

CHAPTER THREE
TUGHLAQ

Girish Karnad's first English play, Tughlaq (1970), is a historical play. It will be of interest to know what some thinkers have said about the relationship between history and drama. Aristotle who first examined the relation between drama and history says that a dramatist's main concern is plot which is bound to express his philosophy. History is simply one of the possible sources for plot and character. Diderot (1967:4) asserted that history is the basis of dramatic art. Dumas (1967:4) says that life is not interesting but history is.

Drama however, is distinguished from other literary forms by its indispensable relationship with the theatre. The act of performing a play in the theatre becomes a miniature reflection of historical action generally taking place within the conventions of the theatre. So the dramatist who calls his play a historical play invites his audience to believe that this is a story which happened 'once upon a time.' Prof. H. B. Charlton (1963:13) states that a better name for history plays would be political plays :

...for they are plays in which the prevailing dramatic interest is in the fate of a nation... The history play is concerned with communities of men and primarily with nation.

Critics have stated that Shakespeare's English plays echo many of the political teachings of the time. Augustus Wilhelm Schlegel (1963 : 11) feels that historical plays furnish

examples of the political course of the world applicable to all times.

Let us see how Girish Karnad has successfully recreated a historical play Tughlaq out of Indian history. Tughlaq ruled India in the fourteenth century. Karnad read a book by Dr. Kirtinath Kurtkoti---‘ Nade-dubandderi ’---The Way We Have Walked---which is a critical re-estimate of Kannada literature from 1880 to 1960. Dr. Kurtkoti shows that many historical plays written earlier were costume plays and that no one had attempted to relate a historical episode to modern sensibility as Shaw had done. Karnad was greatly impressed by the statement. He first read of Tughlaq in Ishwari Prasad’s book---The History of Medieval India and was fascinated by him. Karnad (1999 :15) says :

And when I came to Tughlaq I said Oh! Marvellous ! That is what I wanted. In those days existentialism was very much in the air. To be considered mad was very much fashionable. Everything about Tughlaq seemed to fit into what I had read was the correct thing to do, which was to be mad and do impossible things, and so on. So I started reading about Tughlaq,

Karnad read Ziaud-Din Barani’s Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi, (1357), Al Marshi’s the Mashik-al-Absar, Ibn Batuta’s Travels and Badoni’s Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi. He follows the traditional sources which present biased views about the life of Tughlaq. Tughlaq deals with the last five years (1327-1332) of the reign of Muhammed-Bin-Tughlaq. Karnad has dealt with the aura of mutual distrust, frustrated idealism, orthodox and convention-ridden faith, communal intolerance, religious bigotry, treachery

and sedition, rampant corruption, soaring prices, natural calamities, plague, famine, the Sultan's unmitigated blood-thirstiness and final disillusionment. Karnad makes much of Barani's coloured picture of Tughlaq and portrays the Sultan as addicted to cruelty. Karnad has taken only a partial and one-sided view of Tughlaq's character and administration. It is but natural that Karnad's Tughlaq lacks a just and impartial treatment of historical theme. He wants to show that in true history, faces change but forces remain the same. Karnad has adroitly mingled historical facts with fiction for his dramatic purpose. His imagination and invention work upon the facts and personages of the past till the dry bones and inanimate figures of the bygone ages live once again in his pages. As a drama is an artistic work, Karnad has made much modifications, condensation, shifting, compressing and ordering of real facts of the fourteenth century history in the interest of dramatic effectiveness. He has portrayed the historical facts in thirteen scenes, instead of Acts and sub-scenes, adhering to the conventions of the Parsi Natak company. Moreover, the sub-plot consisting of Aziz and Aazam, is his own imaginative creation. His Tughlaq has a tremendous appeal to the people of contemporary India.

The play can be studied to find a parallelism between the realities of the fourteenth century India ruled by the Sultan and the twentieth century democratic country governed by the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues. In this respect Karnad (1997: VIII) says :

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 ever 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 to be 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 comes very far in the same direction---the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel.

Karnad's genius has a double vision to bring the past to the present need. Tughlaq's high ideals behind Hindu-Muslim unity and his total fiasco in achieving it have a factual relation to the contemporary social disparity between these two groups. Mahatma Gandhi tried hard for Hindu-Muslim unity, but his South African experiences had convinced him clearly that *"There was no genuine friendship between the Hindus and the Musalmans"* (1995:55). The burning problem of unity was mitigated neither in the sixties nor even today. It is an extremely suggestive parallel to the modern Indian experience of the demolition of the Babari Masjid and many Hindu temples which were destroyed.

Karnad has successfully presented the dire consequences of the politician who mixes politics and religion for selfish ends. The politician who is basically a crafty intriguer, like Tughlaq, will have to shun religion ultimately and

cannot pretend to live on it for a long time. He will have to face revolt in the state as well as within him. Tughlaq's decision of shifting the capital to Daulatabad and its miserable consequences remind us of the mass exodus that was forced on Indian populace in 1947. People suffered untold miseries in the play as well as during the partition of India. Karnad's characters Aziz and Aazam represent the public officer of Indian beurocracy who wants bribe. The affairs of the state in Tughlaq's time are in no way different from those of India today. The struggle for power and the desire to perpetuate it remain unaltered.

Thus Tughlaq is a play of the sixties and it reflects the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era in the country. But Karnad, in his occasional comments on Tughlaq states that the play is not an allegory of any one political figure or event. Karnad (1999 : 16) says :

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, that is a compliment that any playwright would be thrilled to get, but it was not intended to be a contemporary play about a contemporary situation.

Karnad's play is from Indian history, yet the treatment is not historical but highly political since the play reflects the political mood of disillusionment in the nineteen sixties. Thus it is not an ordinary chronicle play but a very imaginative reconstruction of some of the most significant

events in the life of the Sultan. In this play, politics is ingeniously linked with people, religion and history. Moreover, though the eponymous character is taken from history and projected in fiction, it ceases to be a historical figure. Karnad liberates Tughlaq from the limits of time and space and gives his character a universality: his Tughlaq may be an emperor, a leader of any time and an idealist with a tragic flaw. Karnad's play becomes a universal specimen.

It is certainly inhuman for one to kill one's close relatives for the sake of the crown. However, it was usual during the days when kings, queens and princes ruled the various parts of the world. In the past, palaces of kings and courts were the places where plots and counterplots were hatched. The king kept an efficient system of espionage. He had to be alert and cautious as there was always the possibility of his being overthrown by conspirators. He used severe measures to crush treachery and conspiracy. In history we have numerous incidents of intrigues, plots, conspiracy, treachery, blood-shed and murder for crown. There is no limit to man's desire. The desire to rule is a peculiar trait in human personality. Man does anything and goes to any extent in order to acquire the authority to rule. It gives him power, status, identity, wealth and fame. In order to quench his desire, he even resorts to deceitful means. Tughlaq is an apt specimen of the limitless desire for power, wealth, fame and name.

Tughlaq presents the same theme of betrayal with its dire consequences. The theme is explicitly expressed

through its plot. All the episodes are so arranged that the audience witnesses a chain of deception throughout the play. One treacherous incident gives rise to another deceitful incident. The play presents betrayal at the following levels :

- 1) **The King betrays his Courtiers, Noblemen and his Subjects**
- 2) **The Royalists betray their Courtiers and Noblemen**
- 3) **The Saints and Courtiers betray their Sultan and Fellow Beings**
- 4) **People betray their Sultan and the State**
- 5) **Self-Betrayal**
- 6) **Religion is betrayed**

It is thrilling to study betrayal at the above stated levels in Tughlaq in details.

1) THE KING BETRAYS HIS COURTIERS, NOBLEMEN AND HIS SUBJECTS

In order to become the king of the Delhi sultanate, Muhammad bin-Tughlaq (Juna Khan) behaved in a treacherous manner. He had his father Ghiyas-ud-din and brother Muhammad Khan killed (Feb. 1325 A.D.) for his indomitable desire to rule. It was a well prepared plot. An elephant went uncontrolled and dashed the wooden pavilion under which the father and brother were praying. Ishwari Prasad (1947:235) says :

Whatever the real truth may be, there are strong reasons for thinking that the Sultan's death was the result of conspiracy in which the Crown Prince took part,...

The Sultan was thus an offender of parricide and fratricide. He was a usurper. His mother had not spoken to him since then. She considered him guilty of the brutal murders. The Sultan had an evil intention as he did not challenge his father openly but killed him treacherously. Like Shakespeare's Macbeth, Tughlaq, a usurper, ascended the throne of Delhi deceitfully.

In the play several characters report about these murders. But Karnad has not mentioned Tughlaq's decision to inscribe his father's name on the coins. His Tughlaq is without remorse for his father's murder. In spite of the controversy about his liability, the Sultan confesses :

I killed them---yes...for an ideal. (p.65)

His assertion is shocking when he says that those murders gave him what he wanted---power, the strength to shape his thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize himself and so on.

The most revered saint, Sheikh Imam-ud-din comes to Delhi to take the Sultan to task for his anti-Islamic behaviour. The Sultan has banished some Ulemas, Sayyids, Amirs, Sheikhs and some religious people behind bars because they interfere with his power politics game. There is a revolt against the Sultan in Kanpur. Sheikh Imam-ud-din goes to talk to the people in the capital. Vizier Najib, a trusted adviser to the Sultan, considers Sheikh Saheb a 'traitor.' Tughlaq who is a deft intriguer arranges a public meeting which is attended only by the Sultan and Sheikh Imam-ud-din. They have been waiting for half an hour but not a soul turns to listen to the

Sheikh. The Sultan arranges things in such a shrewd way that the Sheikh is misled and embittered. According to Sultan's cunning plan, his soldiers go from door-to-door prohibiting people from attending the saint's speech. Apparently it is the Sultan who arranges the public meeting but behind the curtain it is he who detains people in their homes. The Sultan doesn't defy openly the demand of the saint to hold a public meeting. But the saint is humiliated and betrayed in a cunning way.

On another occasion, the machiavellian Sultan persuades Sheikh Imam-ud-din to be his peace envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk who rebels and is ready to march to Delhi with an army of thirty thousand warriors. Ain-ul-Mulk is Tughlaq's childhood friend and the governor of Avadh. But he rebels when he is transferred to Deccan. Ain-ul-Mulk's rebellion can be considered as an act of disloyalty. But he challenges the Sultan openly. On the other hand, the Sultan's crafty and cunning nature prepares a plot to use Sheikh Imam-ud-din. The Sultan pleads to Sheikh Imam-ud-din :

*I 'm not asking you only for my sake but for
all the Muslims who will die at the hands of
Muslims if there is a war...a slaughter of
Muslims at the hands of fellow-Muslims .
(p.23)*

The pleading is a brilliant piece of his machination. The Sultan is a crafty politician and a hypocrite despot. He wants to utilize Imam-ud-din's religious status to pacify Ain-ul-Mulk and crush both of them simultaneously. The Sultan and the saint look alike. The robes make Sheikh Imam-ud-din and the Sultan look even more alike.

At the plains of Kanauj the enemy misconceives the saint to be Tughlaq. But Tughlaq's soldiers who are hiding behind the hills, begin the battle. There is a great commotion. The enemy pours arrows into Iman-ud-din's body. His body looks like "*a gory human porcupine.*" Ain-ul-Mulk's army fell into the trap set by the Sultan. The Sultan's craftiness is evident as two birds are betrayed with one stone; one rebellion is quelled and the other is defeated. Everything happens as per Tughlaq's machinations. After killing the saint, he pretends to be very grief-stricken. He declares a day's mourning in Iman-ud-din's honour and suspends the victory celebration, saying :

When men like him die, it's a sin to be alive.
(p.28)

The Sultan, thus, does not hesitate to kill the saint treacherously. Ratansingh, a soldier, appropriately estimates the Sultan's diabolic nature, thus :

I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt.
(p.28)

No evaluation other than this can be mentioned to describe the Sultan's devilish nature.

Kings were always insecure during those days. Tughlaq is also not an exception. Owing to a sense of alienation from his family and from his people, Tughlaq feels insecure, emptiness and nothingness. It is evident when he says :

And my kingdom too is what I am— torn into pieces by visions whose validity I can't deny.
(p.21)

Security is the basic need of a human being, more essential than food. If one is insecure, one feels a threat to life even though one has all material comforts. The situation can be sound when the case is vice-versa. Tughlaq wants security. Therefore, he decides to shift his capital from Delhi, as he says :

...its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. (p.3)

After Ain-ul-Mulk's rebellion he decides seriously to shift the capital to Daulatabad. Moreover, the conspiracy against his life makes him more ruthless. He orders :

--I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight...Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.(p.44)

He is scared of internal and external aggressions. But he gives a false cause of unity between the Muslims and the Hindus. People of Delhi are reluctant to part with their motherland. The real cause is revealed by Amir I who says :

He wants to weaken the Amirs. You see, we are strong in Delhi ...But Daulatabad is a Hindu city and we'll be helpless there.(p.31)

But the Sultan is an adamant king. He forces them to desert their homeland. An old man expresses his pangs, thus :

But do you know, you can love a city like a woman? (p.52)

People experience untold sufferings. Many die during the exodus and other people, who survive, die while returning to Delhi.

The Sultan is very egoistic. He believes that he is always right which leads him to defy summarily any opposition--religious and political. He brooks no challenge against his supremacy. He becomes a monster spreading death all over. In his acts of cruelty at times he resembles Albert Camus' Caligula, whom absolute power has corrupted absolutely. M. K. Naik (1987:136) in this connection says :

Karnad had Caligula at the back of his mind when he wrote Tughlaq.

As Caligula says :

--that power can never be complete without a total surrender to the dark impulse of one's destiny...I must go on,... (1947:66)

Tughlaq also says :

Not words but the sword---that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission (p.66)

THE SULTAN BETRAYS THE EXPECTATIONS OF HIS PEOPLE

Truly speaking, the Sultan wants to run away from the invasion and calamity. A sense of insecurity and his impulsive nature lead him to behave unwisely. To transfer the whole kingdom is also one of the unwise decisions taken by the Sultan. The Sultan promises people that arrangements have been made to ensure the comfort of the citizens on the way to Daulatabad. All the needs of the citizens regarding food, clothing and medicines will be catered to by the Sultan.

The pathetic and miserable condition of the people is shown in scene eleven. Crowds of people have gathered outside the fort of Daulatabad. They are disgusted and

disillusioned with the mal-administration of the Sultan. Ibn Batuta (1993:83) says that a blind man was dragged from Delhi to Daulatabad and a bed-ridden cripple was projected thereby a ballista.

There is not a single grain in the royal granary. In the village, people are starving or paying twenty coins of silver for a handful of wheat. They have to eat barks of trees or the burnt strips of the skins of animals. For them the arrival of the saint, Ghiyas-ud-din, from Arabia to revive prayer is meaningless. They require food and not prayers. They are fighting amongst themselves over petty matters and are ready to kill each other. Roads are lined with skeletons. There is confusion all around. This external chaos well reflects the spiritual chaos in the Sultan's mind. Only one utterance is sufficient to state people's heart shattering conditions. Thus a third man says :

...people crowding round a butcher's shop...To catch the blood spurting from the slaughtered beasts and drink it ! (pp .70-71)

According to Ibn Batuta (1985:133), Tughlaq decided to shift the capital from Delhi [in 1327] with a view to punishing the people for the scandals they had spread against the Sultan. Discontented people wrote scandalous letters about the Sultan and threw them into the palace. By transferring the capital, he satisfied his sense of revenge. Barani (1983: 83) says that without proper consultation or weighing the pros and cons, Tughlaq brought ruin to Delhi which for 170 to 180 years had grown in prosperity. No one can deny the disastrous

condition that the Sultan had created for himself as well as for his people. When the Sultan had realized the folly of his experiment he ordered a return march to Delhi again. The net result of this experiment was that Delhi lost its former prosperity and grandeur. Lane Poole (1993: 83) says :

Daulatabad was a monument of misdirected energy.

The stepmother rightly states the psychological reason behind Tughlaq's unwise decisions :

But he is so impulsive----and when he gets into one of his moods I don't know what he'll do next. (p.17)

Tughlaq is basically a showy person. He tries his best to impress his people by playing the role of an idealist. At the same time, he practises heinous political game. He is a formidable ruler who would not tolerate any opposition. To have the reins of power firmly in his hands, he assumes masks and disguises in order to silence his opponents treacherously. P. Ramamoorthy (1990:42) rightly says :

Muhammad also wears masks and disguises himself.

In this game of power politics he lies many times to betray others. This is the dichotomy of his real self and ideal self. His life motif is 'I am not what I am'. According to Erving Goffman (1959: 236) :

To the degree that the individual maintains a show before others...He can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self.

These two contradictory gestures can be commonly called ‘ the two faces of Tughlaq.’ Tughlaq is a liar and hypocrite. Every sentence and every act by the Sultan is strung with hypocrisy. Tughlaq on his part refers to the noble ideals and his sincere commitment to those ideas from two different positions. But in reality they lose their sanctity and survive merely as ghosts that roam aimlessly.

2) THE ROYALISTS BETRAY THEIR COURTIER AND NOBLEMEN

Tughlaq’s mother does not figure in the play. We are told that she hasn’t kept any transaction with the Sultan as she considers him guilty of parricide and fratricide. Consequently, Tughlaq develops a sense of alienation from his family. But under such a deserted atmosphere he finds an oasis in his stepmother. Her commitment towards Tughlaq is undoubtful. She is always anxious about Tughlaq’s mental suffering. It is she who tries her best to restrain him from his excessive desire for power, cruelty and bloody deeds. She warns him on the issue of currency. While counselling him confidently she highlights the contrast between his present state and the glory of the past. She describes the worst condition of the state that shows Tughlaq’s degradation. According to her, the kingdom has become a kitchen of death. But when she fails to prevent him from evil deeds, she succumbs to treachery and poisons Tughlaq’s trusted friend and faithful adviser, Vizier Najib. According to her Najib is responsible for Tughlaq’s downfall and

she wishes Najib's destruction. She confesses to Barani her views about Najib :

*I 'll wait for a few days...If he goes on like this, I won't wish his fate even on a dog .
(p.17)*



The Sultan declares death sentence to his stepmother (Scene. X)

Her killing of Najib seems to be an attempt to end Tughlaq's proclivity to treachery, cruelty and bloodshed. Tughlaq loves only three persons in the play : Vizier Najib, Barani and his step-mother, but he is frustrated by her act of deceitful killing of his trusted friend.

She realizes that Tughlaq is madly trying to find out the murderer of Vizier Najib. He suspects the Amirs and Khans. In order to protect them she confesses the crime. Her confession lends nobility to her character but no one can deny

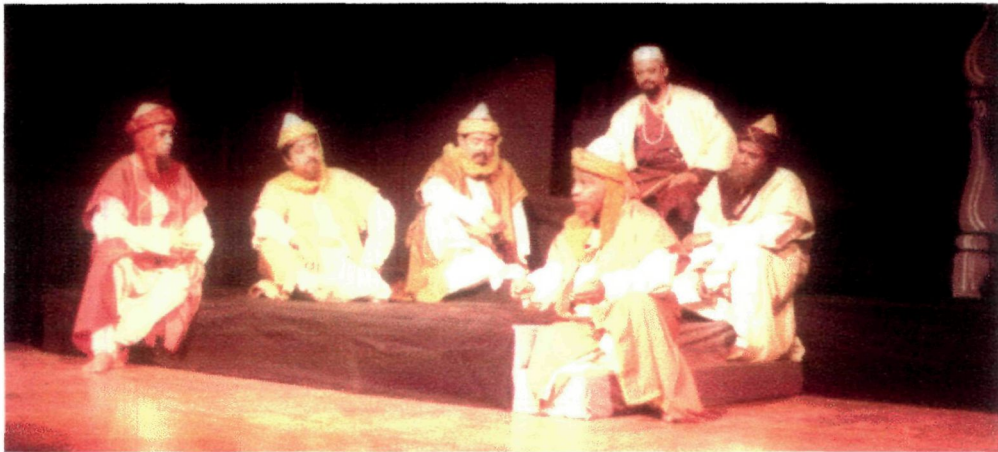
the treachery involved in the killing. She should have told and prompted Tughlaq to kill Najib or she should have openly challenged Najib for a decisive fight. But, instead, she stealthily poisons him. She is the only female character in the play, but she also uses a wicked way to finish her enemy. Tughlaq calls her crime a "*treachery*." He orders that she be killed by stoning. Tughlaq, thus, becomes guilty of matricide.

3) i) **THE SAINTS AND COURTIER'S BETRAY THE SULTAN**

Tughlaq is an intelligent king and a shrewd politician. He does not tolerate interference from Maulvis, Ulemas, Khans, Amirs and Sayyids. Whenever they pose problems and threat to his existence, he either kills them (as in the case of Sheikh Imam-ud-din) or banish them behind bars. To them Tughlaq is partial with the Hindu subjects as he exempts Hindus from Jizia tax. The Muslims, therefore, are critical of the Sultan. On the other hand, Hindus are doubtful about the Sultan's policies. The Muslims and the Hindus do not respect their king and are not happy in his sultanate. He is always suspicious of the motives of the people close to him. Many impostors, betrayers and treacherous people move around him. As a result the Sultan always faces rebellions. There is uprising in the Deccan. In Malabar, Ehsan Shah has declared himself independent and Bahal-ud-din Gashtasp is collecting an army against the Sultan. In Kanpur, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, the most respected saint, supports a revolt. He comes to Delhi to denounce Sultan's anti-islamic behaviour.

But the Sultan has crushed the saint treacherously at Kanauj. This killing creates a strong resentment amongst the religious people and they decide to overthrow the Sultan.

About seven to eight Amirs, Sayyids and Sheikhs hatch a conspiracy against the Sultan. Ratansingh, a Hindu soldier, persuades Shihab-ud-din, a trusted friend of the Sultan to support his devilish plot. Initially, Shihab ud-din is reluctant to join the plot, but Ratansingh and the conspirators prevail upon him in the name of Islam. Shihab-ud-din's unflinching



The conspirators plot to assassinate the Sultan (Scene V)

loyalty is shaken. The religious saints turn out to be the killers. They discuss the Sultan's plan to shift the capital, his inhuman treatment to Sheikh Hood and Sheikh Haidri. They agree to assassinate the Sultan at prayer meeting when everyone is unarmed in the palace.

Accordingly, all the conspirators arrive in the palace. Tughlaq kneels before them and asks them to swear by the Koran and support him in his new measures. There is not any

inkling about what the master strategist is planning to do. When the Muezzin's voice is heard, everybody starts praying. Half-way through the prayer a commotion is heard and Shihab-ud-din and the Amirs pull out their daggers. The Amirs step towards the Sultan who is praying. Suddenly from behind the curtain about twenty Hindu soldiers rush in with spears and surround the Amirs. The conspirators stand frozen with fear and slowly throw down their daggers desperately. Except Shihab-ud-din the soldiers drag all of them away. The entire



The Sultan asks support from the chieftains to build new India (Scene VI)

episode exposes the hypocrisy of the chieftains. While these events take place, Tughlaq continues to pray unaffected. After completing his prayer he informs Shihab-ud-din about Ratansingh's secret letter disclosing the conspiracy and stabs him exclaiming pathetically :

***Why must this happen, Barani ? Are all those
I trust condemned to go down in history as
traitors ? (p.43)***

He orders all the conspirators to be beheaded, to stuff their bodies with straw and hang them in the palace yard in order to create fear in the minds of the people.

As a consequence of the conspiracy, Tughlaq becomes harsher and crueler. He is betrayed at the hands of his trusted friend who turns out to be a foe. He bans prayer at once and makes a public announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer and that the Sultan has been saved by Shihab-ud-din who died a martyr's death while defending him. The declaration is one more instance of Tughlaq's political diplomacy. Barani's utterance is an evidence of the Sultan's crafty nature, when he states :

***Oh God ! Aren't even the dead free from
your politics ? (p.44)***

Prof. Nizami K. A. (1993:95) is of the opinion that :

***Muhd. Tughlaq was one of the few rulers of
the Delhi Sultanate on whose life no attempt
was made to kill him.***

So we can say that the most thrilling scene of the conspiracy against the Sultan, contrived by Ratansingh and the discontented conspirators, is the creation of Karnad's genius. The scene reminds us of the scene of conspiracy in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. It seems that Karnad must have read the conspiracy hatched against Qutb-ud-din Mubarak

Shah (1316 – 1320 A. D.). A conspiracy against Mubarak Shah was hatched by his cousin Asad ud-din, son of Yaghrush Khan. But one of the conspirators (like Ratansingh in Tughlaq) revealed the plot to the Sultan Shah and all the conspirators were accordingly arrested and put to death.

3) ii) THE COURTIERS BETRAY THEIR FELLOW BEINGS

The conspiracy to take the Sultan's life discloses one more secret betrayal. Shihab-ud-din's father had killed Ratansingh's father deceitfully and usurped the kingdom. Ratansingh asserts it :

---everyone knows about it ! His father is supposed to have killed my father by treachery and usurped the kingdom. (p.35)

As Ratansingh maintains a sense of grudge against Shihab-ud-din, he wishes to avenge him. First of all, he wins over Shihab-ud-din's confidence and persuades him to play a leading part in the devilish plot.

Shihab-ud-din falls a prey to this deadly plot. When everything is agreed upon to assassinate the Sultan, he informs the Sultan about the conspiracy beforehand and disappears soon after. The Sultan crushes the conspiracy and kills Shihab-ud-din. Ratansingh, thus, betrays not only Shihab-ud-din but also the conspirators.



Ratan Singh tries to win Shihab-ud-din's support to overthrow the Sultan (Scene IV)

The conspiracy is the climax in Tughlaq and a turning point in the life of the Sultan. U. R. Anantha Murthy (1997:IX) has regarded Ratansingh as a machiavellian, when he says :

The whole episode is ironic. It involves Shihab-ud-din, an idealist who has put great trust in Tughlaq's rule, and is himself ultimately betrayed by Ratansingh who masterminds the entire plan of murder for his own ends. The intrigue here not only enhances the theatrical interest of the play, but is a dramatized projection of Tughlaq's tortured, divided self.

Ratansingh is only one Hindu conspirator among the Muslim chieftains. He is a shrewd, wicked and cold-blooded fox. The conspiracy shows that he wants to avenge Shihab-ud-din. He is not at all interested in killing the Sultan. He succeeds

in having his revenge. He is treacherous, deceitful and revengeful. Nobody suspects his devilish plan. Though he appears only in two scenes, he contributes a lot to the aura of treachery and violence of the play. His act of betrayal can be summed up as 'betrayal within the betrayal.'

4) PEOPLE BETRAY THE SULTAN AND THE STATE

Tughlaq in history had to encounter almost twenty-two revolts during his reign of twenty-five years. As Zia-ud-din Barani observes that Tughlaq considered every idea of his good, but in enforcing his schemes he lost territories, disgusted his people and emptied his treasury. The ill-feeling of the people gave rise to revolution. Truly speaking the Sultan was an administrator with advanced reforms but when his people failed to respond to his wishes, his wrath increased. Tughlaq did not regain the loyalty and confidence of his people. As a result he remained as unpopular as before. People did not dare to oppose the Sultan openly. But when an opportunity came they, with their full strength, betrayed their Sultan and turned the tables on him.

In 1329 the Sultan issued a decree proclaiming that in all transactions, copper token should be accepted as legal tender like gold and silver coins. However, the Sultan made the mistake of not taking proper precaution to check imitation of coins; they could be easily imitated by the moderately skilled artisans. The people were asked to deposit the token coins with

the royal treasury and collect silver and gold coins in lieu thereof. This provided the people an opportunity to betray the Sultan. They started minting token coins in large numbers. The proclamation of his edict turned the house of every Hindu and Muslim into a mint, and they earned millions of coins. The people in general loaded gold and silver coins and turned their copper utensils into coins, paid off the state revenue and other taxes with these token coins. It adversely affected the foreign trade. Every goldsmith struck copper coins in his workshop. The state treasury was crammed with them. Thousands brought them for exchange and their heaps rose up like mountains in Tughlaqabad. The state consequently, was greatly defrauded but people made huge fortunes.

It must be noted that Tughlaq (in history) was not the first to introduce token currency. Earlier the rulers of Iran and China had also introduced token currency. While the experiment was quite successful in China, it had failed in Iran. Similarly, in Persia Gai Khatu had made experiments with token currency towards the close of the thirteenth century.

Girish Karnad has minutely presented the feeling of disillusionment caused by the token currency. Every night the Sultan wanders through the heaps of counterfeit coins in the rose garden. He digs into the heaps with his fists, raises his fists and let the coins drop down. The stepmother sarcastically warns him :

You are just legalizing robbery-- (p.63)

Karnad uses the experiment of the token currency to highlight the Sultan's failure. The reason behind the failure has been stated by the Sultan thus :

It's a question of confidence. A question of trust ! The other day I heard that in China they have paper currency---paper, mind you--and yet it works because the people accept it. They have faith in the Emperor's seal on the pieces of paper. (p.39)

His people with full preparations and malicious intentions deceive their King. They don't co-operate with the stone-hearted and blood-thirsty king. There is lack of trust between the Sultan and his subjects. People avenge and betray their villainous King.

5) SELF- BETRAYAL

Every act of Tughlaq springs from his impulsive motivation. Impulsive decisions are always accompanied by rash actions. It is said that “ *don't be rash and end in crash.* ” At every step the Sultan is frustrated by his own decision. Moreover his trusted friends turn out to be wicked foes. In both the experiments---transfer of capital and introduction of token currency---the Sultan becomes a victim of self-deceit. He accepts his mistake :

---that was my fault. (p.63)

Both the times he cherishes high ideals but their consequences result in insomnia. He is completely disillusioned. So people consider him as mad Muhammad. He realizes that he has

reached the extreme edge of self-estrangement, which is insanity :

I am teetering on the brink of madness, Barani, but the madness of God still eludes me. (p.68)

Even at another moment to punish Aziz, he desperately utters :

I don't know why I am acting like a fool. (p.83)

At the end of the play he tells

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Barani, all I need now is myself and my madness. (p.85)

The tone of despair, helplessness and bewildered incomprehension is unmistakably felt in the above confession. In Tughlaq's case it is an expression of his anguish at the trick played on him by life. It had promised him a memorable rose garden but gave him a rubbish dump of counterfeit coins. He wanted to rule a Utopia but alas ! he ended up ruling a 'kitchen of death ' as 'the lord of skins.' This contrast between man's expectation and the harsh reality of existence is indeed the absurdity of life. Completely shattered, both in mind and body, and at the end of his psychological tether, he now sleeps for the first time after he had murdered sleep long back. Throughout the play, Tughlaq doesn't have a single moment of peace and rest. He aguishly says :

Joy ? It's such a long time since I heard that word. (p.68)

Thus his final shattering is his spiritual death as a natural consequence of his psychological fate. His is a case of self-betrayal as he entertains false notions about him and his schemes. When his grandiose schemes are shattered he retreats. Therefore we can call him an 'unheroic hero'.

6) RELIGION IS BETRAYED

Tughlaq in history was very devoted and a sincere king in matters related to religious rites. He was particular about the performance of prayers. He was perhaps the first Sultan of Delhi about whom there is evidence that he had participated in the Hindu festival, Holi. People were obliged to pray five times a day. If they had failed to follow the rule, the officers punished them. It had never happened before Tughlaq came to the throne.

In the play people talk about Tughlaq's offence of parricide and fratricide at prayer. Shakespeare's Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, did not kill his incestuous uncle-father at prayer. He didn't want to pollute prayer. Shivaji, the great Maratha Emperor, didn't sacrilege prayer. He pardoned his enemies many times when they were praying. But the Sultan treacherously murders the most revered priest, Imam-ud-din. This murder shows that a religious opposition can't be spared at any cost. Shihab-ud-din reluctantly agrees to the devilish plan to kill the Sultan by saying :

Does your Islam work only at prayer? You have persuaded me to do what I had sworn never to do---you, Your Holiness. I'm sure the Lord will not mind an interrupted prayer. (p. 36)

When the Sayyids and Amirs do not approve of Ratansingh's idea to murder the Sultan at prayer time, he ironically asks them :

Where's your Holy Koran? The tyrant doesn't deserve to be considered among the faithful. And then, he killed his own father during prayer time, after all. (p.36)

The religious people indulge in treachery. They make an unsuccessful attempt to murder him. It is a cunning plot to defy the Sultan's absolute power. Thus prayer is desecrated. As a result of the treachery, the Sultan is disgusted with prayer and in a fit of frustration and anger imposes a ban on it. He summarily declares :

There will be no more praying in the kingdom, Najib. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished. (p.44)

The tyrant has to understand the grave consequences of his decree. It worsens the religious susceptibilities of his subjects, making his alienation from them complete and irrevocable. The ban has now made him guilty of blasphemy. Prayer thus loses its efficacy and sanctity in the bloody hands of both the Sultan and the religious chieftains. In his 'Introduction' to the play U. R. Anantha Murthy (1997:IX) while commenting on the desecration of prayer, says:

Karnad makes of the leitmotiv of the play, 'prayer,' in the scene where the Muslim chieftains along with Sheikh Shams-ud-din, a pacifist priest, conspire to murder Tughlaq while at prayer. The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer, which is most dear to Tughlaq is vitiated by him as well as his enemies, is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source.

In this connection K. Ratna Shiela Mani (1999:142) rightly argues :

Betrayal of religion is also evident in the way prayer is treated by the Sultan as well as his detractors, the upholders of Islam...The conspiracy is nevertheless a shattering blow to Tughlaq's pride. He also feels betrayed.

Tughlaq's anguish can't be hidden long, when he says :

I had wanted every act in my kingdom to become a prayer, every prayer to become a further step in knowledge, every step to lead us nearer to God. But our prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled. (p.44)

Tughlaq, the machiavellian murderer and sinner realizes that only Almighty God can save him from the ghosts of those who had been murdered. When his bloody hands cannot be sweetened with all the perfumes of Arabia, he prays :

...God in Heaven, please help me...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. (p. 67)

It is an earnest appeal of the tortured mind of the Sultan who realizes that his murderous career does not bring him peace. Karnad shows the rise and fall of the efficacy of prayer. Inordinate ambition for power and wealth contaminates and pollutes prayer and religion. At the end of the play crowds of starving people gather at the fort of Daulatabad. Empty stomach can't afford to pray. In the vicious atmosphere of atrocity, cruelty, deception, killing, sobs and sighs, wailing and tears, it is very difficult for the people to pray. They cry out their resentment, thus :

First man : *Prayer! Prayer! Who wants prayers now?*
 Second man : *Ask them to give us some food.*
 First man : *There's no food. Food's only in the palace. Its prayers for us... We starve and they want us to pray.*
(p. 70)

The playwright ironically presents how Aziz, a Muslim dhobi regards prayer and religion as sacrilege. Aziz disguises as great grandson of His Imperial Holiness Abbasid al Mustansir, the Khalif of Baghdad and goes to the palace to bless the Sultan, the people and purify Daulatabad. Even the crafty Sultan fails to recognize the impostor Aziz in the saints garb. He welcomes him by saying :

We have waited long, Your Holiness, and our sins have become shadows that entwine round our feet...Only you can save me now, Your Holiness, only the dust of your feet on my head can save me no---(p. 71-72)

He is unaware that the dust of the feet he is taking on his head is a very ordinary man's dust. The King fails before an ordinary man's craftiness. The royalty is betrayed and bowed down by a dishonest cheat. Aziz, a washerman, shows his superiority over the Sultan.



The Sultan welcomes the swindlers (Scene XI)

Only a Hindu woman recognizes Aziz, but her voice is unheard in the chaotic condition. Otherwise nobody suspects Aziz's disguise. The play, in this way, is a combination of the religion and politics of an idealist. It tries to disclose that idealism of the ruler will fail and will ruin the idealist if his intentions are not pious and pure. At the end of the play, it's only prayer, which the frustrated despot Sultan had banned earlier, and now it comes to soothe him. This leads U. R. Anantha Murthy (1997:IX) to comment on Tughlaq :

Both Tughlaq and his enemies initially appear to be idealists; yet, in the pursuit of the ideal, they perpetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites : the ideal and the real; the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue.

THE SUB-PLOT HIGHLIGHTS THE THEME OF BETRAYAL

The play actually begins with the act of betrayal by a major character, Aziz, a low-born Muslim dhobi who represents himself in the guise of a Brahmin Vishnu Prasad of Shiknar. He has filed a suit against the state for confiscating his land. He demands compensation for the loss of the land. The Kazi-i-Mumalik, having scrutinized the matter, finds the state guilty of illegal appropriation of land. Aziz receives, by the decree, a grant of five hundred silver dinars and a post in the civil service to ensure him a regular adequate income. The guard at the court, unintentionally reprimands Aziz :

Bloody Infidel ! (p. 6)

It is said that “ *The Goddess of justice is blind.*” Aziz makes full use of the blind justice for his selfish motives. He betrays everyone who comes across his way. In the guise of a Brahmin, neither the Sultan nor his soldiers can recognize his real self. Aziz shaves his head for the disguise and purchases the land with back dated contract and gets the compensation. From then onwards, under the guise of the Brahmin, Aziz along with his friend, Aazam decides to live together showing the outward unity of the Hindu and the Muslim. Aziz’s

masquerading as a Hindu to test the justice of the Sultan provides a surprise and humour to the audience. Aziz, an impostor, appoints another cheat, Aazam to betray the whole system in the society.

On the day of the judgment, Aazam makes a lot of money by picking pockets. He betrays people by picking their pockets. Karnad has intensified the severity of betrayal/treachery by introducing two impostors in the sub-plot. Aazam accompanies Aziz in all acts of dishonesty and barbarity. Aziz as a state officer is callous towards a Hindu woman who is wailing for her ailing child. He demands bribe for his senior officers. It shows how state officers harass people who suffer the pangs of starvation. They swindle the state also. It happens even today and people suffer unaccountably. Aziz shows affinity to a stoic who is unmarried having six children. He is as unprincipled man as Aziz is. Aziz's views on politics are full of subtle irony. He tells Aazam :

My dear fellow that's where our future is--- politics ! It's a beautiful world---wealth, success, position, power---and yet it's full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head. (p.50)

Aziz is intelligent, imaginative and an opportunist. The Sultan's new proclamation of introducing copper coins is a golden opportunity for him. He along with Aazam makes counterfeit coins. Aziz misappropriates the huge funds sanctioned by the Sultan for the emigrants from Delhi. He rises higher and higher by betraying and exploiting the poor and

needy people. In the guise of a thief he steals the silver dinars. During the famine in Doab he purchases land at a very cheap rate and receives subsidy from the state. Then as a dacoit any evil act is virtuous for him. He recognizes the importance of crime in the world. His devilish mind teaches Aazam the strategy to betray people step by step and gain popularity through evils acts :

If you remain virtuous throughout your life no one will say a good thing about you because they won't need to. But start stealing ---and they'll say: 'What a nice boy he was! But he's ruined now...' Then kill and they will beat their breasts and say: 'Heavens ! He was only a petty thief all these days. Never hurt anyone. But alas ! ' Then rape a woman and the chorus will go into hallelujahs : ' he was a saint, a real saint and look at him now... ' (p. 57)

Aziz considers that to rape a woman only out of lust is “a mug’s game.” Now he wants “the authority to rape”. His principle is that a man must commit a crime at least once in his life time. According to him the real quality of a king is :

One should be able to rob a man and then stay there to punish him for getting robbed... that's being a real king ! (p. 58)

When Aazam is disgusted with all these mal-practices and wishes to run away, Aziz kills him. He, at this time, betrays his bosom friend who tries to defy his authority. In the guise of Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, he deceives not only the Sultan and his people but also sanctity of religion. He pollutes

prayer which is the very foundation of religion. In the last scene the Sultan recognizes the machiavellian Aziz and asks him :

Who are you ? How long did you hope to go on fooling us with your masquerade ? (p.79)

and

Do you know the punishment for killing a saint like Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid ? And for deceiving me and my subjects ? (p.80)

Aziz outwits the Sultan saying :

I have been your most devout servant. I have studied every order, followed every instruction...I insist I am Your Majesty's true disciple. (P.80)

In spite of Barani's earnest suggestion to punish Aziz, the Sultan pardons him and appoints him as an officer in his army in the Deccan. Thus Aziz, the poor washer-man, ascends to a higher position simply by betraying the Sultan at every move. Aziz along with Aazam does nothing but subverts every plan and every person for his selfish end. He assumes different shapes and disguises on different occasions : first as a Brahmin, then as a thief, a robber, a servant and finally as a revered saint. While commenting on the role shifting in Tughlaq Pramod K. Nayar (1999:165) says :

Tughlaq is full of "masked" characters all playing "roles"...In a kind of Bakhtinian carnival all hierarchies are subverted: king/protector turns criminal/ villains, a holy man becomes king, washerman / criminal masquerades as a saint, loyal subjects turn treacherous.

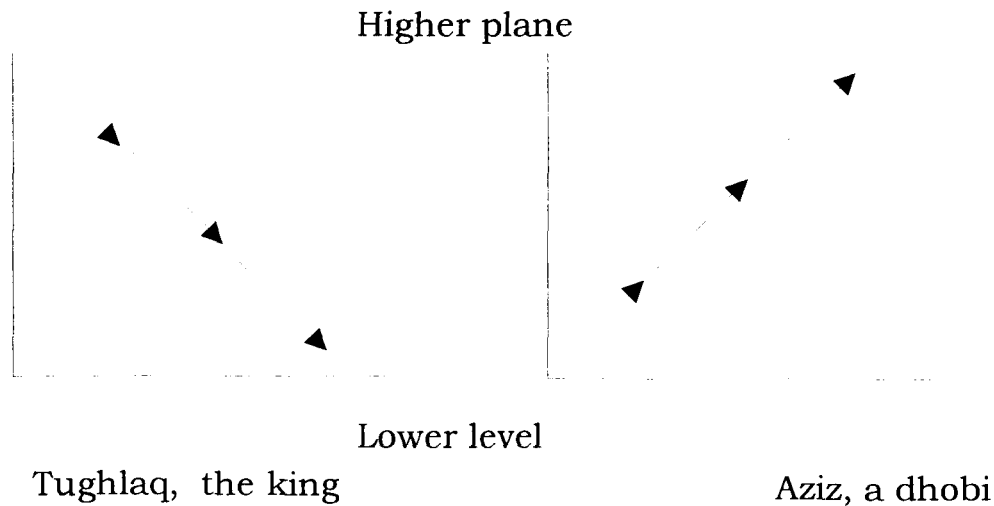
Aziz's single-handed success requires a closer analysis of his character and that of the Sultan. It seems that Aziz is a different version of the evil and viciousness in the Sultan. The sub-plot runs parallel to the main plot surrounding the eponymous hero. Aziz properly recognizes the tragic rhythm of the Sultan's whimsical orders. While Tughlaq's actions spring from power, those of Aziz are directed towards power. Aziz impersonates as Ghiyas-ud-din and presents himself before the Sultan. The two coalesce at a point where they resolve on a course to betray people using prayer as an instrument. The Sultan has captured power merely through gory murders and sacrilege. The same means enable Aziz to secure wealth and position from the Sultan. While the Sultan kills the saint Sheikh Imam-ud-din, to protect his authority and power, Aziz acquires power by killing the saint Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid.



Aziz & Azam plot to kill saint Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid (Scene IX)

Aziz's disguise as the Brahmin Vishnu Prasad shows that he does not feel any sense of obligation to religion like the Sultan who doesn't hesitate to pollute prayer. This discloses how his desire for power runs parallel more or less to the Sultan's rule. Aziz's machinations can be viewed as a continuation of Tughlaq's ideology. Actually what Aziz does in the sub-plot amounts to an imitation of the sequence of crimes committed by the Sultan. The Sultan kills his trusted friend Shihab-ud-din for his treacherous disloyalty. Aziz also kills his bosom friend Aazam for his defiance. Aziz's ironical concept of Hindu and Muslim unity reminds us of the Sultan's apparent desire for equality. But the fact is that Aziz shatters the Sultan's entire design into pieces.

Aziz's will power is unhampered by moral or psychological complexity. He does not experience any anguish, for he claims to be a cheat. He faces no qualms between his real-self and impersonation. The Sultan on the other hand, is a man of split personality, who faces tremendous mental conflict with his real-self and appearance. His dual nature gives rise to indescribable sufferings and deaths in his kingdom. His real self superimposes and ends him into a wreck. He realizes the irony of his life when Aziz, a professional rogue beats him at his own power game. Therefore, while Tughlaq fails in epoch-making gestures, Aziz conducts his micro politics with a chain of success. The graphs of the two personalities can be shown as under :



This shows the reverse attainment of the two characters. Originally a dhobi's business is to remove dirt. He succeeds in his life mission through dirt, whereas the King, while playing dirty politics whirls down into dirt. Shrewd and treacherous like the Sultan, Aziz is a kind of caricature of the Sultan. Aziz represents the utter failure of the Sultan's administration in which the meritorious suffer, while cheats like him are rewarded. His subtle machinations stand for a satire on the working of democracy in which value is given to merit but in practice mischief mongers and trouble-makers get recognition and reward. The virtuous have to suffer exploitation and frustration. From the opening scene till the last scene of the play, the King protagonist, who has been practising deception on the people, is outclassed by Aziz. The King is thereby made a target of ridicule.

In Tughlaq Karnad has attempted to follow the conventions of the Natak Company, specially the Parsi Natak

Company (1850-1930) U. R. Ananatha Murthy (1997:VII) has attributed the stage success of Tughlaq to the elements of Parsi theatre, such as :

The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle, and uses dramatic conventions like the comic pair, Aziz and Aazam (the Akara and Makara of Natak performances), to which theatre audiences respond readily.

There are five comic scenes in the play, which take place in the yards and in the crowds. Karnad has introduced these comic scenes for entertainment as well as for relieving the tension created by the horror scenes in the play. Tughlaq is full of intrigues, blood-shed and terrible murders. The strain would have been unbearable but for the dramatic relief provided by the characters in the sub-plot. Aziz's different disguises create fun and humour and provide dramatic relief and make the play bearable. In Shakespearean tragedies the comic scenes ease the tension occurring from the foregoing serious scenes. The Porter scene immediately after the treacherous murder of King Duncan in Macbeth, the grave-digger scene in Hamlet and the fool in King Lear appear to lessen the horror and terror in the plays and entertain the audience. Karnad has not followed Aristotle's three unities of time, place and action. The play, Tughlaq covers a period of five years. The action begins in Delhi and then shifts to Daulatabad, a city eleven hundred twenty kilometers away from Delhi. The playwright has added a comic sub-plot to the play. It serves as a humorous parody to the main plot and is full of irony and satire .

The overall impression seems that the plot is well-knit and noticeable for its architectural quality. Various events and actions are so integrated that they contribute to the unity of effect. Rajinder Paul (1972:41) in this regard, says :

*Tughlaq is a beautifully structured play---
Each scene is like a brick serving a particular
role and helping in the total structure.*

Thus the sub-plot of Tughlaq serves to broaden our perspective on the overall effect of the theme of betrayal.