

# Periodic Research

## Social relevance and modernity in the historical plays of Girish Karnad

### Abstract

Girish Karnad is probably the most active playwright of contemporary drama. He is an actor as well as director. He is connected with theatre, films, documentaries and TV Serials. His unique command over his dramatic material has made him one of the outstanding playwrights of India. He is one of the most prolific writers in India writing in Kannada and translating his own works himself into English later on. His plays are full innovations and deep insight into human mind. He is a good social thinker. He threw due light on the dark side of society. Every aspect of the society is dealt by Karnad. So social relevance and modernity is one of the characteristics of his plays. His plays have mostly a remarkable contemporary social relevance which establishes him as a thinker playwright. He has carefully and distinctively selected the themes of his plays which have the social contexts and meanings. He treats history as myths and instead of writing factual historical plays he reshapes the situation symbolically and comments on the contemporary issues. His Tughlaq, Tale-Danda and the Dreams of Tipu Sultan are best examples in this regard.

**Keyword:** Playwright, Contemporary, Outstanding, Innovations, Remarkable

### Introduction

Karnad's Tughlaq a historical play deals with the complex and paradoxical character of mohammed-bin Tughlaq who ruled over India for about twenty six years. Although Karnad based Tughlaq's character, administration, politics, barbarity and savagery, he made some deviations from history, which he thinks essential for dramatic purpose. Karnad ingeniously creates the atmosphere of Tughlaq's days- an atmosphere of mutual distrust, frustrated idealism, communal intolerance, religious bigotry, treachery and sedition, rampant corruption and Tughlaq's unmitigated blood thirstiness and his final disillusionment. The play is the play of the sixties and reflects the political mood of disillusionment which were spread over the country after the death of Nehru who was an idealist and a visionary like Tughlaq. Karnad writes-

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 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 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.(8)

Tughlaq is a historical play but while writing it Karnad himself was struck by the parallelism between the reign of Tughlaq and contemporary history. The political chaos, which Karnad depicts in Tughlaq reminded many readers of the Nehru era in Indian history. Karnad finds this similarity a coincidence. He affirms, "I did not consciously write about the Nehru era I am always flattered when people tell me that it was about the Nehru era and equally applies to development of politics since then. But I think, well, that is a compliment that any playwright would be thrilled to get but it was not intended to be a contemporary play about contemporary situation."(8)

At every step the play reflects the chaos, disillusionment and corruption that followed the Nehru era, and this is one of the most important reasons of the popularity of the play. Tughlaq ruled in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and Nehru in the 1950s and 1960s. Striking parallels can easily be drawn between the two ages. This makes Tughlaq a great political allegory. An allegory is apparently a story but it carries within it a hidden moral lesson for the more discerning readers. It tells the story of the reign of



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about to send a delegation to France for commercial and political purpose, his son Fath Haider wishes to join it. At that time, Tipu advises him that he should concentrate on his studies in order to get new and latest knowledge of the world and asks his son to concentrate on his studies instead of going on France tour. Tipu is a far-sighted ruler and father, who took his children with him while administrating. He wants to teach them the practical things of administration, therefore, involved children in the important decision-making process. This shows that he wants to develop his children mind with progressive and enlightened thoughts with the experience of practical things. He wants them to be a strong, knowledgeable, experienced and powerful ruler for future. Tipu is a devotee of new, scientific and innovative ideas. He readily accepts the novel ideas for the public welfare. His goals and ideals are high. He encourages industry, agriculture, trade and commerce for the said object, which gave Mysore State the glory, sound economy, prosperity and respectable place in Indian history. He tries to make his state modern on the basis of European model. Ban on the use of liquor, reform of the calendar, experiments in commerce, changing names of cities and towns, novel revenue and judicial regulations are some remarkable deeds of Tipu Sultan. He is an apostle of modernity, who had modern sensibility and has a great interest in trade. He encourages people to export many goods like pepper, chillies, sandalwood, cardamom and rice. He establishes factories in foreign countries at Muscat, Pegu, Cutch and Jiddah. He makes trade relations with China, France, Turkey and Iran. Things display that Tipu had a commercial view like Britishers.

Tipu has modern sensibility. He knows that to depend on other nation for goods is nothing but slavery. In fact, he wants to become his state as self-sufficient state. When he is sending a delegation to France, orders them to bring everything including new techniques, inventions, machines etc.

He knows that his land is rich and full of ivory, sandalwood and forests and we do not get anything if we sell these things to an individual trader. He is an ambitious ruler whose desire was to change the face of India. He was interested in business, trade, industry and soldiers. He knows that Europe makes herself wonderful due to new ideas, inventions and machines. The scientific approach of Europeans has resulted in rapid progress in every field. That's why he wants to observe these entire things in India in order to make India like Europe. And it is possible only when India would possess them. He (Tipu) wanted to open the doors of Mysore to new inventions, trade and commerce but without compromising on his independence and sovereignty of his state. He made growth and dynamism the foundation of his economic and commercial policies. In addition to heavy industries Tipu saw the value of luxury such as pearl culture, silkworms and import of fine asses from Arabia. Tipu is the Indian ruler who tried to make his state a Republic, his vision is to make his people progressive and prosperous.

It was not Tipu's dreams but his predictions that came true. The treachery and deceit of his own nobles which led to the Seringapatam Fort and Tipu's subsequent death certainly add the element of tragedy that surrounds the legend of Tipu Sultan. It is the tragedy of an Indian hero, though he was conscious about the encroachment of the colonists. The tragedy takes place not due to the English people only but the treachery committed by the Indians is responsible for the fall of Tipu Sultan.

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