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Whimsical Nature of Tughlaq

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Abstract

The present research paper deals with Whimsical nature of Tughlaq. Tughlaq is protagonist of Girish Karnad's famous play *Tughlaq*. He was the sultan of Delhi in 14th century. The play was written by Girish Karnad in 1964. *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad is a classic in Indian English drama. It tells the story of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq, exploring the rationale behind his actions and exploring his psyche. The action of the play takes place in 14th century and it gives a clear picture of that time and character of Tughlaq. In the play Tughlaq is Impulsive and Whimsical king. He always thinks that he is right and all his actions are right too. Nobody can foretell his moods and actions in his own fate. As a king Tughlaq took many decisions but all the plan of Tughlaq has failed due to his negligence and becomes problem for Delhi residents. Thus for his mad plans he was regarded as a mad king.

Keywords: Girish karnad, Tughlaq, Whimsical, Impulsive, Sultan

Girish karnad is one of the most famous Indian English playwrights. He has written five or six plays but best of them being Yayati, Tughlaq and Hayavadana. This plays are based on myth, history and folktales. Girish Karnad is a versatile genius. He is a film producer, an actor, an artist and a playwright all in one. Apart from the above mentioned attributes he is well known for the numerous positions he has held in the field of Indian culture. Girish karnad was awarded by many famous award such as The Padma Shri award (1974), The Padma Bhusan Award (1992) and Jnanpith award in 1998. *Tughlaq* is his second play. *Tughlaq* was originally written in Kannada but was later translated into English by Girish

Karnad himself. This play is classic in Indian English drama. *Tughlaq* established him as a one of the most significant playwrights in India. The story of play revolves around the 14th century historical figure of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq. The play is a successful demonstration of the complexity of the character of its protagonist. Muhammad Bin Tughlaq is the protagonist in the play *Tughlaq*. Muhammad bin Tughlaq is popularly known as “The mad Tughlaq”, ruled Delhi in the 14th century. Tughlaq was a visionary, an idealist, a great scholar as well as a crafty politician. Muhammad Tughlaq is considered as a controversial ruler. His character was a combination of the anticancer properties so while on the one hand he wanted to strengthen his position by reforms of the state where as on another hand he made such plan could not succeed. He had the whim of doing things without giving considerable thought to his action with the result that he had to face shameful situations in his own actions. The sultan had no patience at all. He wanted immediately positive results and the failure disturbed him so much that he rejected the schemes altogether. Thus haste and impatience of the sultan was also a kind of his whimsical nature. About his madness various different views have been expressed by critics and historians. In such a climate of distrust and perpetual rebellions, Tughlaq became suspicious and vindictive. Historian Barani writes that the sultan was a habitual player with men and he acted only to shed the blood of innocent Muslims. A man of imagination, Tughlaq asked his subjects to carry his fantastic schemes into effect and when they failed to do so, he punished them ruthlessly. Failure to carry out the royal orders meant disobedience, hostility and wickedness and thousands of men were involved in trouble on this account. Ibn Battuta also writes about the sultan’s ruthless and inhumanity as Barani does. His eccentric tendencies also appear in criminal judgments made by him. According to the former, Tughlaq punished all offences both great and small without any distinction and with equal severity. The fact is that Muhammad Tughlaq awarded death punishment even for small crimes, not because he was fond of shedding blood but because he was unable to differentiate between the natures of crime. Due to his whimsical plans, cruel works and behaviour of neglecting the happiness of others, he has been called mad and murderous.

Tughlaq’s Whimsical Actions

Tughlaq was regarded as whimsical king because of his thoughtless action. He took many decisions but without giving due thought to them. Some of his plans are as follows:

1. Shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad.
2. Introduction of copper currency.

One of the major decisions taken by Muhammad Bin Tughlaq was the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. He wants his path to lead towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace; he aims at a more purposeful life. And to achieve this end he proposes to take a new step to transfer his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. He explains to the people that his empire cannot flourish with Delhi as a capital. Daulatabad as a symbol of Hindu Muslim unity will help to achieve his ideal. He seeks the cooperation of his people in this project. He says, “I hope I shall have your support and cooperation.” But they do not

understand him. He took this step for Hindu Muslim unity and to strengthen his empire in the south. But he did not make proper arrangement for this plan. He ordered all the citizens of Delhi to leave Delhi and go to Daulatabad.

In the play Muhammad Bin Tughlaq says to Najib: "I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every line being in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad with in a fortnight. I was too soft. I can see that now. They will only understand the whip. Everyone must leave." As the people did not want to leave Delhi, Tughlaq had to treat them harshly and even brutally. Barani remarks, "All was destroyed. So complete was the ruin that not a cat or a dog was left in the buildings of the city, in palaces or in the suburbs." Ibn Battuta also gives a description of Tughlaq's cynical attitude about the shifting of the capital. Battuta says: "A search was made and a blind man and a cripple were found. The cripple was put to death while the blind man was dragged to Daulatabad where only his one leg reached.....In the night Sultan mounted the roof of his palace and looked around Delhi. When neither a light nor even a smoke or a lamp came into sight he remarked, 'Now my heart is pleased and my soul is at rest.' " It was a very cruel unjust order and more so when proper preparation has not been made for implementing the plan. As result of this act thousands of people had to suffer and even died on the way. There was nothing wrong in this decision of moving capital but it was wrong to order people to leave. It was performed without making proper arrangements. Hence it was a mad action.

Another such mad action was the introduction of copper currency. In fact the age of Muhammad Tughlaq is considered a very significant epoch in the history of Indian coinage. Earlier the token currency was issued in China and Persia. Taking inspiration from these countries, Sultan Mohammad Tughlaq also issued copper coins and declared their value as per silver dinar. So Tughlaq ordered that copper coins would be legal in his state and the value of the copper coins would be equal to the value of silver dinars. Following conversation takes part in the play related to this decision of Muhammad Tughlaq:

Muhammad-I must tell you the more important news. From next year, we shall have copper currency in our empire along with the silver dinar.

Aamir I- Whatever for? I mean what does one do with a copper coin?

Muhammad- Exchange it for a silver coin! A copper coin will have the same value as a silver dinar.

Shihab-ud-din- But I don't understand your majesty. How can one expect a copper coin to have the same value as a silver one?

Muhammad- It's a question of confidence. A question of trust! The one day I heard that in china they have paper currency-paper, mind you and yet it works because people accept it. They have faith in the emperor's seal on the piece of paper."

In 1330, therefore copper currency was issued by Muhammad Tughlaq. For some time the scheme of copper currency continued properly but soon people began to feel the difference

between the copper coins and the silver coins. They doubted that the sultan intended to store the entire silver in his treasury. So everybody stored away the silver and gold coins and the market was flooded with copper coins. The number of counterfeit coins was even greater than the original ones issued by royal mint. Barani writes, "The houses of Hindu were turned into mints". But this remark of Barani is not impartial. There seems to be no reason as to why the contemporary Muslims were deprived of the greed of making counterfeit coins. Every person began to hoard the gold and silver coins. The excess of counterfeit coins devalued the copper coins, and it affected the trade and commerce adversely. The feeling of revolt and dissatisfaction began to develop in the hearts of the people against the sultan. Now the Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq felt his intervention to be essential as his scheme of token copper currency was also leading towards failure. He eventually declared the copper coins illegal and ordered the people to exchange their copper coins with silver coins from the royal treasury. Thus the royal treasury had to suffer heavily as a result of this scheme of token currency.

As such there was nothing wrong with this decision; it was all about trust and faith. But the people in state of Tughlaq had lost faith in him and as usual Tughlaq made no proper arrangement for manufacture such copper coins and there was no special mark to differentiate the fabric of original and counterfeit coins. No doubt, the wrong implementation was largely responsible for its failure. The result was that counterfeit copper coins were made on a large scale and later exchanged with silver dinars. It leads the scheme towards failure. The result was that entire economy crumbled. Dr. A. L. Srivastava writes, "The reign of Muhammad Tughlaq is an important landmark in the history of Indian coinage." It can, however be said that the scheme of token currency was started by Muhammad Tughlaq with all good intentions, but it fizzled out as the sultan could not oversee the forgery and fabrication in the making of the counterfeit coins. He did not make proper arrangements to check this evil. So this copper currency scheme also failed and the citizens of Tughlaq's state had to suffer once again because of his whimsical action.

In a last act of his whimsical nature, Tughlaq orders that the people, all without exception, should return to Delhi from Daulatabad. He has learned nothing from experience. The people have suffered and now they will suffer all the more on the way back to Delhi. But he must be obeyed, if the people are to save their skins. "Mad Tughlaq" has become a terror for the people. All his whimsical plans have failed miserably. These failure torture him so much that he begins to cry, "God, God, in heaven please help me. Please do not let go out of my hand. My skin drops with blood. I do not know how much of it is mine and how much of others. I started in your path, Lord. Why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of you. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud? Raise me. Clean me. Cover me with your infinite mercy. I can only clutch at the hem of your cloak with my bloody fingers and plead. I can only beg, have pity on me. I have no one but you now only you." Thus it is evident that Karnad's intention in writing this play is to highlight the nature of the regime of the 'Whimsical' king of medieval India. Indeed some of Tughlaq's decisions

are so much defective that he is bound to face failures and frustrations. Because of his whimsical judgment many of his well wishers decide to leave him forever. As time passed he became more and more cruel, dangerous and thoughtless. The people in general began to call him 'mad Tughlaq'.

Conclusion

The playwright has invented this character of Tughlaq with the purpose of throwing light on problems of Delhi's people who faces the problem generated by sultan with his whimsical action. The playwright has successfully shown the whimsical nature of Tughlaq in the play by considering his mad decisions. From the very beginning to the end Tughlaq remains abnormal and his abnormal behaviour affects every person of state. People began to call him mad Tughlaq for his thoughtless actions. All the people of his subject regard him mad king. Hence it is clear from the above study that Tughlaq was a person who carried whimsical nature.

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