

**' Labyrinths of Power - A Comparative Study of Eugene
O' Neill's Emperor Jones and Girish Karnad's Tughlq**

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Abstract

The human history and the literary history provide an interesting and illuminating study of power and its corrupting influence on man. The life of man from ancient kings to the present leaders, from old demons to today's under world dons is a history of rule or ambition to rule. A persistent preoccupation of epic poets, tragic dramatists and philosophers has always been to explore and understand man's relation to those forces or powers in the world which shape and control man's destiny; in their epics and tragedies they look for answers to certain cosmic problems much as religion does. My paper attempts to examine and compare two modern classic plays viz **Emperor Jones**, an innovative American drama by Eugene O' Neill, and **Tughlaq**, a brilliant and powerful Indian English Drama by Girish Karnad which I believe render a most interesting, psychological picture of the power that corrupts and its various facets.

Key Words : Power, Corrupts, Compare, tragic, destiny, Emperor Jones,
Tughlaq, Eugene O'Neill, Girish Karnad

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O'Neill's **Emperor Jones** and Karnad's **Tughlaq** belong to two distinct areas of English literature viz. American and Indian English Drama and are written at different periods of time, yet they share certain common characteristics providing a valid base for comparison and contrast. A comparison of the two plays becomes a fascinating literary experience when studied especially as an effort to ascertain and explain that extra ordinary power which corrupts and destroys a man's soul. Both the plays revolve round the character of their protagonists – Jones and Tughlaq. Both Emperor Jones and Tughlaq are the proud heirs of such legendary figures as Satan and Faust, whose tragic downfall is the result of the corrupting influences of the powers within and outside them. The reading of the rise and fall of Jones and Tughlaq becomes as illuminating a study as that of Macbeth or Richard II.

In **Emperor Jones**, the playwright Eugene O' Neill has presented his tragic theory of the relation between man's tragic downfall and the power of the unconscious self or the 'psychological fate'. The play depicts the tragic journey of an ordinary West Indian porter, Brutus Jones, from slavery to Emperor hood and from Emperor to his primitive self. The play brilliantly

presents how the hidden force of his unconscious self and biological past shatters one by one Jones' acquired masks of power and civilization, reducing him to an almost animal like primitiveness. And yet like a true Emperor, Jones refuses to surrender the power of his Emperor hood and embraces death in style.

O'Neill is considered as one of the foremost expounder of the technique of Expressionism in America and **Emperor Jones** is the most remarkable illustration of O'Neill's use of the expressionistic technique. The major expressionistic elements in the play are co related with the play's action – the plot of the play. The play is set out in eight scenes, which move in space from the palace at the edge of the forest, through the forest and out again in time from dusk to dawn. Therefore, as Brutus Jones' role passes from that of emperor to that of slave and as the play traces his change from egotism to self-knowledge, the forest and the night appear to embody the limitations of his mind. O'Neill was influenced by Jung's fundamental premise : the existence and power of the collective unconscious. The mind of a given man contains ideas from the collective unconscious which come to him simply by virtue of his membership in the human race as well as ideas inherited from his own specific race, tribe and family. His mind contains, in addition, unconscious ideas and symbols arising from his unique personal situation to make up the structure of his personal unconscious. Finally, from this personal unconscious co verges his own consciousness, his ego. With the devices of expressionism O'Neill has made the play a study in the psychology of fear and the power of unconscious, intended to symbolize the conscience of mankind.

Although **Emperor Jones'** reputation is more dependent on it's use of Expressionistic technique, it is also interesting to examine it as a modern tragedy. Jones holds supreme power over his native subjects and has travelled a bloody path to reach to the position of an emperor from a nigger slave. Similarly Tughlaq is the emperor of Delhi and his character is based on the fourteenth century sultan of Delhi – Muhammad Bin Tughlaq. Like Jones,

Tughlaq has also walked a bloody path, killing his own father and brother to become the sultan of Delhi. It is interesting to note that Tughlaq's father Ghayasuddin Tughlaq was originally a slave who had attained the throne of Delhi by his bravery and loyalty. Thus Tughlaq like Jones came from a slave family. Muhammad himself accepts it : "I know all about slaves. My Grandfather was one and he became a king". (Tughlaq: 21)

Jones and Tughlaq both are obsessed with power and covet god head. Tughlaq revealing his political aspirations telle Imam-ud-din, the priest:

Muhammad: No one can go far on his knees. I have a long way to go, I can't afford to crawl – I have to gallop.

Imam-ud-din: And you will do it without the Kuran to guide you? Beware, Sultan, you are trying to become another God. It's sin worse than parricide. (Tughlaq: 20-21)

In **Emperor Jones**, as play begins, Jones, attired in his gaudy emperor's costume is boasting to Smithers, his cockney helper, of his rise to power: "From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some!" (The Plays: 177). The record has been one of violence and trickery, murder and cheating, but Jones has arrived. A Pullman porter who has made good his escape, Jones runs the emperor show not for power and glory , but for pelf money. He lives by the big lie and makes a fetish of his freedom from erstwhile bondage and of his borrowed success ethic:

Smithers: And I bet you got yet pile o; money 'id some safe place.

Jones: I sho' has ! And it's in a foreign bank where no pusson don't ever git it out.... (The Plays: 177)

Girish Karnad is India's leading playwright and one of the most outstanding practitioners of performing arts today. Karnad's achievement as a playwright has received international recognition. His journey from '**Yayati**' to '**The Fire and the Rain**' holds a mirror to the very evolution of Indian

theatre during nearly four decades. K. Chandrashakhar writes in his article “Before the Curtain Call” published in The Hindu, “The likes of Girish Karnad enable us to pretend that there is such a thing as a truly “Indian” theatre which can be true to its traditions and at the same time responsive to contemporary concerns.: (Chandrasekhar : XV)

Tughlaq which was published in Kannada in 1974, is Girish Karnad’s second play. The play 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. The play was also translated in German and Hungarian languages. The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle, and uses dramatic conventions like the comic pair, Azis and Aazam (the Akara and Makara of Natak performances), to which theatre audiences responded readily.

Like Jones, Tughlaq too wanted power but not to amass wealth but to get his name carved in gold in the history of the world. He tells his mother in a poetic speech:

Muhammad: I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest three in the world, and call out to my people: ... Come, ... History is ours to play with – ours now! Let’s be the light and cover the earth with greenery...” (Tughlaq:10)

Both Jones and Tughlaq are imaginative and excellent actors, shrewd and crafty politicians and expert in deception. Muhammad’s step mother tells him” “I can’t ask a simple question without your giving a royal performance ...” (Tughlaq : 11). Similarly Jones too is a good actor. He himself accepts: “Dey wants de big circus show for their money. I gives it to ‘em, an’ I gits de money.....: (The Plays:177). In order to fulfill their aspirations and establish

their supremacy both Jones and Tughlaq resort to political games and exploitation of their subjects.

Both dramatists deftly project the paradoxes and dualities in the complex personalities of their respective protagonists - Jones and Tughlaq. Tughlaq is at once an idealist and a schemer, a humanist and a tyrant who has no qualms in killing even his own people. The murders, he believes, have not been futile as they have given him what he wanted – “power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself”. (Tughlaq : 66). As a split personality between two selves – his higher ;self and selfish ‘self, Muhammad swings like a pendulum of a clock. Barani sees the visionary in Muhammad and tells him:

You are a learned man, Your Majesty, you are known the world over for your knowledge of philosophy and poetry... That’s where you belong, Your Majesty, in the company of learned men. Not in the market of corpses. (Tughlaq : 55)

Barani, the scholarly-historian and Najib the shrewd politician, represent the two opposite selves of the Sultan. Aziz, who is shrewd, wise, intelligent, pragmatic and utilitarian, is a notorious cheat who represents all those who take unlawful advantage of Tughlaq’s idealism. In **Emperor Jones** too, Smithers and the natives represent two opposite selves or consciousnesses of Jones - outer imperial self and the inner primitive self respectively.

Tughlaq’s attempt to levy heavy taxes on the poor farmers, his far sighted but impractical orders to change the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, the killing of Shiab-ud-din and Maula Immam-ud-din, his cruel punishment of his stepmother because she was responsible for the killing of Vizier Nazib are all instances of the torturous policies he adopted in pursuit of his ideals. The atrocities increase beyond limit and there is rebellion in the state. All policies of Tughlaq fail and all his dreams go awry. His people have given

him the title of ‘Mad Muhammad’ and ‘Muhammad, the tyrant’. In a state of anguish and nervousness, Muhammad prays to God:

God in Heaven, please help me. Please don't let go of my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don't know how much of it is mine and how much of others. 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. Cover me with Your Infinite Mercy..." (Tughlaq: 67)

Sultan, who had passed orders allowing no one to pray is found praying and has almost started losing his balance. Jones too, in the hour of his ruin, is found remembering the Lord : "I se skeered. Oh, Lawd, prectect dis sinner!" Lawd, save me! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer| (The Plays : 200,202)

Tughlaq in a state of torment and despair moves in the ‘garden of roses’ which has become a storehouse for the counterfeit copper coins. He cannot even look into the mirror for the fear of seeing in it the haunts of those whom he has cruelly murdered. However, Jone's guilty conscience actually makes him see the haunts of those whom he had murdered in the past – for instance the ghost of Jess and the guard.

When Tughlaq's idealism and administrative reforms are completely frustrated and disillusioned, he shouts in grief:

I am teetering on the brink of madness Barani, but the madness of God still eludes me. And why should I deserve that madness? I have condemned my mother to death and I'm not even sure she was guilty of the crime... (Tughlaq:68)

Tughlaq's tormented heart is tired and it seeks rest: "I am suddenly feeling tired. And sleepy. For five years sleep has avoided me and now suddenly it's coming back.... (Tughlaq : 85)

Sultan's fall is complete. The nemesis is over. The pursuit of power and glory has destroyed Muhammad. The corrupting forces have won but Tughlaq like a true tragic hero remains faithful to his ideal till the end. He is a fighter and he denies Barani's advice to quit:

Muhammad : I have often thought of that myself – to give up this futile sea-saw struggle and go to Mecca. Sit there by the Kabba and search for the peace which Daulatabad hasn't given me. What bilss! But it isn't that easy. It isn't as easy as leaving the patient in the wilderness because there is no cure for his disease. (Tughlaq: 55-56).

Jones tragic journey follows the course similar to that of Tughlaq. Like Tughlaq, Jones has gone too far in his exploitation of the natives; they are at the point of rebellion – have, in fact, already planned to depose the "emperor" and he must flee for his life; Jones has convinced the native, however, that only a silver bullet can kill him (thinking that they would hardly be able to find silver on the island) and has gorged a silver bullet for himself – the sixth, and last, in his gun – in case he must kill himself before the natives get to him. In doing so, Jones has already given the natives the real key to his destruction – the self and its pride: "I tell'em dat's cause I'm de on'y man in de world big enuff to git me.: (The plays : 179)

Nowhere in O'Neill's work is his theatrical skill more evident than in Jone's flight through the jungle to the drumbeat which begins at normal pulse rhythm, growing faster and faster, louder and louder. As Jones proceeds, lost in the forest he had thought he knew so well, he is confronted with one ghost after another from his past, each representing an aspect of himself of a hidden motive for his past action, and each of which can be dispelled only by his firing one of his six precious bullets. First appear his 'little formless

fears,” then his guilt, in two visions – the ghost of the Negro, Jeff, for whose murder in a gambling fight he was sent to prison, and the ghost of the guard whom he killed in his escape from prison. These three episodes, stemming from fear and guilt, come from Jones’s “Personal unconscious”, while the three following ones emerge from his ‘collective unconscious’.

He must fire his fourth and fifth bullets to dispel his vision of a slave auctioneer who he thinks is about to sell him from the block. By this time Jones is naked and exhausted; he lies down to rest and is surrounded by a group of savages – his ancestors – whose voices, beginning with a low, melancholy murmur, rise in a desperate wail which Jones first tries to shut from his ears, then joins, his voice rising above the other. The scene of this final vision is laid at stone altar near a tree – sexual as well as religious symbols. Jones has shed the last layer of his civilized outward self and has gone back to the dark, primitive world of the unconscious, where physical and spiritual birth are one. When he has thrown himself at the foot of the alter to pray, he realizes that he has returned to the clearing where he entered the forest; he is back where his journey began.

The play might have ended here, for Jones is, in effect, dead; but O’Neil adds a final scene, important for the portrayal of Jones as a tragic hero who died as he lived, with a kind of grandeur, false though it was. The integration had cost Jones everything, but he got what he wanted; and as Smithers says in the closing lines of the play, “Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the ‘eight o’syle, any, ow!” (The Plays: 204)

The Silver bullet is symbolic of Jones’ pride and emperorhood and a temporary defence from his primitive self. In the words of Dr. D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu in his book Eugene O’Neill: A Study,

“The magic silver bullet, by which alone he (Jones) must die, is at once his talisman and his cross, an emblem of his truce with the uncertain transition from servitude to self mastery.” (Raghavacharylu: 55)

Doris Falk rightly observes:

“In his use of symbols in the Emperor Jones, O ‘Neill’ acknowledges as do most modern authors, the validity of Jung’s theory that great literature strikes a responsive chord in all men because its central metaphors can be traced to archetypal images buried in the unconscious mind of humanity.” (Falk : 70)

As a dramatic craftsman Karnad evolved a dramatic technique which is so flexible that it changes according to the requirements of his plots. The plot of **Tuglaq** is based on history and it has all essentials of a good historical play. The play is divided into thirteen scenes. The action of the play takes place first of all in Delhi in the year 1327, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad, and lastly in and around the fort in Daulatabad five years later.

In **Tughlaq** events and incidents which originate from the paradoxical nature of the protagonist Tughlaq and his opponents, have been organized into an artistic whole. The devices of parallelism and contrasts have been vividly employed in the play. The plot of **Tughlaq** is based on opposites and paradoxes. Interigues, coherently brought under the discipline of art, form its main basis. The dramatist introduces tension and conflict, which are essential for plot in the very beginning and all events and actions of characters intensify conflict until it reaches climax and resolves into denouement.

Tughlaq is rightly considered a piece of theatre “par excellence”. Karnad experiments with a variety of theatrical techniques to create visual and auditory images, thereby producing the desired dramatic effect on the stage. By employing a variety of theatrical devices – spectacle, quick shift of scenes, blackout – he tries to control the movement of the play and its impact on the audience. Spectacle refers to all the visual aspects of production, scenery, lighting, costume, make-up, and the business and the movement of

the actors. In the very beginning of the play, the public announcer announces the judgment of the Chief Justice in favour of Vishnu Prasad followed by a loud discussion among a large number of people. The very appearance of Tughlaq in his striking costume adds a lot to the elements of spectacle in the play. The announcement pertaining to the arrival of Sheikh Imam-ud-din enhances the visual appeal of the play. Muezzin's for prayer, the marching of the Amirs towards the throne of Tughlaq, the announcements made by the announcer about the shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, the call for the banning of prayer and the revival of it, the play of music and the anguish expressed by the common masses during the shift of the capital, are some of the elements of spectacle in Tughlaq that have come to assume an organic psychological role in the theatre that reinforce the meaning of the play. The dramatist has also vividly created the atmosphere of court intrigues, murder and bloodshed. In the opening scenes the atmosphere of conflict between the idealism and progressive attitude of the Sultan and the religious bigotry of orthodox Muslims has been recreated. Citizens who have been suffering and starving highlight poverty and destitution in Tughlaq's reign.

Like O'Neill, Karnad has also employed the techniques of symbolism to make his play powerful on the stage. One finds four major symbols in the play. They are prayer, sleep, the game of chess and the rose. Like Tom Jones, prayer is used as leit-motif in Tughlaq. At the micro level prayer symbolizes the religious idealism of Tughlaq, and at the macro level it reflects man's unconscious need for divine protection and guidance in an hour of anguish. Tughlaq killed his father at prayer time, the Muslim Amirs, Sheikhs, etc. conspire to murder Tughlaq at prayer time. The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. U. S. Anantha Murthy in the "Introduction" to Tughlaq rightly says: "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. The whole episode is ironic." (Ananthan Murthy : IX)

‘Sleep’ on one level represents the need for rest in man’s life, at the macro level it becomes symbolic of peace which eludes man often. The rose is a symbol of the aesthetic and poetic susceptibilities of Tughlaq. It later on becomes a symbol of the withering away of all the dreams and the ideals of Tughlaq. The chess suggests duality in Tughlaq’s nature. As skilled chess player he uses his political opponents as pawns on the chessboard of politics.

O’Neill has made a fabulous use of the flash back technique in his play. The past and present are mixed in the consciousness of Jones. Jones remembers the scenes from his slave past which symbolize his personal and collective unconscious self. The vision of the prison chain gang, the slave auction and the slave ship are the remembrances of Jone’s past experience.

Karnad too has used flashback technique to give us glimpses of Tughlaq’s youthful idealism, juxtaposing it with his present alienation. In an idyllic scene on the ramparts of Daulatabad, Tughlaq shares his youthful aspirations with a young guard: “I was twenty one when I came to Daulatabad first, and built this fort. I supervised the placing of every brick in it and I said to myself, one day I shall build my own history like this, brick by brick”. (Tughlaq : 53).

The study of the **The Emperor Jones** and **Tughlaq** reiterates the assumption that tragedy presents man as living under certain forces or power which affects his wordly action. Both Tughlaq and Jones existed in their own idealistic and illusory world which is shattered in their confrontation with the forces outside and inside them. In case of Tughlaq the conflict is between the ‘fate’ and his pride and ambition, in case of Jones it is between his conscious ego and his unconscious ego and biological past. Both tragic plays illustrate how the hero usurps the prerogatives of Godhead and brings down upon himself the crushing Nemesis of reality, before which the grand illusion he has built, crumbles to dust and ashes.

Charles Glicksberg's view as recorded in his book Tragic Vision in the Twentieth Century Literature aptly reflects the vision of O'Neill and Karnad on man's tragic fight with the powers of darkness:

It is always man who is the hero, man who fights against the beleaguering and ultimately victorious powers of darkness. He fights in order to ensure the triumph of life over death, and though he is overcome, he reveals his human greatness in the unequal struggle.

(Glicksberg:20)

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