



Cover Page



## **BETWEEN IDEALISM AND POLITICAL NECESSITY: A MACHIAVELLIAN READING OF GIRISH KARNAD'S *TUGHLAQ***

**Ayush A. Prajapati**

Research Scholar, Department of English, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat

### **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is on analysing *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad through the political philosophy given by Niccolò Machiavelli. The study points out how Girish Karnad portrays Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq as an idealistic ruler and how his political goals push him towards manipulation and harsh methods of governance. There is a conflict between morality and political necessity which shows how Tughlaq's dream of creating harmonious society ends in a political and a personal failure. By analysing Tughlaq's decisions and political strategies, the paper explores significant Machiavellian concepts such as power, fear and statecraft. The research further examines how the question of leadership and human nature remains relevant even today through the Machiavellian perspectives.

**Keyword:** Machiavelli, Machiavellianism, Statecraft, Kingship, Power, Leadership, Political Philosophy, Tughlaq, Girish Karnad, Governance.

### **Introduction**

This paper focuses on the major philosophical perspectives that revolves around the kings and their statecraft through Machiavellian interpretation of the play *Tughlaq*. Girish Karnad's technique of covering all aspects such as religion, history and politics in his literary work enables a separate dimension for critics willing to analyse Machiavellian theories. Karnad's selection of a fourteenth century ruler of Delhi, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, as a protagonist serves as the best example to apply Machiavellian policies.

The political, emotional, visionary and strategical obstacles which Tughlaq encounters in his role as the king can be examined through the political and strategical works of Niccolò Machiavelli. One of the most highlighting arguments in his works is that a leader must balance morality with cruelty to maintain power, peace stability and fear. Tughlaq's tragic failure as a leader is witnessed when his visions of innovative reforms, unifying religious diversities and a society based on equal justice, starts collapsing. Tughlaq's visionary drawbacks in political domain forced him to set his hands on Machiavelli's harsh tactics such as manipulation, deceit, and violence in order to expand dominance.

Tughlaq's tragic downfall is a symbolic reflection of the dilemma that every ruler must fundamentally face. whether to stay honest to moral standards, even if it means risking failure, or to compromise them for the sake of political stability remains complicated to answer. This conflict between idealism and pragmatism is central attraction of the play where Tughlaq's psychological and political state of being defines his diplomatic skills. His idealistic expectations come to ground when his turn to Machiavellianism alienates his supporters and leads to widespread instability.

When the parallels are drawn between literature and philosophy, the complexities of the human nature start revealing themselves, illustrating the struggle that lies in the periphery of the kingship. Tughlaq's label as a 'mad king' is his own underlying desire to rule with moral values that contrast with Machiavellian demands from the king. Out of several personalities of Tughlaq, the one that is most exceptional is his fierce and ruthless image. This nature, according to Machiavelli, is more appropriate compared to other qualities of the king. However, overstretching these qualities rather becomes harmful to the throne as it can widespread hatred. Henceforth, the princes must decide the extents of terror and fear.

Additionally, the examination, also critically comments on the role of history that shaped what Machiavellian theories are today. The key argument of the paper also illustrates that not only the kings but the members in the periphery of the throne can also play a vital character in the long-term success of the state. The fourteen-century historical protagonist



Cover Page



2 2 7 7 - 7 8 8 1



simultaneously also remarks the modern age with post-colonial plight of India. Arguments discussed in the paper also demonstrates that Machiavelli and his philosophies are not limited to any particular time and era but are universal. Thus, with reference to the philosophical approaches, this research will cover multiple aspects of the princes and the literature written around them.

### A Visionary Failure with Machiavellian Aspect

The principality acquired by Tughlaq in the Asian land was the result of hereditary. The controversial accusation whether Tughlaq killed his own father to get the throne is a secondary matter of discussion. The primary concern is that the state is inherited. Such states are comparatively easier to rule according to Machiavelli as he says in *The Prince*,

I say at once there are fewer difficulties in holding hereditary states, and those long accustomed to the family of their prince, than new ones; for it is sufficient only not to transgress the customs of his ancestors, and to deal prudently with circumstances as they arise, for a prince of average powers to maintain himself in his state, unless he be deprived of it by some extraordinary and excessive force; and if he should be so deprived of it, whenever anything sinister happens to the usurper, he will regain it (5).

Having mentioned this, it can be said that Tughlaq could have become a successful and beloved prince in his time for the law and orders were not unusual for the subjects. The government established by his predecessors had become a habit for the people at psychological and physical level. Being the most learned king in the time he lived, undoubtedly Tughlaq had visionary changes to implement in the system for the betterment of his subjects. However, certain obstacles occurred when the prince aimed to introduce irresolute changes in the system. This caused Tughlaq to be labelled a 'mad king'. Though visionary skills are fundamentally required in a king, it may not always be fruitful.

In this light, it is mandatory to shed a light on the reasons why Muhammad bin Tughlaq, despite inheriting a stable empire, is often characterized an unsuccessful ruler. Tughlaq had numerous visionary policies to strengthen his principality such as "the moving of his capital from Delhi, which was close to the borders of his empire, to Daulatabad, which was at its centre..., and the substitution of copper currency for gold and silver coins" (Karnad xi). Yet, these vibrant strategies failed due to poor execution and misjudgement of circumstances. The mass relocation caused immense hardship for his very subjects and disordered his very own administration. This is supported by Karnad as he says about the march of Tughlaq that the policies "collapsed disastrously, landing his kingdom in chaos, because of the intemperate haste with which they were introduced and the extreme cruelty with which they were enforced" (xi).

Machiavelli argued that in hereditary principalities, rulers should focus on maintaining the established traditions and systems of their ancestors. However, while doing this, major changes or reforms in the principality can disrupt this stability and invite unexpected troubles to the prince. Machiavelli says, "in the antiquity and duration of his rule the memories and motives that make for change are lost, for one change always leaves the tothing for another" (6). Hence, the result is the chain of changes that can shift the entire map of the reign. It is evident that the subjects in *Tughlaq* were not expecting any changes in the living conditions. Thus, the desire for changes should have been weakened, because with each change in leadership, people would have been reminded of the instability and problems that come with it. Essentially, once things have been the same for a long time, the people are less likely to want to disrupt the situation again, as each change leaves a desire for even more changes, which they may not want to risk.

The above argument can be distinctly discussed from the mouth pieces of subjects of the new prince, Muhammad. The opening conversation of the play between a Young Man and an Old Man introduces about their plight in living trouble free life. The changes in the state are appreciated less but are criticized more by inhabitants. An Old Man opens play with, "God, what's this country coming to!" (Karnad 1). It is possible to say that Karnad was more interested in highlighting the distrust of people towards their ruler rather than introducing the protagonist of the play. The implementation of the reassembled justice system is one such example of the discomfort of the citizens.



Cover Page



2 2 7 7 - 7 8 8 1



This draws a parallel between younger and older generations of the citizens. Naturally, the perspectives of Young Man differ from that of an Old Man as the young ones are only accustomed to the ruling style of the contemporary prince. Whereas an old generation of inhabitants like an Old Man find the adjustments in the system ridiculous as they have witnessed the customs of the previous princes also. Old citizens' reactions towards the changes are rather pessimistic which is apparent from their statements such as, "What folly is this! May Heaven guide our Sultan" (Karnad 3).

The philosophy about the inherited state is more apparent in the reaction of a Third Man, "this is tyranny! Sheer tyranny! Move the capital to Daulatabad! Such things never happened in his father's days – may his soul rest in peace. Now he has got his father's throne, he isn't happy with that" (Karnad 4). While the Third Man's highly doubtful reaction is about the present king and about the will to remain unsettled to the new customs, the statement also touches upon the inhabitants' demands to previous way of living. Hence, it can be said that Sultan imposed futuristic changes irrespective of choices of subjects.

Just as Machiavelli demands princes to be visionary, Karnad did not fail to portray that. Muhammad remarks, "I have just solved the most famous problem in chess. Even al Adli and as-Sarakhi said it was insoluble" (Karnad 9). From this, it is apparent that Sultan is always into fixing the unfixable. However, his irresolute and self-righteous nature steps as a hurdle for him. Tughlaq's impatient way of acting without much thinking leads to the downfall for his strategies.

Bayapa Reddy remarks on the game of chess and comments on Karnad's ironical narrative techniques, "It also symbolizes a political game in which an ordinary washer man checkmates the most intelligent and clever politician. Through this symbolist technique, the playwright has succeeded in creating the right political atmosphere ..." (9). Furthermore, an ordinary washer man Aziz represents flaws in the political decisions of Tughlaq is a mockery to the policies of Sultan. The end of the play witnesses the release of Aziz even though he misused the flaws of the policies. When this is analysed through Machiavellian lens, it can be argued that the prince should never overlook any possible threat to the throne.

However, one can find in the play that Tughlaq releases his enemy over an unreasonable reason. When it was realized that Tughlaq's chess solution had a flaw within, he sets his enemy Ain-ul-Mulk free, giving him the Governance of Deccan. Tughlaq said, "I have solved the famous problem...he said: 'No, there's a flaw here.'...I had spent days on that wretched problem and he spots a flaw within a half of minute. I had to forgive him" (Karnad 27-8).

Accordingly, one can readily conclude that it was Tughlaq who invited tragedy to his own feet by being a representative figure of a visionary catastrophe. Consequently, so far as Tughlaq's inherited principality is concerned, the steps which he chose to become an idealistic and futuristic ruler does not fit into the Machiavellian framework of the prince philosophy.

### Absence of Humanism

Renaissance in Italy stretched the means of shrewd and cunning policies of medieval ages to sensible psychological attempts of humanism. Political agendas of the dark ages showed the ruthless underlying layers of the monarchy. The similar approach with dark shades of policies is perpetual in the critical findings of the Machiavellian philosophies. Felix Gilbert draws a parallel between the society before and after French invasion and examines the absence of humanism in Machiavellian philosophies. The similar analogy if formed between the 14th and 20th century India with political orientation in Karnad's *Tughlaq*. Karnad's own comment on his play *Tughlaq* highlights the post-colonial plight of India with political darkness.

Tughlaq' history was...contemporary. Here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi...and one of the greatest failures also.... This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty...and I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction – the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel (Ananthamurthy xxvi).



Cover Page



Machiavelli, in his works, moves away from the idea that rulers should have idealized human qualities like kindness, morality, or justice. Instead, his focus is on what works in the real and practical world, even if the approaches seem harsh or immoral. “All trace of the idealized human personality as such vanished from Machiavelli’s portrait of the prince, and its place was taken by the super personal conception of reasons of state” (Gilbert 470). Resultant, what we are left with is a controversial set of philosophies which overlooked the humanist practices in the works of Machiavelli.

Even in the play by Karnad, Tughlaq’s treatment of human ethics, which marginalizes their values, demands a dedicated discussion on Machiavellian approaches that contrast with the ideals of the Renaissance. This perspective of the Machiavellian philosophies not only positions moral interests as subordinate to the authority of the prince but also emphasizes the cruel means by which the prince holds fear. Though Tughlaq, in his role as a tough leader, followed approaches similar to those suggested by Machiavelli, his downfall highlights the neglect of humanity and morality, while simultaneously reflecting the consequences of ruthlessness and the nuances of unethical politics.

Although cruelty and terror were repeatedly enforced by Muhammad in his reign, the political stability rebounded as he overstepped the boundaries of hatred. Besides, Machiavelli argues that “It is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both” (60). and further adds, “Nevertheless, a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated” (60). With this preference in attention, however, it can be analysed that the drawback of being harsh and merciless is that it alienates subjects, leading to hatred and widespread dislike toward the king.

Tughlaq’s motives and actions, aimed at creating an ideal image of a ruler, ultimately painted him as a hated prince rather than a loved or feared one. The imposed march from Delhi to Daulatabad and stubborn financial decisions causing famine during his ruling time are such incidents from the play that substantiate consequences of inhuman inclinations. Resuming public prayer after five-year ban caused subjects to react rather pessimistically, triggering to widespread hatred for the king.

A striking example is when one of the citizens describes Tughlaq’s inhuman nature, saying that “the roads are lined with skeletons. A man starved to death right in front his eyes” (Karnad 70). Therefore, the above presented perspective defines the dispute that hatred in the heart of subjects is one such emotion that the prince must be fearful of during his reign.

Girish Karnad goes the extra mile for portraying the sophisticated yet inhuman ways of ruling during the fourteenth century. In his narrative technique, Karnad attempts to expand the horizon of human limitations by illustrating the concept of everlasting desires. Mohammad embodies a contrast between empathy and ruthlessness. His conversation with his Stepmother symbolizes the extent to which one can attempt to surpass human limitations. Tughlaq tries to connect emotionally with her saying that, “I pray to Almighty to save me from sleep...I have to worry about tomorrow but it’s only when the night falls, I can step beyond all that” (Karnad 10).

His insomnia reflects his desire to transcend these limits, while keeping his mother emotionally close to him signifies the inherent human limitations. Stepmother also empathises with him replying that, “I want nothing for myself. You are my life, Muhammad” (Karnad 64). An emotional attachment with the mother exemplifies the idea of inevitable human nature. This discussion significantly points out that if Sultan himself cannot manage to live without fundamental essence of human life, how can his subjects be expected to do otherwise?

The irony is presented by Karnad through one of the young subjects, “Now you pray five times a day because that’s the law and if you break it, you’ll have the officers in your neck” (Karnad 2). This remark significantly highlights the cruel ways by which citizens are forced to live in Tughlaq’s reign. While it is beneficial to follow Machiavellian tactics, it is also crucial to adapt and modify his philosophies according to the needs of the time in which the prince rules. Tughlaq’s merciless means of governing demonstrates his lack of adaptations in the statecraft.



Cover Page



2 2 7 7 - 7 8 8 1



The contrast which is analysed in Machiavelli's time and the feature of renaissance signifies the evergreen necessity of political sharpness and superiority of brutal demands for leading the state. However, the lack of humanity in both Karnad's *Tughlaq* and Machiavelli's *The Prince* can be summed up with a remark that excess in inhuman ways of ruling, if not carried out adaptively, works cynically rather than helping the ruler. The examples presented by Karnad undoubtedly incarnates Tughlaq with as a cruel prince while his unnatural desire of surpassing the human boundaries caused him to be discussed as a hated prince.

### Political Insights in Tughlaq

Machiavelli's inclination towards the diplomatic statecraft signifies the quality which no king can afford to overlook. A ruthless leader might prioritize power and success over the well-being of others, acting without mercy or kindness. This contrasts with Machiavelli's teachings in *The Prince*, as being consistently cruel cannot benefit a king in the long term. Machiavelli emphasizes that a leader, "must know how to use wisely the natures of the beast and the man" (62). His views reflect the complexities of political life, where moral decisions often conflict with practical necessities. To handle these challenges, a leader needs to make clear decisions and understand how power changes over time. Being able to adapt to political changes while staying in charge is an important part of good leadership.

It is evident that Tughlaq may fail as a visionary leader, but his political strategies set a remarkable standard for princes of the next generation. His reign was marked by bold, innovative ideas, such as shifting the capital and making significant changes in the religious practices, which showed his willingness to think beyond traditional governance. His failure lay not in his ambitious innovations, it was because he overlooked the unpredictable human behaviour and social challenges that weakened his reforms.

Tughlaq's strengths and flaws in the political domain echoes the advises given in *The Prince* that, "It is therefore necessary to be a fox in order to recognize the traps and a lion in order to frighten the wolves" (Machiavelli 62). Tughlaq's political strengths reflect Machiavelli's advice to be both cunning and forceful. Like the fox, he recognized the complexities and dangers of his reign, attempting bold strategies to outsmart opposition. However, his downfall came from failing to balance this with the lion's strength, as his ruthless actions ultimately alienated the people he needed to rule effectively.

Karnad provides several instances in the play where the argument discussed above is substantiated within a political context. Najib's explanation of Ain-ul-Mulk's treason against Tughlaq highlights both the lion and the fox-like qualities in Tughlaq's nature.

When you came to the throne, there was anarchy in Avadh and made Ain-ul-Mulk the Governor there. He crushed the rebels, restored law and order, and the people in Avadh adore him.... Then suddenly he gets your letter making him the Governor of the Deccan, asking him to leave immediately. Is it surprizing he should suspect a knife in his back? (Karnad 15).

Tughlaq's lack of shrewd political vision is reflected in his lion-like nature, where he relies on fear and aggression. However, his fox-like nature is revealed later in the scene, where he cleverly handles his enemy through emotional and social manipulation.

Lack of sharpness in political domain can often offend the subjects to go against the current ruling authority. "For men change their rulers willingly, hoping to better themselves, and this hope induces them to take up arms against him who rules" (Machiavelli 6). Shaikh Imam-ud-din, representing the collective frustration of the people, believes that replacing Tughlaq might restore justice and bring prosperity to the state. Tughlaq, with his fox-like cunning nature, manipulates the Shaikh's trust and uses him as a pawn, which leads to his tragic end. This episode illustrates how civilians' hopes for change can be exploited by those in power. Still the prince can use it to his advantage by outsmarting the civilians' mistrust with clever political tactics.



Cover Page



2 2 7 7 - 7 8 8 1



There are few encounters between the Sultan and the people he emotionally connects with, leaving the audience only to judge him as a leader while ignoring him as a human being. Karnad tackles the Machiavellian requirements very skilfully that the prince must appear neutral and pious. Access to Muhammad's emotional side is primarily controlled by his ministers, which allows critics to examine Tughlaq as a Machiavellian leader. As a result, the true nature of leadership and power demands emotional sacrifices, leaving kings preoccupied with constant political threats and strategies.

When Tughlaq as a king is analysed with this lens, his portrayal as a pious figure in the eyes of his subjects demonstrates the idea that, "the vulgar are always taken by what a thing seems to be and by what comes of it; and in the world there are only the vulgar" (Machiavelli 64). However, while a pious image is significant for the king, Tughlaq's meeting with Imam-ud-din presents an amalgamation of shrewd politics and religious hypocrisy.

Karnad begins Tughlaq's meeting with the Shaikh with the words, "Do you think I would have gone to the trouble of arranging this meeting if I didn't want my people to hear you? I don't want my people to be dumb cattle, Sheikhsahib, and I do not claim to be omniscient myself. I am quite willing to learn from you" (Karnad 19). When the statement is critically scrutinized, it can be argued that Tughlaq had the desire to implement idealist and secular changes during his reign. His action contrasts when the subjects are threatened by witnessing the conversation. The political sharpness presented in this episode can be used to interpret that Tughlaq could not afford to lose his public image.

Taha Khalif Salim, in his thesis, criticizes Machiavelli, arguing that he "teaches the prince how to act far from religion...focusing that religion is no more than a tool in the hand of politicians used to direct people to obey laws" (2). Similarly, Tughlaq also used religion for manipulative purposes. The changes in prayer and the invitation to Ghiyas-ud-din to resume public prayers are examples where Tughlaq used religion as a political tool to influence people. Tughlaq remarks, "I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being" (Karnad 2). reflects his surprising equal treatment of non-Islamic subjects, a practice never followed by his predecessors. However, this approach was ultimately an attempt to secure political dominance.

Therefore, politics and religion remain inseparable in Machiavellian frameworks as he demands religion to be used as a political tool. Similarly, Tughlaq's actions reflect Karnad's excellence in executing the historical play with the most relatable contemporary context. Through Tughlaq, Karnad illustrates the blurry lines between faith and politics, representing how the manipulation of religion serves to maintain power.

### **Existential Parallels in The Period of Karnad and Machiavelli**

Furthermore, Machiavelli's subordinate view of religion reflects the time of renaissance when Christian churches underwent significant reforms. For this period particularly, Khalif Salim adds, "According to the Catholic thinkers, many chapters of this book deny the moral and religious basis of establishing governments and that is why Machiavelli has been accused to be anti-Christian and, as a result, all his books are placed in the index of the forbidden books of the Catholic Church" (2).

Thus, for the readers, it is not unusual to find Machiavelli's disregard for religion. He lived in an era where humanism and the competitions in its periphery widespread a threat to the human existence. In this context, existential questions about meaning and purpose became important as people struggled to find their place in a changing world. Machiavelli connects the key features of political statecraft with existential struggle of the princes. This highlights that quest for power often collapse with moral and spiritual concerns.

Similarly, the twentieth century, especially in India, faced an existential crisis due to colonialism and indirect participation in world wars. In such circumstances, one of the most valuable aspects to human life is overlooked over an aim of pursuing a stable life. Karnad's incorporation of existentialism as a key aspect of the play connects fourteenth-century India with post-colonial India. The audience encounters existential questions when the citizens remark, "who wants to pray now?... There's no food. Food is only in the palace. It's prayers for us. ...Why do they need prayer?" (Karnad 70-1).



Cover Page



P. Bayapa Reddy cleverly remarks, “At the micro level, prayer symbolizes the religious idealism of Tughlaq. At the macro level, it connects man’s unconscious need for divine protection and guidance in an hour of anguish” (9). When Reddy’s comment is examined with the lens of existentialism, it can be argued that high moral standards prayers are reduced to mockery reflecting the uselessness of trying to find divine help in a chaotic world filled with suffering. In this context, prayer shifts from being a true connection with the Almighty to a practice that holds no true value.

However, the fears of existence are not only limited to the subjects; the plight also victimizes Muhammad. Tughlaq’s reign illustrates his failure as leader which leaves both him and his subjects in a state where they are unable to make life meaningful. The most striking example of existentialism in *Tughlaq* occurs when the audience encounter Muhammad’s monologue,

I said to myself, one day I shall build my own history like this, brick by brick....Look at me. I have searched for that moment since then and here I am still searching for it.... Another twenty years and you’ll be as old as me. I might be lying under those woods there by then. Do you think you will remember then? (Karnad 54).

Both Machiavelli and Karnad highlight the human struggle to find meaning in a world where ideals, religion, and power are often used to shape history where true satisfaction remains unachieved. Machiavelli’s suggestion that a king must find their own way through chaos and uncertainty contrasts with Karnad’s *Tughlaq* where a king is unable to fight for his own existence.

Chaos in the governance in Machiavelli’s life and his unfortunate imprisonment might be one on the reasons why he struggled to make life meaningful, at least of Medici prince, if not his own. Quentin Skinner, in his work *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction*, examines the existential struggle of Machiavelli in political orientation. The book discusses that “As soon as he came out of prison Machiavelli began scheming to recommend himself to the city’s new authorities” (Skinner 33). Moreover, Skinner adds, “Machiavelli’s main concern, however, was of course to make it clear to the Medici that he was a man worth employing, an expert whom it would be foolish to overlook” (35). Hence, the personal quest for struggle can be used to scrutinize existential bend in Machiavellian philosophies.

Both Machiavelli and Karnad explore the complexities of power, morality, and the human condition within their respective historical contexts. Machiavelli’s approach to leadership reflects the existential dilemmas faced by the kings in times of political confusions. Similarly, Karnad’s portrayal of Tughlaq illustrates how the struggle for meaning and stability can lead to existential crises for both rulers and subjects.

### Historical references in the Machiavellian application of *Tughlaq*

Although political thought speaks about the organisation with authorities, it is always based upon history. Examination of the history surrounding a thinker or political leader can be utilized to gain insights into their motivations and the hideous implications of their policies. The history of the period plays a key role in shaping the political philosophy of a thinker. It could be argued that a political philosopher can be understood only within his historical context.

The historical connection between Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Karnad's *Tughlaq* enables critics to discover layers of meaning that might not have been possible otherwise. It is irresistible to not comment on the writings of Machiavelli and Karnad as both writers here belong to entirely different genres. The form and the structure of both the categories seem incomparable. However, what makes this analysis possible is the underlying essence of both texts.

One was outwardly dedicated to Italian royalty, while the other served as a referential point for the post-colonial Prime Minister of India. The shift of Western political philosophies, nearly five centuries later, into an Eastern context is the highlights the significant role history plays in shaping a leader. Mohd Sajid comments on Machiavelli’s works in parallel with history,



Cover Page



2 2 7 7 - 7 8 8 1



Although these works are the product of a certain historical time, but their greatness lies in the fact that they are timeless and can be utilised for the current times also. Their timelessness is due to the fact that it is not necessary that the things written about in a book by a political philosopher is written for the first time. It is the manner in which the writer writes them and expounds about them is what gives these texts their quality (24).

While non-political societies undergo constant changes, the political way of gaining power seems universal throughout all centuries. Leaders across different time and place have often engaged similar exercises to maintain authority and power in their reign. Having discussed this, Machiavellian strategies for statecraft does not limit themselves to the period of renaissance.

Furthermore, Karnad and Machiavelli both follow a similar narrative pattern by referring classical examples to convey their messages. A key feature of Machiavelli's writing is his frequent illustration of classical figures such as the Romans. One of the examples goes as "The Romans were brought into Greece by the Aetolians" (Machiavelli 11). Although the two texts belong to different time and category, Karnad's mention of classical thinkers in his historical play aligns with Machiavellian style. This similarity becomes clear when Tughlaq recalls, "read the Greeks – Sukrat who took poison..., Aflatoon who condemned poets..." (Karnad 21).

Mohd Sajid, in his thesis, remarks that Machiavelli's body of work are rooted within the horizon of the Renaissance, specifically dedicated to Italian princes. The argument focuses on the inherent relationship between philosophers' thoughts and the way society demands them to adapt accordingly. Sajid notes, "it is not possible to separate Plato from his Athenian realities. His ideas on education, classification of states was strongly influenced by what he saw in Athens and Sparta. Likewise, Machiavelli's entire corpus of work was based on the prevailing realities of his time which is known as Renaissance" (21).

The way Machiavelli modified his philosophies to provide a guide of statecraft to the Medici family, Karnad's *Tughlaq* also exhibits the requirements and adaptations according to the political authority of the twentieth century in India.

A bunch of similarities can be drawn from the character of Tughlaq and the Former Prime ministers of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. *The Prince* explains that once the throne has been inherited by the ruler, it is his political expertise that allow him to maintain peace while simultaneously dominating ruthlessly. One of the references that connects the ideal prince of Machiavelli, and the chaotic middle years of twentieth century India is Karnad's portrayal of Tughlaq.

Arpana mentions in *Historical Fictions and Postcolonial Representation: Reading Girish Karnad's Tughlaq*, that there is a significant amount of possibility that this text was dedicated to Indira Gandhi.

For the audience of the 1960s, Karnad's play expressed the disenchantment and cynicism that attended the end of the Nehru era (1947-64) in Indian politics. A decade later, the play appeared to be an uncannily accurate portrayal of the brilliant but authoritarian and opportunistic political style of Nehru's daughter and successor, Indira Gandhi (47).

Tughlaq and Indira Gandhi both had failed as a successor of their designation which they received from their fathers. The parallels drawn between Tughlaq and Indira Gandhi emphasize the significant argument that success in hereditary leadership is no longer guaranteed. This suggests that an outsider from royal bloodline is equally capable of becoming an exceptional leader, if trained accurately.

### Opportunists and Their Impact on Kingship

One aspect that Machiavelli does not address in his statecraft framework is the role played by opportunists within the kingdom. These individuals repeatedly exploit moments of political instability to gain their upward mobility in the state. Their presence in the kingdom should not be ignored by the prince as they can turn up as a possible threat to the king's



Cover Page



image and designation. They may often manipulate the laws passed down by the prince for their personal benefits. This gap in Machiavelli's analysis allows room to study how the effects of opportunist class might weaken the most powerful states.

Karnad's portrayal of the most hideous opportunist in the play is Ratansingh. He acts opposite to what he feels which is apparent when he says, "Carry on, sir. I'm here because Shihab's here; otherwise, I'm invisible" (Karnad 32). His presence in Tughlaq is significant as it not only causes the story shift dramatically but also affects the political stability in the nation. His act of exposing the treachery of the Amirs to the Sultan is the sole incident that justifies his label as an opportunist.

Another character, Aziz, in *Tughlaq* is the person who bends every new policy into an opportunity for him. In a way, this a comment made by Karnad on the opportunists, particularly those who know how to manipulate circumstances to their advantage. What Machiavelli missed to address specifically about kingship is presented by Karnad through the character of Aziz. He is the only character who perfectly understands the Sultan while simultaneously turns his mistakes into opportunities for his personal gain.

To sum up the argument it can be marked that, both Machiavelli and Karnad show the significant impact opportunists can have within a political framework. While Machiavelli overlooks this critical element, Karnad emphasizes it through the characters of Ratansingh and Aziz. Though Skinner, describing Machiavelli, comments that he "can only be characterized as 'a teacher of evil.'" (94), this contrasts with Karnad's portrayal of the opportunist section of the play, suggesting that this is something which cannot be overlooked.

## Conclusion

The play *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad explores the complex nature of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's rule, highlighting his visionary ideas and political failures through a Machiavellian lens. Despite inheriting a stable empire, Tughlaq's bold reforms, like moving the capital and introducing new currency, failed due to poor execution and neglect for the subjects' well-being. Machiavelli's *The Prince* advises rulers of hereditary states to maintain stability rather than initiate disruptive changes. Tughlaq's impatience and ambitious reforms led to widespread discontent, reflecting how idealism without practical wisdom can cause chaos.

Furthermore, Tughlaq's use of cruelty and manipulation, which are key elements in Machiavellian tactics, demonstrates how diplomatic dominance can be maintained through fear rather than love. However, Tughlaq's failure of holding balance between cruelty and cleverness alienated his subjects which caused him to become a hated prince. His use of religion as a political tool also mirrors Machiavelli's view of faith as a means of control. Ultimately, what makes Tughlaq a visionary but unsuccessful ruler is his failure that lies in his inability to adapt Machiavellian principles to the specific purpose of his reign.

Both Machiavelli and Karnad explore the complex relationship between power, religion, and human existence within their respective historical era. Machiavelli's works depicts the Renaissance with the existential dilemmas of rulers, suggesting they beyond a point, princes become unable make meaning in the political world. On the other hand, Karnad's *Tughlaq* portrays existential questions of modern India through the role of fourteenth century protagonist. Existential concerns strike the life of not only the subjects but the kings also.

While Machiavellian political philosophies ignore addressing the role of opportunists in statecraft, Karnad's play significantly portrays the influence of opportunistic individuals within a political system. Characters such as Aziz and Ratansingh manipulate political instability for upward mobility. Tughlaq's sleepless nights signifies his attempt to get above the human boundaries while his act of falling asleep the before the play ends signifies physical and psychological limitations of human beings.



Cover Page



Moreover, Tughlaq's attempts in seeking pleasure in the classical world of Aflatoon and Sukrat represents his sophisticated views, signifying metaphysical aspect while his designation demands him to remain practical, eliminating personal agendas from within. Through these parallels, it can be argued that both thinkers provide timeless insights into the nature of political power, the human condition, and the existential crises that rulers face when their political personality contrasts with emotional personality. The summation of research highlights the chaos when the king tries to come down from his designation to become a human being.

### Work Cited

1. Ananthamurthy, U.R. Introduction. *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad Oxford University Press, 1972.
2. Dharwadker, Arpana. "Historical Fictions and Postcolonial Representation: Reading Girish Karnad's Tughlaq." PMLA, Vol. 110, No. 1, Modern Language Association, 2013.
3. Gilbert, Felix. "The Humanist Concept of the Prince and the Prince of Machiavelli." *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 11, No. 4, University of Chicago Press, 1939.
4. Karnad, Girish. *Tughlaq*. Oxford University Press, 1972.
5. Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. Translated by Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa, Oxford University Press, 1984.
6. Reddy, P. Bayapa. "The Theatrical Representation of History." *Studies in Indian Writing: with a focus on Indian English Drama*. Prestige Publishing, New Delhi, 1990.
7. Sajid, Mohd. *Political Ideas of Kautilya and Machiavelli: A Comparative Study*, 2020.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/351946>
8. Salim, Taha Khalif. *Machiavelli's influence on the selected plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe*, 2012.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/96621>
9. Skinner, Quentin. *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 1981.