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PG. ENGLISH PAPER-7 MODULE 4

(UNIT 3, 4)

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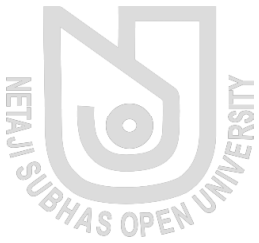
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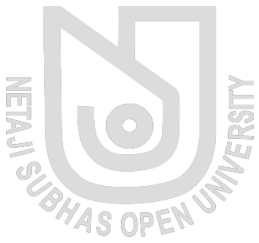
Post Graduate Course in English
PG. Eng-7

Paper—VII

Module 4 (A)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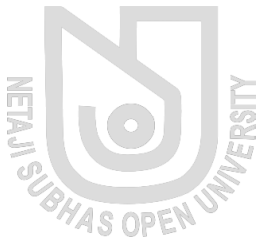
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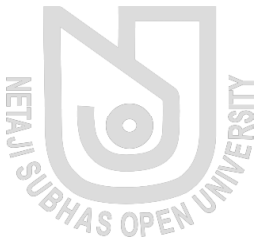
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Unit : 3 Girish Karnad : **Tughlaq**

Structure :

3.1. Date and Text :

Tughlaq, Girish Karnad's second play after *Yayati,* was written originally in Kannada in 1964. This was later translated into English by the author himself at the request of the noted theatre personality Alyque Padamsee in 1970. Karnad himself declares that he "was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee, who later produced it for the Theatre Group, Bombay" ("Author's Note", *Tughlaq,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975, vi). Subsequently the play has been translated into different Indian languages as well.

Though *Tughlaq* - or for that matter - all Karnad's plays should be considered first as products of Kannada theatre, because most of these *(Tughlaq* included) were translated by the author himself into English, they are considered also as important contributions to Indian drama in English (translation). Not only has this helped to bridge gaps between regional theatres by providing a common meeting-point, but has other implications as well. On the one hand, English by now has outgrown its stigma of being merely the coloniser's language and has been so inducted into the Indian set-up that

Indian English itself warrants legitimation. On the other, when British English today has to contend with Englishes produced outside Britain, Indian English holds a place of its own in the changed scenario. In this context, the availability of major regional achievements in English translations only strengthens the position of writings in English produced in India. Karnad's translations of his own plays -*Tughlaq* among them - constitute a major effort in this direction.

3.2. Context of the modern Indian drama

Karnad belongs to that 'new' generation of Indian dramatists who arrived around the sixties, with their urge to create a modern Indian drama. This was a pan-Indian phenomenon, with several dramatists bursting upon.the scene in different corners of the country around the same time. Each of them felt that the aspirations of the contemporary generations of post-1947 India needed new dramaturgical forms for adequate articulations. Translations of Western masters, undertaken by many theatre practitioners, were not serving the purpose adequately. Indian drama needed to reinvent itself, both in form and content. It was this impetus that informed the plays of this 'new' crop of Indian dramatists - Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, K.N.Panikkar in Malayali, Girish Karnad in Kannada. The search for contemporary Indian drama had begun, and the first generation of the sixties was succeeded by others who followed their footsteps: G.P. Deshpande and Bhisham Sahni (in Hindi), Satish Alekar and Mahesh Elkunchwar (in Marathi), Mohit Chattopadhyay and Manoj Mitra (in Bengali), to name a few.

With the ancient Sanskrit drama having receded into the dim past and the folk theatre being confined to the margins, what had been traditionally postulated as *theatre* was largely Western importation. So, when a search for an authentic Indian theatre was undertaken in the colonial period, it usually tended to produce museum replicas of classical Sanskrit theatre. This was a way of reacting against the Western influx, which dominated the theatre scene. Though Michael Madhusudan Dutt had recycled a *Mahabharata*-eipisode in his play *Sharmistha* (1856) to fit it into the Western tragic form, though Vishnudas Bhave had blended folk theatre forms like *Yakshagana* and *akhyan* with the modern proscenium theatre (1843), these examples of 'hybridity' did not always prove sufficient to rescue the Indian mindset from blindly equating

the 'ancient' with the Indian and the 'modern' with the Western. Even the pathbreaking experiments of Rabindranath Tagore - to use an Indian theatre semiology to encapsulate modern anxieties (as done by European masters) - went largely unheeded.

After 1947, as a post-Independence generation tried to come to terms with the reality around them, a fresh search for an authentic Indian theatre was under way. This generation was aware of the double-edgedness of the reality in which they lived: on the one hand, they realised, they could not remain insular to global events; on the other, they were alerted to the regional specificities that surrounded them. The generation of Tendulkar, Sircar and Karnad had received a Western education, often hailed from urban backgrounds, and yet were also aware of the rustic moorings. All this awareness went into the making of their plays even as they tried to express the yearnings of their generation. Even when they returned to myths or legends or folk-tales, they were recycling these for modern consumption, as in Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal,* or Mohan Rakesh's *Ashar ke ek din,* or Bhisham Sahni's *Madhavi.* Karnad also, in several of his plays, explores ancient myths, legends, folk-lore, or even history, all the time contemporarising them to study his own times: while *Yayati* and *Agnivarsha* draw upon episodes from the *Mahabharata, Hayavadana* recasts a tale from *Vetal Panchvinshi,* and *Tughlaq* and *Nagamandala* draw upon chapters from ancient Indian history.

While these dramatists related to developments across the world, and expressed anxieties shared by modern existence, they were also firmly entrenched in their regional contexts. It is important to remember that they were writing in their particular regional languages first; the translations into other languages, including English, came later. Their plays, language-specific/ culture-specific codes, were the rich harvests of modern regional theatres of different parts of India; it was under their guidance that these regional theatres were making progress. Modern Indian theatre, therefore, could no longer be considered a homogeneous entity, as in the years before Independence. Necessarily spanning across the multi-lingual/multi-cultural diversity of the Indian society, it comprised the entire spectrum of the several regional/*bhasa* theatres: the Marathi theatre, Bengali theatre, Hindi theatre, Oriya theatre, Kannadi theatre, Malayali theatre, Punjabi theatre, Gujrati theatre. These modern Indian dramatists, then, had to carefully poise themselves between

the global and the local, forging out of this delicate balance the theatre idioms of the modern Indian theatres.

3.3 Historical play or political allegory?

Karnad recaptures in *Tughlaq* an eventful phase of early Sultanate India as he makes Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq - one of the most controversial rulers of the period - the protagonist of the play. The action of the play begins around 1327 and spans the next five years of Muhammad Tughlaq's reign.

This phase of Tughlaq's reign is etched with his idealistic/eccentric measures, for which he is much misunderstood and ultimately branded as "mad Muhammad". Some of these measures include his overt secular policies in treating all his subjects equally, irrespective of their religious following ("without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed"); his decision to transfer his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad - politically, because Daulatabad is more centrally located ("Delhi is too near the border and ...its peace is never free from the fear of invaders") but, more important, because ideologically it furthers his patronage of the Hindu community (" 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"); his economic vision in his attempt to inscribe money with a new value concept by minting copper coins ("A copper coin will have the same value as a silver dinar...It's a question of confidence. A question of trust!"). With each of these steps Tuglaq makes a bid to carry his generation into a new enlightened era ("They are only cattle yet, but I shall make men out of a few of them"). He is prepared to redefine the boundaries of religion and its interrelations with politics ("Yes, there is dirt and sickness in my kingdom. But why should I call on God to clean the dirt deposited by men?"; "Generations of devout Sultans have twisted their minds and I have to mend their minds before I can think of their souls."). Yet, all his efforts were misunderstood, even grossly abused, jeopardising all his attempts to move beyond the delimiting boundaries of the contemporary socio-economic-political determinants. By the end of the play, we see Tughlaq not only having to retract all his steps but, in the process, losing control over his sanity and on the verge of madness. What started out as idealistic vision is mired in the

crude reality of everyday existence and dismissed as the eccentric policies of a mad king.

This treatment of a historical character in the context of his period was undertaken by Karnad for a specific purpose. He recognised certain contemporary signs in the history of Tughlaq and saw the dramatic possibilities of using this as a framing device to talk about his own times. As he once declared himself (in *Enact,* June 1971):

> What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. .. .within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction - the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel, (as cited by U.R. Anantha Murthy, "Introduction" to the English translation of the play by Karnad, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, viii)

This "twenty-year period" that Karnad refers to corresponds to the two decades of Nehruvian idealism when, as Prime Minister, Nehru was trying to steer India into a new socio-economic-cultural era after Independence. But much of Nehru's idealistic visions went awry frustrated by the socio-economic-political realities of an emergent nation. As experts in the field have pointed out, Nehru's "industrial planning was geared to a purely foreign technology which was incongruous with the country's economic and social conditions" (Amiya Rao and B.G. Rao, *Six thousand days,* Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1974, 32). His socialist model in a democratic context was incomprehensible to the Rightists and inadequate to the Leftists. His brand of secularism, which advocated that the State should have nothing to do with religion, was soon misinterpreted to mean that the State should encourage all religions. Even as these idealistic designs crumbled in the face of the socio-political realities, there was a growing sense of disillusionment that gripped the nation towards the end of that "twenty-year period" of Nehru's rule. Karnad's *Tughlaq,* written in 1964, foregrounds that mood of discontent and disenchantment, and accurately encapsulates the spirit of the age. To quote Anantha Murthy, "it

is a play of the sixties, and reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country" ("Introduction", *Tughlaq,* vii-viii). In doing this, the play problematises the reading of history and ultimately emerges as an astute political allegory of its times.

3.4 Existentialist play

Scholars have noted existentialist traits in Karnad's *Tughlaq.* Affinities with Camus' play *Caligula* have been particularly identified. The protagonists of both these plays are caught in a godless universe, in which they are left to carve out their own paths through odds and impediments. In the course of this, they increasingly lose sight of the idealistic visions they had started out with, and retaliate with a startling ferocity on the world around them, which they hold responsible for stifling their visions. Faced with this bleak situation, in which they are grossly misunderstood and despised, even by ones who had once been close, both protagonists desperately try to cling to their own convictions and retain their faith in their own abilities. If Caligula is faced with the threat of assassination at the end of his career, Tughlaq increasingly loses grasp over his sanity. In fact, even as their faith seems to desert them, both are plunged into meaninglessness where the thin borderline between idealism and eccentricity, cruelty and compassion, sanity and insanity seem to dissolve away. Yet, in the face of such an abysmal void, they try to comprehend the meaning of their existence - even if it be in death or in madness.

Right from the start, Tughlaq dispenses with traditional notions of religion and divinity. He has no use for a religion that cannot serve the cause of the people. Aware that religion has been repeatedly used to break the spirits of men, he sets about to right the wrong perpetrated: "Generations of devout Sultans have twisted their minds and I have to mend their minds before I can think of their souls". He admits there are shortcomings in his realm but insists, "why should I call on God to clean the dirt deposited by men?" At the same time he does not hesitate to take liberties if that would further his cause, though religious leaders like Imam-ud-din warn him that he is guilty of "scores of transgressions" from the tenets of Islam. Tughlaq is prepared to induct teachings and ideas from non-Islamic sources (like Greek

culture) if that would help him to expand his horizons: "I can still feel the thrill with which I found a new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran." He can even intermingle religion and politics to get rid of impediments like Imam-ud-din, tame insurgents like Ain-ul-Mulk, trap the conspiring nobles in their own scheme of striking during prayer, or invite an obscure Abbasid to make a public display of his piety. In brief, out of each adverse situation he tries to carve out a path for himself, not always caring for religious propriety, political niceties, or even personal relationships. Not only does he astutely remove Imam-ud-din or the nobles, but must also sacrifice Shihab-ud-din, whom he trusted, and his stepmother, whom he loved, for a greater political vision. His impatience transforms itself into his ruthlessness, so much so that by the end of the play he stands alone, hated and deserted by all. He even begins to have doubts about his earlier convictions: "I have been chasing these words now for five years and now I don't know if I am pursuing a mirage or a fleeing shadow". Finally he can only fall back upon what fate seems to have in store for him - his madness - and there he finds a companion, his God: "all I need now is myself and my madness - madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence. But I am not alone, Barani. Thank Heaven! For once I am not alone. I have a Companion to share my madness now - the Omnipotent God!"

3. 5. Characterisation

The characterisation in the play calls for special attention. This is all the more necessary when we realise that Karnad has used this particular phase of Indian history to comment upon the contemporary times. Yet, at the same time, he has to show a certain amount of allegiance to the historical data, retaining some of the more well-known historical facts about Muhammad Tughlaq's reign. He has to sift through the historical material at his disposal - selecting, adopting, adapting this material to suit his own purposes. Karnad's play, therefore, has to do a kind of tightrope-walking, carefully balancing a certain degree of fidelity to the historical source with an artistic autonomy that requires of him to digress from and/or rework upon his sources to create a piece of dramatic composition. This dexterous balancing so informs the characterisation in the play that multiple facets of the same character are often simultaneously available.

The central figure of Tughlaq, with ambivalences writ large upon him, is a supreme example of this. Questions are raised about him that are never conclusively answered. The very first scene shows how a large section of the people suspect him of patricide, though there are also several others who rubbish this view and are prepared to support and endorse his idealistic schemes. He guesses that his stepmother harbours the same suspicions, and rebukes her in the second scene. Yet, in Scene X, in a moment of dramatic crisis, he blurts out that he has been responsible for the killings of his father and his brother: "I killed them - yes - but I killed them for an ideal". Even this frenzied confession, from one who by then is tottering on the verge of insanity, does not conclusively prove anything. Neither are we sure of how to respond to his dealings with Sheikh Imam-ud-din - those of an idealist or a wily politician? Similarly, the way he traps Shihab-ud-din and the conspiring amirs at their own game is another instance of his astute political agility. His brutal killing of Shihab-ud-din brings out the ruthlessness he is capable of, yet he almost lovingly stabs him with "But I like you too much"; and immediately after, to pre-empt any trouble from Shihab-ud-din's father, he can think of having Shihab-ud-din declared a martyr who died defending the sultan during an attempt on his life. At the end of the day, we are left wondering whether Karnad has depicted Tughlaq as a hero, or an anti-hero?

That of course, has been Karnad's design. Tughlaq, as the representative of the modern man, in a world that bears close resemblances to the world of the existentialist, can hardly be made into a tragic hero. With its contemporary reading of historical processes, the play problematises the characterisation of its protagonist by having the character riddled with ambivalences. His idealism and his eccentricity are the two sides of the same coin, and we are never quite sure when one passes into the other. His several schemes - the shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, the introduction of the copper currency, the patronage of the persecuted Hindus - are abandoned half-way, corrupted and frustrated by the harsh realities of everyday experience. Is his idealism lacking that sense of pragmatism without which it soon dwindles into mere idiocy?

If we are hesitant to pass this harsh judgement on Tughlaq, Karnad himself has created a figure through whom the inadequacies of Tughlaq are foregrounded. Aziz, through the entire length of the play, acts as a foil to Tughlaq, frustrating each of his designs with his devious distortion of them.

The sultan's grand proclamations to mete out equal justice to his Hindu and Muslim subjects are grotesquely parodied by Aziz in disguising himself as a Hindu Brahmin who seeks justice for being wrongly oppressed by the State. Tughlaq's introduction of the copper currency is ruthlessly battered by those who flood the market with counterfeit coins, foremost among them being Aziz. Aziz buys lands in a famine-stricken region to collect State subsidies and even exploits the ordinary people on their way to Daulatabad. He murders Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, the descendent of the Arabian Khalif, to impersonate him, thereby making a travesty of Tughlaq's attempts to seek the blessings of the Khalifat and publicly reinstate prayers in his kingdom. Through each action, Aziz makes a mockery of all of Tughlaq's lofty idealistic plans, exposing their inherent lapses. In serving as Tughlaq's foil, even his nemesis, Aziz becomes more of an abstraction of the reality that impinges upon the sultan's grand idealism and turns it into a grotesque parody.

Not only Aziz, but the other characters, too, who move in and out of the world of Tughlaq , ultimately help to give further meaning to the character of the protagonist. Tughlaq's political manoeuvres, sharpened by the astuteness of the wily Najib, play the cat-and-mouse game with adversaries like Ain-ul-mulk or Imam-ud-din or even Shihab-ud-din and the conspiring nobles. His awareness that he has a special role to play in history is whetted, on the one hand, through his encounters with religious leaders like Imam-ud-din and, on the other, through his companionship with the historian Barani whom he considers one of his closest friends. If Tughlaq's political measures are guided by Najib, and his intellectual thirst satiated by Barani, his emotional cravings find a mooring in his stepmother, with whom he shares a complex impassioned relationship: he loves her intensely, but ultimately sacrifices her to his political idealism when she confesses that she has killed Najib. By the end of the play, with Najib murdered, Barani alienated, his stepmother executed by his own orders, and the entire kingdom dubbing him "mad", Tughlaq finds himself alone in a world where his idealism is the other name for insanity. Cut off from the rest of humanity, he stands by himself trying to comprehend the meaning of his existence; his affinities with the existentialist modern man is firmly established by then.

3.6. Recurrent motifs in the play:

Though the play makes use of historical material, though it allegorises the contemporary political situation through its use of history, Karnad takes recourse to motifs and symbols that recur through the play to expand its horizons and enhance its structural pattern. One such motif that we meet early in the play and which keeps coming back over and over again is that of disguise, physical and moral. In the very first scene, immediately upon Tughlaq's grand proclamations of Hindu-Muslim amity in his kingdom, we meet the Brahmin who has won the case against the sultan in the court of the Kazi; yet we are soon let into the secret that the Brahmin is no Hindu at all but the Muslim washerman, Aziz, in disguise. Significantly, this truth is held back from Tughlaq till the very last scene of the play. But it is made evident from the very first use of disguise how this motif, through its repeated use, will encapsulate the discrepancies between what is and what *ought to be,* between the dream and the reality, the idealism and its parody, the world of Tughlaq and that of Aziz. Aziz's incessant adoption of disguises and assumption of identities - all the time parodying Tughlaq's idealistic measures - climax in his killing of Ghiyas-ud-din and passing himself off as one of the Abbasid dynasty.

Adoption of disguises run rampant among the other characters as well, wittingly or unwittingly. On the one hand, Sheikh Imam-ud-din is clueless about Tughlaq's sinister plans when the latter requests him to don identical garments to go and meet Ain-ul-mulk: the similarity in physical appearance was intentionally foregrounded, which resulted in Ain-ul-mulk mistakenly killing Imam-ud-din in place of the sultan. On the other, Ratan Singh consciously promotes before Shihab-ud-din his disguise of a trusty ally yet all the time secretly betraying him to Tughlaq. The amirs pretend to be eager courtiers while all the time they wield the sword to kill Tughlaq during prayers. For that matter, Tughlaq keeps changing his own stances like a chameleon, in keeping with his political manoeuvrings: his handling of the amirs at court and effortless foiling of their attempted coup, his encounter with Imam-ud-din to advance his political game-plan, even his final trapping of Aziz provide supreme examples of Tughlaq's dexterity at adopting disguises and identities. In the face of such incessant use of disguises by major and minor characters alike, the borderline between the worlds of dream and reality,

of idealism and ruthlessness, of Tughlaq and Aziz increasingly become blurred till, in the final impression, mask can no longer be distinguished from face, sanity from madness.

This preoccupation with disguise - in major and minor characters - may be related to the prevailing atmosphere of political intrigues in the play. Each plays his/her little game, often from behind assumed/pretended identities. In this context the other important motif that gains prominence is that of the game of chess. The very second scene shows Tughlaq playing the game all by himself, engaged with solving "the most famous problem in chess", which even famous players had not been able to solve. His encounters with Ain-ul-mulk, on the one hand, and Imam-ud-din, on the other, almost remind one of the same game. In fact, Tughlaq's wily handling of the situation is akin to killing two birds with one stone; the moves, prompted by the cunning Najib, and carried forward by the astute ruler himself, have all the unmistakable touches of one expert at the game. It is also significant that as the play progresses and Muhammad increasingly loses control over those around him as well as himself, he is no longer shown to be engaged in this game, which requires a high level of mental alertness. His mental agility, so evident in his political manoeuvrings in the earlier half of the play, gives way to frenzied tyranny ("Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now") and ultimately to moods of despair, vacuity and even madness. The change is perceptible not only to Tughlaq himself ("How can I become wise again, Barani?": Sc 8) but also to others: "It was a man wandering alone in the garden. He went to a heap [of counterfeit coins], stood there for half an hour, still as a rock. Then he dug into the heaps with his fists, raised his fists and let the coins trickle out.... He does that every night - every single night - it's like witchcraft" (Sc 12). By then, all his moves have been checkmated by the likes of Aziz.

Even as Tughlaq makes this journey from intellectual vigour to vacuous insipidity, from idealistic vision to frenzied madness, prayer - another recurrent motif - assumes new significations. Early in the play, Tughlaq is shown to emphasise the importance of prayer ("the Sultan never misses a prayer": Sc 1; "The Sultan, as you know, is a fanatic about prayer. He has made it compulsory for every Muslim to pray five times a day:" Sc 5); yet, at the same time, a substantial part of his subjects suspect that he had arranged for the assassination of his father and brother during a procession at prayer-

time. Subsequently, when the nobles, led by Shihab-ud-din, attempt to kill him during prayer, he pre-empts their move by having them apprehended by Hindu soldiers (Sc 6). At the end of that assassination attempt, he feels that "prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled"; so he prohibits prayer in his kingdom: "There will be no more praying in the kingdom, Najib. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished" (Sc 6). Again, with his idealistic plans collapsing around him and himself tottering on the verge of insanity, Tughlaq tries to reinstate prayer in his kingdom by publicly welcoming Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid to conduct prayers in his realm. Ironically, by then, the real Ghiyas-ud-din has been murdered and supplanted by the impostor Aziz; Tughlaq's desperate bid to reinstate prayer is frustrated by Aziz's machinations. The play concludes with Tughlaq dozing through the Muezzin's call to prayer, at the end of which he wakes up with a start and hardly knows himself: "He looks around dazed and frightened, as though he can't comprehend where he is" (Sc 13).

In the subtle handling of these motifs - many of which operate as stage images - Karnad adds to the dramaturgical texture of the play. As the historical play of a medieval Sultan is recycled into a political allegory of the dramatist's own time, these motifs/images help to expand the scope of the play and give it a wider panoramic perspective.

3.7. *Tughlaq* and 'Transculturation'

Written originally in the Kannada language, the play collapses together the socio-political environments of the medieval Sultanate Delhi and the post-1947 India, particularly under Nehruvian rule. The social/political/cultural parameters of Tughlaq's India are therefore redefined in the post-Independence context. Not interested in merely regurgitating the story of the medieval sultan, Karnad inscribes this with significations more immediately available in his own India. A socio-cultural transition has therefore been made, even as the story of Tughlaq has been retold in our own terms.

Also, even as Karnad undertakes to translate the play into English himself, he is overlaying it with a further deposit of 'transculturation'. The narrative now does not remain restricted to merely medieval Sultanate Delhi, nor only to Karnad's contemporary India, but reaches out to a larger English-speaking world - in other parts of India or even overseas. The relationship

between English (the erstwhile coloniser's language, and even today associated with elite cosmopolitan culture) and the original play in Kannada (a regional language) is anything but simple. The conscious choice of the English language in which he chooses to translate the regional play is a deliberate one, perhaps prompted by several considerations. To make this possible, Karnad has had to make the Indian/Kannada cultural specificities available in the English language. To start with, Karnad had to appropriate the cultural nuances of the Sultanate era of medieval Delhi in Kannada; and, now, he has to recycle them in the English idiom for a wider English readership.

Consequently, on the one hand, Karnad deploys culture-specific terminology that points in the direction of Tughlaq's Sultanate period: not only are common Islamic names used ("Muhammad", "Shihab-ud-din", "Imam-ud-din", "Ghyas-ud-din", "Aziz", "Azam", "Ratan Singh") but also the more familiar Anglicised versions of some non-Ialamic names are rendered into the less familiar Arabic equivalents (so, "Sukrat" for Socrates, or "Aflatoon" for Plato); official designations are retained ("Kazi-i-Mumalik", "Khalif', "Ain-ul-Mulk", "Vizier", "Sheikh", "Ulema", and, of course, "Sultan"); references to "Mecca" or "Kaaba" or even the poetry of Rumi (Sc 8) reinforce the Islamic ambience; the Muezzin's call to prayer reverberates through the play (Scenes 6, 13); the Islamic customs of taking an oath on the Koran (Sc 6), or imposing (or not imposing, in the case of Tughlaq) the jiziya tax on the Hindus (Sc 1), or stoning to death an adulteress (Sc 10) are recalled; the elaborate ritual of prayer *(namaz)* is carried out on stage, though punctuated by the amirs' attempt to assassinate Tughlaq (Sc 6). On the other hand, Karnad has, on occasions, reverted to more acceptable English renditions, perhaps keeping in mind his target readership: "Allah" is therefore used alongside the English - more correctly, Judaic-Christian - "God" (Sc 2, 3, 6, 10, 13) or even "the Lord" (Sc 5); Tughlaq is often called/ referred to as "Your Majesty"/ "His Majesty" (Sc 2, 3,6,8,13).

These repeated oscillations between the several cultural registers - medieval and modern, Arabic and Indian, Indian and English - provide for the cultural density of the play, which, in turn, makes it a remarkable sample of 'transculturation' in modern Indian theatre.

3.8 A brief stage history

Since Karnad wrote *Tughlaq* in 1964, the play has been successfully performed not only in Kannada, the language in which it was originally written, but also in other Indian languages as well as in English. It was Alyque Padamsee who first produced the play in English for the Theatre Group in Bombay in 1970. The first staging of this production was at the Bhulabhai Auditorium, Bombay, in August 1970. It was at Padamsee's request that Karnad translated the play into English.

Tughlaq was produced for the National School of Drama Repertory around 1979-1980, directed by the then Director of the National School of Drama, Ebrahim Alkazi. In this version, done in a Hindi heavily interlaced with Urdu, Manohar Singh played Tughlaq, while Uttara Baokar was cast as the Stepmother. The original site for the performance was the Purana Quila (Old Fort) in New Delhi; the production subsequently toured different parts of the country.

In Calcutta, the play was directed by Sekhar Chatterjee for his group Theatre Unit, and by Salil Bandyopadhyay for Theatron; in the latter production the stage/film star Santu Mukherjee performed the role of Tughlaq for sometime. Earlier, sometime in the 1970s, a production of the play was initiated by the collective effort of several groups of Calcutta, in which no less than Sombhu Mitra, the doyen of the modern Bengali stage, played Tughlaq, Keya Chakravorty took on the role of the Stepmother, while Rudraprasad Sengupta was the historian Barani; this production was directed by Shyamaland Jalan.

3.9 A Select Reading List

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3. 10. Questions

1. Examine Karnad's treatment of history in his play *Tughlaq.*
2. Would you agree that *Tughlaq* is more a political allegory than a historical play? Justify your view.
3. Tughlaq fails because he cannot grow from a visionary idealist into a realist statesman. Comment.
4. Analyse Tughlaq's passage from visionary idealism through tyrannical despotism to frenzied madness. How do you account for this change?
5. Would you agree that Karnad plays off irony against tragic dignity in his treatment of the character of Tughlaq? Substantiate.
6. Consider Karnad's use of the motifs of prayer, disguise or the chess-game in the play.
7. Examine the role of Aziz as a foil to Tughlaq.
8. Examine the importance of the Aziz-Azam sub-plot in the play.
9. What role is played by the other minor characters? Do they contribute to the understanding of the character of the protagonist?
10. Examine Karnad's art of characterisation in the play.
11. To what extent is Karnad justified in his use of violence in *Tughlaq?* What purpose does this violence serve in the dramaturgical structure of the play?
12. To what extent may Tughlaq be considered as an existentialist character? Analyse.
13. Examine the elements of transculturation in the play.
14. In what ways does Karnad's *Tughlaq* contribute to the modern Indian drama? Discuss.

Unit 4 Mahesh Dattani : Final Solutions

Structure :

4.1 Introduction :

Mahesh Dattani is acknowledged in both India and in the West, to be the most important, and probably the most skilled, dramatist writing in English in India today. He has been conspared to such great playwrights of the past like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. A writes of both stage-plays as well as radio-plays (besides beings a writer of film-scripts), Dattani is concerned primarily with social issues such as patriarchal, communalism and gender. A resident of Bangalore, educated in school and college in the same city, Dattani's first performed play was a comedy with serious undertones named *Where There's a will*. The first staging of this play in 1988 was followed by the performance of Dattani's next play Dance like a Man in 1989. This was followed by Twinkle Tara (latest renamed Tara) in 1990, and by Bravely Fought the Queen (1991). Final Solutions was Dattani's fifth play and was first performed at Bangalore in July 1993. Many other productions of this play have ben staged since then, including one in a Hindi translation. For his ''brilliant contributions to Indian drama in English,'' Dattaini was given the Sahitya Academy award.

4.2 Title and Theme :

The title of Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions obviously carries a deeply ironic implication. This is because the term ''Final Solution'' was originally used by Hitter to refer to his moustrous plan of killing and totally

exterminating all the Jewish people in Germany and Europe. Dattani clearly sees a kind of reflection of Hitler's racial hatred in the communalism that is present in the Indian society today. As a play. *Final Solutions* is a powerful indictment of the communal passions that occasionally threaten to split our country into two. Yet, the drama is not entirely pessimistic, for at its end is revealed the fact that the fires of communal passion are ignited less by the instinct of religious faith than by secret economic and political motivations. Additionally. Dattani shows through the characters of the Hindu girl Smita and her friend the Muslim youth Bobby that a new generation is coming into being that can rise above narrow-mindedness and petty religious fanaticism. Two incidents in the play illustrate this; the first, when Smita ''thrusts'' upon Javed, another Muslim young man, a puja-room pot to fill with water meant for worshipping a Hindu deity, and the second when Bobby deliberately picks up the image of the Hindu God Krishna in the puja room and declares : ''He does not burn into ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated! ... He smiles at our trivial pride and our trivial shame.'' It is in gestures like these actions that seek to cross the borders of religions and in sentiments such as Bobby's ''if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed,'' that Dattani holds out the promise of ''final solutions'' to the problem of communal disharmony between peoples of different religions in India.

Yet, in would not be right to see *Final Solutions* as a play about communal tensions only. Certainly the action of this drama takes place over the few hours (from night to the next morning) that two young Muslim boys (Javed and Bobby) take shelter in the home of a Hindu girl (Smita) to escape from a Hindu mob pursuing them during a communal riot. But, significantly enough, the play also shows that the narrow-mindedness of men and women, their ignorance and sense of guilt, can often build prisons of the mind from which there is no escape. *Final Solutions* is thus ultimately, a kind of psycho-drama which regards religion, at least in its organised and institutional form, as productive of malaises psychological and personal, social, political and economic.

4.3 Plot Outline :

Final Solutions is a stage-play in there acts. The play opens with a kind of a flashback scene in which we see (and hear) a fifteen-year old bride, Daksha, reading out what she has written in her own diary. This flashback goes back to the late 1940s, and we simultaneously see (and later hear) Daksha as she is nearly fifty year on, in the present, as a grandmother now known by the name of Hardika. Also on stage, perhaps at the back, are present a Mob/Chorus carrying sticks with a Hindu and a Muslim mask at either end. These masks cover the faces of the members of the Mob/Chorus as they assume Muslim or Hindu identities or faces alternatively throughout the action of the play. Daksha/Hardika's reminiscences over, the Mob/Chorus wearing Hindu masks introduces the theme of communal tension as they speak of the overtuming of a chariot (a ''rath'') carrying images of Hindu Gods and of the knifing of a Poojari.

The scene then shifts to the living room of the Hindu family of Ramnik Gandhi (whose mother Hardika is), and to his daughter Smita was talks about a curfew having been imposed, and about rumours of the bombing of a Muslims girls' hostel. Ramnik also tries to talk over the phone with the father of one of his daughter's Muslim friends to reassure him about his child's well-being, but is cut off by the man who probably did not wish to speak to a Hindu. The Chorus once again speak out, this time with Muslim masks on, in accents of puzzlement, incomprehension and sorrow, about being misunderstood by their Hindu compatriots.

The next important incident in the play is the confrontation of the Muslim youths Javed and Bobby by the Hindu Mob/Chorus and their pounding on Ramnik Gandhi's door, which is eventually opened by Ramnik to allow them to find shelter inside his house. The Mob/Chorus shout outside demanding that the young men be given up to them, but Ramnik resists till they go away. But inside the house, Ramnik's wife Aruna regards the youths with condescension and only very unwillingly offers them some water to drink.

Act II begins with the Mob/Chorus again before shifting to Ramnik Gandhi's living room. The various prejudices in the minds of the different members of the family are gradually revealed, even as the truth tumbles out that Javed is a professional rioter, hired to instigate communal disturbances.

The Third Act of *Final Solutions* opens with the Mob/Chorus once

again, this time in a Muslim incesnation. Ramnik offers Javed a job in his shop, an offer that Javed refuses, and Bobby explains why Javed had turned into a communalist. He had once tried to deliver a letter to a Hindu man, but had been insulted and rebuffed. In a parallel episode, Dakoha in a flashback speaks of having visited the home of a Muslim friend as a young girl. She had been welcomed on her first visit, but on a later visit had been insulted by the same Muslim family. This had turned her into a Muslim-hater all her life. As a strict Hindu wife, Smita's mother Aruna too regards the Muslim youths with suspicion, if not even hatred. Only Ramnik appears to be sympathetic, but this is before the shocking truth about Ramnik's father and grandfather's doings is revealed– that in an earlier riot during the Partition of the subcontinent, they had deliberately set fire to the shop owned by a Muslim family so that they could buy it at half its actual price. This is the climax of the play—a revelation that shames Hardika, Ramnik's old mother, and prods her on to ask and to hope that the two Muslim boys will come back to this home again.

4.4 Characters and Characterization

What makes *Final Solutions* one of the best plays in the English language written in contemporary India is Dattani's art of characterisation in particular. Each character in the play is a complex creation, psychologically and socially appropriate to the situation in which she/he is to be found. Ramnik Gandhi, for instance, has a multi-layered personality, aspects of which we are privileged to see as the play progresses. Right at the beginning of the play when he opens the door to the two Muslim young men even in the face of familial opposition, he emerges as a liberal minded man who in above religious prejudice. He even prevents the Hindu mob from entering into his house and dragging out the youths, saying : ''If you break the door, you will kill me.'' He also gets his wife to offer them glasses of water, and later gives them milk to drink. Yet, despite his conscious liberalism, Ramnik cannot escape from harbouring certain deep seated prejudices about the Muslim faith. When Javed turns down Ramnik's offer of a job, and speaks of the provocation of the Hindus, Ramnik bursts out with: ''You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your faiths is based ...'' He stops himself before completing the last sentence, but his innermost feeling about Javed's religion

has been revealed, and this rips off the mask of the professed liberalism that Ramnik had laid claim to.

However, it is important to note too that Ramnik is a man haunted by a sense of guilt. His grandfather and father had burnt down the shop of a Muslim family in order to be able to buy it at a low price. It was the memory of this crime that had led him to protect Javed and Bobby, for he had hoped that this deed would soon somehow atone for the wrong-doing of his elders.

Like Ramnik, though perhaps at a slightly simpler level, Javed is a type-character. He represents one strand in the sentiment of many Indian Muslims. Having been humiliated in front of an admiring crowd of younger boys by a sectarian Hindu man, having dropped out of school and therefore not having the benefit of a complete education, Javed had been easily enlisted as a stone-throwing rioter and rabble-rouser. He is always conscious of being the member of a minority community – that is, as a marginalized man and his fear of marginalization leads to his assertion of his Muslim identity. He thus imagines himself as a jehadist, a warrior in a holy war against the brute majority all around him.

Of the other characters, Aruna, Smita and Bobby are simpler, though no less interesting characters. Aruna is a typical housewife who has internalized the rites, rituals and customs of the religion she has been born into without any questioning. She has none of (and knows nothing of) her husband's guilt complex and is happy enough within the small circle of domesticity that surrounds her. Smita, her daughter, however is completely different. As a representative of a new India, she is above religious bigotry and has no inhibitions about even being attracted towards the Muslim youth Bobby. In her own house, she adopts a stance of quiet submissiveness in a gesture of solidarity with her mother who too is a subject under patriarchy. Smita's freedom from religious bias is reflected also in Bobby who is humane and understanding, tolerant and broad-minded. It is he who performs the ''final deed'' in the play by touching the image of the Hindu god in Aruna's puja-room, and it is he who profers the ''final solution'' to heal the split between the Hindus and the Muslims in our country when he says: ''The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate.''

The last, but certainly not the least, important character in the play is

that of Daksha/Hardika. In both her selves as a young girl-bride and an old woman, a mother-in-law, mother and grandmother, Daksha/Hardika embodies aspects of both communalism as well as patriarchal oppression. As a young married girl, Daksha had not only been forbidden to sing the songs she liked, but also had been confined to her room and beaten up for daring to visit the home of a Muslim girl, her friend. Not knowing that it was their shop that had been burnt down, she had been hurt and humiliated by their unwelcoming behaviour, and this had turned her against the community for ever. It is only at the end of the play that she learns the truth, and she wonders if ''those boys will ever come back.''

4.5 Stage Technique

Final Solutions is marked by a number of technical stage-devices and conventions used innovatively be Mahesh Dattani. The first of these is the use of the Mob/Chorus. A theatical convention that goes back in time to the Greek classical drama, the chorus had also been used by the twentieth-century American dramatist Eugene O'Neill, and by the Anglo-American poet and playwright T.S. Fliot. Dattani, however, seems to have taken his inspiration from O'Neill, particularly in his use of a masked chorus. That the members of the chorus are the same but for the Hindu and Muslim masks they put on alternatively, is a powerful way of suggesting the sameness of the mob-mentality of Hindus and Muslims alike. It is also a subtle way of suggesting that behind thier religious ''faces'', all men are the same.

The use of the flashback technique is also another of Dattani's accomplishments. Both time and space are elided by this device, as we see Daksha and Hardika simultaneously on the stage, each representing a different time and space before us. The difference is represented materially on the stage, too, for there are two levels – one with a role-top desk and an oil lamp suggesting the 1940s and Daksha's space, the other with a kitchen and a puja-room indicating Ramnik Gandhi's house in the 1990s. There is also a horse-shoe or crescent-shaped ramp on the stage, with its ends sloping down to the stage level. It is on this third theatrical space detached from the two other levels that the action of the Mob/Chorus takes place. Unlike the actions of the other characters which are naturalistic, the action of the Mob/Chorus is stylized or ritual-like. Dattani gives specific instructions about this,. for he

intended the choric action to be a kind of formalized background against which the main action of the play could be played out.

4.6. Questions :

1. Write a note on the appositeness of the title of Mahesh Dattani's play *Final Solutions*.
2. Consider *Final Solutions* as a play probing the issue of communalism in India today.
3. Comment on the role and function of the Mob/Chorus in *Final Solutions*.
4. Show how Dattani uses innovative stage devices and techniques to embody his ideas in *Final Solutions*.
5. Critically evaluate Dattani's art of characterization with reference to any *two* characters in *Final Solutions*.
6. Would it be right to describe *Final Solutions* as a ''Thesis Play''? Give reasons for your answer.
7. ''Dattani's plays hark back to Ibsen and Chekhov for both realism and other stage techniques and dramaturgy'' – Discuss.
8. ''Dattani's plays are very contemporary and avantgarde in their dramaturgy'' – Discuss.
9. Comment on Dattani's use of symbols and symbolism in *Final Solutions*.

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(d) Asha Kuthari Chaudhari, *Mahesh Dattani*, New Delhi : Foundation Books 2005.