



## Existentialism in Girish Karnad's play Tughlaq

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### Abstract

The study mainly focuses on the existentialism in the play Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*. Karnad as playwright has successfully constructed the existentialist themes in this play. *Tughlaq*'s hero Muhammad-bin Tughlaq's dilemma, frustration, isolation and loneliness were clearly emphasized by the author. The present study is an attempt to focus sultan's choice of responsibility and freedom.

**Keywords:** existentialism, disillusionment, dilemma

### Introduction

This paper depicts the existential features of the play of Girish Karnad's famous play *Tughlaq*. Existentialism is a recent philosophical movement dealing with man's disillusionment and despair. The basic idea behind existentialism is that man frame himself to be uniquely individual a subjective a creator and an autonomous agent. *Tughlaq*'s protagonist Sulthan Muhammed-Bin-Tughlaq's "free of choice" and "will power" expresses him as a man of fully conscious of the subjectivity and uniqueness of human existence.

The Indian English drama flourished in the eighteenth century when the British Empire ruled in India. It is supposed to have started with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted* in 1813. It present conflict between the East and the west. Madhusudhan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilization* (1871) regarded as the beginning of Indian English Drama. Rabindranath Tagore, Bharathi Sarabhai, Aurobindo Ghosh, A.S.P. Iyer, T.P. Kailasam were the major contributors to the development of Indian English Drama. The early playwrights like Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh produced mainly poetic drama as they were primarily poets and playwrights. Tagore's first play *Sanyasi* marks the beginnings, he was originally written in Bengali and later he translated it into English. As a poet of great excellence he could not help in the temptation of writing poetry plays. As a result he have immense poetic qualities and not so much dramatic excellence. Tagore's chief contribution lies in his treatment of a recent Hindu myths and legends giving them symbolic significance for example, *Chithra* was inspired by the mahabharath. In the beginning of the twentieth century they are produced mature plays when he dealt with man in relation to God. *The Kings of the Dark Chamber*, *The Post Office* were received favourably by the lovers of drama for their dramatic qualities. Tagore has displayed his perfected command over English language and it is evident from his poetry and drama that the English language can be a suitable medium of expression of Indian thoughts of ideas, sentiment and sensibility. The most memorable accept of Tagore's genius is that he has contributed about forty pieces to a variety of this genre. Like poetic drama, symbolic plays, music drama, prose drama, nature drama, song drama and

dance drama. Such a variety in dramatic experiments speaks volumes about astonishing range of Playwright. He traces the periods ranging from ancient Greece to medieval India. He deals with the themes of human evolution and love. His famous plays are *Eric*, *Vavadutta* and *Savithri*, *Perseus the Deliver*, *Prince of Edur*, *The Viziers of Bassora*.

With the growth of Indian theatre Drama grew both in quantity and quality. Some plays that stimulate the audience include Vasudeva Rao's *Nala and Damaganti* (1928), P.A. Krishna Swamy's *The Flute of Krishna* (1950). Drama became an instrument to spread social consciousness in the hands of the versatile playwright Harindranath Chattopandhyay. His five plays appeared in 1937 and created a revolution by throwing light on social inequality and protest. T.P. Kailasam is another powerful playwright who published his two plays *The Burden and Fullfilment* in 1933 based on puranic themes. Bharathi Sarabhai, as a women playwright has contributed significantly to the English Drama. Her first play, *The Well of the people* Published in 1943 and the later one *Two Women*, have been successful in attracting the attention of the audience towards social problems, particularly in the female world. Indian drama in English becomes a source of entertainment in the hands of a talented playwright. V.V. Srinivas Iyengar. His collection *Dramatic Divertissements* is known for its plays full of humour, fun with dialogues and gentle satire aiming at social criticism. Among other playwrights who attracted the audience are A.S.P. Iyer, I.M. Lobo- Prabhu, S.Fyzee-Rahmin, Suryadutt J. Bhatt. There plays belong to the Pre-Independence age. Indian drama in English flourished remarkably in Post- independence era. When it was taken up seriously by a few talented writers and men of theatre. G.V. Desani published his play *Hali* in 1950. That English drama gained maturity and won admiration for its originality and symbolism. Asif Currimbhoy another gifted playwright who could produce actable plays. He published Four Volumes in which the plays included are *The Dumb Dancer*, *OM*, *Thorns and Canvas*, *The Tourist Mecca*, *The Clock*, *The Doldrummersm*, *The Restaurant*, *The captives*, *Goa*, *Abbe*, *Faria*.

Girish Karnad, one of the creative genius of the modern age. His significant contributions to Indian English drama leads him a supreme position. Karnad, born in 1938 in

Maharashtra, had a long passion to be known as a poet of world acclaim. But he could not able to realize this dream, instead he earned a prominent place in the history of Indian English Drama. He is an admirable multi-lingual playwright. That's why he is endowed with a unique gift of writing plays in kannada and translating them into English. Whereas, both these languages are foreign to him because Konkani is his mother tongue. Karnad's first play *Yayathi* (1961) written in kannada. It is based on an episode in the Mahabharat. The playwright attempts to re-interpret the Indian mythology to a modern context. The play dramatized effectively in modern theatres. It leads the play to won the Mysore, State Award in 1962. *Hayavadhana* (1970) was written in kannad and later translated into English. Karnad borrowed the theme from Thomas Mann's short novel *The Transposed Heads*, based on a tale from *Kathasarithasagara*. The Existential theme or the play is search for identity. With the publication of this play karnad won the Kamaladevi's Award of the Bharathiya Natya Sangh in 1972. In 1988, he contributed a powerful play *Naga-Mandala* (Play with Cobra), concentrates on local kannad folk-tales to produce an entirely new kind of drama. It takes a complete departure from the classical sources. The play won the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the most creative work of 1989. In *Agni Mattu Male* (the fire and the rain), karnatak once again turns the epic Mahabharath, which was published in the year 1995. It depicted the themes of the relationship between brothers and the cousins and also the relation of drama to ritual within Indian traditions. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997), based on the dreams of a great warrior. *Odakalu Bimba (A Heap of Broken Images)* appeared in 2005, is based neither on mythology nor history. The play echoes with a contemporary theme of a writer's dilemma who fails miserably in her own language, when she switches over to English medium she earns world wide acclaim. Other major contributions include *Hittina Hunja* (1970), *Anjumallige* (1985), *Tale-Danda* (1990), *Tippuvina Kanasugalu* (2000) and *Bali, The Sacrifice* (2002).

Existentialism flourished on the European Continent especially after world war second. It is a philosophy of existence. It is true that Existentialist thinkers and writers like Jean- Paul Sartre and Albert Camus offered a new way life and thought to the world. Existentialism is often considered a systematic school of philosophy supposedly originating in the philosophy and literary writings of satre. It is a modern philosophical movement, but its roots can be traced in the works of the philosophers and literary writers of the past. Jean- Paul Sartre (b-1905) is a unique expounder of existentialist philosophy. It found its excellence in the hands of Sartre. His philosophical and literary works reveal the existential situation and depict its essential hopelessness. Sartre mainly emphasized the philosophy of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the pioneers of Existentialism. These philosophers Explore the View of human 'will'. According to Nietzsche's opinion existentialist philosophy argues the supremacy of man's existence in a Godless Universe. Sarte also believe's Nietsche's argument of man's existence. Sarte's being and Nothingness is a treatise on philosophy of ontology influenced by Heidegger's ontological concern. But the treatment of subject is entirely original dealing with various aspects of human condition. Sarte considers man to be the source of 'nothingness' and thus man himself is both 'being' and 'nothingness'. A few great writers also created a favourable condition for the growth of existentialist

literature. Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Andre Gide (1869-1951) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924) penetrate deeply into the subjectivity and freedom of human in their works. His masterpiece work *Notes from Underground* is one of the most revolutionary work in the history of existentialism. He stated through the inner life of the underground man, his moods, anxieties, frustrations and his decisions. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karmazov* anticipate the philosophy of existentialism. Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* is another major example of existentialism.

Jnanpith Awardee Girish Karnad is the most outstanding dramatic genius of the post- Independent Indian literature. His historical play *Tughlaq* is a great classic in Indian dramatic literature. Karnad's ground breaking second play, *Tughlaq*. It is mainly focused on the last five years of the troubled reign of Muhammad Tughlaq (1327-1332 AD) in India. Originally written in kannada and later translated into English by Girish Karnad himself. It is a historical one loosely based on the life of Sulthan Muhammed-Bin-Tughlaq of fourteenth century India, who is ignominiously dubbed the "mad king". It deals with the life, visions, ideals and dreams of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq. Karnad present the ruler Tughlaq as a sensitive and intelligent ruler who sets out to do the best for his subjects and kingdom, but ironically enough he is misunderstood by whom he loved and trusted. As a result, all his dreams and aspirations crumbled down to ashes and he suffers existential alienation when he becomes a tyrant. The present study is an attempt to analyse Girish Karnad's Play *Tughlaq* in the light of the philosophy Existentialism.

Muhammad the great sulthan is a man fully conscious of the subjectivity and uniqueness of human existence. Here he echoes the philosophy of Kiergaard. He points out that a man who stresses and glorifies the individual's 'act of choice' and 'will'. Sultan is a man of 'free choice'. He decides that the capital of his empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad. He claims to be an ideal king and hopes to move his capital an ideal one.

"My ministers and I took this decision after careful thought and discussion. My empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital which is at if heart.

Delhi is too border and, as you well know, It's peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my Kingdom. I invite you all to accompany me to Daulatabad."(4)

Muhammad is so ambitious that he aims at building a unique empire an extraordinary one. This is called going beyond the given situation. He add

"With their help I shall build an empire which will be an envy of the world" (4)

He also knows that 'act of choice' is not enough and the use of subject 'will' is more important. So he displaced his strong 'will' power to create a new empire that will be the 'envy of the world.' Tughlaq's hold decision to more the capital and his 'will' to achieve something knew, grand and extraordinary shows that he is a men who must strive only

to survive but to remake and over power the entire universe through myriads manifestation of his 'will to power'. Muhammad is religious too and never went against the tenets of Islam. But at the same time he is so impulsive and impatient that he has put best of the Sayyids and the Ulema behind the bars in the name of justice as they had tried to indulging politics. Sheikh Imam-Ud din can quote course of such transgressions and yet advises him to take the lead to continue the work of the Arabs for the spread of Islam because Muhammad is indowed with extraordinary power and highlights Muhammad's potential:

"You are one of the most powerful kings on earth today and you could spread the kingdom of Heaven on earth. God had given you everything- power, learning, intelligence, talent. Now you repay His debt" (21)

This is true. Muhammad is gifted man and a capable one, a powerful and dominating personality. However, his immediate reply to Imam-Ud din suggests the other side of Muhammad, the real accept of his character, clashing with the ideal Muhammad. He says...

"No one can go for on knees. I have a long way to go. I can't afford to crawl- I have gallop." (21)

Here Muhammad is impatient to achieve the goal at the earliest. He is over ambitious. Like Macbeth he is likely to suffer, on account of 'Vaulting Ambition'. Who also gallops, take a leap, but falls on the other side. This is highly suggestive. But Muhammad is so dashing that he neither, cares for Imam-Ud din's advice nor the secret reactions of the citizens. His sole concern is to expand, to grow, to appropriate, to gain power, in short, the 'will to power'. He resembles here Nietzsche's ideal of superman Zarathustra who speaks of man as the creator of values. Zarathustra also expresses that whatever comes in the man's transcendence and progress such as reason, morality, politics and religion, should be abolished. Reason, he affirms makes man calculating and hence it becomes a mechanism of escape and withdrawal from action. Reason is inhibitive in the fulfillment of human 'will'. Muhammad seems to be doing the same. Whatever comes in the way of his transcendence and progress it surely but secretly abolished. His conduct invites ironic comment from shake Imam-Ud din in the form of a warning...

"Beware, Sulthan, you are to become another God. It's a sin worse than parricide." (22)  
And further "Religion! Politics! Take head, Sulthan, one day this verbal distinction will rip you into too". (22)

The sheikh knows the real Sultan, so he warms him. However, the Sultan always projects his romantic idealism displays his learning, and romantic yearnings his poetic sensibility and replies accordingly as if he believes in himself and only he knows the correct answer:

"You are asking me to make myself completing by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which leads Zarathustra or the Buddha. (smiles). Iam sorry. But It Can't be done." (22)

Muhammad's character is such a that he can't be denied the vision that lead to Zarathustra and in course of his transcendence and progress he must clear all obstacles. The poor Sheikh, couldn't help being victim of Muhammad's treachery. He is so crafty, so manipulating that he easily wins the confidence of the Sheikh who obeys his command, puts on the robes. This resemblance is used as a dramatic device to get rid of the Sheikh. The Sheikh was Justified when he had earlier paid his compliment to the Sultan:

"You know, Sultan, I'm just beginning to understand why they say you are the cleverest man in the world." (25)

### Conclusion

Of course the play has to be understood in terms of basic questions about Tughlaq's existence and essence, his being and becoming who is characterized by absolute Individualism and power of transcendence. Throughout his political career he asserted his 'being-for-itself' for a meaningful essence took drastic steps to be remembered as a savior monarchs of his subjects but turned out to be a cruel manipulator, a tyrant. This is how the journey of an ideal and romantic Sultan ends at the level of existential reality. He can be safely called an existentialist because he has emerged as a disillusioned romantic. His moral dilemma makes the play existential.

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