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Reflection of political intrigue, betrayal and violence in Girish Karnad's Tughlaq

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Abstract

Girish Karnad is a contemporary Indian playwright who composed plays for four decades and explored relevant issues by using history, myth and folklore. His second play Tughlaq is a masterpiece in Indian English Drama and it was originally written in Kannada in 1964. Karnad confesses "I was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee, who latter produced it for the Theatre Group, Bombay." (Murthu: 142) Karnad was deeply impressed by Tughlaq' character and his political reign and he dared to write a classical play on his life for which Karnad studied deeply and adroitly the fact related to him. Karnad himself explains, "I started with Ishwari Prasad and then went on to all the contemporary material suddenly felt possessed. I felt the character was growing in front of me". Tughlaq is obviously a historical political allegory which exhibits contemporary political treachery, atrocity, corruption and bloodshed. So this paper will discuss the Tughlaq as a reflection of Political Intrigue, Betrayal and Violence in detail.

Keywords: Relevant, political, allegory, treachery, bloodshed

Introduction

Tughlaq mirrors the modern political mechanism. It is replete with conspiracy, massacre and moral bankruptcy from the very beginning to the end. Karnad presents human madness to gain a status in society. He shows how not only the people of upper rank but also the lower strive to gain power and position by using any means. He shows how people do not hesitate to hatch a plan against even their kith and keen in order to achieve their desired end. In Tughlaq, each and every character is whimsical, impulsive and ruthless. Not only male character but Step Mother also does not hang back to kill Najib. Her role is portrayed keeping in mind the vibe of present political system. Aziz, a pickpocket resembles the Sultan Tughlaq and his story runs parallel with Him. It is the skillful narrative technique of Karnad that demonstrates the same lust of two different strata of society king and pauper. Infact, "the play is more than a political allegory. It has an irreducible, puzzling quality which comes from the ambiguities of Tughlaq's character, the dominating character in the play. All the other characters are dramatized aspects of his complex personality." (Murthy: 144) Tughlaq like other princes wants to have power and position in his hand for which he intrigues to kill his father and brother at the time of prayer. When they were engaged in praying under a wooden pandal the elephant dashed it under which they are crushed but Sultan is found praying alone in a mosque. He usurps the throne of Delhi but as a result, he loses his hold on the people. Ulemas, Noblemen and Amirs became rebellious to him. They start creating obstacles on his way. Sultan tries his all best to gain his lost strength but in turn he faces all round revolt. Delhi is a Muslims populated state and Hindus are minority. Ulemas and Amirs' attitude towards Sultan always annoys him. So he now wants to get rid of them. He wants to lessen their power so that they may not dare to challenge him again and again. He declares "My beloved people, you have heard the judgment of the Kazi and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom- without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. May this moment burn light and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace- not just peace but a more purposeful life." (Karnad: 149)

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This step is taken to raise the feeling of unity in them and receive "Your support and cooperation." Just at the same time, he declares his plan to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. The crowd react in bewilderment. Sultan explains his logic behind this decision but logic is different from what he puts before them. In real sense, Sultan wants to cripple the Ulemas, Noblemen, Amirs and Sayyids who often challenge him. Through this scene, Karnad shows the hypocrisy of modern leaders who promise to do many welfare works for the upliftment of public but after their success they deny from it. Here Karnad shows another side of politics. Since every project of a leader has a special intention that is launched to please a particular section of society and to root out the identity of others. Tughlaq adduces the motive that "My Empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too nearer to boarder and as you well know its peace is never free from the fears of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolise the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in kingdom." (Karnad:149)

Since his this rash decision has blown a wave of anger in dominating section of state. Sheikh Imam-ud-Din is already criticising him openly in Kanpur, on the other hands, Ain-ul-Mulk who is Sultan's best friend, the companion of his childhood, his fellow champion in chess, is at this time marching on Delhi. Sultan plans to solve the problems of both by applying one means. He wants to use sheik as a pawn in this game of politics. So he invites Sheikh Imam-ud-Din in order to negotiate with Ain-ul-Mulk but Sheikh is not ready to trust him. Finally after a long discussion, Sultan succeeds do win his faith on the name of humanity. Sultan addresses him, "He will trust yours words- That's why I am asking you -will you please go as my envoy and dissuades him from this folly. Please Sheikhsahib, I am not asking you for my sake but for all the Muslims who will die at the hands of Muslims if there is a war." (Karnad: 166) In fact, Sheikh Imam-ud-Din looks exactly like Sultan and Sultan wants to take the advantage of his striking resemblance to him. Sheikh is sent to Kanauj to persuaded Ain-ul-Mulk to stop the war but unfortunate he is murdered according the preplan. And Ain-ul-Mulk is not punished. He is sent back to Avadh as governor. The corps of Sheikh is brought to Sultan's tent where he expresses his condolence. Ratansingh is shocked to see this nature of Sultan and he utters "I have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt." (Karnad:172)

Next some Amirs, Sayyids Sheikh Shihab-ud-Din and Ratansingh are planning to stop the decision of shifting capital. They know Sultan's motive in this decision. They are challenge for him and his tyrant rule. His cruelty and barbarity has crossed the limit. He imposes the charge of treason if anyone summons courage to speak against him. He has made an atmosphere of fears in kingdom. Sheikh Haidari is in prison and Sheikh Hood in exile. They deeply brood over their present condition in the city and compares it with the condition at a new city. Amir

1 tells, "Just consider this, why is he taking us to Daulatabad? Have you wondered about that? I shall tell you. He wants to weaken the Amirs. You see, we are strong in Delhi, this is where we belong. Daulatabad is a Hindu city, and we shall be helpless there, we shall have to lick his

feet." (Karnad: 174) They secretly try to kill Sultan at the time of prayer in the same way as he slaughtered his father and brother during prayer time. But Ratansingh betrays them. He already informs Sultan about their machination. And as a result, all Amirs and Sayyids Shihab-ud-Din are butchered badly. Sultan decides to politicise this incident. Shihabs father is a strong man who can attack on Delhi.

He, therefore orders to make a public announcement that there was a rebellion in the palace and that the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. So that the Sultan was saved by Shihab who died a martyr death defending him. The funeral will be in Delhi and will be a grand affair. Seeing this Barani asks Sultan surprisingly "Oh God! Aren't even the dead free from your Politics." (Karnad: 185)

Now Sultan has become angrier and orders strictly to vacate Delhi immediately. Public are forced to leave for Daulatabad within fortnight and he bans the prayer till the arrival of holy saint Ghiyas-ud-Din Abbasis, the descendant of Khalif to the city. He commands if anyone is found praying will be severely punished. As a result of his wrong decision all subjects are facing unspeakable problems of food, clothing and medicine. They are exploited by Sulttan's officers on the way to Daulatabad. At Daulatabad the condition of public has worsened. There have been a lot of death since they came to this city. The state is confronting all round uprising. Now people are starving and in this pathetic condition Sultan thinks only over the prayer. He has opened the granary but it is already emptied. Now public have fed up of his game. They want food not prayer. About their condition a man's question is enough to understand, "How long are we going to starve like this?" (Karnad: 210) Krishma Chaudhary analyse that, "Girishe Karnad adroitly employs historical evidence about Tughlaq's rash decision to change the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. It is a turning point in his career and it causes inexpressible suffering to common people." (Krishma: 131)

Like Sultan, Aziz has same political quality. He murders a holy saint Ghiyas-ud-Din Abbasid, the descendant of Khalif for whom Sultan Tughlaq is waiting impatiently and in his guise he wishes to enjoy the pleasure of politics. He is portrayed as an embodiment of Sultan but he is superior to Sultan. Sultan does not make any decision with careful thought and consideration while Aziz takes advantage of his every scheme very skillfully and cleverly. Sultan could never grasp that his all plans are misused but after Aazam's death his identity is discovered. He cleverly implores Sultan not to punish him. If he is penalized the riot will break out in kingdom because now he is a great saint not a cheater. He impresses Sultan by expressing his loyalty to him and Sultan in spite of punishing him, appoints him as an officer in his army. Since" He is aware of the irony of his life when Aziz, the only character in the play who has skillfully used all the schemes of Tughlaq for his own designs, kills Ghiyas-ud-Din and comes in his guise as a holy messenger of peace to purify the land and revive the banned prayer." (Murthy: 145) Thus, the play Tughlaq displays the inner actions of politics. Karnad dramatizes how politics reduces a man to violent, treacherous and opportunist and how it creates existential problem for both ruling and ruled class of society. Sultan Tughlaq intriguingly confiscates the throne of Delhi for whiche Sheikh Imam-ud-Din and Ain-ul-Mulk become his enemy but Sultan brushes them aside. Sheikh is killed and Ain-ul-Mulk is set free. Amirs, Sayyids, Shihab-ud-Din and

Ratansingh plan to kill Sultan at the time of prayer but because of Ratansingh's betrayal, they are slain cold-bloodedly. Step-Mother has Najib murdered and as a punishment, she is stoned to death. In this way, the play Tughlaq is full of carnage, betrayal and disloyalty.

Dharwarker comments that, " Tughlaq has emerged as a modern masterpiece because of its seemingly endless capacity to make history resonate with contemporary meaning and to encapsulate political experience, as it evolves under the condition of modernity and postcolonialism."(Collected Plays. vol-one. Introduction-14)

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