



## Girish Karnad's 'Tughlaq': Theatre of Protest, a Post-colonial play

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In the Post-colonial perspective if we consider Caliban as a representative of the colonized and his master Prospero as a colonizer or oppressor in Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' then Caliban's words to Prospero- "you taught me language, and my profit on it is I know how to curse"- would be a meaningful and suitable answer to Gayatri Spivak's famous question: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Indeed, the subaltern, and to be more specific the oppressed ones have got a voice to 'sing their own song of protest' against the much superior but tyrannical and authoritative colonizer in the world of Post colonialism. And Karnad's 'Tughlaq' which is a masterpiece for its heart-felt tragedy of an 'idealist without practical wisdom' can also be discussed as a theatre of protest or a postcolonial play since it enacts a conflict between the idealistic but tyrannical attitude of a ruler and the resultant uprising of the ruled against the authority. Out of such conflict "a terrible beauty is born"- the beauty of a dialectics of protest which Karnad probably wanted to achieve.

In the play if Tughlaq, the Sultan, is the colonizer or the authority, the people of his empire are performing the role of an enlightened 'other'; and from the beginning of the play the process of domination and protest starts running. There is no denying the fact that sometimes the protest of the people are the result of their prejudice, disgust and distrust against the colonial power and sometimes even his good and impartial intentions are misinterpreted and criticized but the statement that most of his policies are nothing but "a mad whims of a tyrant" has its validity. Sometimes he is really a cruel, rigorous tyrant obstinate in imposing his own will on the people. But the more he tries to do it the more people burst into protest. In Scene I we see a very generous king when he cordially invites his 'beloved' people:

"I invite you all to accompany me to Daulatabad. This is only an invitation and not an order. Only those who have faith in me may come with me. With their help I shall build an empire which will be the envy of the world" (P-149)

But later his invitation takes the form of a stern order of a megalomaniac dictator:

"I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight... They'll only understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now." (P-186)

But many people do not like to move capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. The Old man, in Scene I is the first person to have shown the guts to question this decision. His protest finds ground in the words of the Third Man -

"This is tyranny! Sheer tyranny." (P-149)

The protest of the subaltern is also seen while Sheikh Imam-ud-din, finding Sultan's policies contagious to Islam, raises his voice against the head and says publicly that the Sultan is guilty of killing his father and brother, and therefore, has forfeited the right to rule the country. Not only that but even his step mother charges openly against the majesty and says to Barani,

"I must complain against my own son" (P-160)

Imam-ud-din has risked his life by speaking out against the Sultan and he has to pay for it. He is craftily killed. Ratan Sing while commenting on the death of Imam-ud-din files another protest and calls the king 'an honest scoundrel who actually enjoys the feeling of guilt after murdering calmly' (P-172)

Not only that, Ain-ul-Mulk is also marching towards Delhi. Again, the last portion of Scene IV and the first portion of Scene V show the Amirs, Ulemas and the noblemen of the capital holding secret meetings and branding the Sultan as an outsider, and his modern reformations regarding the religion seem to them as a threat towards their tradition, ideology and culture. Sultan tries to punish the wrong-doers but unfortunately he himself becomes the wrong-doer. The Amirs want to fight against the Sultan and the fight can be related to the one-handed fight of Okonkoo in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart against the white administration that seemed to him as a threat to the central doctrines of the culture and the tradition of the Igbo community

The protest of the oppressed reaches its climax in the murder scene of Shihab-ud-din where it is shown that even the dagger of a colonizer cannot stop the voice of the protest. While Muhammad tries more to quench the flame of protest more it becomes powerful as viewed in the words of dying Shihab-ud-din:

"Get on your killing, Muhammad...you want to solve all problems in the flash of a dagger, don't you? But you can't stop this uprising now... Where will hide my corpse? How will you gag my voice? Kill me- but you won't stop this- this will go on-"

Thus one revolt follows the other. And such process of domination and process or revolt begets intrigue in the play and one intrigue follows the other. The result is that a lot of bloodshed and murder happen in the play and the final outcome is the riot and utter chaos that cause the crumbling down of the empire of Sultan Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq.

It would be very relevant to mention here that the rising of the protest, it's acceleration like a snowball, and the resultant bloodshed, murder, chaos in 'Tughlaq' can be compared, to some extent, to the rising of Arab Spring that originated in the Arab World on December 7, 2010, with the protest of Mohamed Bouzazi, a fruit seller by setting himself on fire in Tunisia. It was the protest of the 'subject' against the 'ruler' or the oppressor. That was followed by a number of violent protests in all over the Arab World- in Egypt against the totalitarian regime of Hosni Mubarak, in Libya and Yemen against the dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi and Abdullah Saleh respectively and so on in Syria, Lebanon, Oman, Morocco etc.

Actually these revolts are nothing but the spontaneous outburst of powerful feeling imbued with the element of protest against the tyranny, suppression and high-handed cruelty. Hence, we have a series of revolts. In this context we remember long irrational, disordered fragmentary speech of Lucky generated by the heat of that crude suppression and cruelty of slave-master Pozzo in Beckett's ground breaking absurd play The Waiting for Godot.

Karnad chooses drama as a powerful medium for his socio-political protests in order to create a polyphonic audio-visual effect. And the forerunner of the theatre of protest in the colonial era is of course Dinabandhu Mitra's Nil Darpan (1860). The impact of the play upon the masses was so overwhelming that the British administration was compelled to proscribe the play by legislating the Democratic Performance Control Act. in 1876. 'Tughlaq' being the successor of Nil Darpan in the post colonial era, too powerfully demonstrates the uprising of the masses against the tyrant ruler who by way of triggering his mad whims led the country on the brink of utter chaos letting loose a nightmarish experience of frustration, discontentment and anger. And the upshot is the theatre of protest in 'Tughlaq'

Like the world of Karnad's 'Tughlaq', in modern world too tyranny, autocracy and various forms of Neo-Imperialism have loosed its poisonous tentacles and while trying to dominate others they invite dangerously and inevitably the multi-faceted protest. Sometimes such protest takes a perverse form and gives rise to the problem of terrorism and counter-terrorism. The result is the utter chaos where things fall apart, centre cannot hold and the ceremony of innocence is replaced by war, murder, and bloodshed. Probably herein lies the modern relevance of Karnad's 'Tughlaq' as it is impregnated with not only a postcolonial issue but also a very modern issue that makes the fifty years old play a contemporary one.

## REFERENCES

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