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**THE VISIONARY SULTAN AND THE POWER OF  
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN GIRISH KARNAD'S  
TUGHLAQ**

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**Abstract:**

Girish Karnad's Tughlaq is a riveting analysis of leadership via the persona of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Sultan of Delhi. This study explores Transformational Leadership Theory to examine Tughlaq's imaginative but faulty government, which led to his downfall. The drama focuses on Tughlaq's ambitious reforms, intellectual brilliance, and attempts to inspire change, which are consistent with the basic aspects of transformational leadership, such as vision, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation. However, his failure to connect with his followers, as well as the mismanagement of his goals, highlights the darker aspects of such leadership when empathy and practical grounding are lacking.

Tughlaq is a detailed case study of the promises and pitfalls of transformational leadership in complex socio-political situations, combining historical events with universal leadership issues. Tughlaq is a paradoxical figure who is both a visionary and a tyrant. His rule devolves into chaos and terror rather than promoting advancement. The perils of unchecked idealism are criticized when it is divorced from political and social reality through Tughlaq's collapse.

**Keywords :** Leadership, Intellectual stimulation, Empathy, Socio-political situations, Goals

**Introduction**

Girish Karnad was a renowned Indian playwright, actor, and filmmaker. Born in Matheran, Maharashtra, Karnad was a prominent figure in Indian theatre and cinema. He wrote plays in Kannada, including the iconic Tughlaq, which won him the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. Karnad's works often explore Indian history, mythology, and culture,

examining the complexities of human nature and society. His writing style blends traditional and modern elements, making his plays accessible and thought-provoking. Throughout his career, Karnad received numerous awards and honors, including the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan. His contributions to Indian theatre and literature remain unparalleled, and his plays continue to be performed and studied worldwide.

Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq* is a historical drama about the life and reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Delhi Sultan. The drama explores the nature of power, leadership, and the intricacies of human behavior. In terms of visionary leadership, Tughlaq's character in the play reflects a nuanced and multifaceted examination of what it means to be a visionary leader. Inspiring his followers with persuasive speeches and bold initiatives like moving the capital to Daulatabad and instituting token currency, he promotes secularism, fairness, and advancement.

As he promotes innovation and strives for an idealistic rule, his leadership demonstrates charisma, motivation, and intellectual stimulation. However, his impracticality, and developing paranoia finally cause his revolutionary leadership to fail. Leadership transformational theory focuses on inspiring and encouraging followers to do the best and believing the leader is the main goal of transformational leadership theory. James MacGregor Burns first proposed it in 1978, and Bernard M. Bass later developed it in 1985. "*A transformational leader's vision is not just a dream, but a well-thought-out plan for achieving a desirable future*" (Bernard M. Bass, 1985). According to this view, good leaders do more than just oversee work while they also help their followers grow personally, question the status quo, and encourage creativity.

#### **Visionary Leadership: The Idealistic Sultan**

*Tughlaq* is a nuanced exploration of leadership through Muhammad Bin Tughlaq's multidimensional personality. Tughlaq demonstrates several visionary leadership skills as a ruler. He is notable for his innovative thinking since he continually challenges conventional thought and experiments with new ideas. Even if it involves making momentary sacrifices, he has a long-term vision for his kingdom, which includes advancing building, art, and education. This idealism is captured in his declaration: "*I want to create a new history for India, And history will talk about me with wonder for centuries*" (Karnad 7). Despite the opposition of his nobility and advisors, his determination and boldness enabled him to make audacious, sometimes unpopular decisions. His decision to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is one of the most striking examples of his visionary but impractical leadership. He justifies this move by stating: "*Daulatabad is a city of many languages, a city where Hindus and Muslims have lived together for centuries. I want it to be the capital of my empire*" (Karnad 15). Despite his gruff appearance, Tughlaq occasionally displays sympathy and empathy, particularly for the disadvantaged, demonstrating that he is willing to hear and settle their concerns.

#### **Tughlaq's downfall and his visionary flaw:**

In spite of his visionary qualities, Tughlaq's leadership is filled with weaknesses, which eventually lead to his demise. His impulsiveness leads to poorly planned decisions

that generate instability in the kingdom. As his reign advances, paranoia and distrust overwhelm him, instilling fear and suspicion among his advisers and nobility. This is evident when he proclaims: *"I trust no one, Not my ministers, not my people, not even myself"* (Karnad 45). His growing authoritarianism causes him to rely on compulsion and force to keep control, further alienating his people. His perception of justice becomes absolute, as seen in his statement: *"Justice My justice is worth ten times your laws and a hundred times your courts"* (Karnad 52). This absolutism creates an oppressive atmosphere in his court, ultimately leading to widespread rebellion and dissatisfaction. Karnad's portrayal of Tughlaq raises important concerns about the intricacies of visionary leadership, demonstrating how unrestrained ambition can lead to self-destruction.

### **Intellectual Stimulation and Philosophical Reflections:**

The drama provides tremendous intellectual stimulation, provoking reflection on historical, philosophical, psychological, and social issues. It is set in the fourteenth century, during Tughlaq's rule, and challenges students to examine medieval India's political, social, and cultural aspects. It also delves into deep philosophical questions about morality, leadership, and power, asking viewers to grapple with these quandaries. Karnad's depiction of Tughlaq's internal turmoil offers psychological insight into the ruler's motivations and the implications of his decisions. His growing isolation and paranoia are evident when he remarks: *"My kingdom is made of glass I can see everything that happens"* (Karnad 67). Furthermore, this historical play is a societal critique, shining attention on problems such as injustice, inequality, and abuse of authority. Tughlaq's exploration of India's historical and cultural identity is enriched by the use of cultural reflections, symbolism, and metaphor. Through these intellectual challenges, the play encourages spectators to connect with its subjects on numerous levels, resulting in a better understanding of human nature.

### **Tughlaq's Struggles as a leader:**

Tughlaq emphasizes relationship-building as well as individual consideration. His meetings with advisors such as Aziz and Najib indicate his initial willingness to seek advice and consider alternative viewpoints. His friendship with the Sufi saint exemplifies the importance of mutual respect and spiritual guidance when overcoming personal and political turbulence. Meanwhile, Aazam's enduring commitment to Tughlaq, despite the ruler's shortcomings, demonstrates the importance of personal attention in building trust. The drama also explores the intricacies of leadership relationships, depicting rivalries, alliances, and betrayals in Tughlaq's court. It contrasts his public image as a strong leader with his personal hardships, highlighting the difficulties of sustaining genuine connections in the face of political demands. Karnad ultimately emphasizes the necessity of empathy, self-awareness, and introspection in leadership while also recognizing the difficulties of balancing personal connections and public responsibilities.

### **The Paradox in Tughlaq's Leadership:**

Tughlaq's leadership is defined by its inherent duality, which produces paradoxes in his character and decisions. He alternates between reason and impulsiveness, sometimes seeking advice and other times making reckless decisions, such as transferring the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. His idealism motivates him to imagine a just and equitable society, but his pragmatic and often ruthless techniques contradict his own objectives. Similarly,

while he occasionally takes a consultative approach, he progressively asserts his authority without regard for others. His piety and religious commitment contrast with his brutal and forceful methods, highlighting the contradictions in his leadership. The Implications of this duality are far-reaching. Tughlaq's impulsive decisions cause turmoil and instability, weakening trust among his advisors and resulting in betrayals. His brutal actions cause internal and external conflict, exacerbating the upheaval in his kingdom. In a moment of despair, he laments: "*What a state to be in The Sultan of Delhi, sitting in the dark waiting for a murderer!*" (Karnad 83). Karnad's portrayal highlights the complexities of human nature and the inherent inconsistencies in leadership. He emphasizes the difficulties of ruling effectively, particularly when aspirations clash with practical reality.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Tughlaq provides a profound commentary on leadership, ambition, and failure. According to transformational leadership theory, Tughlaq is a paradoxical visionary yet imperfect, ambitious, and alienating. His downfall serves as a cautionary tale about the importance of balancing vision and execution, brilliance with empathy, and innovation with practicality. The leadership qualities, relationships, power, and ideology are deeply analyzed through the lens of transformational leadership theory. The tragedy of his rule culminates in his final moment of desperation, where he acknowledges his complete isolation: "*God, God in Heaven, please help me... I have no one but You now.*" (Karnad 89). Karnad's play remains an engrossing examination of the delicate balance required for effective leadership. It challenges audiences to reflect on the fine line between greatness and tyranny, making Tughlaq a timeless and thought-provoking masterpiece.

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