

Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*: A Study of Idealism, Disillusionment, and Political Paradox

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Abstract

Girish Karnad's Tughlaq is a landmark in modern Indian drama, offering a compelling political allegory through the historical figure of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the 14th-century Sultan of Delhi. Set against a backdrop of visionary ambition and political failure, the play explores the tension between idealism and pragmatism, the use and misuse of power, and the human cost of utopian governance. Karnad's nuanced portrayal of Tughlaq as both an intellectual and a despot reflects the complexities of leadership and mirrors the disillusionment of post-independence India, particularly during Nehru's era. This paper analyzes the play's thematic depth, symbolic structure, and dramatic techniques to underscore its enduring relevance as a critique of political idealism, religious conflict, and the paradoxes of power. By examining Tughlaq's tragic fall from a visionary reformer to a paranoid autocrat, the study reveals how historical drama can illuminate timeless political and moral dilemmas.

Keywords: *Girish Karnad, Tughlaq, political allegory, idealism vs. pragmatism, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Indian English drama, post-independence disillusionment, power and politics, religious conflict, tragic hero, symbolism, modern Indian theatre*

Introduction

Girish Karnad's second play *Tughlaq* was published in 1964, after the publication of *Yayati* in 1961, *Tughlaq* was an immediate success on the stage. It was first produced in Kannada in 1965 and was also done about the same time, in Hindi by the National School of Drama, Bengali and Marathi productions followed, and in 1970 there was an English production in Bombay which was a major success. Through *Tughlaq* Karnad has reflected, primarily, the Nehruvian failure. His aim, it seems was to depict the glaring contrast between the ideals bedream and the reality we achieve. As Karnad puts it in the Introduction to *Three Plays*:

"My subject was the life of Muhammad Tughlaq, a fourteenth century Sultan of

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