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PORTRAYAL OF MODERNITY IN GIRISH KARNAD'S TUGHLAQ

S. SENTHIL KUMAR

Asst. Professor in English

PG & Research Department of English

Sri Vidya Mandir Arts and College

Katteri, Uthangarai.

Abstract

Modernity is one of the important nativistic literary values of nativism. It is a process of change, evolution, progress and development. It is based on rationality, a progressive thought and aims at achieving a decent standard of living for all people. As a culture specific phase of history of any society or nation, modernity scrutinizes the traditional thoughts, values or institutions and fights against superstition, narrow world-view, and backwardness of society and other evil some aspects of socio-cultural values. Its purpose is to bring about change in socio-cultural-economic and other fields. Mahatma Gandhi, a true nativist, prefers Indian modernity and its real strength is in native values. It is not blind imitation, adoption or borrowing things from the west. In this regard Choudhari, Indranath remarks, "The elements of modernity are to be sought in our roots and traditions – in our own realities..." (1997:2-3). On the whole, modernity cannot be and should not be transplanted but it must be shaped according to past traditions and present circumstances which suits to our ancient heritage. Thus it is a genuine course of social change which lies at the core of nativism.

Key Words : Nativitism, Modernity, Tughlaq etc

1. Introduction

Girish Karnad's second play 'Tughlaq' (1962) is originally written in Kannada and later translated into English by the dramatist himself for non-Kannada speakers. This play presents Tughlaq as a modernizing monarch and visionary idealist of medieval age whose mind was full of innovative ideas, ideals, plans and projects. In fact he wants to use them for the betterment and development of his subjects. He desires to make his state an utopia. So he sacrifices his sleep, personal enjoyment and luxurious games of life for this noble cause. Verily, he is much ahead of his age. Therefore, he is misunderstood by his people and age. While presenting reformative and

progressive zeal of Tughlaq, Karnad wants to discover our identity and socio-cultural and moral meaning in the present scenario for setting up a new society. Thus this play becomes a political critique of the post-Independence decades.

Tughlaq is an avant-garde Muslim ruler of the fourteenth century India. He has Uncommon desire to achieve noble ideals like peace, prosperity, justice, equality and harmony in his state. So he decides to implement certain policies for this. He takes five revolutionary decisions, viz. 1)prayers five times a day and punishment if one failsto do so, 2) the provision to raise voice even against His Majesty, 3) the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, 4) circulation of copper coins along with the silver dinars, 5) liquidating all those coming in the path of his decision (Barche, G.D.:1999:74).

Tughlaq knows that there is a divine power in prayerwhich controls human mind and provides a great strength in a critical situation. So he makes Namaz or prayer compulsory and allows people to read Koran in the streets. He makes a law that the punishment is given if one fails to do so. This is new step which was absent in previous Muslim rulers. Infact prayer is a moral foundation of politics and Tughlaq wants to spiritualize it like Gandhi. However he makes prayer compulsory for the moral and spiritual betterment of his subjects. Abolition of the

obnoxious system 'Jizia-tax' from the shoulders of Hindus is a shocking decision of Tughlaq. He destroys it on humanitarian ground and treats Hindu-Muslim subjects equally for the communal harmony. Infact Jizia-tax is imposed on infidels by the previous Sultans which actually dates from the last quarter of nineth century. "It was tax paid by an unbeliever in an Islamic state for the permission to live. It means substitute money, that is, the price of indulgence" (Sarkar, Jadunath:1972:176).Tughlaq is widely read man. His vision is enlarged by Greek literature and principles of Zarathustra or Buddha which stresses on the importance on good conduct. He knows this evil tradition discriminates human being from human being. "The greatest truth that Karnad has brought outthrough his Tughlaq is that religious saints cannot wash away fifth from society" (Mahale,H.S.:1985:137). So Tughlaq exempts Hindus from Jizia-tax. He says, "Hindus are also human beings" (Karnad, Girish:1975 (2001):2). Thus he ignores Shariat or canon law and proves himself a devotee of modernity.

Tughlaq has a passion to teach and to impart new things to his subjects. He desires to cultivate a true vision of justice and brotherhood without any discrimination. So he makes a provision to complain even against His Majesty if there is any injustice. Under this new system of justice, Vishnu Prasad files suit against Sultan that his land has been confiscated unlawfully by the officers of state. Kazi-i-Mumalik considers the matter carefullyand declares that Brahmin's claim is right and he should be given five hundred silver dinars as compensation. Tughlaq admits his guilt and decision of Kazi-i-Mumalik. He proves 'everybody was equal in the eyes of law and it was proved by the act of Vishnu Prasad case. It was a rare act on the part of Sultan' (Mahale, H.S.:1985:113). No doubt, Tughlaq shows impartiality while administering justice. It reflects through the example when he orders a sentence of death by stoning to his own step-mother who found guilty in Najib's murder. Such novelty is seen once in a blue moon. Shifting capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is another radical decision of Tughlaq.

To observe communal harmony, secularism, to build new future for India and security from Outside invadation, are the main objectives of Tughlaq behind this decision. He says, "My Empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near to border and as you well know its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is a city of the Hindus and as the capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my kingdom" (Karnad, Girish:1975(2001):3-4). This remark of Tughlaq displays his well-intentioned ideal view, noble vision for the creation of the ideal empire and acute observation of future without emotional attachment with the present. No doubt, all his ideals are influenced by Al Mutazi's philosophy and Sadi's poetry. On the whole, his decision of shifting capital suggests his inordinate ambition to change the course of history in general and to reshape and reconstruct it in particular like Marlowe's Dr. Faustus.

Introduction of copper currency is another fine example of Tughlaq's extraordinary vision. It is the most daring experiment. This Monetary Policy shows his innate passion to build 'a new future for India' (P.40). He introduces it along with silver dinars and giving same value both of them. He issues orders that in all transactions copper tokens should be accepted like gold and silver coins. Infact, his purpose is to build a passionate relationship between ruler and the ruled. Unfortunately his romantic journey of innovative idealism fails miserably. But one cannot deny his love for progressive move and unflinching zeal for reforms. On the whole, his novel Monetary Experiment shows his concrete ability and competence to do something new for the people and the state.

Tughlaq is a distinguished scholar and man of ideas. His vision is enlarged and shaped by Sokrates (Socrates), Aflatoon (Plato), Zarathustra or Buddha and Greek literature. So he segregates religion from politics and does not allow himself to rely on God, religion or prayer merely, though the word of God was his breath of life. The supreme ideals like peace, truth, justice, equality, prosperity and regeneration of people are invaluable than religion and religious people for him. Naturally he does not allow the religious leaders like Sheikh-Imam-Ud-din, Sheikh Haidar Ali, Sheikh Hood etc. to interfere into politics and to spread unlawful and fallacious doctrines of religion in society. When they try to do so, Tughlaq either imprisons or exiles or kills them strategically. He firmly says to Sheikh-Imam-Ud-din, "You propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha I'm sorry. But it can't be done." (Karnad, Girish:1975: 2001:21). However, Tughlaq knows the spirit of religion which aims at the transformation of human heart, self-realization and social regeneration. Thus he tries to teach wisdom and truth, to mend the minds, to enlighten people's souls and to free their minds from the shackles of false religion. While doing so, he crosses the principles of religion but not defies nor sacrileges the religion.

In brief, Tughlaq is an avant-garde Muslim ruler who takes radical decisions and implements certain policies in order to transform his state into utopia. His novel policies viz. Hindu-Muslim unity, abolition of Jizia-tax, shifting capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, introduction of copper currency, equality before law, freedom of expression, impartial justice and segregation of politics from religion represents him a disciple of modernity whose visions are influenced by the ideology of secularism of Buddha.

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