UNIT 2 INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR AND THE PLAY

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall introduce you to Girish Karnad and his plays, discuss possible approaches to a play. We shall then converge on the prescribed text, Tughlaq, providing you with a scene by scene commentary for your detailed study and comprehension.

2.1 GIRISH KARNAD AND HIS WORKS

2.1.1 Girish Karnad: Important dates

1938: Born on 19th May at Matheran in the Konkani region of Maharashtra.
1958: Graduation from Karnataka University, Dharwad.
1961: *Yayati*  
Rhodes scholar at Oxford.
1963: *Ma Nishad*  
1964: *Tuglaq*  
1963-1970: Assistant Manager, Oxford Univ Press and then Manager; resigned to devote himself full time to writing and film making.
1970-72: Homi Bhabha Fellowship for Creative Work on Folklore  
1970: President’s Gold Medal for the Best Film for *Samskara*  
1971: *Hayavadana* (Kannada); Eng trans. 1973  
1974-75: Director, Film and Television Institute of India  
1974: Padma Shri  
1976-78: President, Karnataka Natak Akademi.  
1977: *Anjumallige*. Director, Nehru Centre, the cultural wing of the High Commission for India.  
1987-88: Fullbright Playwright in Residence and Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago.  
1988: *Naga-manadala*  
1988-93: Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi  
1992: Padma Bhushan  
1990: *Tale-danda*  
1993: The Guthrie Theatre of Minneapolis presented his *Nagamandala* for its 30th Anniversary Celebrations and commissioned *The Fire and the Rain* for the next year.
1999: Bharatiya Jnanpith Award.
2000: *Tippu Sultan kanda kanasu*

### 2.1.2 List of Plays

Here is a list of plays by Girish Karnad. The language in which they were written and the date of translation in English is indicated in the brackets.

1961: *Yayati* (Kannada). Remains untranslated into English.
1971: *Hayavadana* [Horse Head] (Kannada); Eng. trans. 1973.
1977: *Anjumallige* [Driven Snow] (Kannada)
1980: *Hittina hurja* [Dough Rooster] (Kannada)
1990: *Tale-danda* [Death by Decapitation] (Kannada); Eng. trans. 1993
2000: *Tippu Sultan kanda kanasu* [The Dreams of Tippu Sultan] (Kannada) Produced by the BBC during the Fiftieth Anniversary of Indian Independence.
2005: *Odakalu Bimba* (Kannada) (Broken Images) (English) 2005.
2005: *The Flowers* (Kannada, English and Hindi)

(The names in Kannada and in translation and dates to be checked by Dr Billi Male.)
2.1.3 Notes on the Plays

i. Yayati

Karnad’s first play, *Yayati* (1961), was originally written in the Kannada language. This play was published in the sixties when the Navya (Modernist) movement was at its peak in Karnataka. Poetry and short story were the two genres that were affected by it most. Gopala Krishna Adiga taught poetry to sing in new rhythms and the interpretation of this poetry was a challenge to the intellectuals. For the first time, the Kannada poets discovered that new thoughts demand a new kind of idiom for their expression. The modernity for Kannada poets means a new way of thinking rather than the prevalence of a new sensibility. It is not surprising that drama for a time being was not affected by the new movement, perhaps because dramatic language has to be more communicative than that of poetry. We do not know whether Karnad, who was one of the youngest writers of that time, had consciously realised it or not. His first play Yayati, like the plays of Jean-Paul Sartre, has a conventional form it closely resembles the form of popular drama in Marathi, but new in its import.

Yayati re-tells the myth of Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, in modern terms. The ancestors of the Pandavas like Pururava, Nahusha, Yayati or Dushyanta enact the myth of immortality in its various aspects. Yayati’s is a more interesting experiment. He falls in love with Devayani, the daughter of a Brahmin and also her friend, Sharmishtha, the daughter of demon king Virupaksha. Yayati’s marriage with Devayani is fatal because it honours the humiliating conditions of Devayani that Sharmishtha should be her servant. But Yayati, who loves both, gets children by both of them. Devayani who is angered by her husband’s betrayal, complains to her father, who curses Yayati that he should suffer old age. Yayati exchanges his old age with his son’s youth and continues to enjoy life for a long time. Puru is the ideal son who is ready to sacrifice his precious youth for the sake of his father. Yayati borrows his son’s youth with an unconscious desire to imitate gods, because gods are both mortal and ageless. Yayati’s lust or Puru’s sacrifice seems to have been born out of the system of the values of the epic poetry.

Karnad’s play protests against this symbolic value system. The protest is voiced through Puru, who is the protagonist of the play. He returns victorious from a swayamvar along with his wife Chitrlekha. But he is critical of the whole setup of chivalrous culture. He had won the bride not because he was valiant and heroic but because he was the son of Yayati. Puru in this play is not a man of action but is withdrawn and meditative. He accepts his father’s old age not with a sense of sacrifice but because he is psychologically and prematurely old. Puru is sick of the palace life, its pomp and glory. He is still groping in the dark for the meaning of life. He is sick of the felicity of life, but has not perceived any truth beyond it.

In the original epic *Mahabharata*, Yayati takes thousand of years to return youth to Puru. But in Karnad’s play he returns it soon and the realizations are like a flash of lightning. In the epic, Puru is still a bachelor, while in the play he is married. But Puru who has lost his youth cannot love his wife. It is his wife, Chitrlekha who challenges Yayati, questioning the morality of the exchange of youth and age. She also insists that the father who has borrowed the son’s youth, should also take her as his wife. The rational of her arguments
morally unnerve Yayati and the moral implications of his new relation terrifies him. Karnad’s play goes a step further towards Chitralekha’s death. This end makes the exchange of youth and age and the realization and everything that precedes it absurd and meaningless. The main strength of this play is in characterization. The mythical characters that are archetypal have become fully individualized in the play.

ii. Ma Nishad

Ma Nishad (1963) is a one-act radio drama in which Karnad depicts the importance of the ordinary man for the hero Rama in the Ramayana.

iii. Hayavadana

Girish Karnad’s third play Hayavadana deals with the problem of human identity. Karnad has borrowed the theme for this play from an old collection of stories — Vetalapanchavimshati. Critics pointed out that Karnad has received this plot through Thomas Mann. The original story in Sanskrit is a comic one, in which the riddle is more important than the plot. But it has become all the more comic in the mock-heroic style of Thomas Mann. Mann’s story gently ridicules the mechanical notion of the real distinction between the body and the spirit. For Mann the organic unity of the body and soul seems to have been maneuvered by nature for the realization of human destiny. Nanda and Shridamana who’s heads are transposed in a comic accident and thus their destinies are also changed. But the situation remains the same even after the transposition of the heads. The transformed young men do not change in nature and the story becomes as Mann comically puts it, “another example to describe the gruesome guiles of Maya”. The only transformation that takes place in the story, is that the two protagonists suddenly become antagonists for the sake of Sita, a beautiful damsel of ‘broad hips’.

Karnad has, more or less, taken the same theme and has added a sub-plot of a ‘horse-man’ who in search of completeness becomes a horse at the end. The main story of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, works out the problem of human identity through fascinating details. The two inseparables, Devadatta and Kapila, are still in the process of individuation. These friends are already antagonists in the making, in the sense, that each is complemented by the other, and also they oppose one another. They are bound by mutual love and live like one individual in two physical frames. The problem of identity does not bother them as long as they are friends. But Devadatta falls in love with Padmini and marries her, and from this moment the relationships get complicated. Padmini is devoted to her husband but she is also attracted by the excellent masculinise form of Kapila. Fortunately, the plot does not end up in the situation of a ‘love-triangle’, nor does it get a tragic twist by the theme of a jealous husband. The characters of this play live in a world different from ours, the difference being not historical but only spiritual. The hysterical suicide which Devadatta commits, believing it to be a sacrifice to Goddess Kali, is as comic as the erroneous transposition of heads done by Padmini.

In the original story, there is a riddle, which contains an ethical question. Whom should Padmini accept as her husband? Should she accept the person who has the head of Devadatta or the head of Kapila? The solution to this problem is given by a sage: the identity of human beings is established by the
head, which is the holiest part of the human body. Thomas Mann retains this situation for the purpose of ridiculing it. This situation is not there in *Hayavadana*, because it is not relevant here. Karnad treats the problem of man's identity as an intellectual and a spiritual problem. Padmini, in order to get the complete satisfaction of love has to love two persons. Only for a brief period she lives in perfect happiness with one Devadatta, who has the head of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. But she soon realizes that perfection is only an illusion because the very organic unity of body and soul brings about the change in Kapila's body. Karnad for the first time used a number of theatrical images in his drama. These images do not develop into symbols, at best they are ideational equivalents. But they are powerful enough to create a world of their own for the manifestation of the plot. The play is filled with half formed beings, right from the elephant-god which the play invokes, to a man with the head of a horse. Dolls speak the comment like human beings, while the son of Padma rarely opens his mouth to speak. The yawning goddess careless creates and recreates the world, allows the heads to be transposed and transforms the horse-man into a complete horse. The only glory allowed to this kind of life is the lusty but monotonous movement symbolized by the horse and the idiotic rider moving round and round the stage.

What is important about *Hayavadana* as a play is that it doesn't depend solely upon language to convey its significance. In one of his interviews Karnad said, 'language is one of the many factors of drama'. Theatrical images, miming and stage-property also can be used for the purpose for conveying the undertones. The play also uses the conventions and techniques of folk-drama.

iv. Anjumallige

Uses the myth of Yama and Yami in the Rig Veda to explore the problem of incest. The play is located in England. But both the problem and the violence of the play are not convincing. The play doesn't seem to have been very successful.

v. *Hitina Hunja*

This play is convincing as a dramatic interpretation of Yashodhara Charite of Janna (1230 AD). But the claustrophobic setting of the play doesn't allow the freedom of the narrative and becomes a bundle of arguments echoing and reechoing in a Jaina temple.

vi. *Naga-mandala*

*Naga-mandala* is based on two folktales Karnad heard from A.K.Ramanujan. A playwright is cursed to stay awake all night in the temple and as he attempts to do so, he meets the spirit of a story who has slipped out of an old woman's mouth as she snored. The story is that of a young bride who is neglected by her indifferent husband and attempts to win his affection with a love potion; instead, she enchants a king Cobra who begins to meet her every night while her husband is away.

vii. *Tale-danda* (Death by Decapitation)

"Tale-danda" literally means, "Head Price/Tax". Though not on the scale of *Tughlaq*, *Tale-danda* is based on a theme which is very relevant to present day Indian caste-based and communal politics. The play is set in the 13-14th
century Karnataka, where the political situation is in a state of turmoil. The plot relates to the saint-poet-philosopher-minister, Basvanna, his life and times. *Tale-danda* keeps in tradition with Karnad’s selection of plots — from popular Indian folklore as in *Nagamandala*, mythology, as in *Yayati* and *Agni mattu male* (The Fire and the Rain) or socio-political themes as in *Tugliaq* and the present play. In essence, *Tale-danda* captures the entire history, especially the later part of Basvanna’s life in a play, which is something remarkable, as there are countless books and theses written on Basvanna. Specifically, *Tale-danda* depicts the struggle of one man for social reformation — this is just the surface. A deeper look into the play provides immense food for thought, what with tales interwoven into the play, and how the destiny of a society is swayed by the whims of a few. *Tale-danda* brings out the intricate complexities of a social order prevailing during that period, when the caste system was at its rigid worst. The best part of *Tale-danda* is its pre-climax (which incidentally is powerful in all Karnad’s plays) when the protagonist faces a moral dilemma. Karnad has pictured it with depth, that each reading furnishes new meanings, and new possibilities.

viii. *Agni mattu male* (The Fire and the Rain)

Karnad bases his *Agni mattu male* [The Fire and the Rain] (1994) on the little known story of Yavakri from the Mahabharat of a seven-year-long fire sacrifice. It is an obscure story which a certain sage narrates to the Pandavas, and to a lay reader, passes off as insignificant. What Girish Karnad has done, however, is to transform it into a masterful piece of drama by depicting conflicting human emotions through the characters. It is an excellent combination of the elements — human, metaphysical and supernatural that constitutes the core of the play. Karnad successfully makes use of the divine element — especially in the climax where the hero holds a conversation with the Gods, and the final result of the rain pouring on a drought-ridden land. The play also focuses both on the negative and positive human emotions — jealousy, betrayal, deceit, as well as selfless love (evidenced by the hero and the heroine, Nittile) and sacrifice. The hero, like most of Karnad’s heroes, is a man torn between moral righteousness, love and duty. It is interesting to trace this path of the hero to its fitting end. Karnad has stated that “the play lived in my mind for 37 years” before assuming its present form. It is a splendid culmination of his creative intelligence.

Ram Gopal Bajaj, formerly Director of NSD once remarked that after Tagore’s *Muktadhara*, and Dhuman Vir Bharati’s *Andha Yug*, Karnad’s play *Agni mattu male* deserved a place among the international masterpieces of our country.

The play was adapted and filmed by Arjun Sajnani with Jackie Shroff and Raveena Tandon and Amitabh Bachchan under the name *Agni Varsha*.

ix. *Tippuvina Kanasugalu* (The Dreams of Tippu Sultan)

This play is based on the Mysore King, Tippu Sultan, who died in a war with the British army in 1799. This play is about the early days of colonialism. It explains how colonization began. Tippu Sultan, a king who ruled Mysore state from Shrirangapatana, engaged himself in importing new technologies and technicians from foreign countries. He wanted to establish friendly relations
with his neighbours. On the other hand, the British wanted to win the war in order to overcome their humiliations, or to increase their wealth. The play portrays Tipu as a noble king interested in the welfare of his subjects, whereas the British are depicted as treacherous and cunning.

x. Bali: The Sacrifice

The play was commissioned and first produced by 2002 Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, U.K. It is based on an ancient Jain myth in which a king is horrified to discover that his queen has an affair with an elephant-keeper. To avert the evil consequences of the adultery, he is to sacrifice a cockerel to the gods but being a Jain, he cannot bring himself to do so and he sacrifices a bird made of dough. The play is concerned with the morality of substitution.

xi. The Flowers

The play is a dramatic monologue and is a triangular tale of loyalty and lust. It uses the famous legend of the priest Veeranna of the Chitradurga region, who is involved in an extramarital relationship with a courtesan. The flowers of the title are the flowers with which the priest decorates the Shivalinga before the young Chief Tain comes to the temple and later the naked body of Chandravati, the courtesan. He is torn between his love for God and erotic love, between his wife and unlawful mistress, between his duty to the king and his duty to his wife.

xii. Odakalu Bimba Broken Images

Like The Flowers, Broken Images is a dramatic monologue. Moving away from myth and folktales and history, Girish Karnad breaks new ground by dealing with contemporary issues like the politics of language and how images constantly thrown at us by the modern electronic age affect human relationships. The play concerns a struggling Kannada short story writer who for once writes in English and her work becomes a bestseller. The inner tension is dramatized when her mirror image shown on the television screen on the stage starts questioning the successful writer. The play in Hindi translation was presented on 7 March 2008 at the Ramayani auditorium and was very well received. (The Hindu, Metroplus, 2, Saturday, March 8, 2008)

Karnad has been a playwright for the last forty years and is growing as an artist and, one hopes, he will produce yet another masterpiece in line with Tughlaq and Hayavadana. In both these plays he has created a drama verging on the theatre of the absurd by fusing comedy and tragedy. Apparently Karnad is not at home in realistic drama and the reason, perhaps, is that he feels that realistic drama cannot express fully what the playwright feels about life deeply.

2.1.4 Girish Karnad’s Films

Girish Karnad won the Presidents’ Gold Medal for the best feature film Samskara in 1970. His directorial debut was with Vamsha Vriksha, along with B V Karanth and he later moved to Hindi films to work with Syam Benegal for his films Nishant, Manthan and Kalyug. His award-winning film Kaadu (The Forest, 1973) is a violent rural drama about rivalry between two villages as seen through the eyes of a young boy, Kitti. The boy, who is staying with his uncle Chandre Gowda and aunt Kamali, notices his uncle’s
secret visit to his mistress in the next village. This affair escalates into a larger confrontation between Chandra Gowda and his rival Shivaganga, which eventually leads to violence, the death of aunt Karnali and the arrival of the police. The boy cannot distinguish the specifically man-made violence that surrounds him from the more primeval threats presented by the dense forest which, according to legend, contains a killer bird that calls out its victims by name. In a fantasy ending, the boy imagines the bird calling him and he follows the call, ignoring the frantic voices of his parents who want to take him home. Another award winning film of his Cheliy, (The Flowering Tree, 1992) is based on a Karnataka folktale. A young woman, Cheliy, living in abject poverty with her mother and sister, can turn herself into a tree yielding an endless supply of blossoms as long as they are picked very carefully. Kumar, the son of the village headman, seduced by the scent of the flowers, marries Cheliy and they enjoy her flowering in strict privacy. During Kumar’s absence, the headman’s younger daughter Shyama forces Cheliy to disclose her secret. Unable to comprehend the delicacy and beauty of the event, the children destroy the tree, leaving Cheliy’s body a mutilated tree-stump. Ondanndu Kaladali (1978), Utsav (1984), and Kanuru Heggadath are his other award winning films.

Awards

Some of the many important awards won by Girish Karnad are as under:

i. Sangeet Natak Akademi award for playwriting (1972)
ii. Bhartiya Natya Sangh award for Hayavadana (1972)
iii. Padma Shri (1974)
iv. Padma Bhushan (1992)
vi. President’s Gold Medal for film Samskara (1970)

2.1.5 Girish Karnad as a Playwright

A multi-faceted personality

Girish Karnad is a multi-faceted personality. He is among the top three contemporary Indian playwrights, the other two being Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar. But among contemporary Indian playwrights Girish Karnad has had what Aparna Dharwadker says ‘the strongest life outside the theatre, in films and television’. He has been a fine actor, has written and also directed several films and television serials in Kannada and Hindi. He has been a cultural administrator too — having been the head of the Nehru Cultural Centre, Indian High Commission in London, among other assignments. However, he has repeatedly said that he has done films to make money and that his primary love has always been theatre. When asked what worried him about the new situation of theatre in India, Karnad said: ‘What worries me really is that there is no theatre — a theatre that may sustain a playwright and save him from drudging in films, bad serials, or whatever to keep his body and soul together’. (‘I am trying to create my own tradition’. Interview with Girish Karnad by Chaman Ahuja HYPERLINK “http://www.tribuneindia.com” March 21, 1999.) In an earlier interview, he pointed out that one couldn’t earn a comfortable living even from a successful play. Tughlaq has been
enormously successful, both critically and in performance. ‘Playwrights in the West have been able to retire on such successes or at least, to devote themselves to that activity entirely. I can’t, and that irritates me’. Interview with Aparna Dharwadker, Jul 1993; published *New Theatre Quarterly*, Nov 1995).

Karnad’s love of theatre goes back to his childhood days when he saw plays in his small town of Sirsi, staged by strolling groups of players called Natak mandalies or Natak companies. He was lucky to have parents who were addicted to these plays. He also sat up with servants at nights watching the more traditional Yakshagana theatre. The love for theatre apparently stuck and has continued till this day.

At sixty Karnad said: ‘I’ve had a good life. I have managed to do all I could wish for even be a government servant. Now I feel whatever time I have left should be spent doing what I like best writing plays. (‘Girish Karnad’ [www.imagination.com] (italics added) His writing continues unabated. Two dramatic monologues of his — *The Flowers* and *Broken Images* appeared in 2005.

As a very young man, Karnad wanted to be a poet in English and be like Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot but when he was about twenty-one or so he realized that he would never be one. He did achieve international fame not for writing poetry but plays — and in Kannada.

In his introduction to *Three Plays* (1994; 2004) Karnad refers to the shattering experience of seeing Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* directed by Ebrahim Alkazi when he came to Bombay for studies. Nothing, he says, had prepared him for ‘the power and violence’ of seeing ‘the inner recesses of the human psyche’ laid bare on the stage. Also, instead of the usual torches or petromax lamps lighting the stage, he saw new technology in the form of dimmers ‘that could gently fade the light in or out’. These two things together, he says, ‘defined a stage that was nothing we had known or suspected. I have often wondered whether it wasn’t that evening that, without being actually aware of it, I decided I wanted to be a playwright’.

**Choice of language**

Karnad’s mother tongue is Konkani but he grew up speaking Kannada. And he has written almost all his plays, except the play *Dreams of Tippu Sultan* in Kannada. This play was commissioned by the BBC and was written in English. *Broken Images* which he himself directed at Bangalore was written in both Kannada and English. Except for *Yayati* (1961), he has translated all his plays into English himself. His plays have been available in other languages also. All this has ensured an all India audience for Karnad’s plays.

**On Translations**

Translations, says Karnad, are always welcome: ‘The world has thousands of languages and translation is inevitable and essential. There are some very good translations available. Without it, we would not know so many Greek and Sanskrit stories’. (‘Karnad’s images for the new age’. [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com) He himself translated *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar.

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His play _Broken Images_ was done in both Kannada and English and staged in Bangalore simultaneously. This led to interesting results. Arundhati Raja, who played the lead role in one of the versions, said that people who watched the English version would come to watch the Kannada version as well and vice versa. That was just to see how the story was presented in the two languages.

About his experience of translation he says in a note to Naga-mandala: ‘I write in Kannada. English is the language of my adulthood. This translation must therefore be seen only as an approximate to the original (Introduction Three Plays 20’).

**Politics of language**

Karnad is of course aware of the politics of language, particularly of the politics of English. His concern with it is expressed in his recent play _Broken Images_ (2005) which deals with a professor of English who is a writer in a regional language but who produces a bestseller in English.

**Use of myth, folktale and history**

At one place Girish Karnad facetiously said: ‘I cannot invent plots therefore I use myths. I cannot invent stories and hence go to history. (HYPERLINK http://www.expressindia.com, 1999). But jokes apart, it is true that most of his plays are rooted in myth and folktale and history.

For a writer writing in post-Independent India, it is only natural that he should want to view the new nation’s concerns and his own concerns in terms of the country’s past. When on getting the Rhodes scholarship for study at Oxford he was faced with his personal dilemma between his obligation to his family and his own desire for freedom, he found himself using the old Puranic myth of Yayati and discovered how well the myth reflected his anxieties.

‘While I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrificed my future. By the time I had finished working on Yayati, the myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. Whether to return home finally seemed the most minor of issues; the myth had nailed me to my past’. (‘Introduction’: Three Plays: 3) (italics added) The last sentence is important: the past has continued to provide him, as it has done to numerous other authors here and elsewhere in the West, archetypal situations and parallels through which he could articulate contemporary concerns. The first play in post-independent India that used myth to make a contemporary statement and which has become an acknowledged classic was Dharmavir Bharati’s _Andha Yug_ [The Blind Epoch], written for the radio in 1954. But that was only the beginning. There have been other retrospective representations too. Those of you who are interested in exploring the use of myth in post-independent drama in India could read _Theatres of Independence_ (Chapter 6 on Myth, Ambivalence, and Evil) (2005) by Aparna Dharwadker. For details of Karnad’s own use of myth and history, you could refer to the notes on individual plays given earlier.
The ‘Double’ as the central motif

In an interview with Dr Ashok Pai, who is a psychiatrist, Girish Karnad said that it was only when he wrote his third play, that he realized that certain themes recurred in his plays or that certain themes seemed to stimulate me themes with the ‘Double’ as the central motif’. He said he had read Freud, Jung and Adler but that his ‘fascination with the complexities of the human psyche comes from the Mahabharata and my study of Dostoevsky’. Karnad’s preoccupation with the essential incompleteness of human beings and with the duality of human personality is patent. This duality can be seen in Tughlaq also. (Indian Psychiatric Society Karnataka State Branch Newsletter, May 2005, 4-5)

Girish Karnad’s achievement

Girish Karnad’s great achievement lies in re-interpreting the country’s past, both its myth and folktales and history, to comment on matters of contemporary interest and also offer insights on human condition in general.

When asked what his legacy would be, he saw a legacy of his generation: ‘I am happy to belong to a generation that had a Dharma Vir Bharati, a Mohan Rakesh, a Vijay Tendulkar, and I. Together we can claim that we did create a national theatre for modern India’. (India Today: 12 April, 1999)

2.2 HOW TUGHLAQ CAME TO BE WRITTEN?

The play owes its origin to the words of the noted Kannada critic Kirtinath Kurkoti in his book Nadedu Banda Dari (1959) in which he said that Kannada had produced no good historical plays, none that was in any sense significant’ (Enact: 54: 1971). Girish Karnad was at that time, i.e. in the early sixties, studying at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes scholar and he accepted the challenge. He set about reading up pre-modern Indian history for a possible subject and zeroed in on the fascinating figure of Muhammad Tughlaq who has been described as ‘the wisest fool’. ‘This is marvelous, I thought’ and he read through all the historiographical materials available at Oxford. His sources included Ziauddin Barani’s Tarikh-I-Ferozeshahi. Barani himself appears in the Girish Karnad’s play. In an interview in Enact in 1971, He said: ‘What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq’s history was that it was contemporary. The fact was that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come to the throne of Delhi…and one of the greatest failures also’.

The reference to failure is important because as Karnad said, ‘though contemporaneity and all that is fine, one picks on a theme because somewhere it hits one. And I think basically, as a person, I am very much afraid of failure; and this particular point in Tughlaq, of a person struggling against failure and failing more, somewhere must have found an immediate echo in me’.

As for influences on him, he listed the following: Anouilh’s Becket, Camus’s Caligula, Shakespeare. He also listed Ivan the Terrible, the Epstein film.
2.3 APPROACHING THE PLAY

Creative Reading

Drama, unlike poetry and novel, is a collaborative art and the words on the page spring to life fully only on the stage. From the simplest to the most profound speech, every utterance achieves its complete meaning when it is skillfully uttered in front of an audience.

As students learning through the distance mode, you have to try to bring your experience of reading the text as close as possible to the experience of a person watching the play on the stage. If you get an opportunity to watch a real performance, there is nothing like it. But if that is not possible, you could try collaborative reading and if that also is not possible, you could make a solo effort and read aloud. Even reading the lines by yourself as you think Muhammad, or Najib or Barani would speak them would help. This would help you to convert words into living images. The aim of all your effort is to get at the heart of the play. Once that becomes clear, all other elements can be related to this central point.

Three Questions to ask

In his essay entitled ‘On Reading Modern Plays’, Anthony Caputi says that every playwright writing a play makes three distinct kinds of artistic decisions. First is the choice of the subject matter. Why does a writer select one particular subject and not another? What is it about the story, its characters and the interaction between them that suits the purpose of the writer? In this case we could ask: Why Tuglaq? Capute has called such decisions substantial decisions — decisions about the substance of the play.

Next come what he calls representational decisions. What is it that writer decides to represent on the stage and why? Similarly what are those elements which he decides merely to report and why? This question could be asked about the first scene of Tuglaq. For instance, the Sultan, we are told, has made several announcements but why does he show only the announcement relating to the decision against the Sultan himself in favour of a Brahmin and not others? Such decisions would determine ‘what was to be represented, in what order the various events were to be represented, and in what scale and proportion they were to be represented. Answers to these questions would determine the ultimate shape of the play.

Finally, a writer has to make what are called focusing decisions. After the subject matter has been chosen and after decisions have been taken about the basic shape of the play, ‘there is a host of more limited decisions that sharpen particular qualities, highlight particular issues, embolden particular elements, in other words, that focus the action and its peculiar power’. (ed. Modern Drama, 1966, xiii)
These questions could help you reach the heart of the play. You could start by asking these questions about this play.

**Writing a History Play**

One question to ask about this play is: Why do dramatists write a history play? What is their motive? Do they write it to celebrate a historical personage and his achievements or the achievements of an age? Shakespeare's Henry V could be cited as an example of this. Is our play celebratory in intent? Or do they write a history play to make sense of the past that seems relevant to our concerns in the present? If that is so, what are those concerns and in what way does this play illuminate the present times? Girish Karnad himself found Tughlaq to be a fascinating figure for being 'the most idealistic' and 'the most intelligent' king of Delhi and also 'one of the greatest failures'. We shall discuss the whole question later in the study material. Meanwhile keep these questions in mind as you read the play. And do keep notes as you go along.

### 2.4 DETAILED COMMENTARIES ON THE PLAY

**[Part One]**

**SCENE ONE**

*Popular response to the new king's idealistic, innovative, secular policies; shadow of dissent and misuse.*

The first scene introduces us to a conversation among ordinary citizens of Delhi about the new king's idealistic, innovative, secular policies after one of the many royal announcements made. The time is A.D.1327 and the place is the yard in front of the Chief Court of Justice in Delhi.

While there is support for the king, especially among the young, there is also dismay at some of his secular ideas. His policy of compulsory prayers five times a day is generally welcomed. But his decision not to charge jizya from the Hindus, his decision to ensure impartial justice with a human face to all (of which we see a practical example) and his idea of transfer the capital to Daulatabad on strategic grounds of its central location and on grounds of its being a Hindu city puzzles and even bewilders the Muslim populace.

After the announcement of the acceptance of the suit against the king and an award of five hundred dinars and a job as compensation, the king himself appears and talks of his ideal of moving towards greater justice, equality, progress and a more purposeful life. His idea of shifting his capital to Daulatabad was, among other things, meant to strengthen the bonds between Muslims and Hindus.

The death of Sultan's father and brother, already a subject of public discussion with Sheikh Imam-ud-din openly accusing the king of murdering them at Kanpur a week back, is talked about. A certain likeness of gestures or mannerisms between the Sheikh and the king is also referred to.

Already chinks could be seen in the well-intentioned policies. Near the end we discover that the Brahmin who has won his suit against the Sultan is Aziz, a Muslim dhobi from Shiknar. He had bought the land that had been confiscated from a brahmin and predating his contract had filed a suit against
confiscation. Aziz asks his friend Aazam, who is a smalltime pick-pocket, to join him in all his moneymaking plans right up to Daulatabad, a suggestion to which the later agrees.

It is good first scene: tightly constructed and economical and while it puts us in possession of essential details of the past it also prepares us for the drama that is to follow. Most of the major characters are either introduced or referred to. The opposition to the policies of the king anticipates the much greater unpopularity that follows later on. We have a glimpse of reported criticism of the king by Sheikh Imam-ud-din, which prepares us for the conspiracy against the Sultan later.

Exercises/Questions

Make a list of incidents/episodes that are reported and not represented before us.

1. In what sense can we call the scene economical?
2. Pick out the sentences that suggest that the Sultan was idealistic.
3. Why does the Sultan want to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad?
4. The use of the prayer motif in the play seems important. Prayers have been compulsory and yet the Sultan is accused of murdering his father and brother while they were praying. Doesn’t this remind you of Hamlet?
5. Is there any element of performance in the first scene?
6. What does the presence of two thieves Aziz and Aazam in the play suggest to us?

SCENE TWO

The Sultan’s discusses the twin issue of the invasion of Ain-ul-Mulk and the disaffection of Sheikh Imam-ud-din with advisers; a clever move is hinted at.

In contrast to the previous scene, Scene Two is set in a room in the palace. The focus here is the danger posed by Ain-ul-mulk’s marching to Delhi and by the open criticism of the Sultan by Sheikh Imam-ud-din, referred to in Scene One.

The Sultan is elated at having solved the most famous problem of chess. When his stepmother suggests that he had better write to Ain-ul-Mulk about this, he tells her that Ain-ul-Mulk, his childhood friend and fellow champion of chess is marching towards Delhi. However the Sultan doesn’t seem overly worried about it. On the contrary when the stepmother says she is worried about his keeping later hours, his reply shows him to be a visionary — he makes a theatrical speech in which he imagines himself climbing to the tallest tree and asking his people to confide their worries in him and share their joys with him. He in fact proposes a complete merger of their bodies and his. But one life is too short for this momentous task. So he says he can’t waste time in sleeping.

In the course of the conversation he discovers that his stepmother too suspects that he had murdered his father and brother. He obviously doesn’t like it.
Vizier Muhammad Najib and historian Ziauddin Barani are announced. Najib informs the Sultan that he has been able to collect more than six thousand soldiers—he doesn’t say against whom. He also informs him that Sheikh Imam-ud-din is in Delhi and that he is openly critical of the Sultan as being incompetent and that he has become a backbone of the rebels, adding that Barani could give him more information about the Sheikh. But he clearly wants the Sheikh eliminated.

Barani is shocked at being spied upon but he admits hearing the Sheikh and that the Sheikh thinks the Sultan to be a disgrace to Islam and also that he had murdered his father and brother. Barani tries ineffectually to defend the Sheikh, saying that the Sultan must ignore these little things. The Sultan however is aghast at the accusation of murder and at the crooked minds of his accusers.

The discussion about Sheikh Imam-ud-din brings out the difference between Najib and Barani. Realistic and ruthless, Najib correctly assesses the danger the Sheikh poses to the Sultan and wants him to be eliminated. The Sultan himself is against any action against him. And Barani, honest and generous, agrees with him saying that the people will respond to the Sultan’s courage, honesty and justice. But no one pays any heed to it.

Finally, Najib darkly hints at the resemblance between the Sheikh and the Sultan and the Sultan apparently gets his message. The moment is significant. The Sultan just stares at Najib and later says: ‘You are a devil, Najib’. Barani looks on uncomprehendingly. The mind of the two prime movers has been made for the Sultan wants their army to leave for Kanauj the day after the following day. Here we can have a glimpse of the politicking at the highest level, the ruthlessness with which decisions are made and the inability of a mere academician to understand the goings on in the power play.

Do we notice a decline in the Sultan’s idealism or do we get to discover another side to his complex personality? Read the play and make up your mind. There is obviously a ruthless side to his character. The exact plan will uncover itself later. But the Sultan’s sentence — You are a devil, Najib. — implies his tacit approval of Najib’s clever move that kills two birds with one stone. In this way the Sultan will checkmate the danger posed by his childhood friend and fellow chess champion and solve the problem of the Sheikh’s dissent. The writer’s use of the motif of chess is clear.

An important fact comes to light here. The Stepmother doesn’t like the influence of Najib. He will look after the administration of the kingdom during the Sultan’s absence. Additionally he has asked Shihab-ud-din, the Prince of Sampamshahr, to be in Delhi to look after the affairs of the state. The true significance of the arrival of Shihab-ud-din will become clear later. The Stepmother not only extracts a promise from Barani not to leave the Sultan under any circumstances but also openly suggests the murder of Najib. The Sultan, Najib, Barani and the Stepmother — everyone seems to have his or her own agenda.

Exercises/Questions
1. What is the point of the reference to chess?
2. Why does Muhammad express his visionary ideas theatrically?
3. Choose adjectives that can be used to characterize the Sultan, Najib, Barani and the Sultan’s Stepmother.
4. Why doesn’t she want the Sultan to call her stepmother? What is the nature of the relationship between the two?
5. In what way does the scene prepare us for the coming action?
6. Which two motifs have been made use of in this play so far?

SCENE THREE

The public meeting fixed for Sheikh Imam-ud-din fails. The Sultan vocalizes his vision of unifying all his people on a basis broader than Koran. The Sheikh agrees to go and persuade Ain-ul-Mulk to desist from invasion.

Preceding the third scene is an announcement on behalf of the Sultan calling people of Delhi to attend a public meeting where Sheikh Imam-ud-din will analyze the administration of the Sultan. The Sultan will himself be present at the meeting. But no one turns up. The reason will become clear as you read the scene.

This scene must be among the most tense scenes in the play. Two formidable adversaries, Sultan and the Sheikh are face to face. The Sheikh, fearless as ever, says the God has given the Sultan ‘power, learning, intelligence, talent’ and that he should use it to spread the kingdom of God on earth, following the Islamic injunctions. The Sultan however says that his kingdom has millions of Muslims, Hindus and Jains and that there is dirt and sickness in his kingdom which he, not, God must clean. He refutes the Sheikh’s charge that he was trying to be another God. He also talks of his deep admiration for the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. The latter’s poetry had opened up vision of a world, which, he says, even Arabs or the Koran could not give him. He frankly refuses to excise the Greek part in him or the visions of Zarathustra and Buddha.

If he had put the Saiyyids and the ulemas behind the bars, it was because these religious figures had tried to play politics.

Finally, using the Islamic card, the Sultan is able to persuade him to go to Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy in the name of Islam and help in bringing peace or else Muslim blood will flow. He presents the Sheikh with the new robes, which bring out his resemblance to the Sultan even more strikingly.

As becomes clear later, the failure of the Sheikh’s meeting is engineered by the Sultan. By sponsoring the meeting himself on the one hand and prohibiting them from coming to the meeting the Sultan has successfully cut the Sheikh to size. But his move doesn’t end here. By sending him as an envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk he practically ensures that he will get killed. The chess metaphor continues.

The Sultan’s view that religion and politics be kept apart from one another is an important element in his convictions as a king. He says that he has never denied the existence of God but he doesn’t want religious clerics to interfere in politics.

Exercises/Questions

1. How does the Sultan ensure that Sheikh Imam-ud-din will not turn down his suggestion to go and meet Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy?
2. How, in the Sultan's view, are religion and politics related?
3. Pick out lines that support the idea that Muhammad is an ideastic ruler.
4. Towards the end of the scene the Sultan tells Sheikh Imam-ud-din that he is 'an incompetent fool' and then offers him the robes ordered for going to Kanauj as an envoy. Why does he call himself 'an incompetent fool'?
5. What are the accusations against the Sultan?
6. Do think this is a powerful scene? Why?

SCENE FOUR

Sheikh Imam-ud-din is mistaken for the Sultan and is killed. Eventually the Sultan wins the battle and forgives A'in-ul-Mulk. A conspiracy against the Sultan is afoot.

The scene opens in the palace with Shihab-ud-din reading a few letters. The Sultan's Stepmother comes in and expresses her satisfaction at the way he has looked after Delhi in the absence of the Sultan.

Shihab-ud-din's adopted brother Ratansingh comes in from the front and tells them the Sultan has come back and that Sheikh Imam-ud-din has been killed.

The Sultan who comes in soon after along with Najib and Barani is very grave at the death of the Sheikh and describes how deeply affected he was when his dead body was brought into his tent. He announces that Delhi will observe the following day as mourning for the Sheikh and that there will be no victory celebrations.

As for A'in-ul-Mulk, the Sultan tells them that he had forgiven him, much to the dismay of both Najib and his Stepmother. He explains that A'in-ul-Mulk took just half a minute to discover a flaw in the problem of chess that he thought he had solved, which pleased the Sultan mightily and he forgave him. He also gave him back his kingdom and promised not to send him to Deccan. This gesture wins the approval of Barani who admires the Sultan for his courage. The Sultan then leaves along with Najib, Barani and his Stepmother.

Left alone with his adopted brother Shihab-ud-din, Ratansingh calls the Sultan an 'honest scoundrel' and shares with him the real story of the engagement with A'in-ul-Mulk and how the Sheikh got killed in the action.

When he saw him at Kanauj, the Sultan wasn't particularly pleased. The following day he found himself posted in the front rank of the platoon, which almost always means certain death. The Sheikh approached A'in-ul-Mulk in full royal splendour sitting on an elephant as an emissary of peace and stopped a hundred yards from the enemy, looking very much like the Sultan. Just then a trumpeter from their own side sounded the charge and the battle was on. The enemy thought that the Sheikh was the Sultan himself and after killing him they tried to chase them. This led to a bloody massacre and an eventual defeat of A'in-ul-Mulk. As for the Sultan himself, he had been hiding behind some hills with the rest of the army.

We need to watch every move made by the Sultan. Do you now see the whole point of sending the rebellious Sheikh who is also a look-alike of the Sultan to Kanauj? The calculations of both Najib and the Sultan prove to be true. The
enemy takes the Sheikh to be the Sultan himself and they kill him and thinking
that they have killed him, pursue them, which leads to a terrible massacre and
eventual defeat. An astute, clever move that checkmates both Ain-ul-Mulk and
the Sheikh.

Before going Ratansingh informs Shihab that the nobles of the court and
important citizens of Delhi were holding a secret meeting — we are not told
about what — and that he had accepted an invitation to attend it. Ratansingh
believes that his adopted brother might also like to join them because the
Sultan had tried to kill him off. At this Shihab turns pale.

**Exercises/Questions**

1. Who calls the Sultan ‘an honest scoundrel’? And why? Is that a
correct reading of the Sultan’s character? How does the Sultan’s
conduct here square up with his professions of idealism earlier in
Scene Three?

2. Ratansingh says: ‘A Sultan’s scowl is a terrible thing’. What does he
mean by it?

3. Why does the Sultan order a day of mourning for Sheikh Imam-ud-
din?

4. Why does Shihab-ud-din turn pale at the invitation from his adopted
brother to attend a meeting of the rebels?

**SCENE FIVE**

*The conspirators persuade a reluctant Shihab-ud-din to lead the conspiracy
and at the suggestion of Ratansingh decide to kill the Sultan while he is
praying.*

This scene deals with the Amirs and Sayyids trying to persuade Shihab-ud-din
to lead the conspiracy. He is an outsider and as such an ideal person to lead
the conspirators.

He repeatedly says no and tells them of the good things that the Sultan has
done and agrees to throw in his lot with them for public reasons.

The scene lays bare the motives of the conspirators. The Amirs are upset at
having to leave Delhi, which is their home and where they are strong.
Moreover Daulatabad is a Hindu city and they will be helpless there. Then
they are required to pay far too many taxes. As one of them unselfconsciously
says, ‘You can’t even cheat without your having to pay for it’.

Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfm, a venerable old man, seems to be the only
man from Delhi who is genuinely concerned about the welfare of the people
and the growing tyranny of the Sultan’s rule. He gives several instances of the
Sultan’s tyranny including the death of Sheikh Imam-ud-din. In reply Shihab-
ud-din says that if the Sultan is responsible for that death, the Amirs and the
people of Delhi are no less responsible for it. They were too cowardly to
attend the public meeting he was to address. At this the old Sheikh uncovers
the Sultan’s designs and explains how the Sultan’s soldiers had orders to
prevent citizens of Delhi from reaching the auditorium. He shows Shihab a
wound that he himself had received on his shoulders in trying to go to the
meeting. When Shihab says that the Sultan has done him no harm, he appeals to him not to think of himself but about the people. Ratansingh also joins the others in persuading him.

At this stage Ratansingh unfolds a scheme to murder the Sultan during compulsory prayers. Even the soldiers have to lay down their arms while praying. Ironically, the god-fearing Sheikh who had tried to exhort Shihab for the killing now pleads with him not to agree to the sacrilege. But Shihab can’t withdraw now. It is too late. They start working out the details.

Exercises/Questions

1. Does this scene ring a bell in your mind? Doesn’t it remind you of a similar scene in Julius Caesar? Conspirators everywhere, it seems, have to look for a leader who has no personal axe to grind.
2. What makes the conspirators choose Shihab-ud-din as a leader?
3. What are the good things that Shihab says about the Sultan?
4. Note the use of the motif of prayer here and at other places in the play.
5. Can you see any hint in the scene that will lead to the failure of the conspiracy?

SCENE SIX

The conspiracy is defeated. The leader, Shihab-ud-din, is ruthlessly stabbed by the Sultan himself.

It is a powerful scene full of tension. Knowing about the conspiracy as we do, we watch the goings-on with bated breath. Barani notices that both the Sultan and Najib are tense and at this stage we suspect that they know about the conspiracy. But though they behave with great self-restraint, the Sultan’s impatience and fury come through increasingly as the scene progresses.

The Amirs come in and the Sultan informs them with obvious warmth that a descendent of the Abbasid Khalifs, Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad is coming to India. Shihab-ud-din compliments the king on his ‘wisdom’ — a word to which the Sultan objects. He says that he has invited him not to ‘placate the stupid priests’, as he puts it.

The Sultan then asks a question about what lends legitimacy to his kingship, which shows the big hiatus that exists between the Sultan and the conspirators.

Am I a king only because I am the son of a king? Or is it because I can make the people accept my laws and the army move to my commands? Or can self-confidence alone justify it? I ask you — all of you — what would you have me do to become a real king in your eyes? (Silence)

The conspirators have no answer to this and they all keep silent. The Sultan then explains that until he has the answer, he has to continue to rule but that he is not happy. He adds that he is turning to history and tradition to seek an answer and seek the blessings of the Abbasid Khalif.

The Sultan’s responses bring out his increasing impatience at the opposition of the people and the Amirs to his policies. When Shihab implores the Sultan not to take the capital to Daulatabad, he says his empire cannot flourish from Delhi as his capital and then adds: ‘But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven’t even opened their eyes to the light of today?’ Later he makes a fervent speech asking the Amirs to trust him and cooperate in the building of new future for India and ends by melodramatically kneeling before them. The
entire scene is meant to discredit the conspirators. To use the metaphor from chess, they are checkmated.

The Sultan’s vengeful fury against Shihab-ud-din is well-founded. He had sent for him to assist Najib in administering the state in his absence, which shows that he fully trusted him. He is furious to discover that that very man should betray him. The additional stabs that he gives to Shihab’s body after Shihab has died not only show his deep frustration but also his cruelty. When the kind-hearted Barani covers his face with cloth, the Sultan removes it saying that people should see the wounds. Obviously he wants Shihab’s death to be an object lesson for all against treachery.

But if the Sultan is furious, he knows how to turn adverse events to his advantage. This is clear from his directions on handling Shihab’s treachery. It will be given out that there was a rebellion in the palace and that Shihab had died a martyr’s death in trying to save the Sultan.

The conspiracy has another fallout. He now orders that people should start moving to Daulatabad within a fortnight. His statement — Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now — reveals how he is now bent upon implementing his ideas ruthlessly in spite of all opposition.

Exercises/Questions

1. Why does Barani sob at the end of the scene? Account for his behaviour throughout the scene.
2. The exposure of the conspiracy has been deftly handled. There is a similar scene in Henry V. An important item in this respect is the sense of timing. Do you agree?
3. What is your own response to the Sultan’s behaviour in this scene?
4. The motifs of prayer and chess are employed most clearly in this scene.

Public Announcement about Shifting to Daulatabad.

The public announcement after the failure of the conspiracy is on expected lines. When the Sultan had addressed the people in the first scene, he had said: ‘This is an invitation, not an order. Only those who have faith in me may come with me’. Now he leaves the citizens of Delhi no choice: ‘within the next month every citizen must leave for Daulatabad’. (italics added)

It must however be added that the Sultan says he has taken care of all the needs of the people including their medical needs.

The remaining seven scenes of the play are set either on the way from Delhi to Daulatabad, in the hills or in Daulatabad itself.

[Part Two]

SCENE SEVEN

The scene between Aziz, an officer in the Sultan’s employ in the guise of a Brahmin and Aazam gives us an idea of the privations of the people during the transfer of the capital. The introduction of copper currency gives Aziz ideas.

The purpose of the scene is chiefly informative. The tension of the previous scenes is over. The officers entrusted with providing facilities during the
shifting of the capital are corrupt and the poor suffer. With copper currency replacing the silver currency Aziz thinks of making counterfeit coins.

Aziz’s comments on the emerging new profession of politics are highly relevant — to these times as they were to the sixties when the play was written. Politics, he says, was full of brainless people but could ensure ‘wealth, success, position, power’. Compared to the god-fearing Aazam, Aziz is a hard-boiled villain and will lose no opportunity to make money.

Comments/Questions

1. Read this scene with Scene One when the duo first makes their appearance.
2. Do you agree with Aziz’s estimate of politicians?
3. There is a bit of humour too. Can you pick out an example of it?
4. With people like Aziz as officers or as profiteers what do you think are the chances of success of the new measures?

SCENE EIGHT

_The Sultan besieged by insurrections is in conversation with Barani and looks for a solution for his harassed kingdom._

The scene is midnight at the fort at Daulatabad five years later in A.D.1332. It opens with a conversation between two sentries in which they talk about the new fort and the road from Delhi to Daulatabad. Also, the old sentry from Delhi reminisces about his family and the losses he suffered on the way.

This preliminary conversation is meant to serve as a prelude to a serious conversation between the sleepless Sultan and Barani. The Sultan is a troubled soul, restless and in need of company, any company. The young sentry reminds him of his own youth years ago and so obsessed is he with his past dreams that he talks about them to the young sentry before Barani comes. He particularly shares with him his memory of a mystical moment one night at the fort (when he was twenty-one) when the torch burning nearby, the half built gate, the fort and the sky all melted and merged and flowed into his blood stream. That moment has gone forever. The Sultan has been trying to recapture that mystical moment but has been unable to do so. When the sentry confesses that he hasn’t understood him, he turns away from him in disgust. This conversation underscores the fact of the growing lack of communication of the Sultan with the world.

The Sultan confesses his restlessness to Barani and asks him to prescribe a medicine for what he calls his ‘honeycomb of diseases’. Poetry no longer interests him. There are several uprisings one after the other. The new copper currency has turned every Hindu home into a domestic mint. The drought in Doab is spreading from town to town. He can’t trust anyone except A’in-ul-Mulk and Shihab’s father. Barani tells him that he belongs in the ranks of learned men, not in ‘the market of corpses’. The Sultan responds by saying that he is too engrossed in the struggle to withdraw.

The Sultan does some soul-searching. But he doesn’t like to admit that he has been in the wrong. Barani emboldened by the Sultan’s confidence accuses him of going back on his ideals and of heedlessly indulging in bloodshed. He, however, persists in believing that he has done no wrong and that he has
Just then he receives the news of another calamity — the murder of the loyal Vizier Najib.

Exercises/Questions

1. The Sultan accuses every Hindu home of being a domestic mint. But so far as this play is concerned it is Aziz who is shown to be a criminal in this respect. Knowing him as we do, he must be among the biggest makers of counterfeit currency.
2. Pick out the sentences that present the Sultan as a visionary.
3. The process of alienation of the Sultan from others is on.
4. Who killed Najib? It should be easy for you to identify the killer?
5. How would you describe Barani’s relationship with the Sultan? Is he disillusioned with the Sultan?
6. The Sultan has fallen from his ideals and his fall has been steep. Does he still command the sympathy of the audience/readers?
7. How does this scene prepare you for what is to follow?

SCENE NINE

Aziz is another pretender to power. He kills Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid who is on way to Daulatabad and decides to go in his place.

The scene is in a hideout in the hills. It introduces us to an uncommon crook who we have met before and who now aspires to power.

Aziz has obviously given up his disguise of being a Brahmin and instead he and Aazam now rob travellers of their money. But Aziz’s sights are set much higher. He is sick of running and hiding. He wants to be able ‘to rob a man and then stay there to punish him for getting robbed’, as he puts it. He wants power. When Aazam suggests he could be ‘a court thief’, he is simply delighted.

Soon an opportunity presents itself in the form of Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendent of the Abbasid Kalifs. He is brought before them bound hand and foot by mistake. This gives him the idea that he could go to Daulatabad in his place. Ghiyas-ud-din is remorselessly killed and Aziz dances with joy at the opening palace doors.

Exercises/Questions

1. Do you notice any growth in Aziz’s character?
2. What is the point of the scene? Does Aziz’s bid for power suggest a parallel to the Sultan’s wresting of power after the murder of his father and brother? Is this scene meant to be an ironic contrast to the Sultan’s quest for power?
3. Pick out lines that suggest Aziz’s love for power.
4. How does he express his joy at the idea of going to Daulatabad in place of the descendent of the Khalif?
The Stepmother admits having murdered Najib; is sentenced to be stoned to death. This highly dramatic scene takes place between the Sultan and his Stepmother, with Barani coming in at the end.

The scene shows how the move for a new copper currency has misfired with people having taken to minting copper coins on a large scale. When the Stepmother draws his attention to the cartloads of copper coins outside the palace, he expresses his helplessness saying that they will not go to the treasury but will be heaped up in the new rose garden. This use of the rose garden will mean the death of one of his dreams. His chief worry now is to find out who murdered Najib.

It is an intimate scene in which both the Sultan and the Stepmother uncover their secret selves to each other. At first she tries to worm out whatever information he has about the murderer and adds that it was a good riddance, for in her view he was leading the Sultan ‘astray’. Later she confesses that it was she who had killed him saying that ‘it was easier than killing one’s father and brother’ and it was ‘better than killing Sheikh Imam-ud-din’. She then explains that she killed Najib because it was he who was driving him to murders (Look at your kingdom now. It’s become a kitchen of death — ‘all because of him’.)

The Sultan of course cannot believe her and explodes into admitting that he had killed them but had done so for an ideal. But he also confesses to have suffered for those killings. Lately Najib too had been telling him to hold back his sword. But he has not been able to do so. After the killing of Shihab, he seems to have realized that ‘not words but the sword — that’s all I have to keep my faith in my mission’. His killings, he says, had a purpose — they gave him what he wanted — ‘power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act’. But her killing has not only been futile, but it has led to his astounding discovery that she also wanted power; power to control him. He says he had only three friends in the world — Najib, Barani and the Stepmother. Now he feels betrayed by her — ‘...I love you more than I have loved anyone in my life’. In his uncontrollable fury he sentences her to death by stoning, a punishment awarded to adulteress.

This is a scene of great power because it lays bare the tortured soul of Muhammad in all its complexity — its sense of mission, its hunger for power and his growing need to resort to violence.

The scene also highlights the essential loneliness anguish of a man of power whose hands are red with blood and his need for a power greater than his own. That is why he falls down on his knees, makes a confession and prays to God for mercy.

Barani’s entry brings to the Sultan’s mind that by praying he is violating his own injunction not to pray. But Barani gives him what he considers to be the joyful news that Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendent of the Abbasi Kalifs is reaching there within the coming month. But the Sultan is not cheered by the news and is torn apart by his gnawing, growing guilt.

Exercises/Questions

1. Can you pick up any lines that show some trace of poetry in the Sultan?
2. Why lesson does the Sultan learn from killing Shihab?
3. Why did the Sultan want power?
4. Why does the Sultan consider his stepmother to be ‘worse than an adulteress’?
5. Note the prayer motif again. Why does he say he was trying to pray but the words left no echo in the heart?

Announcement

The public announcement describes Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid as a saviour and signals the restarting of prayer. The desperation behind the need for the blessing of a descendent of a Kalif is clear. But of course the hope is stillborn.

SCENE ELEVEN

The imposter Aziz is recognized during the ceremonial welcome of the descendent of the Kalif. The starving crowd breaks into a riot.

The scene is set on a plain outside the fort of Daulatabad. It is a crowd scene in which we see the people asking for food and not prayer. They have no use of prayer. The discontent shows no signs of abating and leads to food rioting at the end.

The Sultan stares at Aziz and it seems that he doesn’t quite recognize him. But whatever be his private thoughts, he goes through the motions of receiving the descendent of a Kalif. His last sentence shows his hopeless hope: ‘Only you can save me now, Your Holiness, the dust of your feet on my head can save me now’.

While the Sultan fails to recognize Aziz, the Hindu woman of Scene Seven does and shouts but as always no one pays much heed to her.

Incidentally, Aziz is a totally imagined character. Ironically, while his fortune is rising, that of the Sultan is on the decline.

SCENE TWELVE

Aazam, the more timid of the two imposters, develops cold feet and wants to run away from the city of starving people.

The scene is the palace.

Aazam who is supposed to be the disciple of Ghiyas-ud-din wants to run away to safety and has actually ordered two horses to be brought. He has been to the city and gives a harrowing report of the weeklong food riots in the city — violence, heaps of corpses, burning houses. Aziz is still unconvinced and wants to stay on to enjoy the taste of power.

Aazam also draws a graphic picture of the Sultan digging his fists into the heaps of counterfeit coins and letting them trickle out from his raised fists.

Finally Aazam goes out himself.
Barani seeks the Sultan's permission to leave on the pretext of attending his mother's funeral. He sees through Aziz's fraud and forgives him and speaks of his plan to go back to Delhi.

The scene is set in another part of the palace. It opens with the Sultan in conversation with Barani. Later Aziz is brought in.

The gentle Barani seeks the Sultan's permission to go away to attend his mother's funeral. She has been a victim of the riots, though he hasn't said anything about it to the Sultan. When the Sultan asks him if he will come back, he keeps quiet. His reluctance to return is clear. Barani's departure will leave him without sound advice or a restraining hand.

Aazam Jahan's death is reported. When Aziz is called, he frankly owns up to what he is — a dhobi from Shiknar. Unabashedly, he tells of his career of crime saying that he has been the Sultan's 'true disciple' — a dhobi disguised as a Brahmin, officer on the way to Daulatabad, maker of counterfeit currency, farmer in Doab, robber in the hills, and finally a descendent of the Abbasid Califs. As a state servant who handled corpses of important people, he says that he had a revelation once: 'One day, suddenly I had a revelation. This was all human life was worth, I said. This was the real meaning of the mystery of death — straw and skin!'

Muhammad is particularly struck by his reply about the revelation that he has had about the mystery of death in his new mood of resignation of a man who finds himself driven into corner: 'Sweep your logic away into a corner, Barani, all I need now is myself and my madness — madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence. ... I have a Companion to share my madness now — the Omnipotent God'. So while the otherwise soft Barani calls for the direst punishment for Aziz, the king forgives him. The Sultan also tells Barani of his plan to return to Delhi.

The play closes on a beautiful sombre note. The Sultan is tired and wants to sleep. He asks Barani to pray for him before he goes. Soon he falls asleep. An attendant comes and wraps a shawl round him. Just then the Muezzin's call for prayer is heard. The attendant stops but decides not to wake him up. After the Muezzin's call fades away, the Sultan suddenly opens his eyes and looks around dazed. It is as if his unconscious had nudged him awake at prayer time.

There was a time when he didn't have time to sleep. Now he is so dead tired that he goes to sleep just before prayer time. It is touching to see a thoughtful servant preferring to let the Sultan sleep even when it is near prayer time. The suggestion is that natural needs are far more important than political necessity.

**Exercises/Questions**

1. Why does the Sultan want to restart public prayers?
2. The Sultan uses the chess metaphor in the scene. Can you spot where?
3. What is your final impression of the Sultan?
4. Why doesn't Barani want to come back?
5. In what sense are the Sultan and Aziz alike?
2.5 LET US SUM UP

In spite of his many forays into the world of film and television and also in that of cultural administration, Girish Karnad remains deeply committed to playwriting. His themes chiefly drawn from myth and folktales and history have been an attempt to define the Indianess of Indian theatre.

The most obvious reason for Karnad’s choice for writing a play on Tughlaq was the contemporaneity of Tughlaq’s history. As he said in an interview in Enact in 1971, ‘here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi…and also one of the greatest failures’. According to U.R. Anantha Murthy ‘the play reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country’. (Introduction to Tughlaq) While this general statement is true to an extent, it needs further, closer examination.

The critical commentary on Tughlaq has also, we are sure, enabled you to see Girish Karnad’s dramatic artistry at close quarters and prepared you to see the play as a whole and discuss the structure of the play, its theme and the motifs of chess, prayer and performance used in it.

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

