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English Literature

IDEALISM AND REALISM IN TUGHLAQ

KEY WORDS: Idealist, Oppositeness, Aspiration, Spectator

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ABSTRACT

“Both Tughlaq and his enemies initially appear to be idealists; yet in the pursuit of the ideal, they perpetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real: the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue.” These opposites constitute the main charm of the structure of Tughlaq. P. Bayapa Reddy highlights the specialized technique, which Karnad employed in Tughlaq to uphold the theatrical appeal of the play for the spectators:“

One of the critical issues that Karnad addresses in TUGHLAQ is the striking gap between political aspirations and its reality. Tughlaq was a brilliant individual yet is regarded as one of the biggest failures. He tried to introduce policies that seemed today to be farsighted, but earned him the nick name "Mohammed the mad" then. He ended his career in bloodshed and chaos. Karnad renders a vision where the reality and aspirations collide. Karnad writes the drama in 1964. India had been less than two decades removed from Partition and Independence. India had not established direction and transformative vision as a nation was still hopelessly locked in sectarian violence and communal hatred. The theme of political aspiration was limited by temporal reality in both the drama and the historical condition. It is reflective of the India that Karnad sees a stunning realization between the gulf between what is and what can be. Tughlaq states early that he wishes to see unity between Hindus and Muslims as a significant part of his vision: "Daulatabad is a city of Hindus and as the capital, it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom."

The play reflects the contemporary Indian society through history to comment on the pathetic and corroded state of Indian modern day politics. Tughlaq should be studied to find parallelism in the realities of the fourteenth century India ruled by the Sultan and the twentieth century democratic country governed by a Prime minister and his colleagues in the cabinet. The contemporaneity ascribed to a historical situation makes the play unique. Major Characters, Tughlaq, emerges as a headstrong and idealistic ruler. He is vulnerable, and constantly admits his mistakes and allows himself to be punished publicly. He moves his capital to Daulatabad because it is a city dominated by the Hindus. This move will further the cause of togetherness and communal unity.

In order to establish himself as a worthy ruler, he exposes himself to public scorn and invites public condemnation. He hastens the process at projecting himself as a tolerant and efficient ruler. His irrational and erratic methods are severely criticized by his courtiers and citizens. He emerges as a shrewd contriver and a mercilessly ambitious ruler. He is responsible for the assassination of Sheikh Muhammad, his severest critic, who accuses him of parricide and of being un-Islamic. He stabs Shihab-ud-din when he tries to conspire against him. He is doomed because of his own follies and failures, and becomes an insensitive murderer. The height of his insanity is reflected in the later episodes of the play. He later becomes a divided self, and suffers from inner turmoil and contradictions. His ultimate isolation in a world turned alien gives a tragic dimension to the play.

The step-mother of Tughlaq is torn apart by conflicting emotions—her over-riding concern for her son is in contradiction with her awareness of the fact that he is guilty of

parricide. She appears troubled, and confides in Najib, the courtier and politician. She is consistently projected as an embodiment of rationality. Tughlaq orders her to be stoned to death for the unwarranted act.

Aziz- Muhammad is very manipulative, witty, imaginative, secretive and ruthless, He is a Muslim but in order to get the compensation he disguises himself as a Brahmin. Thus he punctures the balloon of the king's welfare policies .If Muhammad is confident that everything will be settled after he reaches Daultabad , Aziz is also confident of his plans. He becomes an instrument in exposing the cruelty and corruption prevalent in Muhammad's regime when he refuses to help a woman with a dying son in her lap and asking for help for his medical aid. Aziz expects money from her knowing full well that her husband is bed-ridden and she is helpless.

Tughlaq is known for its historical theme and contemporary relevance. Tughlaq, the central figure of the play, stands for administrative reforms, for implementing the policy of Hindu – Muslim amity, etc. It is he who cherishes impossible dreams to be fulfilled. The study also endeavours to show how an idealist and visionary Tughlaq radically deviate from the religious tenets in matters of politics and administration and how this departure from the holy tenets enrages the orthodox people and in what way they condemn, oppose and rebel against Tughlaq. Sultan's character more fascinating , paradoxical and complex nature. He is portrayed as “a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and callous.”

U.R. Anantha Murty remarks: “Both Tughlaq and his enemies initially appear to be idealists; yet in the pursuit of the ideal, they perpetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real: the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue.” These opposites constitute the main charm of the structure of Tughlaq. He promises his Subjects to maintain “justice, equality, progress and peace -- not just peace but a more purposeful life”“without any consideration of might and weakness, religion or creed.” But to a great surprise he could not win the hearts of his public. It is worthwhile to point out in these words: Tughlaq “focuses entirely the socio-psychological and politico-religious motifs of the Sultan – Muhammad Tughlaq.”

It is “the best play in the 'New Drama in India' series” and is regarded as an abiding contribution to modern Indian English drama. Girish Karnad, a versatile genius, is “one of the foremost prolific writers”¹

Muhammad Tughlaq, a fourteenth century Sultan of Delhi, is certainly the most brilliant individual ever to ascend the throne of Delhi and also one of the biggest failures.”²

After his accession he issued many ordinances for the

improvement of the administration and revenue. He wants to give his "beloved people" peace, freedom, justice and progress. He says that his people would witness how justice works in my kingdom - without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. But his ascendancy over the throne of Delhi makes him at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and godless. His two close associates- Barani, the scholarly historian and Najib, 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 fooled him. Ramamurthy is equally right when he says that Tughlaq is "at once an idealist and a crafty politician, a humanist and a tyrant, a man who has murdered sleep and yet not a Macheth haunted by supernatural solicitations as man who thinks and broods too much and yet not a Hamlet incapable of action or guilty of delay."

As an idealist and visionary, a rationalist and forward looking emperor Tughlaq tried to introduce his kingdom into an egalitarian society. But he found the circumstances not favorable to rule because the country was divided between Islam and Hinduism. There was much animosity between the Hindus and Muslims. Tughlaq began to make efforts to bring about harmony between the two communities, justice and equality for all for the welfare of his people. He said: May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace – not just peace but a more purposeful life. Tughlaq wanted to be an enlightened and liberal despot and tried hard to find the cooperation of his subjects, which was denied to him due to the bigotry and orthodoxy of his people. The people fail to understand his idealism and reformatory zeal, and condemn him as an enemy of Islam. In fact, he is a devout Muslim with full faith in the Holy Koran but his rationalistic and ideal views are beyond the comprehension of his subjects. However, the young people admire and support the liberal and secular policies of the Sultan whose rationalistic and modernized attitude appeals the youth. To him, "The country's in perfectly safe hands – safer than any you've seen before".

Rulers and politicians use religion as a medium to befool the common man. They pollute religion by misusing it for fulfilling their dirty political motives. But religion cannot be used to serve the end of those who are in power because it preaches morals and expects morality from the people. It stands for virtue, goodness, righteousness and moral conduct while politics thrives on intrigue, craftiness, dishonesty and deceit. The case of Tughlaq is no exception. Karnad shows in Tughlaq that the idealist and his idealism do not go hand in hand with a politician and his politics. But the idealist Tughlaq fails in producing any lasting result. What he gains, as he tells, is: "Not words but the sword – that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission" and "power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize my self" (66).

All his idealism is shattered in the game of politics and thrown to the winds. Even Barani, the best of his advisors, asks Muhammad, who is a man of great learning, You are a learned man, Your Majesty, you are known the world over for your knowledge of philosophy and poetry. History is not made only in statecraft; its lasting results are produced in the ranks of learned men. That's where you belong, Your Majesty, in the company of learned men. (55) And further Your Majesty, there was a time when you believe in love, in peace, in God. What has happened to those ideals? You won't let your subject pray. You torture them for the smallest offence. Hang them on suspicion. Why this bloodshed? (56) The murder of the Sheikh leads to the intrigues of the courtiers and other idealists of the kingdom. This happening unites the Hindus and the Muslims altogether to rise against the craftiness and tyranny of the Sultan. Shihab-ud-din, the most trusted of the friends of Sultan is persuaded to attend the meeting of the intriguers and at last to stand against the Sultan. Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim

tells Shihab-ud-din that he is attending the meeting to save Islam not to "get mixed up in the treacherous games of politicians.... But Allah isn't only for me,... while tyranny crushes the faithful into dust, how can I continue to hide in my hole?" (32). Tughlaq is of great interest as it combines religion and politics of an idealist and visionary Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq. It intends to show that idealism of the ruler will fail and will ruin the idealist. The concepts like secularism, equality and unity in a country like India are very much ahead of the times. In India people still are led away by the saints and religious heads. They believe more their religious leaders than a politician. The fiery speeches of the religious saint swing people this side or that side for the vote. People still are befooled by them as they were during the reign of Tughlaq. Thus the life of the people is governed and corrupted by the interaction of the saints and the politicians.

Tughlaq pretends to be a true follower of religion, commits numberless murders to retain his monarchy. He commits patricide, fratricide and wipes off the religious and political leaders like Imam-ud-din and Shihab-ud-din for his kingship. He tells the cause of murdering them to his Step Mother in a simple way: "They couldn't bear the weight of their crown. They couldn't leave it aside so they died senile in their youth or were murdered" (11). Muhammad is torn in finding peace in his own kingdom that "has become a kitchen of death" (65). There is only one punishment for treachery, he tells his Step-Mother, it is death.

He feels lonely and frustrated. In such torn and wretched state he seeks the shelter of God who can only save him from misery and the ghosts of the murdered. Only He can help him to be a man. For this all of a sudden Tughlaq, the mighty murderer, plunderer and sinner, falls to his knees and clutches his hands to his breast to pray God in Heaven, please help me. Please don't let go of my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don't know how much of it is mine and how much of others. I started in Your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of you. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud? Raise me. Clean me. Cover me with your Infinite Mercy. I can only clutch at the hem of Your Cloak with my bloody fingers and plead. I can only beg—have pity on me. I have no one but you now. Only you. Only you ... you ... you ... you (67)

It reveals a Faustian cry of anguish, which comes from the mouth of Sultan. This Sultan uses his opponents like pawns on the chessboard of politics and unscrupulously kills them. U.R. Anantha Murthy remarks: "Both Tughlaq and his enemies initially appear to be idealists; yet in the pursuit of the ideal, they perpetrate its opposite. The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real: the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue." These opposites constitute the main charm of the structure of Tughlaq. P. Bayapa Reddy highlights the specialized technique, which Karnad employed in Tughlaq to uphold the theatrical appeal of the play for the spectators:³

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