

THE CONCEPT OF SECULARISM IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *TUGHLAQ*

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Secularism implies that the state should treat all the recognised religions and religious laws equally without preference or prejudice. Francisco Fontanella's plays dealt with renovation and updation of current events and trends. His important plays are - 'Tragicomedy of Love', 'Strength and Perseverance'. Both these plays were written for and about wealthy people.

The Indian constitution recognises the people of India professing different religious and brings them under the single umbrella as citizens of India. Secularism encompasses the state of religious reformation. Today, even after sixth eight years since Indian Independence, politicians appeal to the Hindus and Muslims, but not Indians as a whole. This cannot be called Secularism. Mahatma Gandhi has said rightly that "I swear by my religion, I will die for it. But it is my personal affair!".

Under these circumstances Girish Karnad's treatment of the theme of secularism is not historical. The treatment is that of the post-Independence day politics. In the present paper I have discovered the secular principles followed by Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. During his reign, he never destroyed any Hindu Temple. He was liberal in his approach and tolerant in his attitude towards religion. He never accepted any orthodox proposal presented by the religious fanatics. He appointed deserving Hindus in significant positions. He never hesitated to punish severely anyone who was a religious fanatic, indulging in intolerant activities. Of all the Sultans of his times. Mohammad Tughlaq was the most liberal and judicious. People were permitted to prefer complaints even against the Sultan himself. He was a famous ruler who rendered impartial justice to all his subjects.

Tughlaq treated all religions as equal. He withdraws the Jizia Tax levied on Hindus especially. But the Muslims did not approve of it. In the opening scene of the play common people openly express their displeasure at the behaviour and policies of the Sultan.

"All this about the Hindus not paying the Jiziya Tax. That's against the Koran, you know. A Molwi told that" (Scene 1, Page 1, 2)

People gather in front of the court to hear the judgement on the case of one Hindu Vishnu Prasad who has filed a case against Tughlaq's regime that his land has been confiscated by the government officials illegally. Vishnu Prasad claimed compensation for the loss of his land. Finally he was granted a compensation of five hundred silver dinars and was offered a civil post as a means of a regular income.

After the judgment is passed, Sultan Mohammad Tughlaq, addressed the citizens. He publicly praises the impartiality of the Kazi. The Sultan speaks to the citizens, how law and order is protected by his reign. His opinion is that there is no rich and poor, no religion and all are his citizens. He always used to greet the people, "My beloved people". He tells the citizens that he wants in his kingdom a greater justice, equality progress and a more purposeful life for which he wants the co-operation of his people. When he proposes to the people that he would shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, he tried to convince the people that his kingdom is quite vast, Delhi is near to border, enemies can invade here at anytime, but the city Daulatabad is the centre of his country, more suitable to rule. Daulatabad is a well populated city; therefore, making Daulatabad the capital would strengthen the Hindu Muslim unity.

The Sultan tells them that his decision has the approval of the ministers because the new capital will be free from the dangers of the invasion of enemies. The Sultan invites the people to accompany him to Daulatabad. But the people have misunderstood the Sultan's plan of shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and it was also criticized by the people generally. They considered this step as a symbol of the king's madness.

Sultan Mohammed Tughlaq's principal aim is unity of all religions, and the development of his country. When the Muslim Saint Sheikh-immam-ud-din also advises the sultan that he is a mighty king with power, good learning and intelligence and so he can spread Islam far and wide. On the other hand, he is trying to become God himself, which is a greater sin than killing one's father. Tughlaq says that he is a believer and the most obedient servant of God.

"You are one of the most powerful Kings on earth today and you spread the kingdom of Heaven on earth. God has given you everything – Power, learning, intelligence, Talent".

(Scene 3, Page 20)

Tughlaq says that his country is vast, billions of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs reside in it. So he wants to make his people think like him and not to be led like dumb cattle. Sultan knows the Greek authors like Socrates and Plato; Socrates was given poison, when he wanted to give the drink of gods to his countrymen. He also knows Plato who wrote fine poetry but condemned poets and not allowed them in his ideal Republic. Tughlaq wants to be a visionary like Zarathustra and Buddha.

"You are asking me to make myself complete by killing the Greek in me and you propose to unify my people by denying the visions which led Zarathustra or the Buddha".

(Scene 3, Page 21)

Sultan Mohammad Tughlaq gives the order for the people to vacate Delhi. The distance between Delhi and Daulatabad is about 950 kilometers. Tughlaq had tried to provide all possible facilities to people. He got roads repaired and constructed rest-houses on both sides of the road, every two or three miles. Sultan spent a lot of money to carry out this plan. He tells to Najib, that he wants Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi immediately will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. Shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, many people died particularly muslims, while they were shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad.

Regarding copper currency, Tughlaq has known that China has introduced paper currency. So he orders that the copper coins would have the same value as the silver coins. As a result of announcing the copper coins or currency, everyone has made it a business of making counterfeit copper coins. Hindus especially are in the higher office of Sultan Mohammad Tughlaq. Every Hindu had minted money. The traders and businessmen are waiting for the death of the Sultan. Except Ain-ul-mulk and the father of Shihab-ud-din, the Sultan had never expected his people would become businessmen of counterfeit copper currency. The Sultan's whole economy collapsed.

“Every Hindu home has become a domestic mint; the traders are just waiting for me to close my eyes”. (Scene 8, Page 55)

Sultan is standing by a window, now he realizes his mistakes and thinks that if he does not withdraw the coins the whole economy will be in the shambles. The sultan is highly anguished at his own doings. He feels that he wanted to be an idealist, but miserably he fails. Sultan tells his step-mother that he is trying to find out the murderer of Najib, which gives a great shock to Mohammad. Finally Sultan has found out that his step-mother does not like Najib as the advisor of Tughlaq. She knows that Mohammad passes sleepless nights. Step-mother shows herself a wise and practical advisor of the sultan. She cannot close her eyes at the happening in the kingdom. She tried to convince Tughlaq. Seven years before, Mohammad Tughlaq become Sultan of Delhi with great ambition, but now what is happening in the country, which has become a kitchen of death on account of Najib. Finally sultan gives the death punishment to his step-mother for the murder of Najib.

On the fifth year after the arrival at Daulatabad, the whole kingdom became poor; the people became the victims of poverty. Ghias-ud-din Abbasis has arrived at Daulatabad from Turkey. He has announced in a public meeting at Daulatabad, the muslim will pray for five times a day as enjoined by the holy Koran and declare himself a faithful slave of the Lord”. But the people are fed up of even prayers. They need food rather than prayer.

“First Man: Prayer! Prayer! Who wants prayers now?

Second Man: Ask them to give us some food.

First Man: There’s no food. Food’s only in the palace. It’s prayers for us” (Scene 11, Page 70)

However, the ideals of the Sultan Mohammad Tughlaq fail miserably. All his constructive plans are frustrated. Perhaps it is because he is too visionary. His very decision of shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, faces the displeasure and silent disapproval of his Amirs and subjects. Likewise, his decision of issuing copper currency flops miserably. As a result a lot of counterfeit currency came out. The whole kingdom would be collapsed economically. Tughlaq’s genuine secular views ended up in vain without success.

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