



ROYAL MALE PERSONAE IN GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

In the early decades after independence, Indian English drama did not cultivated so well as the other genres of Indian English literature. However, it is apparently observed that frenzy for Indian English drama was increasing in most of the European countries. Our few playwrights had tried their hands in Indian English Drama, however the attempts made by them could not meet successfully its demand in the western countries. As such drama in English has to suffer at home, while it became popular in other corners of the world. However, a large number of playwrights devoted to contribute to the development of Indian English Plays. At that time, most of the plays were prose plays. However, some of the playwrights like Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sir Aurbindo and T.P. Kailasam followed the tradition of poetic drama. The two dominant figures in the field of playwrighting from the last two decades of twentieth century are; Girish Karnad (b.1938) and Mahesh Dattani (b.1958). Girish Karnad, one of the most leading Indian English playwright as well as one of the most outstanding practitioners of performing arts, he is a man apart of Indian art and culture. As a successful actor, an eminent director of feature film, documentaries and television serials, he has left an indelible impression on the minds and hearts of his audience. In India as well as abroad (The U.K. and the U.S.A.) he has received warm welcome for his talents as a playwright, actor and film director. At times he has officially or unofficially represented India as a harbinger of Indian art and culture.

Key Words: cultivate, eminent, harbinger, art and culture, devoted, practitioners, dominant.

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From the very beginning, in his childhood days, Karnad witnessed dramatic performances in the native folk theatre at Sirsi, Karnataka. Matheran, being his birth place had taught him a lot about folk culture. It seems that his mother's contribution to the shaping of Karnad's personality is more than his father's, who was professionally a physician. Thus he got influences from his parents as well as his witnessing the theatrical activities in rural areas including Sirsi. Subsequently, he cultivated aesthetic sense for dramatic art which was later perceptible in his active participation in such activities. He has

been recognized as a promising playwright on the basis of his art of characterization. He wrote several historical plays like *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* etc. In the play *Yayati*, Yayati, a royal personae and the protagonist of the play, cursed the old age for his moral transgression, wishes to exchange his old age for money, land and even a part of his kingdom. Nobody including his three elder sons is ready to fulfill his wish. It is only his youngest son Puru, who with a great sense of filial obligation and respect for his father, offers his youth for his old age and takes the curse on him. Seeing

the disastrous result of his action , he finally takes back the curse from his son as a remorse.

His play Tughlaq presents Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, the eponymous and enigmatic character, who keeps on changing his roles . He thinks that he alone can rule his kingdom ideally. So he gets his father and brother assassinated in a contrived accident and inherits the kingdom. While he himself is caught under the game of power. He plays the role of Rescuer in order to feel powerful. Though his favourite role is the Rescuer, he shifts to the other roles of the Drama Triangle , Persecuter and Victim. He effects several reforms that , he thinks , will benefit his people. He declares equality of justice on the second anniversary of his coronation . Aziz takes advantages of it and, in the guise of Brahmin named Vishnu Prasad , files a suit against the government after buying a confiscated land from a Brahmin with a back date. He is offered five hundred silver dinars and also a post in the Civil services as a compensation for the loss of his land. Thughlaq feels overwhelmed about his success in implementing his ideal . He addresses his people and says :

My beloved people ,you have heard the judgement of Kazi and seen for yourself how justice works in my kingdom – without any consideration of might or weakness , religion or creed . May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality , progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life. And to achieve this end I am taking a new step in which I have I shall have support and co- operation . Later this year the capital of my empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad.¹

He is , thus , blind to how some people like Aziz exploit his reforms, which therefore fail to reach the needy people. And people are not happy at all with his rule . A Hindu, for example, does not commend his removal of Jijiya tax and condemns him for hypocrisy:

We didn't want an exemption ! Look , when a Sultan licks me in the teeth and says , 'Pay up , Hindu dog , 'I' m happy . I know I' m safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, 'I know you are a Hindu, but you

are also a human being' – well , that makes me nervous.²

In this way Muhammad does not mind becoming the Victim of his own ideals or the people. Perhaps for this reason , he forgives Aziz at the end when he comes to know all his crimes of misusing the reforms for his gross selfish needs. He shifts to the role of the Persecuter when anybody tries to oppose or abort his reforms. When the Amirs of Delhi try to abort his attempt to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, he gets them killed. He, who once gave an option to the people to leave for Daulatabad now makes it compulsory. He orders Nazib to vacate Delhi immediately. This chain from the Rescuer to the Persecuter in his repeats on such occasions. Lastly, he is horrified by his own violence. He feels helpless and hopeless. He finds himself staying away from his ideals. As a victim, while playing, he appeals to God , the Supreme Rescuer to free him from his turmoil.

God , God in Heaven ,please help me. Please don't let go my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don't 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 of mud ? Raise me. Clean me . Cover me with your Infinite Mercy. I can only clutch 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...You...You...You.³

M. Sarat Babu says : "Muhammad's condition evokes pity in us . We sympathize with his ideals and identify with him though we denounce his violence." The roles played by Muhammad are prototype to some extent. In Hindu mythology, there are several examples of these roles. For instance, Lord Shiva rescues Bhasmasura, his demon devotee, granting his wish that the person on whom he places his hand will be burnt to ashes. Then Bhasmasur runs after his God to rest the power of his boon on him. Lord Vishnu in the guise of Mohini, a charming lady, rescues Shiva from Bhasmasur by making him burn himself. Similar instances can be found in the mythologies and legends of other religion. Jesus

Christ sheds his own blood for the sins of the other people and thus tries to rescue them from demnation of Satan. Thus history repeats itself. In Karnad's play *Tughlaq*, the failures in the reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq finds a parallel to the great failure of Nehru's idealism.

Aparna Dharwadkar aptly points out,

Tughlaq's madness and tyranny- the only qualities his subjects attribute to him-are thus forms of powerlessness posing as power.⁵

And M.K.Naik compares Karnad's *Tughlaq* with Camus's *Coligula* and finds the fiasco of power in both of them. *Tughlaq* can also be compared with Tendulkar's plays, especially with *Ghasiram kotwal* where power game is very intense. Muhammad plays the Rescuer while Ghasiram becomes the Persecuter to exercise power. Interpreting why people play these roles, steiner says:

Having been in powerless position, we make ourselves feel better by taking, and assuming power over other as Rescuers or Persecutors.⁶

Tughlaq, however, is a formidable ruler who would not let anything or anybody come in his way in the pursuit of power. His answer to resistance in his sword. His unpopular schemes, such as moving the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and making copper coins the acceptable currency, create many foes for him. He calls these no "mad whim of tyrant" but gives solid reasons such as Delhi being too near the border, and Daulatabad being a city of Hindus turning into a bond between Hindus and Muslims. But he cuts no ice with either the people or the Amirs. Tughlaq is an usurper, having come to the throne after getting his father and brother murdered during prayer time, and has blood on his hands at such a young age. Rather dear ones he would prefer to have only fawning sycophants around him. In the plot, Tughlaq appears to be idealistic but instead he practices selfish political game. The scenes are so juxtaposed one is not allowed to be either carried by one's hatred towards Tughlaq for his master tactics or by one's sympathy or admiration for his idealism.

Karnad displays great talent in the delineation of the character of Tughlaq. Throughout

the play, one finds elements of dualism in the character of Tughlaq. As an idealist, he aims at the welfare of his people of his people; but he practices hypocrisy by employing a Hindu officer to watch the Muslim soldiers and vice versa. As a pious Muslim, he prescribes the custom of prayer five times a day, but as a crafty politician, he indulges in deft intrigue. He kills his father, his brother and Shihab they are at prayer. He is highly resourceful and imaginative because he can solve easily "the most famous problem" in chess which was not solved by experts like al-Adli and as-Sarakhi. Barani rightly says:

You are a learned man, your Majesty, you are known the world over for your knowledge of philosophy and poetry. History is not made only in state craft, its lasting results are produced in the ranks of learned man.⁷

In the words of his own step-mother, Tughlaq is "an intelligent boy and he works so hard for the people." In short the playwright has succeeded in presenting the conflict in the mind of Tughlaq.

Another historical figure that Karnad chooses is the figure of Tipu Sultan in his play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, who is known as the "Tiger of Mysore". Tipu fought till his last breath to prevent the British takeover of the southern states. He would not have met failures if he had not been cheated by his own people. Tipu was politically perceptive because he was a dreamer, who dreamt of a strong and united Mysore state but the treachery and deceit of his own nobles led him to fall. His subsequent death certainly adds the element of tragedy to the legend of Tipu Sultan. Karnad's above mentioned play is mainly based on historical accounts, memories, letters, ballads, rural plays and the "Notebook of Dreams". In the words of Grace Sudhir:

As he did with Tughlaq, Karnad must have sifted through a substantial archive of historical accounts, memories, letters, ballads, rural plays and especially the remarkable "Notebook of Dreams"- before constructing the essence of Tipu's character which would lend itself to a particular displaying at once grandeur and nobility, vulnerability at once grandeur and nobility,

vulnerability and desperation of a very human figure poised at a critical moment of history, trying single-handedly to stem the onslaught of foreign invasion into his beloved land.⁹

The playwright attracts the attention of the audience to the two very important qualities of Tipu Sultan which are evident in his dreams: first, an extra-ordinary honesty to his duty as a king and secondly, the absolute fearlessness he displayed throughout his life. Surely fearlessness was born out of his sense of duty. Though he was brave and fearless, the fort of Seringapattam fell and he died fighting like a tiger with his sword still clutched firmly in his right hand. His death raises a question in the minds of the audience. Was there an inherent weakness in his dreams or in the man himself? Actually his weakness was his own people, who betrayed him, and they were Kirmani and Munshi Habibullah. Kirmani who could not even remember the last expression on his Sultan's face. He confesses himself "....for the life of me, I can't remember his face at that moment. It's such....such betrayl ." And Munshi Habibullah, who did not have the basic loyalty even to hold on the book of dreams- which was infact the innermost revelation of Tipu Sultan's thoughts. This dream book was considered less precious than the looted jewellery and weapons, less precious than the political victory and less important than the huntingdown of the Tiger of Mysore.

The play shows how everything reveals the different aspect of Tipu's character- the toys, Bahadur Khan(his tiger), the thermometer, the silk worms, his father's soul and the idols in a temple. He was sensitive to everything around him. The area of his sensitivity was very wide, ranging from the love of infants to the need of the nation. He died in harness. He lived like a tiger and died fighting with the strength of a tiger. Denys Forrest evaluates him thus:

Though he had a tragic end he had a rare quality of single-mindedness. As in the style of his letters, so in the shape of his life- Tipu Sultan was always recognizably himself. That is why the English feared him, even beyond reason. And he was a brave

man. He may have fallen short in wisdom and foresight, but never in courage, never in aspiration, never in his dreams of a united, an independent, a prosperous Mysore.¹¹

Another aspect of his personality that the play expose, is the vision of progress. He wanted to open the doors of Mysore to new inventions, trade and commerce but without compromising with the independence and the sovereignty of his state. He wanted both Mysore to be a strong state economically and commercially. He wanted to modernize Mysore by introducing new industries such as cannon-founding, paper making, glass manufacture and ship-building.

Describing Tipu's character in particular, one may draw out the one Karnad teaches us a moral that a conclusion that one whole life is not sufficient for the realization of high principles and ideals. Personalities like Tipu Sultan cannot be vandalized and hunted down in a unequal battle. He was a visionary king. His patriotism was like a lighted candle to show the path of freedom struggle to a later generation of the great patriots like Mangal Pandey, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Chandra Shekhar Azad. Grace Sudhir compares him with the martyrs like Thomas Beckett and Joan of Arc and writes:

Tipu died fighting like a true warrior, as Thomas Beckett, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had died for the principles he stood for; as Joan of Arc preferred to be burnt at the stake, rather than recant to save her life.¹²

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