

The treatment of religion in Girish Karnad's Tughlaq

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Abstract

Girish Karnad is a modern Indian playwright who is recipient of Jyanpith Award, Padam Bhusham and Padam Shri for the contribution to the art. He draws plots from history, myth and folklore and wrote many plays on current issues in both Kannada and English. His all plays from Yayati to The Dream of Tipu Sultan depict the malaise of politics, caste and feminism effectively. His second play Tughlaq is very popular which first published in 1964 in Kannada and latter on it was translated into English. Karnad himself confesses, "I was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee, who latter produced it for the Theatre Group, Bombay." (Murthy: 142) Tughlaq is a historical play that is based on the life of 14th century historical figure Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq who is well-known in history for his idealism and vision but is misunderstood and maligned too. This play established Karnad's name as a successful playwright because it presents the contemporary political reality. It is obvious that Tughlaq is a political allegory which reflects the political atmosphere of sixties of Nehru era. U.R. Ananth Murthy comments "It is a play of sixties and reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which follows the Nehru era of idealism in the country." (Murthy: 1143) Tughlaq is a nice fusion of religion and politics and this paper will concentrate how religion is used in politics.

Keywords: Religion, politics, current, issues.

Introduction

Tughlaq portrays the inner action of the politics it exhibits how religion is applied as a means to gain political advantage. In the play, Sultan Tughlaq is not single character who makes use of religion but all other characters take its advantage. Every character uses it according to his desired end. Aziz is appointed in the royal court in the name of religion. He enjoys the pleasure of royal saint. Shihab-ud-din, Ratensigh and Amirs plan to assassinate Sultan at the time of prayer. Sultan first makes prayer compulsory for everyone and latter bans it for next decision. Karnad is a master playwright. He beautifully presents the attitude of people towards religion. In the light of the play, religion is only a means. Dr. Lakhwindar Sigh Gill says about Sultan Tughlaq "For his hypocritical attitude towards religion and religious practices, Muhammad stands for the contemporary ruler of India. Like an Indian ruler he uses religion for his political motive." (Gill: 01)

Sultan Tughlaq wants to capture the throne of Delhi for which he takes the help of religion. He made his father and brother assassinate at the time of prayer. But due to vitiate the religion, Amirs, Sayyids and Noblemen become his opponents. Sultan loses his control on them. He starts facing revolt from all sides. The wave of rage begins to blow in the country. Sultans tries all his best to gain his lost position. In the name of peace, harmony and brotherhood, he again uses religion as an object. He declares equal judicial system in country. He addresses "My beloved people, you have heard the judgment of the Kazi and seen for yourself how justice works in my kingdom-without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed." (Karnad: 149) But Aziz, a pickpocket takes the advantage of his policy of religion. Aziz is a Muslim and guises himself as Vishnu Prasad, a Brahmin of Shiknar who files a suit against Sultan Tughlaq claiming that his land has been seized illegally by the

officers of the state and with it he urges that he should be given the compensation for the loss of land and the privation resulting there from. In return, Aziz receives a grant of five hundred silver dinars from the State Treasury and a post in the Civil Service.

Sultan Tughlaq's crafty diplomacy of religion entangles him in bad condition. Ain-ul-Mulk, who is his dear friend, the companion of his childhood and the fellow champion in chess is at this very moment marching on Delhi. On the other hands, Sheikh Imam-ud-din is criticizing him publicly. About Sheikh, Najib informs Sultan Tughlaq that "He says Your Majesty has forfeited the right to rule by murdering your father and brother at prayer time." (Karnad: 157) Ain-ul-Mulk and Sheikh Imam-ud-din begin to prick in his eyes. Sultant becomes restless. Najib considers them treacherous and tells Sultan, "A traitor's a traitor, friend or saint and he must be crushed." (Karnad: 159) Sultan now plans to thrash them by taking the help of religion. Sheikh is invited to attain a meeting where Sultan tries to send him as a negotiator but he does not get ready because he has not trust on Sultan. Sheikh warns Sultan, "Beware Sultan, You are trying to become another God. It is a sin worst than parricide." (Karnad: 164) But Sultan knows how to deal with his opponents and he has the ability to turn the unfavourable condition into favourable. He uses his diplomatic mind and expresses, "He respects you as every Muslim in India does. He will trust your words. That's why I am asking you-will you please go as my envoy and dissuade him from this folly? Please Sheikh Sahib, I am not asking you only for my sake but for all the Muslims who will die at the hands of Muslims if there is a war." (Karnad: 166)

Sultan makes Sheikh ready to stop Ain-ul-Mulk in the name of Muslim. Sheikha is sent to negotiate with him at Kanauj but he is entangled in Sultan's trap. In fact, Sheikh Looks exactly like the Sultan in the royal rob who has become a

victim of Sultan's diplomacy. He is treacherously murdered and Ain-ul-Mulk is made the governor of Deccan. When his body is brought to tent Sultan gazes it for some time and pays condolence. Ratan singh tells Najib, "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)

At this very moment, some Amirs, Sayyids, Shihab-ud-din and Ratansingh are planing to kill the Sultan in the same way as he killed his father and brother at the time of prayer but unfortunately all except Ratan sigh are butchered. Ratansigh betrays them. Sultan has killed Shihab-ud-din who is the son of a powerful king. Sultan will have to face the wrath of Shihab's father. So he politicizes the incident. He orders to make an announcement that, "There was a rebellion in the palace and that the nobles of the court tried to assassinate the Sultan during prayer. Say that the Sultan was saved by Shihab-ud-din who died a martyr's death defending him. The funeral will be held in Delhi and will be a grand affair. Invite his father to see it and see that he is treated with respect due to the father of a loyal nobleman." (Karnad: 185)

This attack shocked Sultan deeply and he becomes mad in anger. He now does not want to stay here for a moment. So he issues an order to vacate Delhi immediately. Everyone has to leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. And he bans prayer till the arrival of holy saint Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, the descendant of Khalif. Karand here shows the hypocrisy of Sultan Tughlaq who uses religion as an object for his politics at every step and now when it becomes danger to his life, bans it forever. But religion is Tughlaq's weapon to defend himself in the field of politics. When he finds no any means then implements it because before religion everyone bows his head without any objection. At Daulatabad, the condition of public has worsened. They are starving. There have been several deaths since they came to this city. Country is facing all round revolt but Sultan always thinks to resume prayer. He does not take care of public and public want food not prayer. Sultan thinks the step of holy saint Ghiyas-ud-din will purify his country and spread peace. So he is waiting him impatiently. Ghiyas-ud-din Abbas lands on Delhi but Aazam kidnaps him and Aziz guises himself as holy saint by killing him. He here becomes the royal saint. He turns himself into another religion and takes advantage of it. His religion changing attitude symbolizes the modern Indian leader who change themselves at election time. Aziz here is enjoying the pleasure of courtly life but his friend Aazam has fed up of this hide and seek. He wants to leave this world but Aziz tries to lure him in these words, "Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world-politics! My dear fellow that's where our future is -politics! It's a beautiful world- wealth, success, position, power." (Karnad190) Aazam does listen to him and leaves for Delhi at night but meets a tragic death. His death discovers Aziz's identity but Aziz is superior to Sultan in matter of presence of mind. He uses his mind and takes Sultan in his words. He presents before Sultan himself his great devotee. He urges Sultan that, "I daren't. But since Your Majesty came to the throne, I have been your most devout servant. I have studied every order, followed every instruction, considered every measure of Your Majesty's with the great attention. I insist I am Your Majesty's true disciple." (Karnad: 216) Sultan is impressed and in spite of punishing him, appoints him as an officer in army. Since,

He is aware of the irony of his life when Aziz, the only character in the play who skillfully uses 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, Tughlaq is a play of religion that presents the different usage of religion in different forms. Karnad has beautifully shown how it determines the future of society and dominates people. Sultant Tughlaq always misuses it. Sometime, he uses it as a weapon to kill other. Sometime, he applies it as a means to win the heart of public. Another time, he imposes ban on it. Amirs, Sayyids too imitate his diplomacy. They take religion in their hands to kill Sultan. Aziz gets reward and is appointed in royal court as an officer. Obviously, Tughlaq reflects current socio-religious dictates that determine the socio-political system of country. Tejwant S Gill analyses Tughlaq, "\No wonder, the life, rule and time of this charismatic and erratic emperor has past significance, the present meaning.....is getting more and more pronounced with the passage of time." (Gill: 57-58)

References

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