

EVERY ACT OF VIOLENCE INEVITABLY DEBASES SOCIETY AS A WHOLE:
A CRITICAL OUTLOOK OF THE PLAY ‘ANDHA YUG’

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Abstract:

The Revenge Saga or the tale of revenge is the main concern of the this article. Revenge is an attempt, at some cost or risk to oneself, to impose suffering upon those who have made one suffer, because they have made them suffer – is a universal phenomenon. It is considered that Mahabharata is a symbol of victory of truth over lies, but there are few incidents related to revenge. The epic from Indian mythology contains lots of hatred as well but, this does not take away the magic of this epic. Revenge is indeed a strong feeling in Mahabharata. The research paper here, gives its space to understand on how every act of violence inevitably debases society as a whole. The Blind Age, for the profound questions of darkness, blindness, complicity, and ignorance resonate at the core of the play and point out that the lack of vision characterizes not just individuals but entire eras.

Keywords: *acts, violence, society, revenge*

After seeing consequences in the play, one understands the futility of war, revenge or violence. It is a waste for both the sides as who won (victor) or who lost, both feel the grief of losing close ones. So as Mahabharata story gives the message of do good actions, one should try doing good actions for the welfare of the society. As we hear or read about the people who say that God or good things are always present in the universe, even in the worst time. That same feeling is experienced while reading the play 'AndhaYug'. Throughout the play Lord Krishna is the moral centre which is always present. But people are not acknowledging him. The people have not learnt even after seeing the bad conditions of people and go to take revenge instead of thinking that this might lead to bad consequences of some bad deeds of their own, violence or treachery and eventually they had to face the same consequences.

AndhaYug by Dharamvir Bharati is most commonly read as contemplation on the partition of the Indian subcontinent, and the reworking of the final day of the battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas is also interpreted as an allegory of the war between two modern political states. Rightly so, the play could be taken as an allegory for the war between two technologically modern states, consequences of which doesn't limit to any specific geographical region, instead influence the entire human race. The play deals with the important philosophical questions like, ethics, necessity and consequences of war. But, most criticism limits itself to the ethics and the morality of the war from the standpoint of the two major parties, i.e. Kauravas and Pandavas, or from the standpoint of Krishna. Minor or common characters are usually treated as the instruments of settling the debate over Dharama and ethics of the battle, always treated as means rather than ends in themselves. It tells the story of modern human tragedy symbolically and metaphorically using the characters from Mahabharata. Through these characters, Bharati has commented upon tragedy of our times. A composition, AndhaYug is a perfect balance between drama and poetry, where the theatricality is further expounded by Bharati adapting the classical structure of Indian drama with Greek Chorus. The Mahabharata is about power politics, about national disintegration and schisms; the Indian here confronts the forces of history. It is these darker aspects of political conflict that Bharati brings the foreground in his theatrically poetic interpretation of the epic in Andha Yug. The vast expanse of Indian epics and the kaleidoscope of folklore provide enough material for a theatrical production exploring almost all aspects of the stage. The action of the play takes place on the last day of the Mahabharata war and is centred on a few bewildered survivors of the Kaurava clan. The ramparts are in ruins, the city is burning, and Kurukshetra is covered with corpses and vultures. The surviving Kauravas are overwhelmed by grief and rage. They long for one last act of revenge against the Pandavas. That is why when Ashwatthama releases the ultimate weapon, the Brahmastra, which threatens to annihilate the world, they refuse to condemn it as ethically reprehensible. The moral centre of the play lies in Krishna. Despite his failure to ensure peace, it is his presence throughout the play which reveals to us that the ethical and the sacred are always available to human beings even in the worst of times. The Kurukshetra war is obviously an archetypal one as it suggests the metaphysical war between Good and Evil. Whereas the Kauravas represent Evil, the Pandavas represent good. The war is necessitated by the blindness of the Kauravas and consequently the Pandavas have suffered countless sorrows. But in the war there has been a reversal of situation so far good was helpless against the force of Evil. But Good is slowly gaining victory over Evil. As a consequence of this unwanted war the common people feel that their whole life has become meaningless. For example, the two guards express their opinion, which voices that of the common people. They say that they are very tired but yet they have to march up and down guarding these desolate corridors. They are unhappy to learn that the Kaurava queens, who once wandered gracefully like the fragrant breeze, have become widows now. They are sad to notice that the Kaurava Kingdom is ruled by an old and blind ruler and therefore all their actions are meaningless. Now the guards are surprised to see the Kaurava Kingdom is overcast with thousands and thousands of ravenous vultures, which are eager to feed on the dead. The guards consider them as a bad and dreadful omen. The shadow of the vultures indicates physical darkness symbolizing other kinds of darkness like ocular, psychological and one moral ones. King Dhritarashtra's blindness is indicative of ocular darkness. Queen Gandhari's voluntary blindfolding of her eyes shows her extraordinary loyalty to her husband. But both of them, in addition to being physically blind (or blindfolded) are morally blind also because of their blind affection and attachment to their children i.e. Kauravas. AndhaYug is one of the most significant plays of modern India. Written immediately after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, the play is a profound meditation on the politics of violence and aggressive selfhood. The moral burden of the play is that every act of violence inevitably debases society as a whole. Alok Bhalla's translation captures the essential tension between the nightmare of self-entrenchment, which the story of the Kauravas represents, and the ever-present possibility of finding a way out of the cycle of revenge into a redemptive ethicality. One of the most significant plays of post-Independence India, Dharamvir Bharati's AndhaYug raises pertinent moral issues in the context of Partition-related atrocities. The action of the play takes place on the last day of the Mahabharata war and is centred on a few bewildered survivors of the Kaurava clan. The figure of Krishna is central to the narrative. He represents the infinite variety of ways in which the good manifests itself in the ordinary world. He is the man of justice and truth. The Kauravas, however, are unable to imagine the truth about Krishna. This failure of imagination becomes the cause of their final undoing. Thus where AndhaYug talks about futility of war and the massacre that made it difficult for people to emerge from, both with respect to the Mahabharata and Partition, it also brings hope. It is this lotus foot that bears the arrow of a hunter. The mortal Krishna is killed under Gandhari's curse. As Gandhari, the wife of King Dhritarashtra and mother of Kauravas, on hearing the news of her sons' demise, curse Lord Krishna. She believes he could have stopped the destruction but he was compliant to the state politics and killed her sons by deceit. Her pain is moulded into the form of a curse. Just as Lord took Ashwatthama's pain upon himself, he will take the pain of mankind upon him, granting them a chance to make this

AndhaYug an endurable place. The text ends with the reference to a small seed in the mind which gives “courage/ and a longing for freedom/ and the imagination to create something new” (Bharati 161). The absence of God is but his presence in a different form, that of a ‘small seed’. It is hope for a new beginning, devoid of wars, bloodshed and rivalry. The play gives a moral lesson that Truth will be ultimately victorious, although un-Truth may enjoy some power temporarily. In other words the play is a dramatization of the formula, Satyameva Jayate. The moral centre of the play lies in Krishna. He is the voice of compassion, an embodiment of all that is good and just in the world. Despite his failure to ensure peace, it is his presence throughout the play which reveals to us that the ethical and the sacred are always available to human beings even in the worst of times.

Dharamveer Bharati presents one such perspective and set of interpretations by setting his play AndhaYug in the backdrop of the war at Kurukshetra. It echoes the sentiment of a post apocalyptic world, where dissolution engulfs not only the environment but also the emotions of the survivors. A semblance can be found between the political situations that were contemporary to Bharati and the play that he knits around the war at Kurukshetra. In 1953, when the play was first published, the world had fresh the memories of two massive World Wars and at a closer front, India had recently gained Independence and had been partitioned. The violence had caused dismay, that affected Bharati too. The play resonates the bloodshed and destructions that the great contemporary wars caused. Thus, even though Bharati sets his play within the backdrop of an age-old event the concerns that he puts forth, the dismay that the characters showcase is equally representative of the contemporary sentiments of survivors of the World Wars, he thus says in the very beginning of the play, “A profound sadness lies over everything” (7). The setting of the play acts only as a medium for the presentation of these post-apocalyptic sentiments. Prof. Niranjana Sahay suggests in this regard that on a closer reading of the play, one would realise that AndhaYug is in fact not about TheMahabharata, but in acting as the backdrop it merely takes up an appearance on which Bharati reflects serious questions. However, the answers to these questions lie within oneself, which can be only attained through introspection. The violence is not isolated to the war at Kurukshetra alone. In the context of the play the war was fought over the rightful accession of the kingly throne of Hastinapur. The ability to assert oneself over others, to establish one’s superiority act as the explicit motifs of the play, while in the contemporary wars these abilities act as implicit yet present, latent motives. Bharati foreshadows the consequence that unfold by the end of the play, it comes through his reference to the Vishnu Puran that proclaims that in the dark age the “whole earth shall slowly perish” (5) and people shall “hide in real caves or in the caverns of their souls” (5). It is from these dark caverns that a corrupt idea is delivered into an environment that is infected with desires and passions ready to take an unpleasant form provided the gruesome stimuli. Blindness becomes the genesis of this unchecked mania the results of which are unmeasurable. As Deepak Gupta asserts, blindness becomes a “stock metaphor” that is “metaphorically represented as an ethico-moral and an intellectual lacuna, narrow mindedness and a diseased mentality”(12). Honour that stems out of this blindness is farce and misunderstood, it acts as a “rotten whore, who had infected everybody” (Bharati 8). An ill-conceived notion of honour gives rise to a kingdom ruled by an “old and blind ruler whose children in their blindness declared a bitter war” (Bharati 8). The shared lust for power that passes on from one generation to the next becomes the seed idea, which when nourished by the latent desires of individuals such as Duryodhana, causes a lack of discretion, thereby creating a force that pulls everyone into a frenzy. The effect of this frenzy is so strong that even those who do not relate with the concern are pulled into the force of the action, like the dark passions of Duryodhana pulled great warriors like Bhishma, Drona and other kingdoms into the action of the war. Bharati, however portrays this pull of frenzy not through the major characters of The Mahabharata, but through a creative characterisation of minor soldier characters. The guards while presenting a criticism of the war comment, “for seventeen days we have defended the life and honor of a blind and sick kingdom...all our actions are meaningless, our faith, our decisions, our courage, our lives are meaningless, utterly meaningless” (Bharati 8). In the cyclic accumulation of vices, nature endows certain people with the circumstances that render their desires to grow uncontrollably, they find support from some who lose their foresight in the heat of the action and finally the ones who find themselves unable to oppose the blinded hysteria provide the perpetrators with encouragement. Be it the Dwaparyugor today, such hysteria engulfs mobs where otherwise innocent and peaceful people get enraged by passionate blindness and become a part of the turmoil. After the heat of the action resides, introspection begins and the relevance of the action comes into question. The parallelism is so synonymous with AndhaYugthat Bharati too sets his play on the eighteenth and final day of the war. It is once the tumult settles down and contemplation begins, that Dhritrashtra realises the inherent blindness, “I was born blind. How could I have discerned the real world or recognized its social codes?” (Bharati 12). The blindness of Dhritrashtra is all pervading, his “blind ambition and blind love is responsible for the moral blindness of others: as if it is he who breeds blind envy in Duryodhana, stirs blind rage in Gandhari and Ashwatthama, and ultimately drives the entire Kaurava clan to be blind” (Gupta 12). It is in this introspection that the characters come to realise the basic premise of Dharma, which itself lies in timely impartial evaluations of actions. The realisation for the characters comes when they must face the consequences of their decisions. Thus, Dhritrashtra remarks, “I realized that there is a truth that lies beyond the boundaries of my selfhood. I realized that only today” (Bharati 13). The ability to seek righteousness while remaining neutral is absent in Gandhari too. She curses Krishna manifesting her sorrow for the demise of her sons. The acceptance of her curse by Krishna allows her to reflect on the magnitude of her curse and she regrets, “I did not weep like this for my hundred sons” (Bharati 81). It is her rage that takes the vices of the age to their zenith, it becomes a decisive moment directing the fate of the subsequent ages. The fulfilment of the curse changes the fate of all, while Ashwatthama and the hunter find their redemption and faith witnessing the bodily agony of God; Sanjaya and Yuyutsu, however lose their faith due to their abandonment by the divine. Circumstances might not have changed for them but

their outlook changes. Thus, “the word “honor” which had gathered meaning over ages lost all value for the living” (Bharati 82).

Thus, in *Andha Yug* the decisions of some influence the lives of others and the mania is heightened to have influenced even time itself. Yet again, his choice of using the great epic as the backdrop for his discourse through his characterisation brings forth the biggest argument that Bharati puts forth over the subject of destiny. He breaking away from the tradition of the great epic creates a minor character to reflect the flaws of the major characters of the epic. To deal with the essential question of destiny, Bharati asserts on the character of Duryodhana but the commentary is marked through a minor character of the fortune telling mendicant. Bharati establishes the role of a pre-destined path in the lives of individuals that brings them to their decreed fate. The fortune telling mendicant had prophesied, “Duryodhana shall be victorious” (Bharati 31). His prophesy had been proven true, for Duryodhana had been victorious several times be it the game of dice or the accession of the throne. His destiny had taken its rightful course. But it is after this employing of the destined values that man through his actions can change the course of his fate. Therefore, Bharati introduces the idea of pre-determinism but he brings it under the influence of a strong acting free will. The mendicant says, “I suddenly understood as if in a flash of revelation that when a man surrenders his selfhood and challenges history, he can change the course of the stars. The lines of fate are not carved in stone. They can be drawn and redrawn at every moment of time by the will of man” (Bharati 18). Gandhari nurtures every alternate possibility that pays to her aspirations. In her vanity she chooses to blind herself, as Bharati writes, “sick of all this hypocrisy I chose to live with my eyes blindfolded,” she considers, “morality, selflessness and surrender” “masks that cover” (15) blindness. She covers her eyes with an ambition to hear that her son Duryodhana is victorious, she feeds on these ambitions, also in the form of half-truths to give reassurance, not only to herself, but to her son too. However, in her inability to acknowledge the victorious fate of Duryodhana, she finds herself amongst “Many false prophecies broken dreams half-truths” that “lie scattered in every nook and corner of the city of the Kauravas” which she “fondly nurtures” (Bharati 18).

The action of the play takes places on the last day of the battle, since characters like Ashwatthama and Gandhari find their expression on the last day of the battle unlike the protagonists of the epic. They focus on the here and now of the war and thus find themselves wronged against. But the conflict of the last day in terms of the war is but a consequence of the actions that preceded the war and although theirs’ seem a very strong voice in the pretext of the last day of the action, it removes them from taking responsibility for their decisions. For Bharati, the modernist readers, the aversion of the war becomes the foremost and utterly imperative action which stands in contrast with the idea of justice. However, when Gandhari claims, “I had seen the ways of the world and knew that dharma, duty and honour were illusions” and later goes on to claim, “I told Duryodhana: O fool, where there is Dharma there is victory” (Bharati 5), she effectively asserts her minimal awareness towards a holistic and objective truth. Her awareness, like her, is blinded by her false beliefs. She blinds herself with prophecies that she would like to believe in, which stops her from judging the moral calls in an unfavourable situation. Her act of blindfolding herself causes a lack of foresight in her son as well, which grows out of her false reassurances and with this Gandhari not only changes her own course of destiny but that of Duryodhana as well. The characterisation of Gandhari, Duryodhana and Dhritrashtra comes in contrast with the characterisation of Sanjaya, Yuyutsu and Vidura. This brings to light the subjective versus the objective truth that Bharati deals with in the play. While for the former the concentration is on a subjective truth the latter find themselves adhering to an objective reality. Dhritrashtra comprehends, “My love, my hate, my law, my dharma had evolved out of my peculiar world.” (Bharati 12). Bhumika Sharma comments in this regard, “Dhritrashtra's confession exhibits the limitation of subjective perception” (177). Yuyutsu seems to be in sync with the objective reality that stemmed from a moral reaction. But he constantly struggles with his decision, he is pulled into the passions of his parents and his conscience. He is lured into a subjective truth of being wrong even when it was proclaimed that Dharma was with the victors. Even though in the face of the conflict Yuyutsu retains his sense of discretion but he keeps losing it with every stone that is hurled his way. He too had won in the battles of rightful action, but it is his weakness in the face of the consequences that render him long dead before he actually commits suicide. He too takes a decision that he is too afraid to bear the consequences of and thus Bharati through Dhritrashtra rightly comments, “you were conceived in blindness. It defined the boundary of your existence” (71). The shadow of an inherent blindness overpowers the conscience of Yuyutsu and he despite choosing what he considered to be the ethical side in the war reshapes his fate and parks his soul in the unending torments of the after world. “Yuyutsu also ultimately turns out a blind spirit, even though he fought from the side of Pandavas in accordance with his subjective conception of reality. Yuyutsu's subjective truth is already fractured and therefore cannot accord him a life of dignity” (Gupta 13).

The effect of the war is stated through Ashwatthama who is dehumanised. Much like Draupadi, Ashwatthama is wronged but he unlike her, he chooses to transform his destiny and thus, becomes part of Bharati's narration. He struggles between a desire to avenge and a fear of death that pushes him to insanity. He symbolically brings out what happens when a brutal frenzy and disorder takes grip of a person. As at the time of the partition of the country, the latent motivations that otherwise would have never found manifestation in people came out and they exercised power and penetration into the social order in whatever way they could. Similarly, Bharati's Ashwatthama's, transformation was the manifestation of what was vested deep in his unconscious. It was something savage and beastly that made him stoop below what essentially makes mankind human. In this regard Paranjape comments, “...he alone is condemned to roam the worlds without peace for having descended below the threshold of the human in his pursuit of revenge in exterminating the Pandavas, down to their unborn child.” The death of God restored what was humanly in not just Ashwatthama but also in the age that was to come.

The discussion of Dharamveer Bharati's play *AndhaYug* entails the play of destiny and desires, and how circumstances lead to the development of these aggressive desires into a destructive frenzy. It has, alongside, attempted to highlight the effective characterization that Bharati employs in his play, which establishes the said interplay between pre-destiny and the desire. The consequence is understood in terms of the Hindu philosophy of the cyclic movement of time. The entire argument is studied in the light of the great Indian epic *The Mahabharata*.

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