

The use of dramatic irony in Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the use of dramatic Irony in Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq*. Dramatic irony or Tragic irony is a figure of speech. In this what is said by characters in a play has a different and more serious meaning to the audience. The audience is more aware than the characters concerned, of the catastrophe which is either going to occur or has occurred. Often it happens that what is being said or done on the stage has one meaning for the characters concerned and another for the spectators who know something that the characters do not know. The device on the part of the playwright which produces these two points of view is called dramatic irony. When it arises of what is said, it is verbal irony. When it arises of what is done, it is irony of situation.

Keywords: tughlaq, sultan, dramatic irony, tragic irony, dramatic contrasts

Introduction

Dramatic irony or Tragic irony is a figure of speech. In this what is said by characters in a play has a different and more serious meaning to the audience. The audience is more aware than the characters concerned, of the catastrophe which is either going to occur or has occurred. Often it happens that what is being said or done on the stage has one meaning for the characters concerned and another for the spectators who know something that the characters do not know. The device on the part of the playwright which produces these two points of view is called dramatic irony. When it arises of what is said, it is verbal irony. When it arises of what is done, it is irony of situation.

In fact irony is a kind of contrast. The principle of contrast is in the very nature of a tragedy where there is clash between opposed persons or passions or interests. Some antithesis is always found between the good and the evil, or the sympathetic and unsympathetic sides of the action; and specifically among the characters groups of characters by whom these different sides are respectively represented. There are many forms of dramatic contrasts. Dramatic Irony is one of the forms of dramatic contrast.

Dramatic irony is defined in the Dictionary of World Literature thus: "Dramatic irony, also called tragic irony, is a device whereby ironic incongruity is introduced into the very texture of the plot, by having the spectator aware of elements in the situation of which one or more of the characters involved are ignorant. The words and actions thus have, in addition to their natural tragic impact and their value as furthering the action of the play, the peculiar relief which they derive from the contrast between the spectators knowledge and the character's ignorance."

The opening sentences in the play '*Tughlaq*' strike the keynote of the play. These sentences are noticeable for the artistic use of verbal irony. To allay the doubts of the old man, who doubts that in the reign of Tughlaq the country is not safe, the young man says: "The country is in perfectly safe hands- safer than any you've seen before." These words may be understood at one level as referring to performance of

Tughlaq's administrative duties in public and national interest, but with sinister mockery they actually express the utter failure of Tughlaq's administration which hurls the country into the maelstrom of murder and bloodshed, sufferings and ruin. The old man is not well versed with the tenets of Islam. He condemns the Sultan for his liberal and tolerant attitude towards Hindus and considers him an enemy of Islam. Here irony is implied. It becomes poignant and sharp in the following words of the young man. "Now you pray five times a day because that's the law and if you break it, you'll have the officers on your neck. Can you mention one earlier Sultan in whose time people read the Koran in the streets like now? Just one?" It is indeed, ironical that after sometime the Sultan himself prohibits prayer when an attempt is made to kill him at prayer time. He ironically says. "But our prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled. There will be no more praying in the kingdom. Najib, anyone caught praying will be severely punished?"

There is irony in the use of the word 'prayer'. It is reintroduced when a notorious cheat Aziz comes to Daulatabad in guise of Ghiyasud-Din Abbasid to reintroduce prayer five times a day as enjoyed by the Holy Koran. It is very ironic that a notorious cheater and murderer reintroduce prayer. The Sultan knows it but the public does not. U.R. Anantha Murthy writes that prayer has been used as leitmotiv in the play "in the scene where the Muslim chieftains along with Sheikh Shamsud-Din, a pacifist priest, conspire to murder Tughlaq while at prayer. The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent of what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father. That prayer, which is most dear to Tughlaq, is vitiated by him as well as his enemies is symbolic of the fact that life is corrupted at its very source."

Tughlaq's speech in which he elaborates publicly his ideals and administration reforms is a nice example of verbal irony. His ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity is exploited by Aziz; orthodox Muslims condemn him for his flagrant violation of Islam. Even the Hindus whom he trusted betray him. Tughlaq little understands that nobody would cooperate with him in the implementation of his plans which have a forward

looking quality. How ironical are his words: "Every Hindu (Goldsmith's) home has become a domestic mint; the traders are just waiting for me close my eyes. He does not know while announcing his decision to shift. The capital of his empire from Delhi to Daulatabad that this decision would make him immensely unpopular and would be one of the important causes of his downfall."

The chess symbol is an interesting example of verbal irony in Tughlaq. He says to his step mother, "I have just solved the most famous problem in chess." His mother fails to understand that Tughlaq means to say that to him politics is like a game of chess and he can use his political rivals and opponents like pawns on the chess board of politics. He intends using Ain-ul-Mulk and Sheikh Imam-ud-din the orthodox priest who fans the flames of the rebellion against him, according to his will. But at this moment he himself does not realize that his chess like tricks would recoil on him. Barani tells Najib that he cannot properly understand the tenets of Islam because, "Your Hindu childhood has twisted your attitudes beyond repair." Najib tells him why he embraced Islam. He says, "Islam is worried about this world, I said, it'll bring the kingdom of heaven on earth. But I know it won't work. There's only the present moment and we must grasp it firmly." To Barani Sheikh Imam-ud-din is a respectable person but Najib says "A traitor's traitor, friend or saint and he must be crushed." Najib's words have an ironical significance.

Tughlaq's diplomatic moves are beyond Sheikh Imam-ud-Din's comprehension. Tughlaq is an exponent of Hindu Muslim unity but he persuades the Sheikh to act as his envoy and to go to Ain-ul-Mulk to hold talks of peace. Mark the ironical implication of Tughlaq's words, "You can't deny that this war will mean a slaughter of Muslims at the hands of fellow Muslims. Isn't that enough for the great Sheikh Imam-Ud-Din." By persuading the Sheikh to go to Ain-ul-Mulk for the sake of saving Muslims from slaughter. Tughlaq hatches a conspiracy to kill him. The paradoxes in Tughlaq's character are the main source of irony in Tughlaq.

The plot of the play 'Tughlaq' is based on opposites which constitute irony. M. K. Naik points out, "Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan, who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel. 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 the Sultan's visionary schemes and fooled him. Ironic incongruity is interwoven in the whole play. The Sultan's declaration of tolerance towards Hindus and the recognition of merit, irrespective of caste and creed create a situation, the serious implications of which he fails to understand. To him it is a fine policy intended for the welfare of the orthodox Muslims who rise in rebellion against him and frustrate his schemes.

Aziz, who is a cheat, assumes many disguises to befool the Sultan and when his identity is disclosed, he calls himself the Sultan's close disciple. Aziz spreads a net of words around the Sultan and creates a complicated situation from which he cannot come out. He reminds the Sultan quite ironically that he has publicly welcomed him as a saint, has started public prayers after a lapse of five years and called him a savior. Irony reaches its climax when he Sultan decides to appoint

him an officer in the army. The play ends with an ironical note. Tughlaq falls asleep after a pretty long time. He does not awake even when the muezzin's call to prayer is heard. As the muezzin's calls fades away, Tughlaq suddenly opens his eyes. He looks around frightened and dazed, as though he cannot comprehend where he is. Thus, the play Tughlaq has irony- verbal irony as well as irony of situation.

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