

Discuss Girish Karnad's "Tughlaq" as a historical play

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Abstract

The present research paper deals with Girish Karnad's 'Tughlaq' as a historical play. 'Tughlaq' by Girish Karnad is a classic in Indian English drama. The play revolves around the 14th century historical figure of Muhammad Tughlaq. Karnad deals with history of that time in the play. He was deeply impressed by Tughlaq's character. The play is highly complex and it can be seen and read from a number of perspectives. Tughlaq is obviously a historical play with a mixture of fact and fiction in its narrative. Karnad studied deeply the facts related to Muhammad Tughlaq before writing 'Tughlaq'. The play is set in the year 1327 and the action moves from Delhi to Daultabad. Karnad himself explains, "I started with Ishwari Parsad and then went on to all the contemporary material and suddenly felt possessed. I felt the character was growing in front of me." So, in this essay we discussed "Tughlaq" as a famous historical play.

Keywords: Tughlaq, Girish Karnad, Historical

Introduction

A historical play seems to be a contradiction in terms. History requires truth to the events of the past, but art require imagination and concentration on needs of art. In other words that the writer of a historical play, must use the facts of history with discretion to suit the needs of his drama while maintaining overall truth to history. He has to deviate from the facts of history, and even introduce new characters in the interest of dramatic effectiveness. This is what Karnad has also done in the present play.

Girish Karnad closely follows historical sources in this respect. In the opening scene the old man represents the orthodox clerical class which vehemently opposed Tughlaq's liberal and rational policies. He says, It's an insult to Islam. The young man who defends the liberal attitude of the Sultan appreciates his devotion to Islam, which has also been mentioned in the aforesaid words of Ibn-i-Buttuta. He says now you pray five times a day because that's the law, and if you break it, you'd have the officers on your neck. Can you mention one earlier Sultan in whose time people read the Koran in the streets like now?" Karnad follows the history in making Tughlaq guilty of parricide and fratricide. The third man in the first scene has heard that the Sultan is guilty of killing his father and brother.

Girish Karnad adroitly employs historical evidence about Tughlaq's rash decision to change the capital from Delhi to Daultabad. It is a turning point in his carrier and it causes inexpressible suffering to the common people. Historic evidence also proves that Tughlaq took the drastic step to shift the capital for effective administrative control of south.

The contemporary historians' emphasis on mass exodus, which Girish Karnad also presents in Tughlaq, is not correct. In fact the upper classes comprising nobles, courtiers, sheikhs, ulema and the elite were shifted to Daultabad. The general Hindu public remained unaffected by this project. In order to prove that Sultan Tughlaq was a devil, Karnad greatly alters the historical facts of the rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk. Karnad makes Tughlaq weak. So this play at last considers a classic play and a regarded as a famous historical play.

Discussion

There can be no doubt in the fact that Tuglaq is the result of Karnad's deep study of medieval history after Ishwari Passed. Karnad also went to other historical authorities on medieval India. He read ziaud-din-barani's Tariph-i-Firuz-Shahi, Bodoni's Tariph-i-Mubarakshani, Ibn-i-Buttuta's Travels. It is interesting to note that Karnad is not a slove to historical accounts. He deviates from historical sources whenever he feels it necessary for artistic and dramatic purposes. Karnad follows the conventional accounts in creating the atmosphere of mutual distrust, frustrated idealism, corruption, unrest and communal intolerance not only the circumstances but also the personalities of the major characters are in keeping with the historical account.

Tughlaq is the central character in the play. Historians had already said much about Tughlaq's scholarships, religious tolerance and poetic gifts. Karnad closely follows historical sources in the presentation of these qualities. He portrays Tughlaq as a generous and charitable Sultan in the very first scene. He accepts the kazi's judgment graciously in which he himself is held guilty of confiscating the land of a Brahmin, Vishnu Parsad. The Sultan is shown making a grant of 500 silver dinars to the Brahmin and also giving him a post in the civil service. The Sultan also invites non-Muslim scholars for discussion. He used to have discussions with Muslims, Hindus and Jain scholars. This shows the liberal attitude of Sultan in case of religion.

The shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daultabad was an important decision on the part of the Sultan. Karnad gives great importance to this incidence in giving the account of that period in the play. The incident is presented as turning point in his career and it causes great suffering to the common people. However, Tughlaq has his own logic behind the decision of shifting the capital. He explains the reasons in the very first scene and says, My Empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the border and as you well known its peace is never free from the fear of invaders.

It is true that Karnad has introduced some other details which are not exactly supported historical accounts. The Sultan is said to have liberally given over gifts to people who came to Daultabad. But the play shows the Sultan using the force to teach the people a lesson. Karnad's Tughlaq conveys his desire to Nazib when he says, "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.

In many other respects, Karnad uses history very effectively. He affects alteration of the facts to suit his artistic design. He refers to numerous problems faced by the Sultan both natural and manmade. It is just to highlight the idea that Tughlaq was losing his grip over the thing. The various problems like lawlessness, corruption, rebellions and draught etc. are highlighted for the same purpose. The dramatist aims to present a particular picture before the reader eyes to suit his dramatic design. Karnad has portrayed Nazib as an important character who exercises great influence on the character of Sultan. He is later murdered through the intrigue of his stepmother. In history, he is not a very important figure. Karnad has given him much importance just for the dramatic purpose. The episode of Aziz and Azam has also been included with the purpose of creating humour. It is also to exhibit the failure of Tughlaq's administration. The two comic characters also suggest the rampant corruption in Sultan's kingdom.

It can be safely said that Karnad has made great use of history. But he is guided by a particular artistic and 'Tughlaq' is a play revolving around a historical character rather than particular history.

Conclusion

Naik M K. says, Tughlaq is a historical play on the life of Sultan Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India. Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of Sultan who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout the godless. His two close associates, Barani the scholarly historian, and Nazib the politician – seem to represent the two opposite selves of Tughlaq while Aziz the wily time server appears to represent all those who took advantage of Sultan's visionary schemes and faded him. Karnad himself has suggested that he found Tughlaq's history contemporary. So, it is to be concluded that Tughlaq is a history and a historical play.

References

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