

THE THEME OF EXISTENTIALISM IN GIRISH KARNAD'S 'TUGHLAQ'

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This paper aims to present the existentialist features in Girish Karnad's play 'TUGHLAQ'. Existentialism is a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the problems of human existence and is based on the subjective experience of thinking, feeling and taking action. It highlights the fact that every individual is unique in this world possessing freedom of choice and to execute their will. Individuals have to bear the responsibility for their actions as a result of their choices and thus shape their own destinies. Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, theologian, poet and Nietzsche, the German philosopher are the pioneers of the philosophy of Existentialism. They explore the idea and view of human will and supremacy of existence of the humans as the highest species of living beings in this world, in a Godless mysterious universe. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus are also existentialist thinkers and writers who not only expounded the existentialist philosophy but mainly emphasized what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had already opined. Existentialism is a modern philosophical movement whose roots can be traced in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka and others. They philosophize into the subjectivity and freedom of humans in their works.

Girish Karnad a multifaceted creative artist and one of the pillars of Modern Indian drama had trained himself to be an English poet early in his life. He received a scholarship at age twenty to study at Oxford University in United Kingdom. He was a Rhodes scholar from 1960 to 1963. He desired to live in the country where Auden and Eliot lived and to write the best poetry there. Three

things were a source of great surprise to him at the time of his stay in England. First, his greatest ambition was to become a good English poet but drama became a source of his creative expression. Second, he had trained himself to be an English writer for long but when it came to penning down his creativity the language which was automatically employed was Kannada, his second language. The third thing which took him by surprise was that though he thought of himself as a modern man who was temporarily alienated from his culture and language, he found himself writing his first play 'Yayati', based on a myth from Mahabharata. A noted playwright of post independent India Karnad has written a number of plays in Kannada which were later on translated mostly by himself thereby creating a reverent and immortal niche for himself as a great dramatist. He is an immensely versatile writer, actor and director winning many accolades and noteworthy awards.

As an existentialist dramatist he explores the problems of existence of self, search for identity, isolation and frustration. This philosophy has been well exemplified in his plays specially the first three plays Yayati, Tughlaq and Hayavadan. Tughlaq his second play published and produced in 1965 was originally written in Kannada and subsequently translated into English by Karnad himself. Tughlaq was an immediate success on the stage. It was produced on the stage in Bombay in 1970 and proved to be a major success. The theme of the play is from history but it is not a historical play. The whole play is structured on opposites : the ideal and the real, divine aspiration and skillful intrigue. The external action in Tughlaq throughout enacts the inner drama of Tughlaq. It is a dramatized projection of the character of Tughlaq who appears as a divided tortured self. He made certain choices at important junctures of his life with a will to establish an ideal kingdom. He reveals this to his step mother "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.....History is ours to play with – ours now! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery." He was a scholar and visionary who aspired for the noblest ideal in life.

As Karnad says that he had hit upon a fantastic character from history. Tughlaq was a unique character to come on the throne of Delhi, in religion, philosophy, battlefield even in calligraphy and anything we think of, he outshone everyone. The character of Tughlaq has been portrayed in great psychological depth, all the other characters in the play are dramatized aspects of his complex personality. When he wanted to be the Sultan, he did not hesitate to commit patricide and fratricide though indirectly. A sinful choice at the beginning to achieve a lofty ideal. He wanted peace, love and brotherhood to prevail amidst the different communities in his kingdom. To treat all his subjects as equals. His religious policies were quite liberal. He was one of the first Muslim rulers who was liberal and tolerant. He dreamt of establishing a secular kingdom. He wished to mete out equal justice to his subjects and to prove this, he was over generous to the Brahmin Vishnu Prasad whose lands had been confiscated by the state. No one knew that the beneficiary of Tughlaq's justice and generosity was actually a Muslim dhobi in the guise of a Brahmin. He abolished Jijya tax levied on the Hindus. Fed up with his futuristic schemes his noblemen and the religious leaders turned rebellious. His own trusted friend Ain-ul-Mulk who had attained lot of power because of Tughlaq's benevolence had turned against him and was marching with a huge army towards Delhi. His decision to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad was not taken well by the nobles and the subjects alike. He gets rid of

the rebels by craftily getting them murdered. Ain-ul-Mulk, Sheik, Imam-ud-din a revered religious leader, Shihab-ud-din and the group of intriguers, his step mother and many more meet a bloody fate all in the name of establishing an ideal kingdom where there would be peace, prosperity, love and brotherhood. It is the schemes and policies of Tughlaq, his impatience to implement them and force his will on his subjects, the failure of his schemes cause immense frustration and towards the end he is completely alienated from his subjects, his well wishers and loved ones no longer with him. He faces frustration isolation and loneliness which is the result of the choices he makes in life regarding his thoughts, feelings and actions. Tughlaq is what he is inspite of his self knowledge and an intense desire for divine grace. Tughlaq realizes that all his ideal schemes have come to nothing. Shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad to please the hindus proved an utter failure for him and his people and caused lot of agony and suffering to the citizens of Delhi. His crimes and their after effects come to haunt him and he undergoes great spiritual crisis.

Muhammad bin Tughlaq is over ambitions, his only concern is to gain supreme power and translate his thoughts and ideas into actions and whatever came in the way of his progress, such as religion, morality, politics and even reason, he just annihilates. Sheikh Imam-ud-din could understand all this and warns him, "Beware Sultan, you are to become another God." Thus the play Tughlaq is about the life and existence of the protagonist Tughlaq. A true depiction of existentialism can be seen in his character. He is unique, strong willed, wanted to establish the ideal but in the process proves to be a cruel and crafty intriguer who was called Mad Muhammad.

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