

Unit 11

Tughlaq

Written and translated by Girish Karnad

11.1 Warm Up

Why do we remember some historical figures more vividly than others? For example, Alexander, Ashoka, and Queen of Jhansi are leaders whose names are etched in our minds. We also remember Hitler for very different reasons. The downfall of a heroic figure is usually the result of his/her personal shortcomings. Disappointment and failure are human emotions that strike a chord in the hearts of many people. All these factors are put together in this interesting play which will remind the readers of a chapter from history. Read on...

11.2 Objectives

After reading this play, you will be able to

- Identify the elements of drama in the source and the translated texts
- Examine the development of characters and plot in a drama
- Analyse language use in different aspects of drama—dialogues, stage directions, and descriptions.
- Explain the parallels between the historical depiction and the Indian political scenario in the sixties

11.3 Getting Acquainted

A. The Dramatist

Girish Karnad (b. 1938) is a versatile playwright, author, actor, and film director. His films and plays explore the contemporary socio-political conditions through history. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. He has served as the Director of Nehru Centre, Film and Television Institute of

India and Chairman of Sangeet Natak Akademi and National Academy of the Performing Arts.

B. The Translator

Girish Karnad himself has translated the play, *Tughlaq*. This offers interesting insights into the choices made by him both as an author and a translator.

C. The Play

This play refers to Muhammad bin Tughlaq's rule in history and alludes to the political reality in India after Nehru. This political allegory dramatizes Mohammed Bin Tughlaq's complex personality which was misunderstood by most people.

11.4 Tughlaq-Plot Summary

The play is not divided into Acts but progresses in the course of thirteen scenes. It presents the well-meaning reforms introduced by Tughlaq and the ways in which they fail. The play explores the consequences of removing the *jizya* tax paid by the Hindus and the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. Both these actions are intended as reforms to help the people but result in a state of anarchy.

Characters:

[In order of appearance]

ANNOUNCER

SULTAN MUHAMMAD TUGHLAQ

AAZAM

AZIZ

STEP-MOTHER

VIZIER MUHAMMAD NAJIB

ZIA-UD-DIN

BARANI

SHEIKH IMAM-UD-DIN

SHIHAB-UD-DIN

SARDAR RATANSINGH

SHEIKH SHAMS-UD-DIN TAJUDDARFIM

GHIYAS-UD-DIN ABBASID

CROWD OF CITIZENS KAZI-I-MUMALI K AND RETINUE
GUARD

DOOR-KEEPER SERVANT AMIRS SAYYID MUZZIN

SOLDIERS HINDU WOMAN REFUGEE FAMILY WATCHMEN
KARIM

The action of the play takes place first of all in Delhi in the year 1327, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad, and lastly in and around the fort in Daulatabad five years later.

Stop & Think

- A play, unlike a novel, introduces the characters at the beginning
- The location where the play takes place is also mentioned to provide clarity

Scene One

*Setting: chief court of Justice - New Delhi
Relighting capital from Delhi to Daulatabad*

Aziz is introduced

MUHAMMAD: My beloved people, you have heard the judgement of the **Kazi** and seen for yourselves how justice works in my kingdom—without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. **May this moment burn bright and light up our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace—not just peace but a more purposeful life.**

And to achieve this end I am taking a new step in which I hope I shall have your support and cooperation.

Later this year the capital of my empire will be moved from Delhi to Daulatabad.

The crowd reacts in bewilderment, MUHAMMAD smiles.

Your surprise is natural, but I beg you to realize that this is no mad whim of a tyrant. My ministers and I took this decision after careful thought

and discussion. My empire is large now and embraces the South and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near the 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.** I invite you all to accompany me to Daulatabad. **This is only an invitation and not an order.** Only those who have faith in me may come with me. With their help I shall build an empire which will be the envy of the world.

Stop & Think

- Kazi is a judge in a Muslim community, whose decisions are based on Islamic religious law
- Tughlaq's vision of "justice, equality, progress, and peace" are laudable ideals but cannot be translated into political goals.

Pause and Proceed

1. "My beloved people...creed". Notice the length of this sentence and the details conveyed. Is this a correct translation? Why? Why not?

2. Is Tughlaq's reason for changing the capital of his empire acceptable? Explain.

3. Asking people for their support seems like a clever strategy. What aspect of Tughlaq's character is revealed in these words?

4. "This is only an invitation and not an order." What does it convey about Tughlaq as a ruler?

Scene Two *Tughlaq's chamber in his place, where he is sitting*
 NAJIB: He says Your Majesty has forfeited the right to rule, by *them* murdering your father and brother at prayer time.

The STEP-MOTHER and BARANI react sharply, but MUHAMMAD is still. A short pause.

MUHAMMAD (quietly): Did he say that?

BARANI (*almost in a whisper*): Yes, Your Majesty.

MUHAMMAD: So now they talk about it openly, do they?

BARANI: He said it in the heat of the moment, Your Majesty. I'm sure he didn't mean it. Your Majesty must ignore these little things.

MUHAMMAD: Do you really think it a little thing? **And fratricide? And the pollution of prayer? It's not what people say, Barani, it's their crooked minds that horrify me. Look at my own mother—she won't talk to me now...** Do you know, I've just found out that even this step-mother of mine thinks I am a murderer?

Stop & Think

- Notice the crisp translation of stage directions along with the emotions of the people
- Fratricide refers to the killing of one's brother or sister
- Najib's statement about forfeiting the right to rule echoes the emotions expressed in *Hamlet*.

Pause and Proceed

1. Tughlaq's reactions are in sharp contrast to that of his step-mother and Barani. Why does he remain unaffected? Does this imply a gap in translation?

-
-
2. Use a dictionary and learn the meanings of the following words in English and your mother tongue: amicide, gynicide, homicide, matricide, patricide, sororicide, suicide.
-
-

Scene Three *Sheikh Imam-ud-din meets Tughlaq*

IMAM-UD-DIN: You are a learned man. You may be able to manage this delicate balance within yourself. **But a kingdom needs not one king but a line of rulers.** Will they manage this balance? Where are these brilliant successors of yours? **Where are these guarantors of your balanced future?**

MUHAMMAD: There is none—yet. But I haven't lost hope. I shall find them and teach them to think like me. **They are only cattle yet, but I shall make men out of a few of them.**

Stop & Think

- A line of rulers was the norm in ancient empires. E.g. Mughal Emperors, Egyptian Dynasty
- “They are only cattle yet, but I shall make men out of a few of them” captures the mob mentality of people.

Pause and Proceed

1. Translate Imam-ud-Din's speech into Tamil. Note how it sounds.
-
-

2. “They are only cattle yet, but I shall make men out of a few of them”. Explain the sentence in your mother tongue.
-
-

Shep mother shares her an xnehin about Tughlaq ke Shihab-ud-din

Scene Four:

RATANSINGH: I have never seen an **honest scoundrel** like your Sultan. He murders a man calmly and then actually enjoys the feeling of guilt.

SHIHAB-UD-DIN: What are you talking about?

RATANSINGH: I'm silent!

SHIHAB-UD-DIN: I'm sorry. But you have never liked the Sultan, I don't know why. After all that he has done for the Hindus—

RATANSINGH: Yes indeed, who can deny that! He is impartial! Haven't you heard about the **Doab**? He levied such taxes on the poor farmers that they preferred to starve. Now there's a famine there. And of course **Hindus as well as Muslims are dying with absolute impartiality.**

Stop & Think

- Honest scoundrel is an interesting oxymoron
- Doab is a tract of land between two rivers

Pause and Proceed

1. Notice Ratansingh's tone as he talks about the ruler. Do you think the descriptive terms he has used to describe the ruler convey his thoughts aptly?

2. Why do you think the Hindi term Doab is transliterated? Is this term used in the original text as well?

3. What is an oxymoron? Give examples in Tamil.

conspiracy - plan to kill Sultan.

house in Delhi

Shihab-ud-din
Tughlaq 113
Patan Singh + himself

Scene Five:

SHEIKH: You can't pollute the time of prayer. It's a sacred time. We can't stain it with the blood of a Mussulman.

AMIR II: Of come, we can always make up later. Do penance for it.

SHEIKH: But prayer isn't penance. Remember we are here to save Islam, not to insult it.

AMIR I: Don't get excited. **Islam will benefit in the long run.**

SHEIKH (to SHIHAB-UD-DIN. *Pleading*): You can't agree to this, Shihab-ud-din. You are the only sensible person here. You can't agree to this sacrilege. You can't do this to Islam.

SHIHAB-UD-DIN: **Does your Islam work only at prayer?**

Stop & Think

- Observe the usage of the archaic term Mussulman from Persian which refers to a Muslim
- Conflicting emotions are juxtaposed in the speech of the characters

Pause and Proceed

1. Why has the playwright used the term Mussulman in the play rather than Muslim?

2. Is the translation adequate in conveying the contrasting emotions expressed by the characters?

3. "Islam will benefit in the long run." Translate this phrase into Tamil/ mother tongue. Compare the impact of these words.

*Amir's confront the sultan for
durbar - i - bhas*

Scene Six:

MUHAMMAD: ...from next year, we shall have copper currency in our empire along with the silver dinars.

had **AMIR I:** Whatever for? I mean what does one do with a copper coin?

Amir killed **MUHAMMAD:** Exchange it for a silver coin! A copper coin will have the same value as a silver dinar.

SHIHAB-UD-DIN: But I don't understand, Your Majesty. How can one expect a copper coin to have the same value as a silver one?

MUHAMMAD: It's a question of confidence. A question of trust! The other day I heard that in China they have paper currency—paper, mind you—and yet it works because the people accept it. They have faith in the Emperor's seal on the pieces of paper.

Stop & Think

- Silver was rarer and carried more value than copper and hence it came as a surprise when Tughlaq changed the currency.
- The Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) in China used block printing and introduced paper currency

Pause and Proceed

1. Comment on the impact of the change in currency introduced by Tughlaq as revealed in the translation.

2. Is Tughlaq aware that the people in his empire did not have any confidence in him and the decisions he took?

3. Does the translation convey the rise in conflict between the ruler and the common people? Explain.

Scene Seven

AZIZ: You are a hopeless case, you know. Pathetic! **You've been in Delhi for so many years and you're stupid as ever.** Look at me. Only a few months in Delhi and **I have discovered a whole new world—politics!** My dear fellow, that's where our future is politics! It's a beautiful world—wealth, success, position, power—and yet it's full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head. When I think of all the tricks I used in our village—to pinch a few torn clothes from people—if one uses half that intelligence here, one can get robes of power. And not have to pinch them either—get them! It's a fantastic world!

Stop & Think

- Delhi Sultanate was used as capital by five dynasties—Mamluk, Khilji, Tughlaq, Sayyid and Lodi.
- Even in ancient times, politics has been the source of power and corruption

Pause and Proceed

1. Can you identify the places in the national capital Delhi as found in the descriptions in the play?

2. Aziz's comments on politics sound like the universal truth. To what extent do they represent the author's views?

3. "...if one uses half that intelligence here, one can get robes of power..." Comment on the opinion voiced by Aziz.

Scene Eight

Daulatabad - After few years, it is in a very bad condition

MUHAMMAD: You know what my beloved subjects call me? **Mad Muhammad! Mad Muhammad!** (Suddenly pleading.) How can I become wise again, Barani?

Najib is murdered across snow

BARANI: **Your Majesty, there was a time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What has happened to those ideals?** You won't let your subjects pray. You torture them for the smallest offence. Hang them on suspicion. Why this bloodshed? Please stop it, and I promise Your Majesty something better will emerge out of it.

MUHAMMAD: But for that I'll have to admit I've been wrong all these years. And I know I haven't. **I have something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history, but I have to do it within this life.** I've got to make them listen to me before I lose even that!

Stop & Think

- Muhammad's ideas are well-intended but poorly implemented.
- Notice the shift in Tughlaq's words. This shift indicates the time lapse in the play.

Pause and Proceed

1. What figure of speech is "Mad Muhammad"? List a few more examples from the play.

2. Do you think Tughlaq is aware of the harm he is causing to the people in his empire? Explain.

3. "Your Majesty, there was a time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What has happened to those ideals?" This is a very poignant sentence. Does the translation convey the mood?
-
-

Scene Nine *Aziz to Aazam*

AZIZ: You are a funny creature. **You have seen enough corpses to last you seven lives. You have stuffed them with straw, practised obscenities on them.** And still, you can't see a man die. (*Takes out a robe and puts it on.*) How do I look, eh? The great-grandson of the **Khalif!**

AAZAM looks away. AZIZ slaps him on the back.

Laugh, you fool, laugh. Celebrate! What are you crying for? Look, look at the palace doors. They are opening for us. **Dance, dance, you son of an ass—**

Sings.

Grandson of the Khalif! Great-grandson of the Khalif! Great-great-great-grandson of the Khalif!

Sings and dances in a circle, clapping his hands, AAZAM looks at him angrily. Then slowly his face breaks into a smile and soon he is laughing.

Stop & Think

- Khalif is a civil and religious leader of a Muslim state considered to be a representative of Allah on earth
- The repetition of the word 'great' is ironical because Tughlaq is not considered a successful ruler.

Pause and Proceed

1. What does the term 'seven lives' mean? Try translating it into Tamil.
-
-

2. Ass is a derogatory term. Do you have similar swear words in Tamil? List them.

Scene Ten *apamatha' confuses Sultan.*

MUHAMMAD: God, God in Heaven, please help me. Please don't let go of my hand. **My skin drips with blood and I don't know how much of it is mine and how much of others.** I started in Your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of You. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud? Raise me. Clean me. Cover me with Your Infinite Mercy. I can only clutch at the hem of Your cloak with my bloody

fingers and plead. I can only beg—have pity on me,

I have no one but You now. Only You. Only

You ... You ... You ... You ...

Enter BARANI.

BARANI: In the name ...

Stop & Think

- This scene reveals Tughlaq's momentary understanding of his failure.
- God as an eternal refuge is brought out clearly.

Pause and Proceed

- Tughlaq's examination of imaginary blood on his hands reminds us of another famous play by Shakespeare. Identify and Compare the scene from Shakespeare.

Scene Eleven:

FIRST MAN: We don't want any prayer. We want food—

as *shakifa*

SEVERAL VOICES: Yes, food—we want food—not prayer—

A SOLDIER: Quiet! Quiet!

FIRST MAN (*shouting*): Kill us, kills us. Don't starve us to death. Kill us quickly...

SECOND MAN: They'll kill us, will they? Let's see who kills whom? Bring them down.

ALL: Bring him down—let's see—so they'll give us poison instead of food, will they-kill him-kill him- show him what we can do—

Confusion. Some of them mob the soldier and beat him. A group of soldiers arrives and starts beating them, ordering them to keep quiet. The riots begin.

Stop & Think

- Prayer and religion cannot replace the basic necessities of life.
- Note the desperation in people's choice of instant death over starvation

Pause and Proceed

1. Why does the playwright use short phrases?

2. Compare the riots in this scene with any recent riots that took place in the country/state.

3. What is the impact of the short stage direction, "The riots begin?"

Scene Twelve: *Azam plans to escape but Azim is*
 AAZAM: Have you seen the city? The people are like mad dogs. They have been screaming, burning houses, killing people for a whole week now. Have you ever stepped out of the palace? *from*

AZIZ: Of course not.

AAZAM: I have. Twice.

AZIZ: Twice! **Is your skull filled with dung?** Twice! How did you go out?

AAZAM: There's a secret passage. I discovered it the day we came here. I have been through it. Twice. And do you know what the city is like? In the northern part, the houses are like forts and the streets are like little fingers. And they are **full of dead bodies. Corpses and flies. It stank so much I almost fainted—I can't stand it any longer, Aziz.** Today the people are a little quieter. They are tired; besides, they have to dispose of the bodies. Tomorrow they'll start again. . .

Stop & Think

- Observe how humans are compared with mad dogs
- Life gives dignity to humans. Death robs them of their dignity.

Pause and Proceed

1. Does the translation convey the differences in the characters of Aziz and Aazam?

2. Is it easy to translate obscenities such as "mad dog" and "skull filled with dung?"

3. "I can't stand it any longer..." Is he talking about the physical condition or his emotional state?

Scene Thirteen

*Azari nation of
Dagon*

Tughlaq 121

Azur Heener.

BARANI (*desperately*): I don't know.

MUHAMMAD: Don't you? **Because I do. She died in the riots, didn't she, when my soldiers butchered everyone in sight—old men, women, children, everyone?** So you see, even I know what is happening in my kingdom. I may be responsible for that **massacre**, I accept. But have I really fallen so low that even you have to lie to me?

BARANI (*almost crying*): I don't know. I don't know. Please don't ask me. I beg of you.

Silence. A SOLDIER enters running.

SOLDIER: In the name of Allah. A **terrible** thing—Your Majesty, I don't know how to—

MUHAMMAD: What is it now?

SOLDIER: Your Majesty, Aazam Jahan, the friend of His Holiness Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, is dead.

BARANI: Dead?

SOLDIER: Murdered, Your Majesty. I was on **sentry duty** at the mouth of the secret tunnel from the palace.

...

MUHAMMAD: **You wanted to see history formed in front of your eyes, didn't you? Just wait a few moments, and you'll see not just the form but the coiled intestines of it.,**

BARANI (*Wounded*): Your Majesty is a learned man and has every right to laugh at a poor fool like me. But I **implore** Your Majesty to understand I am not going because my life here has been futile. I have spent seven years here and the greatest historians of the world would have given half their lives to see a year in it. Your Majesty has given me a gift—

...

MUHAMMAD: Who are you?

Silence. For a moment no one speaks, AZIZ is obviously frightened.

Who are you? How long did you hope to go on fooling us with your **masquerade**?

BARANI: But your Majesty—

MUHAMMAD: Answer me. Don't make me lose my temper.

AZIZ: I am a **dhobi from Shiknar**. My first name was Aziz, There have been many others since then,

BARANI: But—what about His Holiness?

MUHAMMAD: **Do you know the punishment for killing a saint like Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid? And for deceiving me and my subjects?**

Aziz (*bolder*): No, Your Majesty, though I have never **Underestimated Your Majesty's powers of imagination**. But it would be a grave **injustice** if I were punished. Your Majesty.

...

MUHAMMAD: I am suddenly feeling tired. And sleepy. For five years sleep has avoided me and now suddenly it's coming back. Go, Barani. But before you go—pray for us

Closes his eyes again. BARANI bows and exits, obviously in tears. There is silence on the stage for a while, and then a servant comes in.

SERVANT: In the name of. . .

He sees that MUHAMMAD is asleep and goes out. MUHAMMAD's head falls forward on his chest in deep sleep.

...

MUEZZIN (*off-stage*): **Alla-Ho-Akbar! Alla-Ho-Akbar!**

Alla-Ho-Akbar! Alla-Ho-Akbar! ...

Stop & Think

- After losing his own mother in the riots can we expect the historian Barani to write an untarnished account of all the incidents?
- Muezzin is a Persian term which refers to the crier who calls the faithful to prayer five times a day

Pause and Proceed

1. Why do you think Tughlaq stopped Barani from leaving the court?

2. Notice how words like 'butchered', 'massacre', and 'terrible' have been used in the scene. Are these words translated from the original text or has Karnad used it only in the English translation to give emphasis?

3. "Tughlaq falling asleep"—what does it signify?

11.5 Recap

- **Remember** the delineation of characters in the play
- **Understand** the combination of translations and transliterations to create an Indian English text
- **Think about** the techniques used to represent the plot development
- **Create** terminologies to translate dramatic terms

11.6 Activities

1. Protests and riots have become routine occurrences. Discuss among your friends and suggest alternatives to avoid them.
2. Do you think the decisions taken by Tughlaq were taken for the benefit of the people? Hold a debate in class.
3. Imagine you are the political advisor of the Chief Minister of your state. Prepare an action plan to benefit the people of the state.
4. Delhi is the capital of India. Give reasons why you feel this is the best location.