

The Great Indian Novel: The Mythification of Contemporary Political History and the Rise of a Despot.

Dr. Ravi. C. M. Assist. Professor
Dept. of English, University College of Arts
Tumkur University, Tumkuru
ravicmtmk@gmail.com
Mob:9110673772

Abstract: This article aims to show how Shashi Tharoor mythologizes the contemporary political history of the nation and the rise of a despot in the socialistic, secular, and democratic system. The focus is more on the allegorical portrayal of Smt. Indira Gandhi and her political make-up. An attempt is also made to discuss how Tharoor, as a critical insider, masterfully recasts an ancient Hindu classic, *The Mahabharata*, to fictionalize the highly recognizable socio-political events and characters of the twentieth-century Indian politics. This epic style will definitely enable the readers to uncover the hidden conflicts and contexts as means to re-evaluate the value of contemporary socio-political phenomena.

Keywords: mythologize, political history, despot, democratic system, Smt. Indira Gandhi, twentieth-century, re-evaluate, contemporary, phenomena

Introduction

Shashi Tharoor, as a critical insider, masterfully recasts an ancient Hindu classic, *The Mahabharata*, to fictionalize the highly recognizable socio-political events and characters of the twentieth-century Indian politics. He recasts the epic because of its considerable historical core which embraces virtually all vital aspects of human experiences. Moreover, it appears to be an appropriate model for his fictional reconstruction of the national history which centers on themes such as power, politics, and conspiracy, clash of personalities, institutional structures and individuals as well as collective *dharma*. Tharoor uses this epic as a paradigm with flexibility and freedom to write his own version of a modern epic with postcolonial and postmodernist perspectives. Thus, Tharoor's choice of selecting the *Mahabharata* as a model to recast its characters to describe the epic magnitude of the contemporary political history rich with tones of sarcasm, irony and satire is remarkable.

Tharoor's allegorical mode helps him adopt an ancient epic to a highly individual version of Indian history. He weaves and moulds Indian myths and legends to suit contemporary politics with his mature craft and recasts the historical account of India beginning with the nationalist movement in the early 20th century and culminating in the emergency in the late 1970s. While commenting on his story, Veda Vyas, the narrator, says, "We're not writing a piddling Western thriller here. This is my story, the story of Ved Vyas, eighty-eight year old and full of irrelevancies, but it could become nothing less than the Great Indian Novel" (18).

His version is not mere history but it is the history of the present. He reconstructs his version with his memoir to show that, "India is not an underdeveloped country but a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay" (17). While Salman Rushdie uses a subjective interpretation of the collective experiences, Tharoor uses multiple interpretations of India's

multiple realities. He shows how this multiplicity of truths has given the shape and substance to the idea of India. This makes his version a more interesting read than Salman Rushdie's in *Midnight's Children*. Commenting on the primary source of his inspiration, Tharoor says, "Many of the characters, incidents and issues in the novel are based on the people and events described in the great epic, the Mahabharata, a work which remains a perennial source of inspiration to millions in India" (419).

Tharoor, as a postmodernist, uses the technique of redaction of epic narrative for the mythopoetics of national history. This parodic redaction of individuals, places and events enable him to intertwine more cleverly and pointedly the two somewhat apparently unconnected subjects, the Mahabharata and the history of modern India, in this remarkable book. While documenting his postmodernist impressions of the contemporary history, he shows, as Kanchika Chowdhury says, "An analysis of the historical legacy of colonialism, however, does display a certain degree of uniformity in the postcolonial condition" (43). It seems that with the help of mythopoetics he intends to critique certain socio-political issues and trends of the present which have the resonance of the legendary epic.

It is interesting to know what Edward Said remarks in his article titled "Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations" with reference to Tharoor's contemporary postcolonial text. According to him:

The contemporary postcolonial literatures expresses ideas, values, emotions formerly suppressed ignored or denigrated by and of course in, the well-known metropolitan centers. These literatures have played a crucial role in the re-establishment of national cultural heritage, in the re-installment of native idioms, in the re-managing and re-figuring of local histories, geographies, communities. (Chowdhury 43)

These remarks appropriately corroborate Tharoor's act of revisioning history in order to rearticulate his colonial and post-colonial views and experiences. Indeed, his act of revisioning is essential, since it illuminates the readers of the history with new insights. His daring and innovative use of the epic brings contemporaneity both to the epic and to his work.

Mahabharata: A Contemporary Political History

Commenting on the emergence of the literary texts Aijaz Ahmed remarks that "literary texts emerge from a complex set of historical circumstances and competing ideological and cultural clusters" (Ahmed 42). Therefore, it is important to negotiate Tharoor's postcolonial text through an intricate mapping of specific socio-cultural conditions that accompany the production of this text. His nostalgia enables him to generate new historiographical insights for comprehending and discussing his recent present. In an interview Tharoor quite clearly states his reasons for using the *Mahabharata* to foreground events in modern India:

The *Mahabharata* struck me as a work of such contemporary resonance; it helped crystallize my own inchoate ideas about issues. I wanted a vehicle to transmit some of my political and historical interests in the evolution of modern India. I saw the recasting of the *Mahabharata* as a perfect vehicle for the two Indias. (Tharoor "Interview"18)

This, of course, may not help him to create a new master narrative or a legitimizing monolithic discourse but enables him to make his narrative of history differ from those official, orthodox and authoritatively national and institutional versions.

In fact, Tharoor's attempts at envisaging the emergence of a modern India from the bowels of the ancient one are vividly reflected in his literary inventiveness which helps him to handle the epic masks with remarkable fineness. The result, thus, is *The Great Indian Novel* which is an allegorical reinterpretation of the modern historical account of Indian politics. While commenting on this account Meenakshi Sharma states:

The historical account of India, which Tharoor presents in *The Great Indian Novel*, covers a much longer time-period from the nationalist movement to the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. A host of important historical figures from the pre-and post-independence eras. Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Patel, Indira Gandhi, Krishna Menon, Sam Manekshwa, Arun Shourie as well as major historical events such as the Salt March, Jallianwalla Bagh, the assassination of Gandhi, the Emergency, the General Elections of 1982 appear in the narrative. (Sharma 135)

Tharoor deploys Veda Vyasa, the narrator of the novel, to narrate his version of modern history who as M. K. Chaudhary says:

Veda Vyasa in *The Great Indian Novel* narrates to Ganapati in pretentious, jocular, garrulous and perky manner the story of modern India. He not only transforms the ancient myth into Pre-Independent and Post-Independent politics but also transforms the contemporary political history into myth or some kind of other. (Chaudhari 104)

In the first half of the novel Veda Vyasa takes us through all the major socio-political events which shaped India as an independent nation with high expectations. In the second half he gives an account of how the nation, instead of its march towards progress, regresses under the rulers who failed to keep in tune with the national expectations. Vyasa being both a narrator and a critical commentator attempts to explain how the nation experiences the 'darkness at dawn' and eventually witnesses its fall. For this job, he invents new metaphors with which he can reinvent the past with a hope to show some ways to reshape the present. His new versions of truths and realities may give the base for reshaping the present.

Tharoor uses the concept of intertextuality of James Joyces' 'mythical method' to make his novel a piece of criticism of the twentieth century socio-politics of India. While yoking the myth for the critical appropriation of the contemporary society, Tharoor constantly uses myth and re-presents it to draw a parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity like James Joyce. Therefore, it is interesting to know what T. S. Eliot says about James Joyce's 'mythical method'. He says:

Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the

immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.
(Sugg 10).

It is by making declarations like “In my epic I shall tell of past, present and future, of existence and passing, of efflorescence and decay, of death and rebirth; of what is and of what was, of what should have been” (18). Tharoor captures the mood of the epic to make his work as Roland Barthes would call, a “Creative Text” which resists finality and remains open to skepticism. It seems that his creative text with multiplicity of truths and multiple versions of realities would give a terrible jolt to contemporary history.

The novel presents a compact historical narrative that covers major political events of the pre- and post-independent India. The events re-presented are Champaran Satyagraha, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Salt March, the Round Table Conference, Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, the Quit India Movement, the Partition and Independence of India, India's conflict with Pakistan and China, the Bangladesh war and the 1975 Emergency period. Here it seems that Tharoor gives his alternative version of fictional history to critically reassess not only the events but also the roles played by the leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Indira Gandhi, Jayaprakash Narayan, Murarji Desai and many other prominent leaders. Tharoor, as a postcolonial writer, adapts indigenous myth as an important mode of retrieval of the past with which he integrates the cultural life of the past with his post-independent reality.

The 1975 Emergency under a Microscopic Lens.

Though the novel is rich with Tharoor's brilliant combination of the myth and contemporary realities with wonderful insights into the past socio-political events of the nation, this research paper takes up the event of the 1975 emergency under its microscopic lens. His witty, thoughtful, outrageous, sensible, amusing and chilling details of this political event definitely reshape the historical truth of the emergency. Tharoor, with these details, seems to address the problem how the emergency has failed independence and democracy and impoverished the souls of those who cherished the lofty ideals of freedom. Thus, the study of such an event, through this fictional narrative, provides an ample scope for comprehending the contemporary realities of socio-political and cultural life.

It is through the mythification of the portraits of prominent national leaders and their roles in the national events that Tharoor revisualises many corners of the past. His act of recounting the past as Vyasa, the narrator, says, “recounting of history is only the order we artificially impose upon life to permit its lessons to be more clearly understood”. (109). Tharoor's fictional account of the struggle of Indian national leaders who, with millions of other fellow beings, falsify the British notion of indispensability is remarkable. The British often used to say, “You see these Indians can never agree amongst themselves. We really have no choice but to continue ruling them indefinitely *for their own good*”. (125). He applauds the ways through which the notion of the British is destroyed by the millions of freedom fighters. At the same time he is thoroughly critical about the ways through which the notion of indispensability is reinstated in democratic India twenty eight years after its independence by Priya Duryodhani (Smt. Indira Gandhi), daughter of Dritharashtra (Nehru).

It is interesting to know what Karna, a lawyer, (Jinna), predicts at one point of time when he has a heated debate on his reluctance to join Congress Party with Ganga Datta (Gandhiji). When Ganga Datta asks him how he assesses the situation he remarks:

I believe it is quite deplorable,' the lawyer replied. 'Ganga Datta and his Kaurava Party (Congress Party) are the only actors of any consequences on the stage, and they stand for all that is retrogressive and populist in Indian politics. If they are to triumph we shall witness neither democracy nor progress but mobocracy and anarchy in India. (145)

These subtle remarks shed a lot of light on the very act of the political functioning of the Congress Party and its leaders in post-independent India. Its undisputed triumph against the British, Jinna predicts, would cost so much damage to the nation. It is quite an unfortunate thing that his remarks come true during Priya Duryodhani's regime.

Tharoor, in his novel, gives an account of the factors responsible for Priya Duryodhani's political makeup that made her democratically undemocratic in all her political endeavors not only to ascend but to remain on the throne. He begins his account from "The Eighth Book, Midnight's Parents" by commenting on her most striking pair of eyes. He says that her eyes are, "dark and lustrous, they shone from that pinched face like blazing gems on a fading backcloth, flashing, questioning, accusing, demanding in a manner that transcended mere words" (152). They seemed to be the eyes made up for all her mysterious traits. They gave her the strength and dynamism to belie everything else in her near future.

Nehru's devotion to his daughter is used to talk about her subsequent actions in this novel. Despite her father's unconditional love for her, she realizes her own aloneness. Tharoor remarks that, "After what she saw in her childhood, Priya Duryodhani would never be able to trust another human being, no, not even –especially not – her own father" (152). It is quite clear that the attitude of mistrusting others and some other aspects of Priya Duryodhani's unique character manifested themselves very early in her life. She grew up as an introvert and the one who always followed instructions especially the written ones. But later she learnt to act differently. Vyasa (Tharoor) aptly comments on her changed self. He says, "Priya Duryodhani acted only according to the dictates of her own conscienceless mind. Even at the age of twelve, overkill was already her problem" (155). Furthermore, he says that "Perhaps things might have been different had Dhritarashtra taken her in hand, rather than his pen. But he did not" (155). He means that it is difficult to speculate what might have happened if Nehru, instead of making her as his personal secretary, had taken her as his fellow politician. On the other hand, this could be seen as criticism of the dynastic politics which is breeding in post-independent India.

Hence, it is necessary to understand the process of a historical context which shapes a particular personality and its actions. Human beings, after all, are made and unmade by the events that take place in their lives. Therefore it becomes a reasonable act in the present Section 2 of Chapter 4 to contextualize Smt. Indira Gandhi to deepen one's comprehension of her 1975 regime. Thus, the selection in this section, interpretation and arrangements of facts of the past related to the subject has been contextualized in a manner wherein the section

traces the rise of the despot in Indira through the lens of Tharoor's characterization. Though they are fictional facts, the truth is not jeopardized by inaccuracy.

Tharoor delineates Smt. Gandhi as lonely and neglected, who spends her childhood by the bedside of her perennially sick mother. He casts her in the role of female Duryodhana –Priya Duryodhani to make the character appear as an ironic combination of Indira Priyadarshani and Duryodhana. Tharoor conceives her as a modern counterpart of Dhritarashtra's eldest child because of her arrogance, selfishness, scheming nature, intolerance and undemocratic instincts to eliminate her political rivals. Her early exposure to the dynamics of the local, national and international politics helps her to have the hands-on experience of socio-politics. While commenting how she profoundly absorbs the lessons from her political experience after her father appoints her as his official hostess, Vyasa says that, "Yes, Ganapathi, Priya Duryodhani listened, and watched, and imbibed tone and technique from her paternal model. With Manimir, she learned her first exercise from her father's political primer. It was an education from which the country was never to recover" (261).

His comments throw more light on the way she has been brought up. Her exquisite looks often used to add an open manner and an ability to learn from and adapt to the conditions in which she finds herself and her willingness to play in politics. This gives her an adequate space to learn the idioms and diplomacy of politics which make her to grow not just as an undisputed but an indispensable leader of Congress Party. She develops a great faith in herself to muddle through though she, at times, is unable to perform brilliantly.

Democracy: Corruption and Maladministration

After Dhritarashtra became the Prime Minister of independent India, Priya Duryodhani had the chance to listen to a piece of advice to Dhritarashtra given by V. Kanika Menon, (V.K. Krishna Menon), High Commissioner, India. The Prime Minister was a little upset as he saw Jaya Prakash Drona's growing popularity with his young followers. Drona attempted to raise the villagers' consciousness to their democratic rights. He wanted to expose the corruption and maladministration in the police and the village council. It was at this point, V. Kanika Menon intervened to give the lessons from the *Arthashastra* and the *Shantipurana of Vyasa* that have been sanctified for centuries.

Dhritarashtra sighs deeply after he listens to Kanika's counsel. He, as an ardent socialist and a democrat, thanks Kanika and says that "I know you're speaking with my best interest at heart, but, that's simply not me. I can't do it" (273). He decides to ignore all that is said to him. He thinks that it will go no further.

But it does not happen in the way Dhritarashtra thinks. Vyasa, the narrator, observes that it has already gone further. He says:

Just beyond the half-open door leading to the Prime Minister's private study, Dhritarashtra's dark-eyed daughter put down the book she had been pretending to read and smiled a quite smile of satisfaction. She was glad her idealistic father had some less idealistic friends. Dhritarashtra might forget Kanika's advice, but Priya Duryodhani would remember every word of the acerbic High Commissioner's brutal counsel. And she would not hesitate to act on it. (273)

This would become the most comprehensive answer for the repeatedly asked question how Duryodhani, daughter of an idealist father, became less idealistic in all her political acts. It is quite surprising to see that though she was born and brought up in a socialistic and democratic milieu, she was pleased by the acerbic counsels which helped her to rise as a despot.

In “The Fifteenth Book: The Act of Free Choice” Tharoor gives an account of DraupadiMokrasi (Democracy) after her adoptive father Dhritarashtra passes away. Vyasa tells Ganapathi:

Draupadi was like the flame of a brass lamp in a sacred temple of the people. Imagine it: a flame nourished by a ceaseless stream nourished by a ceaseless stream of sanctified oil and the energy of million voices raised in chanting adoration. A flame at an evening *aarti*; at the end of puja, a flame offered to the worshippers as bells tinkle and incense swirls, and moving towards these hands, glowing ever more brightly as it breaths their reverence. This was the beauty of Draupadi, a beauty that glowed in the open that drew sustenance from the public gaze. (309)

It is quite clear from the above extract that democracy was sanctified with all respect during Nehru's rule. He tried constantly to nurture Ganga Datta's percepts of democracy and preserved all the values that strengthened it. But Miss Mokrasi experienced symptoms of trouble soon after the death of her adoptive father. It becomes quite interesting to study how Miss Mokrasi is treated by Priya Dhuryodhani who was little upset with her directness. She says, “You have got to do something about this. She was direct as usual. The girl is becoming a positive nuisance. None of the boys are listening to anything that's going on –they have eyes and ears only for Miss DraupadiMokrasi” (311).

Smt. Gandhi: Disrespect for Democracy

She considered Miss Mokrasi as a positive nuisance and wanted to establish control on her by getting her married to a young member of the Kaurava Party. She suggested Miss Mokrasi to consider Ekalavya (Jagjivan Ram) who was bright, intelligent and well-informed, for her marriage. But when she learnt that her suggestion was discarded she asks bitterly, “Who am I? Draupadi would never listen to me. There . . . there isn't the required . . . trust between us.” (312). But, Miss Mokrasi's marriage was completed later at the *swayamvara* where Arjuna (Judiciary) married her by completing a certain task. This was how Miss Mokrasi came to Pandavas. But Priya Duryodhani's wish to establish control over her remained unfulfilled.

She continued to show her disrespect to Miss Mokrasi whom she considered as a positive nuisance. As a result she was found undemocratic in most of her socio-political acts. The sudden death of Shishu Pal made the Kaurava Working Committee to make their collective choice for the most coveted post of the nation. There was a dilemma of who to choose and who not to. They solved it with their act of free choice. One of them said, “There is only one possible solution to our dilemma. I said, the words emerging by themselves from my vocal chords. ‘Priya Duryodhani’” (319). It was not an innocent choice. When he was asked why a woman, he justified his choice by saying:

We want a Prime Minister with some limitations, a Prime Minister who is no more than any minister, a Prime Minister who will decorate the office, rally the support of the people at large and let us run the country. None of us can play that role as well as Priya Duryodhani can. She is easily recognizable. She is known as her father's daughter, and she will be more presentable to foreign dignitaries than poor little Shishu Pal ever was. And if we ever decide we have had enough of her –well, she is only a woman. (318)

This was how Priya Duryodhani was sworn in as the third Prime Minister of independent India. It was during her first year in the office that she remained conscious to find and learn all that she could. When her party somehow managed to retain its power in the fourth general election, some leaders like Yudhishtir (Morarji Desai) were of the opinion that the leadership of the Kaurava Party had to be changed. But his objection was strongly overruled. It was Duryodhani who took the chance to speak to show how sharp she was when she says that "I think that if the elections have shown anything, it is that the people want a change. I represent that change. The Kaurava Party can't do without me" (340). She wanted to make it a point to show to others that how indispensable she was to her party.

She, at times, made the best use of immense sacrifices of her father and family for the great cause of national independence. She gave a lip service to her father's socialist ideals to promote herself as the *netha*. Her magic spell was such that even leaders like Jyaprakash Drona (Jayaprakash Narayan) yielded to her appeal. She often proved to be very particular in her choices. When she chose to do away with the old Kaurava Party members who often questioned her leadership, she did not care to eliminate them by splitting her party into two. She, for her own vested interest, ruined her old party and smashed it to pieces all the pillars and foundations that had supported her in the past. Yet she proved her might with her own supporters and emerged as an undisputed leader of her own Congress Party. She emerged victorious with great power to rule. The frequently asked question was what did strengthen her to do it? There are different answers for this question but Vyasa says, "Ganapathi, I think it was innocence. Not hers... but ours, India's innocence. She had tapped the deep lode of it that still ran through our people, the innocence that had led 320 million voters to cast their ballots for a slogan ('Remove poverty') devoid of sincerity... ." (352).

National Service: Amassment of Power and Money

It is interesting to know about the things Mrs. Gandhi started to do after she amassed power and wealth in the name of her service to the poor nation. Vyasa, through his comments, unveils the traits of a despot. He says:

She squeezed the newsprint supplies of the press because they were out of touch with the masses (you see how she remembered Kanika's conversation with her father), she fettered the judiciary by demanding they be committed to the people (whose true needs, of course, and she alone, represented), she emasculated her party by appointing its state leaders rather than allowing them to be elected (for she alone could judge who best would serve the people). (357)

Her constant attempts to establish her control over media, judiciary and politics continued until she succeeded to centralize the power of her administration. Vyasa says:

While the poor remained as poor as they had ever been, while striking trade unionists were beaten and arrested, while peasant demonstrations were assaulted and broken, all this while more and more laws went on to the statute books empowering Priya Duryodhani to prohibit, proscribe, profane, prelate, prosecute or prostitute all the freedoms the national movement had fought to attain during all those years of my Kaurava life. (357)

The hard-earned freedom and long-cherished democratic and socialist ideals of the nation suffered from coercion by Duryodhanis's rule. AshisNandy, while commenting on her undemocratic actions, points out that "Indira Gandhi was an authoritarian ruler who tried to consolidate a culture of politics which was in essence authoritarian" (Nandy 127). She worked hard for her high-handedness with which she established her hegemony. She discovered her own strategically designed ways to make her super power perpetuate by breaking the institutions and organizations. According to Ashis Nandi, "gradually all the important new institutions which stood between the ruler and the ruled –the judiciary, the trade unions, the press, the political parties including her own party, and the parliament –were one by one weakened or wrecked" (Nandi 121).

Here it is necessary to ask how that could be possible for the prime minister of an independent and democratic nation to ask for the total obedience and acceptance to its master. She was not naïve enough not to know that her expectation was beyond her reach. Nevertheless, she worked tirelessly to reach it.

It is unfortunate that her acts of dishonesty, corruption, undemocratic rule, bossism, enslavement, unconstitutional practices and cynicism came to public notice in 1975 when Jayapraksh Drona invoked the spirit of the Indians against all her evils. Vyasa says, "Jayapraksh Drona emerged from his retreat and called for a People's Uprising against Priya Duryodhani" (361). Jayapraksah declared that he wanted to restore India's ancient values about governance with all their due respect by eliminating the corrupt prime minister. He strongly held her responsible for the socio-political unrest caused by Duryodhani's misrule. Therefore, he decided to lead a mass movement against her government that caught the imagination of the people and ignited that of the opposition parties. Vyasa says:

Drona preached not only against Duryodhani but against all the evils she had failed to eradicate and therefore, in his eyes had herself come to represent: venality and corruption, police brutality and bureaucratic inefficiency, rising prices and falling stocks in the shops, adulteration and black-marketing, shortages of everything from cereals to jobs, caste discrimination and communal hatred, neglected births and dowry deaths – the whole panoply of national evils, including the very ones against which the Prime Minister had campaigned in the elections. (363)

India's socioeconomic conditions and problems became chaotic. The Prime Minister was held accountable for the pledges she had failed to redeem, the hopes she had betrayed and the miracles she could not make. Thus the mass movement targeted to oust her from the throne.

The Choices: The 'Self' or the Nation

It was a great tragedy to see that the riots, mass rallies, demonstrations and counter demonstrations reduced precious independence and democracy into anarchy, betrayal and chaos. The political battles determined by vested interests continued to ignore the needs of the common people. No political parties seemed to have interest in the development of the nation. Priya Duryodhani's rule became the subject of criticism as there were allegations of her corrupt rule. When she was found guilty of a corrupt electoral practice while making a campaign speech for her parliamentary elections by a legalistic provincial court, she was deprived of her parliamentary privileges. This made Drona's mass movement to demand her resignation. Some of her party members suggested her to step down temporarily to quieten the cry of the opposition and give time for the judicial process. But Vyasa says how she responded to this cry, "if there was one thing Priya Duryodhani had learned from her mother's wasted sacrifices, it was never to put anything, anything at all, ahead of self-interest. She would not allow anyone to place a blindfold on her blazing eyes" (365).

It was with her self-interest that she decided not to budge to any pressure however expensive it could be. She decided to listen to her closest adviser who was known as, Vyasa says, "Duryodhani's Kanika, the Bengali lawyer, Shakuni Shankar Dey" (365). He said, "Don't resign, even for appearance sake. Why gratify the howling jackals outside and give time for the opportunists within the party to wrest control from you?" (365). When he was questioned about what choice she had, he said, "The Prime Minister always has a choice. You don't have to do anything merely because it's expected of you. But there is something else you can do" (365). He advised her to hit them back undemocratically and mercilessly by using her super power.

It was with this crucial counsel Shakuni Shankar Dey (Sidharatha Shankar Ray) poisoned her mind to do away with all the socialist and democratic principles of the constitution. When she expressed her fear about her actions, he told her carefully to change the rules of the game. He told her, "You could declare a Siege" (366). When she referred to the siege that was already there in the country declared at the time of the GelabiDesh (Bangladesh) war, he said, "That Siege was declared to cope with an external threat which everyone knows has long since passed. What you could do now is to declare internal Siege. A grave threat to the stability and security of the nation from internal disruption" (366).

He wanted her to declare internal siege which could enable her to execute preventive detention of all obstreperous politicians. While explaining the benefits of this siege, he affirmed that, "Not to mention censorship of the press, which is nowhere explicitly ruled out in the constitution, suspension of certain fundamental rights –free speech, assembly, that sort of thing – and measure to put the judiciary in their place" (366).

Shakuni's advice relieved all her anxieties. It revived the spirit of a despot. She felt that with the consent of the President to impose the internal siege she would use the last *astra* to win the battle illegally. This brutal advice made her stubborn to wage the great battle of modern Kurukshetra. It was a war between the democrats and the constitutionalists led by Drona on the one side and the undemocratic and non-constitutionalists led by ruthless and power hungry Duryodhani on the other side.

Vyasa explains in detail how each side prepared for the battle and its consequences. Jayaprakash Drona in association with the opposition parties addressed the mammoth mass rally at the Boat Club lawns convened by the People's Uprising movement to call for the exit of Priya Duryodhani. Drona said:

I stand here and look upon the hundreds and thousands of you gathered here before me, the lakhs of men and women who have come to see us all on the same platform, who have come to *sense* and *feel* our unity, our confidence, the strength of our commitment to freedom and justice and change, who have come to *hear* us because for once we represent your hope instead of merely your dissatisfactions, as I feel all this, I feel a surge in my heart. (367)

It is with this invocation that Drona prepared for the battle. The court verdict against Duryodhani, inevitably, stirred people's uprising movement to greater boldness. The demonstrations continued to condemn the central government and demanded the Prime Minister to step down.

On the other hand Shakuni, to counter the attack, arranged the hired busloads of rural peasants to express their support for the government in the rallies outside the Prime Minister's residence. He tried to divert the attention of the mass movement that was against Duryodhani. When he experienced his futile attempts to stop the mass movement, he let his master plan come smoothly into action. As a result a team of red-eyed policemen knocked at the doors of the opposition party leaders before dawn to take them away to prison which would be their home for months to come. The arrest of the political opponents in free democratic India by the Prime Minister's gang shocked the nation. The citizens experienced darkness at dawn when they heard the radio announcement by the Prime Minister that stated that the President of India had declared an internal emergency for the national security reasons. It remained an incomprehensible question for millions of citizens as to how a democratic free nation with a strong written constitution was defeated by undemocratic means. There was a ban on the free play not only of ideas but of everything. The very purpose of democratic government was thrown out to replace it with a despotic rule.

The imposition of the emergency was a betrayal of everyone who respected the ideals of democracy and constitution. Duryodhani, Vyasa says, "censored the press, stifled public debate, and placed restrictions even on the reporting of the speeches of a few opposition stalwarts left in the House to criticize the new laws she was bulldozing through parliament" (372). Her insecurity was such that it made her behave heartlessly. One of the ironies of her authoritarianism was that it was more authoritarian than it needed to be. There was no need to be merciless in most of her actions during the emergency. But she wanted to build a political system based on absolute personal loyalty to her that assured absolute security to her position. This made her to monopolize her democratic and constitutional power to behave like a despot which resulted in a lot of excesses during the emergency.

She, with her garland keepers and minions, stripped the nation of its values and institutions which had been cherished by millions of Indians. The emergency became a legal license to introduce all the illegal acts with force that muted the voices of democracy. She made parliament supreme to establish her control over it. But Vyasa remarks that she appeared to

forget the fact that, "It is not the Parliament that is supreme, but the people; the importance of Parliament arises simply from the fact that it embodies the supremacy of the people" (384). When she disconnected people's relationship with parliament, it lost its significance as a democratic institution. It turned out to be her own army that empowered her to treat brutally not only her political opponents but the very innocent citizens she was supposed to protect. Vyasa while criticizing her rule says, "That is why Priya Duryodhani's parliamentary tyranny was no better than the military dictatorships of neighboring Karnistan" (384). Her act of imposing the draconian emergency rule and calling it off when the repression of her regime was at its peak made people see again Muhammad bin Tughluq in her. Like him she mastered the skills to tame the press, sterilize the potent, terrify the workers and terrorize the poor.

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