a man who is ahead of his age, and this causes his estrangement from the society. In the age of religious compartmentalism and fanaticism, here is a man who talks of religious tolerance and wants to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims. Ironically both the communities disapprove of him—Muslims find him foolish and Hindus suspect him. Thus Muhammad becomes an outsider in his own society, for his own people. The very first scene presents this alienation and prepares the reader for the ensuing tragedy. Writing of *Tughlaq* Jayadipsinh K. Dodiya says:

*"The play is a historical allegory and revolves round Tughlaq's character. Karnad poses a philosophical question how a self-righteous idealist with absolute power over his subjects can be dangerous for the destiny of the whole nation. His policy of complete impartiality between Hindus and Muslims, of equal justice to all without consideration of caste, creed and class makes people uncomfortable under the prevailing social order. The Hindus grow suspicious and the Muslim fundamentalists turn hostile to him."*¹¹

Tughlaq's tragedy emanates from the fact that he fails to establish meaningful connection even with people around him. In fact, at times he manipulates people, which results in his alienation

Along with symbols, Karnad beautifully makes use of what Makrand R. Paranjape calls *"shape shifting"*¹² Paranjape defines shape shifting as *"the term cultural anthropologists and folklorists use to describe the transformation that are so common in the myths and folklore of most cultures..... Like when a plant becomes an animal or when a woman becomes a bird, or when a statue*

*becomes a man, or when a dead person becomes alive, or when a person becomes someone else by changing shape or form in any way."*¹³

Karnad heavily draws from the rich tradition of shape-shifting as prevalent in the folklore in his writings. Though as has already been said, *Tughlaq* does not make use of myths and folklore as such, yet it creates myths out of history and applies them. Thus in *Tughlaq* Karnad makes use of the tools such as shape-shifting, which are attached with the myths. One of the examples of shape-shifting in *Tughlaq* is the attempt to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. In his attempt to change the capital Muhammad is trying to turn Daulatabad into Delhi. The attempt fails, representing the failure of Muhammad's policies. *Tughlaq*, according to Paranjape, *"is a play full of dissimulations, illusions and lies."*¹⁴ The whole play, in fact, is about lies and hypocrisies. This is the dominant theme of the play. This makes the play a modern play, as it becomes a commentary on the moral decline of a polity, which could be applied not only to the time of writing of the play, but also today. Karnad makes a poignant commentary on the contemporary state of affairs; when he makes Aziz, a murderer, masquerading as a holy man, bless Daulatabad. How can a kingdom thrive, he seems to be asking, when its foundation is based on deceit and betrayal. Aziz's pretence brings illumination and self-knowledge to the audience as to the present political state. In fact, *Tughlaq* mirrors the disillusionment of the people with the contemporary political situation. Through *Tughlaq* Karnad also exposes the betrayal of high ideals for selfish ends that Tughlaq has when he comes to the throne.

Tughlaq needs to be one with his people for the success of his schemes. Unfortunately, this is what he fails to do. In fact, most of the problems that Tughlaq encounters are not because of his people, but because of his own tragic inability to reconcile the opposing forces of his own nature. His failure lies in his alienation. His tragedy also stems from the fact that he is alienated from the individuals around him. According to Christine Gomez, *"his interpersonal alienation manifests itself in two ways. First of all he is shown to manipulate*

people for his own purposes, treating them as objects and not persons. Secondly he is unable to establish meaningful communication with others and is seen to be play-acting continually.”¹⁵ He seems to be giving a performance all the time. There is very little genuine communication in Tughlaq’s relationship with others, even with those who are very close to him—his stepmother, Najib, Barani. He wants to impress upon his peoples that he is a just and impartial Sultan, which he indeed wants to be, and for this purpose he stage-manages the episode involving the aggrieved Brahmin. He does not want to let go of any opportunity to win popular support. But his theatricality fails to arouse the emotions that he wants.

Tughlaq’s theatricality is suggestive of the isolated island that all of us have become. All our actions and utterances are calculated to further our own interests. Tughlaq is presented as a mirror to the modern man. In another sense too Tughlaq mirrors modern man. His alienation is not limited to society, or his close circle; it extends to his own self too. He is alienated from his own persona also. There is a chasm between his actions and his ideals, which Tughlaq finds almost impossible to bridge. This is also the problem with the modern man.

Muhammad is alienated not only from his friends and people, but from himself too. He is an extremely lonely man. He finds it impossible to share his dreams and ideals with anyone. Even his stepmother fails to understand him; and this makes Tughlaq wonder whether he is doing the right thing or not. Tughlaq is fighting with his own self and experiences extreme self-estrangement after passing the death sentence on his stepmother. His alienation from his people and society reaches completion when he bans prayer from his kingdom and asserts:

“Anyone caught praying will be severely punished. Henceforth let the moment of prayer walk my streets in silence and leave without a trace.” (Tughlaq, p. 186)

Here is a self-proclaimed tolerant ruler proceeding onto the path of extreme intolerance. The political overtones are hard to miss.

Karnad’s prose here borders on poetry at many places. Tughlaq wants to be one with his people too as he wants to be one with nature. He wants his people to share his passion for his dreams. In a poetic outburst he tells what he wants from his people.

“I look at the Pleiades and I think of Ibn-ul-Mottazz who thought it was an ostrich egg and Dur-rumma who thought it was a swallow. And then I want to go back to their poetry and sink myself in their words. Then again 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. History is ours to play with—ours now! Let’s be the light and cover the earth with greenery. Let’s be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations, come! I am waiting to embrace you all.” (Tughlaq, p. 155)

His people, unfortunately, do not share his idealism and passion for oneness. And he fails to understand the practical problems and issues involved in pursuing his idealism. The poet goes awry as a Sultan. Karnad has used the delicate and evocative symbol of Rose Garden to voice Tughlaq’s dreams and later on their failure. Tughlaq plans a rose garden where he could write and say verses. This garden for him is symbolic of his own kingdom—a utopia. Instead this garden becomes the dumping ground for the counterfeit copper currency. Ironically Muhammad keeps a vigil over this dump at night. The Utopia that he wanted to rule has degenerated to a ‘kitchen of death and he is the lord of skins’. Karnad has very poignantly brought out the wide chasm between man’s dreams and expectations, and the harsh reality. Tughlaq is acutely aware of this unbridgeable divide. Almost tired of trying to justify his actions to himself and to others, he tells his stepmother:

“Now I don’t need a rose garden. I built it because I wanted to make for myself an image of Sadi’s poems. I wanted every rose in it to be a poem. I wanted

every thorn in it to prick and quicken the senses. But I don't need these airy trappings now; a funeral has no need for a separate symbol." (Tughlaq, p. 202)

Tughlaq now knows that he has not been able to connect with his people. Through Tughlaq Karnad also made it manifest that man is essentially alone. Tughlaq started his journey with friends and relatives and during the course of his life, in some way or the other, he has to lose his companions and friends. In the end Barani too has to go, for a man with a vision like that of Tughlaq cannot but be alone and lonely. There cannot be any companion who will share his vision, and this is where Muhammad realizes that he can have a companion in God only:

"For once I am not alone, I have a companion to share my madness now—the omnipotent God!" (Tughlaq, p. 220)

In *Tughlaq* also as in his other plays, Karnad makes use of traditional theatrical devices. Mask and disguise are his favourites for communicating varying emotions and viewpoints to his audience. In his other plays he uses masks from the absurd tradition. Here he uses disguise in place of that. When the play opens Aziz is in the guise of a Brahmin, and later on he meets Tughlaq in the guise of Ghiyas-ud-din. The resemblance between the Sultan and Imam-ud-din has been very cleverly used by Karnad to project an alter ego of the Sultan. Sultan is Imam-ud-din who in the guise of the Sheikh is himself a victim of his own whimsical visions.

Tughlaq, as a play, is applicable to all times and all places. It is a commentary on the sad plight of the masses when ideals are used in the game of power. The words of Aparna Dharwadkar sum up the play beautifully. She feels that the historical narrative is "particular, complete and significant in itself. *Tughlaq* is as much about history, historiography, and the historical *Tughlaq* as it is about post-colonial identity and political modernity. The fictional *Tughlaq* evokes Nehru, Gandhi and their political heirs, but he does not evoke any one contemporary figure consistently, and sometimes he evokes only himself".¹⁶

NOTES

¹Nibir K. Ghosh, " Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* : History in the Future Tense" in *Fifty Years of Indian Writing*, ed., R.K.Dhawan,(London: Sangam Books, 1999), p. 119.

²Girish Karnad, *Tughlaq*, in *Three Plays* (1994; rpt. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002 (8th impression), p.151. (All the subsequent references to the play have been taken from the same edition. The reference in the form of page number will be given in brackets along with the quotation in the text itself)

³ Bayapa Reddy, "The Theatrical Representstion of History: Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*," in *Studies in Indian History in English with a Focus on Indian English Drama* (New Delhi: Prestige, 1990), p. 51.

⁴Nibir K. Ghosh, in R.K.Dhawan, p.116.

⁵Christine Gomez, " Karnad's *Tughlaq* as an Alienated Protagonist" in *The Plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives* ed. Jayadipsinh Dodiya (New Delhi: Prestige, 1989), p. 125.

⁶Reddy, p.45.

⁷Christine Gomez, "Karnad's *Tughlaq* as an Alienated Protagonist," in *New Directions in Indian Drama*, ed. Sudhakar Pandey and Freya Barua, (New Delhi: Prestige Books,1994), p.144.

⁸P. Ramamoorthi, "He That Playeth the Sultan: A Study of *Tughlaq*," in *Studies in Contemporary Indian Drama*, ed. Sudhakar Pandey and Freya Taraporewala, (Prestige Books: New Delhi, 1990), p. 42.

⁹U.R.Ananthmurthy, "Introduction to *Tughlaq*," pp. 144-145.

¹⁰Reddy, p. 51.

¹¹Jayadipsinh K. Dodiya, "Girish Karnad: The Man and the Writer," in *Indian English Drama: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Jayadipsinh K. Dodiya and K.V.Surendran (2000; rpt. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2002), p.44.

¹²Makrand R.Paranjape, "Metamorphosis as Metaphor: Shape Shifting in Girish Karnad's Plays," in *New Directions in Indian Drama*, ed. Sudhakar Pandey and Freya Barua (Prestige Books: New Delhi, 1994), p.87.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid. p.92.

¹⁵Christine Gomez, "Karnad's *Tughlaq* as an Alienated Protagonist," in *New Directions in Indian Drama*, ed. Sudhakar Pandey and Freya Barua (Prestige Books: New Delhi, 1994), p.138.

¹⁶Aparna Dharwadkar, "Reading *Tughlaq*," in *Girish Karnad's Plays: Performances and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Tutun Mukherjee (Delhi: Pencraft International,2006), p.117.
