
Symbolism and Parallelism in Girish Karnad's Tughlaq

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Abstract

The writer Girish Karnad deals with the most important phases of life of the medieval Indian ruler Muhammad bin Tughlaq in his play Tughlaq. The writer was fascinated by the character which fitted accurately in his play as according to him Tughlaq was a fantastic and unique character to be portrayed in his plays. The character of Tughlaq has been portrayed with adequate insight and is revealed in the theme of the plot. In the play Tughlaq is presented beautifully expressing his idealism, policies and frustrations when his plans are not materialized. There is Parallelism between reign of Tughlaq and India of the sixties. The play is basically a historic play of the reign of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq but the writer makes it more relevant in the modern context of Indian politics. Karnad uses symbols to make the play relevant and highlight the hidden meaning.

Keywords: Idealism. Policies, frustration parallelism, symbol

Introduction

Girish Karnad is one of the genius dramatist of Anglo-Indian drama. Initially he wanted to be a poet but he was destined to be a playwright. He came from a traditional Konkani family and was educated abroad. He spent his youth in training himself to be an English poet but could express himself better in Kannada. The theatre had a great influence on him. He was also a noted actor and a popular TV artist and won the president's award for his films. In spite of his immense versatility he has written notable plays among which Tughlaq is one of the main published in 1962. It was originally written in Kannada but later he translated it in English. Karnad was extremely interested in Indian history and studied about Tughlaq and was fascinated by the character of Tughlaq who was portrayed as a man of his will and did what he wanted which fitted well with his own character. Karnad found that Tughlaq was the character he was possessed with and felt that he was the most extraordinary ruler of Delhi and outshone in different spheres of life be it religion, philosophy, battle, war-field and even calligraphy. He display concerns with the problems of existence and search of Identity, isolation and frustration. The main theme of Tughlaq is the search of Identity. His main inspiration for writing drama came from the 'Natak plays'

hence he has strictly followed the classical rules of drama. Karnad has a rich vocabulary and is capable of using appropriate words for different situations. His language is refined and precise and he maintains decorum in his dialogues. His language suits his plays and their characters.

Tughlaq - A Historic Character in the play.

Tughlaq ruled India in the fourteenth century after the assassination of his father Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq in 1325. He says: "I have hopes for building a new future for India..." (Tughlaq scene VI) The changes in his mind are quite vividly presented by the dramatist. Thus these historical characters are made real being suffering from intense pain and mental crisis.

He was the most competent among all his brothers and had great experience in warfare and administration. He had friendly relations with all his nobles and had a control over the central government. Though some of the historians are of view that Tughlaq was behind the death of his father but it was not proved.

During his reign direct rule of the Delhi sultanate was established and his territories were expanded. He is graded as the man fond of making presents and also shedding blood. His generous and brave actions as well as his cruel deeds have gained a typical place for him in the eyes of the people. In spite of all his misgivings he shows great equality and comes out as the most humble man. He is portrayed as the Sultan who was a great well wisher of his people. He was very ambitious and had many plans which were executed though most of his plans failed yet he shows greatness and a feeling of public welfare. At times he was ignorant of the condition of people and collected revenues which made the farmers very poor and the rich against him. When the Sultan was made aware of famine and drought he took great measures for the good of the farmers and ordered wells and tanks to be dug for irrigation and also supplied free food for the people and their animals; though these measure and help failed to help the farmers as it was given very late. In conversation with Barani he says:

"The draught in Doab is spreading from town to town- burning up the country. Only one industry flourishes in my kingdom. Only one –and that's of making counterfeit copper coins...What should I do Barani? What would you prescribe for this honeycomb of diseases?" (Tughlaq scene VIII)

Another scheme started by Tughlaq that failed was the shifting office capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. He thought that Daulatabad was the centre of his empire and he could rule better from there but he was seriously mistaken. Though he gave ample help to the people to migrate to Daulatabad but the distance was too much and he had to spend a huge amount in execution of his plan. He thought that

the Muslim culture will flourish but a large number of people died on the way. The land of Deogiri became the graveyard of its subjects. Realizing his mistake and the loss he ordered his people to move back to Delhi and again thousands of people died on the way and the glory of Delhi perished away with the loss of people and money

Tughlak's reign is also considered very important in the history of coinage. He introduced many reforms in manufacturing and evaluation of different coins. After his accession on the throne of Delhi he spent a lot of money on rewards and grants to his noble and people and also for suppressing the rebels which emptied his treasury. He needed huge amount of money so in 1330 he started the bronze coins and declared that they are of the same value as silver coins, now people started hoarding the gold and silver coins and the markets were full of bronze coins. Consequently the Sultan declared the bronze coins illegal and ordered people to exchange the bronze coins with silver coins from the treasury. This was great loss of wealth to his Empire.

According to history Tughlaq was a man who was a great visionary, idealist and scholar. He was cultured scholar a poet and had great command on subjects like astronomy philosophy mathematics and physical science. He was a lover of fine arts and an excellent calligraphist. In the matters of religion he was very tolerant and liberal he never followed the proposals of the Ulemas blindly and also invited the non-muslim scholars for the discussions which angered the Ulemas. They became his bitter critics even some of the contemporary historians considered him as a non-believer of Islam.

When the Shaikh accuses Tughlaq for bringing disgrace to Islam. In answering his accusations Muhammad Tughlaq says:

“They tried to indulge in politics- I couldn't allow that. I have never denied the word of God. Shaikh Sahib, because its my bread and drink. I need it most when the surrounding void pushes itself into my soul and starts putting out every light burning there. But I am alone in my life. My kingdom has millions- Muslims, Hindus, Jains. Yes there is dirt and sickness in my kingdom. But why should I call on God to clean the dirt deposited by men?” (Tughlaq scene III)

On the whole the writer has altered several aspects of his reign with view of making the play more relevant in the modern Indian

Parallelism between reign of Tughlaq and India of the sixties

Karnad's play Tughlaq is a historic play and has made the modern audience fascinated by the depiction of characters. Karnad was very conscious while writing the play regarding parallelism between the reign

of Tughlaq and the Indian scene. The play can be considered as a political allegory as it reflects the corruption and disillusion prevailing in independent India of fifties and sixties. It shows the corruption and frustration of the people that was in the Indian politics of the independent India. The play shows great similarity with the politics of India as there was mistrust between the Hindus and Muslims in the reign of Tughlaq as well as after independence in India. The Muslims never trusted the Hindus even when they were exempted from the taxes. The situation in both cases worsened as despite the effort Tughlaq's efforts to bring harmony between Hindus and Muslims the situation prevailed and same with the post independent India where Gandhiji did his best effort to bring Hindus and Muslims together but failed and became a victim of the mistrust of both. Tughlaq is intellectual but is impulsive and is not able to evaluate his actions properly and invites criticism and fails in his plans. He is very intelligent where he deals with the Imam he knows that Imam is instigating people against him he invites him to Delhi to address his people. But when the Imam comes to Delhi no one comes to hear him. Tughlaq also flatters him to be an envoy of peace to the Nawab of Awadh as the Imam resembles the Sultan very much in appearance. The Imam falls to the trap of the Sultan and dresses like him and goes mounted on the elephant and is charged by an army and killed, same happens to the step mother of Tughlaq who is killed for murdering Najib. Thus Tughlaq becomes a murderer and his idealism fails.

Practically politics and idealism do not go together, which is perfectly true in the present Indian situation. Many idealists try their best to put their ideals in practice but face challenges in implementing them. Karnad's play depicts that Tughlaq was in no way different from the modern India. He had plans and programmes for the development of his Kingdom but the courtiers did not give him their support and his administration was also corrupt. The officers took bribes and undue favours from the king and also the plans of the Sultan were beyond the understanding of his subjects. His officers who executed his plans were corrupt and the plans failed. The same situation prevailed in modern India many plans and projects were taken up for the welfare of the people by the government but their enforcement was faulty hence they miserably failed due to the dishonesty. Thus we can say that the time of the reign of Tughlaq was not different from the time in modern India. Dishonesty, flattery and many other evils of the kingdom of Tughlaq's reign was no different from modern Indian politics which makes Karnad's play relevant to modern India.

Symbolism in the play Tughlaq

To make his play infuse deeper projecting hidden meanings he uses symbols and images in the form of words to have a greater emotional significance in his play. He has idealized Tughlaq as one of the greatest rulers to rule Delhi and also the greatest failure. It is clear that the play reflects the mood of

disillusionment that also followed in the modern India. The most important symbol used by Karnad in his play is the chess symbol. He depicts that Tughlaq plays chess to pass his time as well as to solve problems. This shows Tughlaq's manipulative skills to deal with his opponents. He considers his opponents and rivals as pawns in the chess which he could use or move at his own will. It also describes the clever move of chess by Tughlaq when he invites the Imam to address his subjects and also to dress like him and go to Ain-ul-Mulk as a peace ambassador where he kills him in an attack by his army and suppresses the foolish act of rebellion. This shows that he plays the game well and has clever moves on the board.

The two rogues are also used as symbols of a nasty class of people they are Aziz and Azam who are unprincipled and opportunists and exploit people. They disguise themselves; cheat the people and the government with their deeds and policies which benefit them. Prayers can also be seen as a symbol in Karnad's plays where the farmers and some courtiers led by Ratan Singh and Shihab-Ud-din plan to kill Tughlaq when he is in prayer. When Sayyed and Amir refused to do so they clearly express their views that tyrant like Tughlaq should not be considered among the faithful to religion and should be killed during prayer as Tughlaq killed his father when he was praying. In the end of play Tughlaq falls asleep and in his sleep hears the Azan and gets up but he is dazed and frightened as he fails to offer prayers at the right time. Thus prayer is also used as a symbol in the play. The reference of vultures also indicates that Tughlaq has lost his peace of mind. The shifting of the capital also is taken as a symbol which shows that the city of Daulatabad was the city of Hindu-Muslim unity which Tughlaq was seeking but he miserably failed in his plans due to his dishonest officers and people. We can summarise that Kannad has used relevant symbols in the play and has acquired great force and beauty.

Conclusion

Girish Karnad portrayed the character of Muhammad Tughlaq with keeping in mind his strength and weakness. He was fascinated by the character of Tughlaq and asserts his policies, idealism and frustration. Karnad uses symbols in the play to express the complex situations. There is a clear parallelism between the mediaeval and modern period of Indian history. The aspect of religion is dealt with the eye of an observer. The failure of the policies of Tughlaq can be seen in his resultant frustrations. The play with its various aspects and symbols illustrate its relevance in the modern context.

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