

Discuss “Tughlaq” by Girish Karnad as a tragedy of intrigues

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Abstract

The present research paper deals with Girish Karnad’s famous play “Tughlaq” as a tragedy of intrigues. Girish Karnad’s ‘Tughlaq’, though written in Kannada, is a classic in Indian English drama. The story of the play revolves around the 14th century historical figure of “Muhammad Tughlaq”. The play presents a clear picture of the circumstances of the time and the character of Tughlaq. The play is an artistically successful presentation of the complexity of the character of Tughlaq. The action of the play takes place in 14th century and at that time, the Sultan was surrounded by a network of intrigues. Thus, the play gives the impression of the tragedy of intrigues. The courtiers hatched various intrigues against the Sultan and they were always ready to overthrow him. The Sultan, on the other hand, also indulges into various intrigues to surpass his enemies. The play has many intrigues like the intrigues of Sultan against his nobles and the intrigues of the trusted courtiers and the nobles against the Sultan. In this essay we discussed “Tughlaq” as a tragedy of intrigues.

Keywords: Tughlaq, Girish Karnad, intrigues

Introduction

Girish Karnad is one of the most significant Indian English playwrights. ‘Tughlaq’ is his second play. It was originally written in Kannada but was later translated into English by Karnad himself. “Tughlaq” is a classic in Indian English drama. The play is an artistically successful presentation of the complexity of the character of its protagonist. It depicts the disintegration of a powerful personality within a span of five years. The play is regarded as modern tragedy of intrigues. Muhammad Tughlaq is the protagonist in the play ‘Tughlaq’. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must be highly placed individual. Tughlaq appears a fit tragic hero from this perspective. He is a highly prominent person who has some great qualities of head and heart. He is well-versed in Greek, Prussian and Arabic literature. He is a highly proficient player of chess. The qualities of his character strengthen his claim to be a tragic hero and the claim of the play being a tragedy. Tughlaq is a medieval play. The king at that time was a prisoner of a network of intrigues which surrounded the king and his court. The courtiers hatched intrigues against the Sultan and were ever ready to overthrow him. The nobles too plotted and intrigued against each other to settle old scores. Thus there were intrigues and counter intrigues and even the most shrewd and crafty could not survive for long.

In the present play there are intrigues of three types:

- The intrigues of Sultan – against his nobles and even against the royal family.
- The intrigues of even trusted courtiers and nobles against the Sultan.
- The intrigues of the nobles against each other one cannot depend even on one’s trusted friends.

Discussion

A genuine tragedy is a tale of suffering in which the hero undergoes great mental torture. The hero of the tragedy falls from a very high position to a lower position. However, his fall is due to some weakness of his character which is variously described as ‘Hammertoe’ or the ‘tragic flow’. Tuglaq’s

idealism can be taken as his hammertoe or tragic flow. He has idealistically made praying five times daily compulsory for all Muslims. He treats Hindus and Muslims alike. He has even permitted his citizens to appeal against his actions in the court. It appears that his ideas of justice and equality are ahead of his time. He decides to shift his capital from Delhi to Daultabad. The decision proves fatal to him. It highlights the existentialist implications in the delineation of the character of Muhammad Tughlaq. “Tughlaq” thus, can be seen as an existentialist tragedy. It is a play dealing with the theme of existentialism because the protagonist is concerned with the problems of selfhood search for identity, isolation and frustration. The Sultan sets to discover his identity in the pursuit of high ideals and visionary plans. Karnad himself comments, “In those days existentialism was very much in the air. To be considered mad was very much fashionable. Everything about Tughlaq seemed to fit into what I had read was the correct thing to do Conflict is the main ingredient of a tragedy. It can be both internal and external; we have plenty of internal and external conflicts in “Tughlaq”. The sufferings of a protagonist seem to be a result of the conflict in his heart. His sufferings acquire tragic proportion due to the internal conflict within the soul. At every stage of his degradation and decline from high ideals, Tughlaq feels tormented within himself. He expresses him mental agony in the words, “God, rod in heaven please help me. Please don’t let go of my head, my skin drips with blood and I don’t know how much of it is mine and how much of others. I started with your path lord, why am I wandering in this desert naked now?” some critics have compared the mental anguish of Tughlaq with the mental agony of Greek tragic characters like Hamlet and King Lear. The play opens in a big yard, in front of the chief court of justice in Delhi. A Brahmin has brought a law suit against the state. The case is to be observed by Kazi-J-Mumalik who is the chief judicial officer. A large number of people, both Muslims and Hindus, are gathered in the yard. Their conversation reveals many aspects of the character of Sultan. It becomes clear that the Sultan is generally disliked by the people of the state. One of the reasons behind their disliked by the people of the state is an intrigue. It

is believed that Sultan came to the throne through an intrigue against his father and brother. They believe that the Sultan plotted the intrigue of the murder of his own father and brother. It was given out that an elephant had gone mad at the prayer time. A large number of people were killed at the same time. The Sultan's own mother also suspected and didn't talk to him since that day. However, his stepmother is quite conscious about his welfare.

As the action of drama progresses, the intrigues against the Sultan also come into light. It is told that the problems of the Sultan keep on mounting day by day. On one hand, he is worried about Sheikh-Imam-Ud-Din who is turning the people of Kanpur against him. He is poisoning the people against the Sultan. He calls the Sultan a disgrace to the throne because he has killed his own father and brother and that too at the prayer time. The result is that there are wide-spread riots in Kanpur and the city starts burning. On the other hand, Sultan's own boyhood friend Ain-UI-Mulk has revolted against him. He is marching on Delhi with an army of 30,000 soldiers.

Tughlaq is also a crafty politician and he can handle his enemies. He plots an intrigue to kill two birds with one stone. The Sultan makes a public announcement that a great Sheikh-Imam-Ud-Din would address the people of Delhi and the Sultan would also be presented in the meeting. The Sultan's vizier tells him that the Sultan resembles with Sheikh-Imam-Ud-Din and the Sultan exploits this resemblance to the full. He prevents the people to come to the meeting. As a result Sheikh loses his credibility and he is considered as a spy. Then, the king urges Sheikh to go as his newsy of piece to Ain-UI-Mulk. He is successful in convincing him with the logic that precious Muslim blood must not be shed. As the Sheikh goes to the enemy with an offer of peace, the signal of battle is sounded by the soldiers of the Sultan. There is bloodshed at very large scale and the Sheikh gets killed in the battle. Ain-UI-Mulk is sent back to Avadh as governor. Thus, the Sultan succeeds in killing two birds with one stone and emerges more powerful than before.

However, this is not the end of the problems of Sultan. The Sheikh, the Amirs and the Syads plan to kill the Sultan at the time of prayer. It is agreed that at the time of prayer when the entire place would be unarmed, they would rise as one-man and kill the Sultan. The Sultan comes to know about the intrigues of his nobles and takes necessary precautions. As the rebels rise to attack him, the runty Hindu Soldiers hidden behind the curtain attack the rebels. There is great violence and many people are killed. But the intrigue of the rebels is frustrated and the Sultan is saved.

The play has various intrigues between the courtiers also and the twisted courtiers and nobles too hatch a number of intrigues against each other. These intrigues at the court also play an important role in the play. One of the important intrigues is the intrigue of the Sultan's stepmother against Nazib. The stepmother is displeased with Nazib and ultimately gets him poisoned. She believes that the decisions of the Sultan are the result of Nazib's influence on him. There are many minor and major intrigues in the play. It appears that the whole action of drama is a series of various intrigues. The action of the play moves with the help of intrigues.

Conclusion

Thus "Tughlaq" is great tragedy of intrigue and as such its cathartic effect is weak. The hero does not die in the end.

Tughlaq is seen sleeping on his throne exhausted, confused and bewildered.

Reference

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