

Historical Play – Tughlaq

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Abstract: Girish Karnad's 'Tuglaq' is a classic in an Indo-Anglican drama. Karnad is one of the greatest living Indian dramatist writing in English. Tughlaq is a 1964 Indian Kannada Language play written by GrishKanad. The thirteen scene play is set during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. In 1970, it was enacted in English in Mumbai. Tughlaq is a historical play. It deals with the last five years (1327-1332 A.D.) of the troubled reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. The Sultan is known as the wisest fool in Indian History. Tughlaq was a visionary and an idealist as well as a crafty politician. There were three outstanding events in his career. First, the suspicion that he killed his father and brother in a fake accident. Secondly, he not only shifted the capital but also the entire population from Delhi to Daultabad. Thirdly he introduced copper coins and made them equivalent to the current silver dinars. Because of the dichotomy in his nature, he fell to pieces within twenty years.

Keywords: Indo-Anglian, Visionary, politician, dichotomy

Introduction:

Girish Karnad is a multifaceted genius who infused fresh life into Kannada drama by his blending of the indigenous and the occidental traditions. His plays like Yayati, Tughlaq and Hayavadana deal with Indian myths, legend and history but in a novel way, synthesizing the Indian and the Western dramatic idiom. Tughlaq was written originally in Kannada in 1964 and Karnad himself translated it into English in 1970. It is based largely on the historical accounts of the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq who reigned in Delhi in the fourteenth century. There are quite a few deviations from the conventionally acceptable accounts given in chronicles of the period but the play presents a largely well-connected and credible narration of the period. The imaginative and the fiction fit very well with factual and the historical.

Karnad relied on the accounts given by historians like Ishwari Prasad, Ziaud-Din Bharani in Tarikh-e-FiruzShahi, AlMarshi in Mashik-al-Absar, Ibn Battuta in Travels and Badoni in Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi besides others in a general manner. Karnad focused on the last five years of the reign of Tughlaq. He follows the conventional accounts in creating the atmosphere of mutual distrust, frustrated idealism, orthodox resistance to the Sultan's policies, general communal intolerance, unrest, sedition, corruption, famine and other natural calamities and the Sultan's want on cruelty and heartlessness. Not merely the circumstances but also the personalities of the major characters are in keeping with the historical account as currently available.

Tughlaq in Historical Play:

Historians speak unreservedly of Tughlaq's scholarship, religious tolerance and poetic gifts. According to the famous historian of Medieval India, Ishwari Prasad, Tughlaq was

“A lover of fine arts, a cultured scholar and an accomplished poet. He was equally at home in logic, astronomy, philosophy, mathematics and physical sciences ... He was well-versed in Aristotelian logic and philosophy, so that divines and logicians feared to argue with him.”

The play is a political allegory. It is the reinterpretation of Indian History in modern context. U.R.A. Murthy Comments;

“Another reason for 'Tughlaq' appeal to the Indian audiences is that it is a play of the sixties..... it reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehra era of idealism in the country.”

Karnad himself has said that Tughlaq was the most idealistic, the most intelligent King ever to come to the throne of Delhi and one of the greatest failure also within a span of twenty years. This capable man disintegrated. The play is the dramatized projection of Tughlaq's tortured soul. Both Tughlaq and his enemies appeared to be idealist. Yet in the pursuit of idealism, they do what is really the opposite. The whole is structured on these opposites-the ideal and the real, the divine inspiration and the deft intrigue. The Sultan shows his idealism by making prayer compulsory five times a day as ordained in the Koran. He has exempted the Hindus from the payment of 'jiziya'. But the Sultan is generally disliked by the people. They don't like his pose of impartiality between the Hindu's and Muslim's. They have also heard the gossip of his having murdered his father and brother. Tughlaq's scholarship makes him a visionary. Tughlaq proved to be one of the greatest failure in Indian history.

The shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daultabad was an important decision on the part of the Sultan historically and Karnad gives it matching importance in his account of the period in the play. Historically Tughlaq thought of the shift for reasons

of administrative convenience for his empire extended southwards and it could be better controlled from a base in the south rather than from Delhi which was on the periphery. In the play the Sultan does refer to some such reasoning when he explains to the people that Delhi is on the borders of his empire and therefore it is vulnerable to attack by enemy forces. The other reason the historians give for the changeover relates to the Sultan's awareness of the conspiring nobles – the Sheikhs, Amirs, Sayyids and others – in Delhi whom he wanted to weaken by shifting his capital to a distant place.

Historians describe the elaborate arrangements made by Tughlaq for Convenience of the people. Halting stations had been got constructed after a distance two miles or so all the way and court officers posted to render assistance to the migrating people. Karnad does refer to Aziz in such a role, even though he uses his position to make money. Historians suggest that no en mass migration took place. First the aristocracy – the Sultan's family, Amirs, Maliks, Ulemas etc. – shifted and then the ordinary populace. The Sultan is said to have liberally given over gifts to the people who came to Daultabad. But the play shows the Sultan taking recourse to repressive measures to force people to leave Delhi in order to teach them a lesson. It is thus he conveys his desire to Najib.

“I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living being in Delhi will leave for Daultabad within a fortnight. I was too soft. I can see that now. They'll understand only the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not whip of smoke rise from its chimneys but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.”

Karnad shows a Hindu man suffering greatly and in great distress. The play has sought to present the problems faced by the people in a highlighted, even exaggerated manner. Karnad does evoke the unpopularity earned by the Sultan by this move to shift the capital but he completely ignores the beneficial fallout of this decision. As another noted historian of the period, Prof. K.A. Nizami contends, **“The barriers which had separated the North from the South broke down and though the extension of administrative powers of the Delhi Sultanate into the Deccan did not prove successful, the extension of its cultural institutions did in fact succeed.”** Karnad obviously presents only one side of the picture to suit his fictional design.

Karnad has used a number of motifs and symbols to represent the contradictions of Tughlaq's personality. 'Prayer', 'Chess' and 'disguise' are the leading motifs of the play. Prayer is the leitmotiv of the whole drama. 'Tughlaq' is a drama of intrigues and counter intrigues. These intrigues reflect the contradictions in Tughlaq personality. Both Tughlaq and his opponents use 'prayer' as a political strategy. U.R.A. Murthy remarks, **“Prayer which is most dear to Tughlaq is vitiated (poisoned) by him as well as by his enemies. It is symbol of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very Source.”**

The whole episode is ironic. The Amirs, the Sayyids, Shihab-ud-Din and Sardar Ratan Singh conspire to murder Tughlaq at prayer. The use of prayer for murder reminds us what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father and brother. It involves Shihab-ud-din who is an idealist like Brutus. Shihab is himself betrayed by Ratan Singh who master minds the entire plan for murder for his own ends. The Sultan is mad with anger at the treachery of Shihab and kills him with his own hands. The external action of the play is the projection of Tughlaq's split personality. Ratan Singh throws light on his characters.

“I have never seen an honest scoundral like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt.”

The 'chess board' symbol has unique significance in the play. When we meet Tughlaq for the first time, he is shown bending over the chess board. Trying to solve a problem. The chess board symbol implies that Tughlaq manipulates his opponents as pawns on the chess board of politics. He very cleverly gets rid of Sheikh Imam-ud-din. The Sheikh resembles him closely. Tughlaq exploits this fact and persuades him to go as a messenger of peace to meet Ain-ul-mulk. Ain-ul-Mulk is the old friend of Tughlaq and has rebelled against him. Tughlaq gets Imam-ud-din killed and then wins over Ain-ul-mulk by making him governor of Avadh. Thus, Tughlaq out wits his two opponents in one move. 'Disguise' motif shows how Tughlaq's best intentions are exploited by Aziz-a muslim 'dhoobi'. He disguises himself as a Brahmin whose property has been confiscated. He wins a case against the State and is awarded compensation. This is a sad comment on the justice prevailing in the State. Later on Aziz disguises himself Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid after killing the holy man. It is ironic that even Tughlaq is taken in by the mistaken identity. The greatest irony is that this scoundral with the name of Aziz who has killed so many people is rewarded in the end.

The Sultan is spiritually lonely and is tortured from within, he is aware of the irony of his life. When Aziz comes in the guise of Ghiyas-ud-din as a holy messenger of peace to purify the land. Muhammad is a frustrated man and people call him 'mad' Muhammad. This frustration is made verse when news is brought that Nazib, his trusted vizier, has been murdered. He breaks down and prays:

“God, God in heaven, please help me. Please don't let go of my hand.....

I have no one but you,..... You..... You..... you”.

This scene reminds us of the prayer of Dr. Faustus for mercy at the time of death. In the end Tughlaq suffers mental break down. There is complete disintegration of the personality of the Sultan. He and his kingdom are in total chaos. The play is the object correlative of the Tughlaq's mental state.

Conclusion:

Tughlaq is a play revolving round a historical character rather than history. M.K. Naik, explaining this contention says that Karnad has used his material to project **“the curious contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan who was at once, a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devote and godless.”**

It is a story of intrigue and blood-shed. Najib, who is a politician has also been playing with pawns of flesh and blood in the chessboard of politics; but meets a tragic end. The Sultan has been shedding the blood if not only his opponents but also of common people to keep his held on power. Aazam and Aziz’s murder of Ghiyas-ud-din is nothing as compared to these conspiracies and plots – all is the dirty game of power politics.

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