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The Predicament of Yuyutsu in Dharamvir Bharati's 'Andhayuga'

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Abstract

The Hindi play 'Andhayuga' by Dharamvir Bharati is an analogy between the devastation caused by the great war of Mahabharata and ravages caused due to the partition of India in 1947. Its main theme is anti-war. However, this paper analyzes the predicament of one of its characters, Yuyutsu, a Kaurava prince, Dhritrashtra and Gandhari's lone surviving son. After the war, he was mainly concerned with the reestablishment of *dharma*, which he thought would happen immediately after it as it was won by those who were righteous. But since it did not happen, it made him depressed and confused. It was coupled with the humiliation and neglect that he suffered at the hands of his erring family as he had fought against them. The gory events that followed the war made him question his decision to the point that he began casting doubt on the guidance of Krishna Himself. Lonely and faithless, he committed suicide. His concerns, however, were not individualistic. He was primarily anxious about the future of man in that blind world. The questions that he raised were not only about the futility of war, but their scope was wider. These queries were answered by Vidura and a *vyadha* (Jara) in two different ways. The *vyadha* stated that those who are not blind in passions and perverted will save the future of man. Jara therefore suggested the *karma marga*, while Vidura suggested the *bhakti marga* where there is complete trust in God. Yuyutsu, however, had lost his faith. He did not see the promise of restoration of *dharma* by Krishna getting fulfilled. He sought answers but he did not find satisfactory reply to his questions and his predicament continued, even after his death.

Keywords: Mahabharata, Dharamvir Bharati, Andhayuga, Yuyutsu, Krishna, Vidura

Introduction

There is a humongous variety of telling and retelling of the famous ancient Sanskrit epic, Mahabharata, written by Ved Vyasa. It has inspired the culture of the Indian subcontinent in myriad ways, influencing paintings, sculptures, plays, dances and much more. The epic's characters too have been interpreted and reinterpreted many times. The play, 'Andhayuga' written by a renowned Hindi author, playwright and poet, Dharamvir Bharati (1926-97) written in 1953, is one such example. This play, based on *Mahabharata*, is an allegory to the tragedies that follow the war such as loss of human life, ethical values and resultant faithlessness. It creates an analogy between the violence and devastation that happened after the war of Mahabharata with the ruination that followed the partition of India in 1947, where millions died, got mutilated, became homeless, to count only a few of the endless number of tragedies it brought forth. It is a reminder about the ill-effects of the politics of violence and how combative self-hood results in war and dehumanizes the individuals and the society^[1]. This creates a situation where both the victor and the defeated finally lose as a war has no winners. In Mahabharata it was a darkness borne out of blindness-the blindness of fear, of mother's blind love, of father's blind ambition etc.- which prevailed, and to borrow a concept from Eric Hobsbawm, made it an 'Age of Blindness'^[2]. This paper aims to discuss the doubts and perplexity of one of the victims of this blindness, Yuyutsu, son of Dhritrashtra and Gandhari. He was a conscientious person and believed in the human values of truth, faith, righteousness and moral self-restraint. In the hope of a better future of mankind, he had fought from the side of the Pandavas. But since his hopes were belied, he died a broken man. This paper analyses his journey towards faithlessness which sprung from his disenchantment with the failure of his vision of the future, and consequent *felo-de-se*, even after which his quest remained incomplete.

The plot and its backdrop

'Andhayuga' is a tragic play by Dr. Dharamvir Bharati. This play has five acts- 1) Act One- *Kaurava Nagari* (The Kaurava city), 2) Act Two- *Pashu ka uday* (The Rise of the Beast), 3) Act Three- *Ashwatthama ka ardhasatya* (The Half-truth of Ashwatthama), 4) Antaraal

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(Interlude)- pankh pahiye aur pattiyan (Feathers, Wheels and Bandages), 4) Act Four- *Gandhari ka shraap* (Gandhari's Curse), 5) Act Five- *Vijay: ek kramik atmahatya* (Victory: a Series of Suicides) followed by an Epilogue-Prabhu ki Mrityu (Death of God). It has three types of characters-divine, semi-divine and human. Dr. Hukumchand Rajpal says, the poet has portrayed the characters not only according to their depiction in the epic, but has also fitted them in the present context^[3]. So, there is contemporaneity in this play. Presenting the eonian truths in a contemporary context is a releasing point of the inspiration of the author^[4]. Its story begins on the evening of the last day of the war of Mahabharata when the capital, the once-splendid city of Hastinapur, is lying in ruins. The battle ground of Kurukshetra has just witnessed the dance of death and is burning. The air is filled with the smell of corpses all around while the preying vultures fill the sky^[5].

Yuyutsu

Yuyutsu is an important character of 'Andhayuga'. He is a pitiable yet unforgettable character. He feels that he sided with truth and justice by fighting the war from the side of Pandavas, against his own erring bothers, and yet he is left in lurch. He is always ignored by his own parents-Dhritrashtra and Gandhari. Unluckily, he is also insulted by the Pandavas from whose side he fought the great war against his own brothers.

In the 'half-truth of Ashwatthama', Sanjay reaches Hastinapur and tells Dhritrashtra and Gandhari the details of the gory war till the dawn breaks^[6]. The injured soldiers and widows are returning and Dhritrashtra, despite being visually handicapped, is trying to touch and feel the pain of his subjects. Gandhari is petrified in grief, as if unable to hear or say anything. Meanwhile, an injured soldier passes by. There is sudden noise all around that along with the tired and injured army, there is a soldier from the 'other side' as well. The citizens are seeing him as a deceptive demon, as someone who eats children! He was Yuyutsu, the son of King Dhritrashtra. The guards hide in fear due to his seemingly monstrous demeanor, and he is extremely hurt by this response. He looks around and wonders in shock that 'these are my parents, it is my palace, yet everyone is scared of me!' ^[7] This feeling of disconnect eats into him. He is feeling tormented. He has fought from the side of Pandavas, even though he is a Kaurava and so he is anxious that he will not be welcomed back at home by his family, since the people who side with truth have to bear opposition. Vidura, however, thinks that Gandhari will feel good if she sees her son, Yuyutsu. His only sin, he believes, is that he refused to follow that path of the great warriors like Bheeshma, Drona etc. who chose the wrong path. He was unable to bear the wanton behaviour of Duryodhana. He knows that he is a Kaurava prince, but also thinks that truth is above this identity of this dynasty. His painful loneliness and the frustration arising out of the uselessness of his actions and the pangs of all-encompassing failure has been depicted in an effective and forceful manner by Bharati. He also ponders over the thought of events happening otherwise. The eternal question-what if? He thinks that had he sided with his brother, Duryodhana, his mother would have welcomed him even if he had lost the war! ^[8] That way, he would also not have to bear the hatred of his family.

In contrast to that, his mother now welcomes him with taunts, as she blames him of having killed his own brothers.

She taunts him by asking him whether his arms are tired after killing his own brothers and other kinsmen! ^[9] He bears the anger of Gandhari and suffers this punishment. It is traditionally said that, '*Mata kumata na bhavati.*' But here Gandhari is an exception as she is punishing her son who stood for truth rather than siding with wrong. She further taunts him by asking Vidura to give him a bed of flowers to rest on, since he, having fought a war and won it too, would not rest in mud like Duryodhana! Yuyutsu is mentally broken by this sarcasm and negligence. He is caught in a web of contradictory thoughts. He thinks it would have been better had I compromised with falsehood! ^[10] Vidura tries to make him see reason and asks him whether that was the solution of the problem? And that could not have given him mental peace. He answers that due to the hatred he is getting, he is not at peace otherwise also. He is suffering hatred of his mother and reproach of his subjects. And he concludes in his mind that whether you side with right or wrong, in the end there is only decay and dilapidation. The scream arising out of his agony asks Vidura, 'what did I get, Vidura?' resonates in one's ears ^[11]. The echo of his bewilderment is getting louder. Vidura consoles Yuyutsu, who is otherwise left all alone. He tries to reinstate Yuyutsu's faith in *dharma* by saying that he is the only one of the malevolent Kaurava brothers who stood for righteousness and can therefore at least walk with his head held high ^[12].

But soon, another incident leaves him sullen and dejected. An injured soldier asks for water, but thwarts Yuyutsu's attempt to quench his thirst, as his knees had got burnt due to Yuyutsu's arrows. This hurtful event leads him to ponder again on the result of fighting a war, even for truth and justice ^[13]. His heart at this juncture is filled with abhorrence even for God Krishna. He remarks, 'Hail Krishna! because of whom I am a slaughterer, devoid of mother's love and an object of hatred for all!' ^[14] Yuyutsu feels like a wheel which had been fitted in wrong axle and has now been disjointed from that. He has fought from the side of *dharma*, still his heart feels heavy with the killing of his own kinsmen. He is in remorse thinking that how would he join the last rites of those kinsmen who he has killed himself! ^[15] Clearly, the message of Krishna, as put forth during the war (and later compiled in Shrimad Bhagwadgeeta), has had no impact on him.

When Ashwatthama arrives, Dhritrashtra and Gandhari ask Yuyutsu, their only surviving son, to hide somewhere, as he is their only support now. But Yuyutsu is pondering over the futility of life. He is wondering why he should stay alive at all! And for whom! ^[16] It is evident here that Yuyutsu is predominantly concerned with the reestablishment of *dharma*, which he thought would follow since the war was won by those who were righteous. But this didn't seem to be happening and this left him depressed and confused. Dhritrashtra tries to convince him of predetermination of events by saying that he was born out of his blindness (lust, ignorance) and this had already set limit on Yuyutsu. And that hence he should not have dared to cross this boundary and go towards light (of *dharma*) ^[17]. Nevertheless, Dhritrashtra is still harbouring a wish that his son Yuyutsu may be offered throne by Yudhishtira, the eldest of the winner Pandavas. But Yuyutsu's heart is hurt and broken. He sarcastically rebukes any chance of getting the throne and comments that he doesn't want restoration of his good luck behind which lies the inhumanity of Ashwatthama ^[18].

He exhibits his certain conscience here. Ashwatthama's *brahmastra* destroys any chance of flourishing of Pandavas' progeny by killing Abhimanyu and Uttara's unborn son in her womb. This act of revenge was fueled by Gandhari and no one could stop him. It weighed heavy on the hearts of judicious men, including Yuyutsu. He had believed in the human values of truth, faith, justice and ethical self-restraint, which seemed irrelevant and unachievable now. He shares his doubt about Krishna with Gandhari who told Vidura that she doesn't trust Krishna as He Himself lost self-control many times ^[19]. And a day comes when he loses faith in Krishna completely and even accuses him of being a coward, deceiver and powerless ^[20]. He had been suffering the sarcastic comments of his subjects but he is unable to bear the unceasing insults hurled at him by Bheema. Calm Yuyutsu is shaken and becomes uneasy to the point that he starts contemplating suicide. A distant voice of Vidura comes from the backstage that Yuyutsu has committed suicide ^[21].

Many pertinent questions arise here. Yuyutsu rose over the personal comfort, relations, self-hood and fought for truth, betterment of subjects, future of mankind. He renounced his familial duties in favour of his pursuit of truth.

He kept seeking love and affinity from his family. But what did he achieve? Negligence of father, hatred of mother, fear in the hearts of subjects, disregard by kinsmen, torture by Bheema and sarcastic laughter of all. The partisan of truth was a sorry figure in the end. The society could not accept his sane voice. Kripacharya lamented that this is the condition of those who sided with *dharma* in the reign of Yudhisthira! ^[22] Pandavas laughed, but they did not realize that this suicide of Yuyutsu will have consequences, as he himself said, 'written in blood, this suicide will reverberate in this whole civilization, philosophy, and in governance, self harm will be the end goal ^[23].'

Yuyutsu suffered with a sense of loss of purpose. Humiliation, neglect, loneliness and anxiety of it all lead him to commit suicide! But did his suicide solve the problem? It obviously did not as Yuyutsu returns as a blind *pret* (ghost) and calls himself a self-harming blind ^[24]. His dilemma and his faithlessness remained intact. He still saw the earth as the darkest place in the universe. He says, 'I have been ordered to stray in blind world but where else is darkness more prevalent than on earth? I was born in blindness, and for some time I roamed in the false light of Krishna, but suicide made me return to darkness. I came to see His (Krishna's) death, He won but could not win over faithlessness, he was powerless, he could not save me, or Parikshit. He has created drama of his death but when in this blind world, the children will be killed or many like me will take their own lives, who will come to save them? ^[25]' However, his concerns are not individualistic, they are rather connected with the future of whole mankind. That's why he poses a question-Who will save the future of man in this blind age? And how will he be saved? This question by a person who chose the path of *dharma* and because of which he had to tolerate the neglect and disdain of his own family, remained unanswered. He lamented that not a single faithful man is alive to answer this question ^[26].

Yuyutsu even comes to see the glorified death of Krishna but his faithlessness does not fade away. Driven by faithlessness, he ends on a pessimistic note. But there are prudent men like Vidura and a *vyadha* named Jara (a hunter who killed Krishna) who believed that the cycle of revenge

can be stopped by those who instead choose a redemptive path, which is always accessible even in the worst of scenarios; that the ethical and just way to a higher goal is always available to the individuals and society even in the darkest of times although everything beautiful, auspicious and gentle is lost as *dwapar* ended ^[27]. Although Vidura also questions Krishna's efficacy and wonders whether he is really the centre, the key player anymore! ^[28] But he does not lose his trust and sees hope in future. He put both his faith and faithlessness in the feet of God ^[29].

Conclusion

Yuyutsu wondered as to who will save the future of man in this blind world and how will the slaughterers have *mukti* (deliverance from the cycle of repeated birth and death) after the death of Krishna ^[30]. The first question is answered in two different ways by Vidura and Jara. The *vyadha* answered that those who are not blind and perverted will save the future of man. Jara here suggests the *karma marga*, as recommended in Shrimad Bhagwadgeeta when Krishna talks about *nishkam karma*. According to this, a person is supposed to follow his *dharma* and do his duty ethically, without deliberating upon the fruits of action. The other opinion comes from Vidura, who once said to Dhritarashtra that if he is anxious, it is because his knowledge is superficial and incomplete. He reminded him of the *upadesha* (message) of *Geeta* that Krishna had asked us to submit your fears to Him and become fearless. That's how you will reach to Him, without a doubt ^[31]. Here he suggests the *bhakti marga* where there is complete trust in God and hence there is no doubt or confusion. In expressing disbelief in Krishna by asking the two aforementioned questions, Yuyutsu seems to have cast a doubt on the theory of *karma* that Krishna put forward in *Geeta* during the war of Mahabharata. Krishna could not have averted the war on his own when the kauravas and Pandavas decided upon it. It was only when they collectively rejected the voice of wisdom and peace (that Krishna had proposed as a *shanti-duta*), that the war came about, leading to wide-scale bloodshed. He sided with the Pandavas only to prove that the righteous wins. And yet when they err, as Krishna Himself said, there is no escape from *karma* for them as well. The slaughterers' deliverance (*mukti*) would also be decided according to their *karma*. Yuyutsu, however, has lost his faith. How would he believe since the promise of restoration of *dharma* by Krishna Himself had not materialized! He sought answers first, not redemption. He found no satisfactory answers to his questions and his predicament continued, even after his tragic death.

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