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Research Article

GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAY TUGHLAQ IS A RELIGIOUS PLAY MINGLED WITH SYMBOLISM

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the life of Indian ruler Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq who is a persona totally estranged from the society. Though he is religious by heart but his ideas are far above the reach and comprehension of the common people. He gives priority to all religions but the Hindus and Muslims are unable to understand the broad-minded religious tolerance of Tughlaq and all his good thinking for public is beyond the non-comprehension of people and so both Hindus and Muslims burst into violence and cruelty for the implementation of his idealistic plans. In the play religion is presented with so many symbols like chess, prayer, python, sleep, vulture, rose, tree and Daulatabad.

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INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad, being a man of theatre and a playwright of Indian society draws the plots of his plays from Indian history and Karnad presents them in such a way with the urgency to negotiate dramatic representation. Karnad creates a kind of bold experiments with modern devices like the symbolism, irony and humour which are the integral parts of his dramatic technique.

Footnotes-urgency, negotiate and integral. U.R. Anantha Murthy in his introduction to Tughlaq says- "It is not hard to account for the immediate response the play has received from Kannada as well as other audiences. One can enjoy the play on the stage without paying much attention to its rich and complex symbolism and the subtle weaving of its different motifs.

The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle and dramatic conventions like the comic pair, Aziz and Azam, to which theatre audiences responded readily." (VII) The play *Tughlaq* presents the story of such a person who ascends to the throne by murdering his father and brother and ruled over India for about twenty years. It is the tragedy of such a ruler who is wise, foolish, kind and at the same time he is very cruel. It is a religious play as the very first scene opens in front of the Chief Court of Justice in Delhi and it shows a crowd of two communities Muslims and Hindus which is the microcosm of the contemporary Indian society. The very opening sentence of the play is- "God, what's this country coming to!"

The play picturises the present scenario of India and the feeling of brotherhood and unity which begin to vanish under the regime of their own. The old man's

Footnotes-microcosm, scenario and regime. lament - "I don't know. I have been alive a long time, seen many sultans, but I never thought I would live to see a thing like this." (P-147) A kind of hypocritical attitude is presented in the play towards religion. Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq is an Indian ruler who uses religion for the purpose of political motive.

It is true that he is religious by heart but at the same time he gives priority to all religions. Despite his best efforts to bring the Hindus and Muslims together, he fails to unite them into one bond. According to Veena Noble Das: All his brilliant ideas were doomed to fail because they were implemented impulsively without weighing all the aspects involved. None of his schemes, however well intentioned, was understood or appreciated by his people and none of them succeeded.(p-92)

In this play religion is presented with so many symbols. These symbols are-chess, prayer, python, vulture, rose, tree and Daulatabad and even characters like Barani, Nazib, Aziz and Sheikh Imam-ud-din.

Chess - He plays the game of chess and the purpose of playing this game is to solve the complicated problems. The game of chess is the symbol of high manipulative skill dealing with political rivals and opponents. Tughlaq

Footnotes-hypocritical, treachery and manipulative. considers his critics and enemies only as pawns of chess which he can use at his will. Chess symbolizes that the whole kingdom is complicated and full of problems just like the game of chess.

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According to P. Bayapa Reddy, "At the macro level, the game of chess is an ordinary game which is popular in India. It also symbolizes a political game in which the most intelligent and clever politician is checkmated by an ordinary washerman. Through this symbolist technique the playwright has succeeded in creating the right political atmosphere." (p - 155)

Prayer- Prayer symbolizes the fact that the life of Tughlaq is full of corruption. The leitmotiv of the play is prayer. Generally prayer is organized to pure the mind. Even Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, wants to kill his uncle as the latter murders his father by pouring poisonous juice of hemlock on his ear but he does not kill him on prayer's time. But in Muhammad's reign, prayer becomes a dirty political game. The father of Tughlaq was murdered at the prayer time.

Besides the Muslim courtiers and chief along with Sheikh Shamsuddin and Shihab-ud-din conspire to murder the king at the time of prayer. So prayer is taken as an instrument of murder. Prayer is deeply allied to religion which is used for murder in the play. Prayer is repeated several times and it reverberates through the play. But Tughlaq is such a usurper who ascends the throne after

Footnotes-leitmotiv, usurper and assassination. getting his father and brother murdered during prayer time. This assassination reminds us of Shakespearean hero Macbeth who murders king Duncan, Banquo and others only to establish himself as the king of Scotland. So in this play prayer becomes a subject of mockery because most of the crimes particularly murders were committed at the time of prayer. So Sethumadhava Rao 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." U. R. Anantha Murthy says- "The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq did to kill his father, that prayer which is most dear to Tughlaq is symbolic of the fact that his life is corrupted at its very source."

Python- The Fort is compared with Python which is coiled like an enormous hungry python inside its belly. The python symbolizes the increasing fierceness, brutality, blood thirstiness and inhuman nature of Tughlaq. The python is the symbol of complete degeneration of the personality of Tughlaq.

Vulture - Vulture is the symbol of frustration mood of Tughlaq. Muhammad says- "Don't you see - this patient, racked with fever and crazed by the fear of

Footnotes - vitiated, reminiscent and degeneration. the enveloping vultures, can't be separated from me?... (Karnad, Tughlaq 56; sec 8). The vulture is the symbol of Tughlaq's ideas, ambitions and desire of revenge for which he cannot gain any peace and he becomes a mad emperor.

Rose- Sultan being a learned man is deeply influenced by the beautiful poems of Sheikh Sadi of Persia. He plans to make a beautiful rose garden which is heaped only with the counterfeit coins minted in his kingdom. So the rose garden is actually the garden of ideals which has dried towards the end. According to P Bayapa Reddy, "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 ideas of Tughlaq."

Sleep- Sleep is a symbol of peace. In sc-XIII, Tughlaq wants to take rest in the lap of sleep. So he says- "I am suddenly feeling tired. And sleepy. For five years sleep has avoided me and now suddenly its coming back." (XIII.83).

Tree- Tughlaq himself is comparable to a tree which wants to spread its branches among the stars and the roots of which are yet to find their hold on earth. Tughlaq wants to climb the tallest tree or reach new heights.

Footnotes-counterfeit, aesthetic and withering away. Tughlaq's main intention is to cover the whole earth with greenery or prosperity; he intends "to cover up the boundaries of nations." The route from Delhi to Daulatabad is compared to a snake which is the image of poison and death.

Daulatabad - Daulatabad is a Hindu city which is a symbol of Hindu-Muslim Unity and it throws light on the mistrust that is emerging among the Hindus and Muslims in Tughlaq's life.

Characters

Aziz - The character like Aziz is the symbol of such type of criminals who always want opportunity to exploit people. He is modelled on Shakespeare's buffon Falstaff and lacks of humanity and he is a dhobi who takes the pseudo shape of Brahmin Bishnu Prasad who wins a case against Sultan. The kingdom is described by Tughlaq as "a honeycomb of diseases."

Footnotes- mistrust and honeycomb.

Sheikh-Imam-Ud-Din- Sheikh-Imam-ud-din is a symbol of orthodox, theo-logician, archenemy and fanatic who undermines Tughlaq's vision of secularism.

He gives public speeches and tells the people how the sultan is bringing blot to Islam. He is hound by a profound sense of guilt and turns to God:

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

... I started in your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert

Now?" (Karnad, Tugh. X.67)

Besides, the whole play Tughlaq itself is very symbolic. This play presents the contemporary political situation in India and at the same time it reflects a chaotic condition of corrupted India. The whole play is based on religion and so many symbols are mingled with religiosity.

Footnotes-the ologician, archenemy and secularism.

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