

RELEVANCE OF HISTORICAL PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD IN POST-INDEPENDENCE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

History is an integrated narrative or description of past events or facts written in a spirit of critical inquiry for the whole truth. Girish Karnad had revolutionized the Indian drama in English especially on historical theme during the post-Independence period. He had chosen the historical subject matters giving it reshaping to reinforce the contemporary issues. Thus his historical themes are found to be appropriate with the modern and contemporary India. In this article an attempt is made to justify the relevance Karnad's treatment of history in his selected plays in the post-independence period.

Keywords: History, Present, Ruler, Secularism, Similarity

Indian playwright Mahesh Dattani remarked about Girish Karnad, "He has a historic vision but a contemporary voice." History uncovers the inner truth of human psychology, so it is never a study of back-dated issues, but is relevant with the progress of time. Karnad thought that we can compare the historical characters with the real life person as whom we meet daily. They bear the same psychology-attitude, motif, ambition, only the time and situation is different. They are the 'same' persons having 'different' names. In his dramatic career, Karnad's chief effort was to make a parallel between the ancient or mediaval India with the post-Independence time. He discussed the current social-economical religious and political context through historical plots. In this regard his most notable plays are 'Tughlaq' (1964), 'Tale Danda' (1990), "The Dream of Tipu Sultan" (1997)

It is nevertheless to say that Kanrad's dealing of 'Tughlaq' is huge and contemporary. It is to be noted that the attitude of that Sultan (Thgulaq), the typical 'Madness that is 'Tughlaque' became a proverb in Indian senerio. Karnad took the plot from 1327 A.D. to 1332 A.D. of Delhi Sultani. In the text, Tughlaq is the protagonist who brings his downfall due to his 'unnatural' over ambition and wrong judgments. But the fact is that, like other tragic heroes, when he understood his fault then the time is already over. We all are known about his great misdeeds like his decision of transferring capital from Delhi to Daulatabad (Debgiri) making copper coins equal in worth to silver dinar, which is also displayed in the text of Kanrad. But the playwright's chief aim was to show another side of the sultan that is his endeavor to bring communal harmony, his failure and frustration that lead his madness. He possessed the ambivalence of individual and royal duty, greatness and cruelty. The main problem of Tughlaq was that he took up ultra modern ethos on planning-vision, project, administration, prosperity, justice that was beyond his time. His decision of making G.T. Road is excellent whose benefit we are availing even today. He was right on his planning of transferring capital. It would bring the centralized protection of the country that is the wish of any ruler of any time. He intended to make a harmony between Hindu and Muslim as Daulatabad was a hindu oriented time. He said, "Daultabad 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." But his policy and conditions for transferring was wrong. So unfortunately he was misunderstood and did not gain public support. Actually, making religious harmony in a multi lingual, multi-cultural country like India is very tough even today.

Tughlaq bears a close resemblance with the national leader of India of 20th Century. His vision of democracy, secularism, assimilation, modernity has a close relation with Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel during Independence. All of them failed on the ground of their ideology. He was highly offended during the partition of 1947. He blamed that people did not understand the principle of secularity and so they had no trust upon the people of other religion. As a result the non-violence and integrity notion of Gandhiji was failed due to partition, once who demanded that the country would only be divided upon his dead body. It is the tragedy of the Father of the Nation that India was partitioned from Pakistan on the ground of religious and communal violence during his life time. We have witnessed the Hindu-Sikh riots in 1984 due to assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It is also revealed during Babri Masque violence of 1992.

Tughlaq bears close resemblance with Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India. Nehru also gave more importance to ideology rather than real practically. He tried make a strong Ideal India but all of such efforts were collapsed. Nehru era is called the era of disillusionment specially on Indo-China issue of 1964. His modern idealism was misunderstood by people. Similary people did not response Tugh's calls. He said in the text, "Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let's laugh and cry together and then, let's pray..... History is ours to play with - ours now! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery.... Come! I am waiting to embrace you all!" In the present India many governmental projects are not executed for the lack of support of the public. We may remember the case of Tughlaq who openly blamed his citizen for not understanding him. So, out of frustration he ordered people to make Delhi empty with in a fortnight. The mutual distrust, frustrated Idealism, communal and religious bigotry, treachery, sedition, rampant, corruption are similar in both Tughlaq and Nehru administration. Even the refugee problem from Pakistan after 1947 hampered Nehru's ambition of communal co-operation. Tughlaq was disturbed by some revolt like Nawab of Avadai, Kanpur, Fakir-ud-din revolt of Bengal, uprising of Malabar of Deccean. Nehru faced the same situation and if Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel, the Iron Man of India did not take proper steps the whole 'Nehru Dynsty' would be collapsed and the united India would be damaged. However Nehru was highly disturbed by this issue. The fault of both ruller is that their idealism could not provide any lasting effect. Nehru suffered from Para doxical despotism. He wanted to create history according to his own ideology and deserved public support in it. He took wrong decision during Kashmir issue and Indo-China war that are the major fault of his administration. He did not want to make a diplomatic solution with China before the war. It was his strategic misdeed of creating military posts in a disputed zone where food, equipments, arms can't be reached properly. Historian Rajni Palme Dutt said that Nehru was a dreamer, a visionary, but failed to evolve a concrete strategy of building a civil society. There his manipulation may be compared with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Her authoritarianism caused her failure. Her character was as complex as Tughlaq. When the Allahabad High Court ordered her not to contest in any election for six years She suddenly advised President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to announce the National Emergency on June 25th, 1975. Mrs. Gandhi was highly criticized by critizen for hampering the public life for calling emergency without ample reason. Consequently, she lost the next Lok Sabha election with a heavy margin. She was then helpless like Tughlaq. So Kanrad Picturized the real Image of India. Here another issue is important that in the play so many farmers committed suicide, for high debts and starvation in Doab region. The predicament, starvation, too much debt, death of farmers lead to peasent revolt at the beginning of Independence like Tebhaga, Telengana, Warli, Maharastra movement during 1946-51. In India more than 900 farmers have committed suicide till 2001. Tughlaq advised his countrymen for not judging him as the son of king, but on his performance. Same situation was created in India whereas political button was being handed over

'The Dream of Tipu Sultan' was written by Kanrad in 1997 to celebrate the Golden jubilee anniversary of Indian Independence. Here is a clash between Tipu's vision of liberty and the real colonial bondage. He crossed the boundary of time and place. He had the sense of pride for his motherland. He had secular attitude as he constructed the Hanuman Temple in Kollegal Taluk, appointed Hindus in high administrative posts like Poorniya, Krishna Rao. He was probably the first ruler in India who had international outlookings and signed treaty with foreign countries on business purpose. He also made treaty with those countries for the internal security of his motherland. In present time, India is taking the assistance of the foreign nations to have permanent seat in UNO. We may recognize the bravery of Tipu as he is called "The Tiger". We can quote from the text:

Wellesley: Is that Tipu Sultan, Qilledar Sahib?

Nadeem (broken Voices): Jee han.

Wellesley: So that's the Tiger of Mysore

The problem of Tipu's time and contemporary India are same - the lack of faithful residents. He was modern in the sense that he dreamt a India free of fear, malice, poverty, bondage that is the ideal of Indian constitutions also. He business policy bears a similarly with Gandhian policy of 'Swadeshi' in terms of nationalizing the commodities. It would prevent India of becoming open to all for business purpose. In Act One he declares: "This land is ours and it's rich, overflowing with goods and the world hungers for, and we let foreigners come in and rob us of our wealth! Today the Indian princes are all comatose, wrapped in their opium dreams. But someday they'll wake up and throw out the Europeans." Tipu nationalized and controlled the trading of sandal wood and iron. Tipu's economic policy is found in the 'Five Years Plan' of Independent India. In the first three five years plan upto Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi, the main project was to increase national income in industry of trading, nationalization of business, enhancement of small and micro industry, establishment of large industries. In the third five years plan, Prime Minister Shastri intended of having the materials of chemical, power, steel industry so that the cost of buying those materials from foreign countries would be decreased. The older East Indian Company is turned into foreign multinational companies that attempted to smash Indian economy and have monopoly here. There are very few Indian companies having international brand. Most of the electronic products being sold in India are made in China and Japan. These foreign companies appoint Indian youth with high salary whereas the Indian companies are in backward in failing to do so. Tipu had predicted the situation. He called his countryman, "If you will assist me, in a short time not do Englishman shall remain in India," just as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose said, "Give me blood, I shall give you freedom." But Tipu was misunderstood for his ultra modern vision. He suspected that his own trusted men will kill him one day. This predicament took the real form in India when Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. It is notified by Karnad in the play that a great havoc was occurred after the death of Tipu that remind us the situation after the death of Indira Gandhi. Tipu's dream of progressive India was failed due to lack of unity. That is apparent also in Maratha-Non Maratha clash, Gujrat riot, Gorkha-Non Gorkha fight. So Karnad's dealing of history is really contemporary.

In this regard the last name is "Tale Danda" (1990) that deals with the social, political religions upheaval of Kalyan, Karnataka during 1105 AD - 1167 AD. Here the protagonist Basavana is a poet, saint, philosopher and social reformer. Kanrad wants to highlight the violence, hatred on caste and social inequality. He chose the subject on Mandir-Mandala issue and Sarana movement. In the play Damodar Bhatta is the representative of orthodoxy who treated Sanskrit as the language of upper class and Kanada as the language of shudra Saranas and baggers. He said, "Sanskrit is a language engraved on diamond, unchanging, austere. Eternal truths can be captured in its immutability. Kannada, our mother tongue, on the other hand, is pure flux. It changes from mouth to mouth, from caste to caste, from today to tomorrow. It is geared to the needs of squabbling couples, wheedling beggars, prostitutes spreading their saris out. It can only speak in inconstant moods". Even the king of Kalyana, Bijala was victimized on caste-discrimination as he belonged to lower barbar caste, not Bramhina or Kshtriya. He was the believer of secularism. He said, "Look at those he has gathered around him: poets,

Vol. 5 No. 4 April 2018 ISSN: 2321-788X UGC Approval No: 43960 Impact Factor: 3.025 mystics, visionaries....They sit together, eat together, argue about God together, indifferent to caste, birth or station. And all this is happening in the city of Kalyan – my Kalyan!”. Here the barbarism on inter caste marriage is shown in the case of Bramhian daughter Kalavati and lower class cobbler Shilavanda. Bijala is mercilessly killed by Jagadava at the end and Basavana also failed in Sarana movement. Condition of women from 1200 A.D. to present time is same. Women of Kalyan are submissive, silent. Rambabati was victimized as her husband Bijala had relation with so many women. But the condition of Savitri is most wretched who is like a commodity to be packed up and sent to her parents. Actually, an Indian woman for all the time is submissive and stereotype to will take care for children and meet the sexual demand of husband. If we look on the contemporary Indian women are sold, bought, abducted, raped and faced violence. They are the materials of lust to be satisfied.

The Episode of Sharana’s smashing the Jain temples and turning them into Shiva temple reminds us of the violence on Babri issue in 1992. In the text, Damodor Bhatta, the upper class leader is not concerned about the subjugation of lower class and did not support their upliftment. It is also apparent now. The enforcement of Mandal Commission (1980) for the reservation policy was the cause of agitations of upper class people, the new reservation policy faced protest, bandh, fighting during the reign of Prime Minister V.P. Singh. The upper class people had withdrawn their support from V.P. Singh government. Even we witness a large protestation against UPA government in 2006, when central government under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh implemented 27% reservation for OBC. In contemporary example, in Rambai nagar district of Uttar Pradesh in a primary school, the guardian did not allow their children to eat the food cooked by a Dalit girl. Here is the play, like Gandhiji Basavana advocated for peace but both of them faced tragic calamity. In the play Kanrad criticized the child marriage, system that is visible in present India in Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal. The early marriage of teen children snatches their childhood before they understood the real meaning of it. It is their psychological burden. So the central government amended the constitution in 2002 and makes it a fundamental right of any child up to age of fourteen to have free and compulsory education. In the play women are neglected as per the eyes of the religion. Even till now in Sabarimala Temple women are not allowed to enter. It is the shame of Indian nation that on the one hand we one restricting women from everything and on the other hand one worshipping our motherland as “Bharatmata”. So in the play Amba said, “We must suffer what is written in our forehead.” The moral corruption of the religious leaders are depicted by Karnad as the orthodox replica of vedic Shastra, Damodar Bhatta did not hesitate to visit a courtesan. In our time, there are so many religious leaders (Guru) are accused of having sexual relationship in the name of religion with their female disciple.

So Karnad had presented historical facts successfully in contemporary form that is the cause of stage-success of his plays where the characters take the real-form of our known people. We can easily witness the historical facts by the experience of our daily life. That is the ultimate success of Karnad that in his pen drama and real life are mingled.

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