

Shakunir Pasha: Humanification of Mahabharat's most misunderstood villain

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Abstract

The character of Shakuni is perhaps the most despised in the Indian Grand Narrative Mahabharat. Rudraprasad Chakrabarty's *Shakunir Pasha* (The Dice of Shakuni) is one of the first and finest attempts in theatre rhetorics to deconstruct the vicious, almost demonic character of Shakuni to a man misled, misunderstood, and misinterpreted. Ajitesh Bandopadhyay etches a withering and old Shakuni, the night before he is about to fight against the Pandavas in the historic play of dice. Like an apt painter, Ajitesh is able to pendulate between reality, symbolism and fantasy, bringing out the emaciated soul of Shakuni, a man dying of guilt, a man who is kind, caring and seeks to return to an old life charm, but possessed with revenge for the death of his dear father and brothers. The research paper seeks to reconstruct the true nature of Shakuni, excluding his characterization from the popular soap operas, and tries to situate his character amidst the erstwhile society and its contradictions. The character of Shakuni vacillates between right and wrong, truth and falsities, revenge and self-respect. It also reflects a deeply anguished populace, battling with the overriding taxation system of the Kauravas, political deaths in the city, undernourished and a seething section under King Duryodhan waiting to explode. Drawing a similarity with Shakespeare's Macbeth, there is a reference to spectre and apparitions that Shakuni imagines of his dead father, his starved and dying brothers. The research paper also recourses to myth making as a vent to the anguish of the people who are unhappy with the system. Based on conversation analysis, the paper analyses Ajitesh Bandopadhyay's brilliance in resonating Shakuni's multifaceted and deeply intriguing personality as a commoner, a dreamer, a man obsessed with vengeance, a fighter for freedom, a doomed villain, a creator of history that men in future generations loved to hate.

Keywords: Shakuni, symbolism, deconstruction, reconstruction, theatre rhetorics, Macbeth.

1. Introduction

“Revenge, the sweetest morsel to the mouth that ever was cooked in hell”

-Walter Scott, ‘The Heart of Mid-Lothian’

Shakuni (named after a bird Shakun or vulture in Bengali), son of King Subala and brother of Gandhari is said to be the mastermind of the Kurukshetra war in the Indian Grand Narrative Mahabharat. The multifaceted character of Shakuni, his viciousness, his recourse to sorcery, his mastery over the dice has prompted producers of soap operas and films to wreak TRPs from time to time. During the late 1980s, the Nationalist agenda of the erstwhile BJP coincided with the telecast of Mahabharat at 10 am. Produced by BR Chopra, it is said that the entire nation came to a standstill while this serial was being telecast. The onset of the religious genre based on ‘Dharma’ and ‘Adharma’ gave rise to a spurt of teleserials like Ramayan, Sri Krishna, Panchatantra, Vikram aur Betaal during this time, culminating in the historic Rath Yatra epitomising Sri Krishna’s chariot in the Kurukshetra war by Advani of BJP.

The characterization of Shakuni, the maternal uncle of Duryodhan forms the crux of the Mahabharat, The play of Dice, or Pasha Khela as called in Bengali forms the point of climax and etches the background of the later Kurukshetra war. In almost a Machivellian gesture, it is the cunningness of Shakuni that ultimately topples the throne of the Kurus and lead to their death. Shakuni’s revenge is fulfilled. ‘Shakunir Pasha’ authored by Rudraprasad Chakrabarty is a play where the veritable Shakuni is played by none other than Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, the Doyen of Bengali Theatre, takes a leap from the erstwhile characterizations of Shakuni and humanizes him. In what can be called one of his best dialogue delivery, Ajitesh Bandopadhyay’s rich baritone, growling at one hand and crouching on the other brings out possibly all the layers impinged into the character of Shakuni.

Hailed as one of the doomed villains of the Grand Narrative, ‘Shakunir Pasha’ deconstructs the demon and shows his soft side. We see a withering and aged Shakuni, bereaving the death of his father Subala, the King of Gandhar and that of his 100 brothers who died of starvation. A vulnerable Shakuni who is torn between Dharma and Adharma, and chooses the latter to avenge the death of his father, a guilty Shakuni who lives a life of lies, as he has to befriend Duryodhan knowing well that all the pomp and grandeur he is bestowed with is only for one night. A distraught Shakuni who is overwhelmed with compassion at the misfortune of the guards of the Pramod Prasaad(Palace of entertainment) Chittaseba and Kharbahatta.

Ajitesh Bandopadhyay does full justice to the character of Shakuni if not more in the fact that he portrays each nuance in his personality to perfection. Produced by Ajit Mukhopadhyay, the play opens with the conversation between two guards watching over the Pramod Prasad of Durjyodhan where Shakuni was to stay for a night, with all kinds of entertainments possible to keep him happy. He was to play the Game of Dice with the Pandavas the next morning, and hence the guards were given the crucial duty to see that he did not change his mind. Before Shakuni enters with Durjyodhan, the dialogue between the two guards Kharbahatta and Chittaseba along with courtesan Madanika gives us a glimpse into the lives of the common people under the regime of King Durjyodhan. It is apparent that none of these people are happy. Guarding the royal Palace of the King, the guards could envisage good food and jewellery in front of them, yet they were famished, did not have a good pay and their family was far away from them. The poor administration of King Durjyodhan and his inability to govern his kingdom based on justice is further magnified in the later sections.

1.1 Politics of Durjyodhan’s administration: Background to *Shakunir Pasha*

The grand entry of Shakuni along with Durjyodhan in the first scene of the play, preceded by the dialogue between the Palace guards helps us to understand that Shakuni will be harbored in the Palace for a night before he competes with the

Pandavas for the play of Dice. 'Shakunir Pasha' centers around the historic event where Shakuni is the undeclared king of the day, but during the conversation, once by Madanika the courtesan and again by the relentless Durjyodhan, we get a glimpse of the contemporary society and the administration of King Durjyodhan. Madanika, understandably is extremely unhappy, she strives for freedom inspite of being granted the post of 'raj nartaki' (Kings favorite dancer). She craves to go back to her native village, and reminiscences the Mahakali Mandir (temple), her father Gadadhar Morol, her family members all whom she had left back there, and the love of her life Anjan.

The entry of Durjyodhan and Shakuni, we also get to know about the formers lustful character, as he fondly describes the physical beauty of each of the dancers in the palace- Haimantika, Anupama, Lubdhika, all ready to entertain Shakuni and give him forbidden pleasures for the night. He makes tempting promises to Shakuni, declaring that if the Kauravas win the play of Dice, the Pramod Palace (palace of entertainment) along with all the courtesans will be his. Durjyodhan also promises that he will mold a golden tooth for aging Shakuni so that he is able to devour fleshy meat. All through the conversation between Durjyodhan and Shakuni, we see him making promises, but himself jestfully also confides that they were only promises, promises that were never meant to be fulfilled.

The Kingdom of Durjyodhan according to him was thriving on these promises. Promises of doing away with poverty, unemployment, to spread 'gyaner aalo' the light of knowledge. However, these over time only remained false promises never to be fulfilled, and a generation thrived on, believing these promises. While the King himself enjoyed all kinds of tangible pleasures, the subjects were dying of astute poverty, ignorance, captivity, and starvation. Women were treated as objects of pleasure, and poor people had no say in the administration. Anybody speaking against the King was secretly murdered, his body then laid in an open space under the tree, for full view of the public, and labelled as 'Rajnoitik Hatyakando' (political killing). This bears a stark resemblance to Satyajit Ray's 'Hirak Rajar Deshe', where Hirak Raj

deployed secret surveillance agents to see if anyone was plotting to overthrow the kingdom, an entire system that thrived on promises- false promises and commitments that would forever alight the desire for an Utopian kingdom someday, when people will be happy, ever after special mention may be made of the sequence where a singer present in the palace of Hirak Raja sings:

“.....Dakho bhalo jone roilo bhanga ghore/mando je se singhashon e chorey/ sonar fosol folay je tar dui bela jotena ahaar/hirak khonir mojur dakho kanakori nai.....”

1.2 Blurring of subjective and symbolic realities

Ajitesh Bandopadhyay’s credit lies in the fact that he is brilliant in rendering different psychological zones and layers to the personality of Shakuni, the mastermind of the Kurukshetra war. At times we see Ajitesh in a high-pitched baritone, laughing with a gigantic growl, and the next moment we see him cowering down, his voice mellifluous, soft and detached. In true theatrical rhapsody, he is able to open up the magnificent personality of Shakuni, vicious, cunning, megalomaniac, who plays his Dices according to will. The next moment, we hear a reticent, pained and breaking Shakuni, who is avenging the death of his father Subala. The theatrical version of ‘Shakunir Pasha’ which is actually in the form of Srutinatok (audio drama) actually is able to transfer the audience to a different period zone all together, with the baritone of Ajitesh Bandopadhyay creating vivid imaginations in his mind. What interests the audience however is that they are able to sketch the image of Shakuni in their minds which is far from the limping one-eyed villain like caricature shown in soap operas. And herein lies the success of Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, who played Shakuni’s character to every layer possible in the peoples’ psyche.

The second scene of the play opens with Shakuni entering the Grand palace, awestruck with its splendour and opulence. There is every possible object that any

human being can want, every form of temptation to give pleasure to Shakuni. This grandiose moment is however short lived as subjective reality gives way to symbolic reality. On seeing the beautiful courtesan(Noti) Shakuni ironically asks her to show her hand. He also asked her what she used on her skin to make it look so supple and tempting. Just as the audience expects to hear words of lust from the mouth of Shakuni, he utters the unbelievable! He tells the courtesan that if she had to starve for days, the skeletal fingers would be exposed instead of the beautiful skin.

Ajitesh Bandopadhyay is apt in creating moments of contradiction, playfully caressing the expectations of the audience. He swiftly changes his voice, as Shakuni moves from the subjective reality of the grandeur of the Pramod Prasad to the symbolic reality of the time when he and his brothers, his father had all been imprisoned and made to starve, being given only a handful of rice, which could only feed one brother at a time. We see Shakuni breaking down in front of the courtesan when we least expected it, and a sudden comparison of the beauty of the courtesan with that of a starved skeleton, making the audience sit up from their chairs.

In the second sequence, we again find a transcendental soliloquy, as Shakuni reminisces his days in prison seeing the Rajbhog (a Royal Dish only meant for Kings). His dialogues move on from subjectivity of seeing the Royal sweet being served to him, specially cooked by the Queen to the days he spent in starvation in the dark prison along with his brothers. There were days when the same courtesan served him burnt food, but the irony of the day was that the same woman was serving him Rajbhog in a gold plate with immense reverence.

1.3 Spectre of the past and jailing system: Apparitions of Subala

Throughout the play, the apparition of King Subala keeps haunting Shakuni, as we are reminded of his past suffering in the hands of Durjyodhan. In a ploy to invade Gandhar, Durjyodhan had imprisoned King Subala along with his 100 sons. They

were put in a dark prison with only one small window, served only a handful of rice that could only be eaten by one person, leaving the others to starve. This was a ploy of the King to gradually kill the prisoners. Shakuni 's memory moved from present to past, as he remembered his father saying that he would only allow his successor to have that rice as long as he promised to overthrow Durjyodhan in the Play of Dice and take revenge. King Subala was prepared to starve to death along with all his sons but wanted to defeat Durjyodhan. It was Shakuni who killed his little brother Shatkuni on a moonlit night like this. He saw his brothers die of starvation one by one. The last gift was the Dice he received from his father which he had secretly carried to the prison. Before his death King Subala, he blessed Shakuni saying that nobody will be able to defeat him in the game of Dice. The Dice would listen to him.

Shakuni saw the apparition of his father just as he was going to eat the Rajbhog. The apparition of his starving skeletal father prohibited Shakuni from eating the morsel meant for him. Ajitesh Bandopadhyay takes over from here as we see a distraught Shakuni wailing in pain thinking of the tough times he and his brothers had. Like a skillful orator Ajitesh fluidly moves back and forth, as the vicious Shakuni thirsting for his revenge against the Kauravs and as the failed son wailing for the departed soul of his father.

We see the apparition again in the last scene, when the ghost of King Subala prevents Shakuni from committing suicide. Ridden by guilt, for the last time Shakuni tries to have Dharma on his side and prepares to kill himself, but aptly the apparition of his father appears and tells him that History will always remember Shakuni, and that his name will forever be etched in gold. This metaphorical soothsaying by Subala is like an Oracle to Shakuni- metaphorically, as he will be reincarnated every time there was the need to take revenge. There is a strong resemblance here with Shakespeare's Macbeth, who also sees apparitions of the three witches who make prophecies about his future. In Macbeth, we see these apparitions during crucial times, once in the beginning, when they come and make prophecies regarding Banquo and Macbeth, and

then again every time Macbeth kills his enemies one by one to gain kingship. The apparition of Subala appears every time Shakuni deters from his evil path to follow the path of Dharma. Subala's apparition constantly reminds him, of the starvation they had to face during their days at the prison, and how just to keep Shakuni alive his brothers died one by one.

The moon plays a vital part throughout the play, in particular junctures. When Shakuni arrives at the Pramod Prasad (palace of entertainment) we see him looking at the Moon in a sense of Déjà vu. The Moon alone is the witness to past events that took place in his life as well at the present. He was being treated like a Kig just for one day, the Moon was in full delight seeing the Grand Arrangements done for him. However, it was the same Moon that was witness to many of his sleepless nights—when he lay awake, having nothing to eat, starving for days. It was the same moon that his younger brother Shatkuni was looking at when Shakuni killed him! Ajitesh Bandopadhyay renders the softest dialogues when he sees the Moon, as Shakuni, as if Shakuni the main villain of the Mahabharat had a more mellow nature than what History and popular opera thought of him. Metaphorically, the moon in all its subtleness, beauty and mellow form was present in the character of Shakuni. And gradually as the play unfolds, we get to see the withering Shakuni, the perfect epithet of a man who has lost the battle with himself.

1.4 Shakuni Revisited: Layers of Characterization by Ajitesh

If there is one person who can resonate the character of Shakuni perfectly, it has to be Ajitesh Bandopadhyay. Right from the beginning of the play, where he plays an old Shakuni, we get to hear his baritone. Being only in audio, we are able to paint a picture of an ailing Shakuni, weighed down by age, who has endured suffering for a long time. Aptly, Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, like a master craftsman captures the different moods of Shakuni. There is a high chance of the audience undergoing “suspension of disbelief” when all previous inklings about the character and nature of Shakuni is

deconstructed. Mass Media, especially electronic media has never shied away from depicting the character of Shakuni in myriad colors, most of which is black. It is unfortunate that a man who has been painted throughout ages only in negative shades. It is with this play that the audience gets to toss up different nuances in Shakuni's character albeit most of them are far away from the ones they have seen in the electronic media.

Mahabharat, considered to be one of the age-old blockbusters in the history of Indian Television, have done immense harm to the psyche of the audience. The producers of the serial have played to the gallery, etching the character of Shakuni as someone who is cunning, vicious, and Evil personified. The character played by Gufi Paintal earned hatred among the women and children. With his awful limp, half winking eyes and black attire, Shakuni was portrayed as the epitome of villainy. This has been entirely deconstructed in the Ajitesh Bandopadhyay play Shakunir Pasha, where perhaps the audience for the first time humanifies Shakuni, he is transformed from Satan to Human. We see a pensive Shakuni, when he enters the Pramod Prasad (Palace of Entertainment), a man who understands that the blessings being showered to him are only for a night. The beautiful courtesans who are all eagerly waiting to please him are all temporary, so is the royal Rajbhog served to him on a golden platter.

Sometime later, we see a jubilant Shakuni who declares himself as “Ajeyo Shakuni”, “bhishan Shakuni” and revels in the fact that he alone holds the thread to the victory of the Kauravs over the Pandavs in the play of dice. He is happy that at last the prophecy of his father Subala is going to come true, and he will take his sweet revenge over the Kauravs. Ultimately, Shakuni becomes the torch bearer of the Mahabharat, as he is one of the main reasons why the Kurukshetra Battle takes place.

There are two songs that play intermittently throughout the play- “gaan ke dilam chhuti” and “o amar chokher aalo”. Coming to the first song, this is sung by Chaittaseba, the palace guard in front of Shakuni, while reminiscing about his life in

the native village. He was happy living a simple life and tells the story of his village to Shakuni. Shakuni becomes nostalgic hearing this and we get to hear the painful longingness in his voice, to abandon his kingly status and go back to the simple life. This search or quest for a simple uncomplicated life is a painful thread that we see coming up in the play intermittently. We conceive Shakuni in all his splendor, a man misunderstood, lost, sacrificing his own happiness to avenge the death of his father and 99 brothers. We feel sorry for Shakuni at this point seeing his helplessness in front of familial commitments. The scheming Shakuni is overtaken by the human Shakuni, a man who is juxtaposed between right and wrong, Dharma and Adharma.

Speaking of Dharma, in most of the earlier narratives, Shakuni is cited to be an epitome of Adharma, and wrong doing. Even the clothes that he wears are black, comparing him with everything Evil. However, there are many instances in Shakunir Pasha where we understand that the line between Dharma and Adharma gets blurred. Shakuni is a pious and noble soul, who is seen to support the side of Adharma(here the Kauravs) against Dharma(the Pandavs).but in his personal life, Shakuni is a dharmic, in that he fulfills all the tenets of being a noble man, who does no wrong. Shakuni treats the palace guards just like his own children. He gives them Rajbhog to eat which they never dreamt of eating ever. He asks them about their native village and about their lifestyle. And he bridges the hierarchy by telling both “amar buke eso”.

It is said that the best Dharma is to feed people who are starving. The age-old adage goes:

“Jeeb e prem kore jei jon, sei jon sebiche Ishwar”.

Ajitesh Bandhopadhyay in the Shakuni avatar brings out the ‘dharmic’(religious and wise) side of Shakuni. Instead of despise, at this juncture we feel a deep lunge towards him- our consciousness propelling us to endear him along with his shortcomings.

Though Duryodhan was entitled to the best possible comforts in his own palace, the dialogue between the palace guards as well as their conversation with Shakuni reveals a deep anguish in their minds. Clearly, all was not well in the kingdom, as the guards were famished, away from home, unable to see their children, a voyeur to the pleasures of the palace but unable to enjoy them. The tragic part of Shakunir Pasha is when Ajitesh as Shakuni asks the guards to eat Rajbhog, and they reveal that their children have been begging their fathers from ages to bring Rajbhog for them.

Shakuni is also a vanguard of freedom if we are to see the dialogue between courtesan Anupama and him. During an intimate tete-e-tete with Anupama, Shakuni asks her what gift she wanted if he were to win the game of Dice the next day. Much to his surprise the courtesan, who usually love jewelry and money asked him to grant her freedom. And more surprisingly, instead of wanting to keep her as a beautiful piece of commodity in the palace, Shakuni grants her freedom if he wins. This is in stark contrast to the shrewd and vicious character of Duryodhan who only makes promises to his people, but never fulfills them. Anupama the courtesan paints a nostalgic picture of her life in the village. She was not as rich there as she is in the palace, but she had the freedom of choice, the freedom of life. Time and again, the play Shakunir Pasha takes us back to the simple village life. We revel in Freedom when she speaks about her lost lover Kanko, whom she has left behind to pursue the life of a courtesan. She remembers the 'Nilkantho Pakhi' (blue bird) that flies over the chhatim tree.. she remembers the painful song Kanko sang when they were being separated:

*“.....o amar chokher aalo, andhhar raatey/ shunyo ghore
tomar premer prodip jwalo.....”*

Translated, it means Kanko considered Anupama to be the light of his eyes, her love was like the lamp in days of darkness. We saw in the earlier chapter that he promises a royal necklace to a courtesan and then says it is merely a promise, and promises are meant to be broken. However, though Shakuni has always been portrayed as the

conceited one, he promises freedom to the courtesan. In reply, Anupama says that Shakuni is great. Thus, we get to see snippets of the greatness of Shakuni the man.

We often see that Shakuni day dreams and goes into a trance reminiscing about his past life. He understands and values the concept of Freedom, because he himself is shackled in the temptation to take revenge. The revengeful and deceitful Shakuni is the superficial façade, whereas his soul craves to go back to the small hut, the 'tulsi mancho'. This utopian fall back upon his past life is what we see intermittently throughout the play. In one instance, he tells the guards about his days in prison. The moon, which stated earlier too had a crucial effect on his mind. Starved of even a morsel of food grain, Shakuni used to stare at the moon through the miniscule prison window. To him, the golden moon seemed like a golden plate. In pain he played the Veena and sang. He asks himself- "can Shakuni not love?" this again makes us realize that Shakuni was a misled man, suffering his own agonies. In him too resided a man full of hope and romanticism. We see him discussing in full flavor the beautiful songs of the village fellows- 'shib nachon', 'fashol katon', 'baron bata'. Somewhere here the audience is filled with déjà vu. The character of Shakuni is deconstructed at this very juncture. A man longing to go back to his village, a common man, a man avenged, a man wronged is the ultimate revelation. For Shakuni, as well as for the audience.

In his dreams, Shakuni is often able to hear his younger brother Shatkuni crying in pain. The man Shakuni is grieving inside at the death of his dear father, and his 99 brothers who died in starvation in the prison. From the different layers of characterization that Ajitesh portrays, the revengeful Shakuni is indomitable in spirit. His pain gives rise to volcanic anger and ultimately revenge. It is this towering personality that we get a glimpse of time and again in Shaklunir pasha. At the same time, Ajitesh perhaps outdoes himself, playing to the core, a man wronged who is on the verge of historic revenge, in all possible shades—the withering old man, the pained, broken man, the lover of freedom, the wise and dharmic, and dominating over

all these shades is the 'ajeyo' Shakunmi the indomitable spirit which though tamed by old age is not out. This is most vividly seen in his conversation with Krishna.

2. Ajitesh's Brilliance in playing the shrewd Diplomat: Shakuni vs. Krishna

The climax of the play Shakunir Pasha reaches its zenith when Shakuni confronts Krishna. According to many critics, the brilliance of Ajitesh Bandopadhyay playing Shakuni lies in the fact that he exhibits every iota of his talent even in under toned gestures. Nowhere during the conversation during Krishna and Shakuni do we see him losing control, his voice modulated to bring out the serpentine viciousness of Shakuni, creating a mood that is full of tension, but Ajitesh himself remained in his muted best. Unlike other plays especially in Bengali Jatra Pala, the character of Shakuni is loud, irreverent and vociferous. The greatness of an actor lies in the fact as to how well he can merge himself with the character he plays, and in this play, Ajitesh is able to do just that. Throughout the play he shows no intentions of being loud, in fact he never does. Only the hissing sound of a man wronged can be understood from his groaning laughter. The voice is of such high baritone that the audience gets the creeps.

There is rapt attention when Krishna comes in the dead of night to meet Shakuni and negotiate with him. Saying that Shakuni has caused 'nidraharan' of Krishna (sleeplessness), Krishna tries different ways to tempt him to forego the play of dice the next morning. There are two layers of meaning in which this can be interpreted- first, in the perpetual conflict between Dharma and Adharma (Right and Wrong), there has been a role reversal. Krishna who is considered as God in many parts of India till now, and manifest in different incarnations has chosen Adharma to tempt Shakuni. In the dead of the night, he stealthily enters the Kaurav Palace to bribe his enemy into withdrawing from the play of dice and not winning purposefully. Secondly, he renders all types of tempting bribes to Shakuni to lose the play of Dice, he promises kingdom, the friendship of the Pandavas and the blessings of Krishna himself. Thirdly, when all

persuasions fail, he plays the woman card, saying that a special letter of acknowledgement has been sent by Draupadi herself stating that all the promises would be fulfilled. Thus, Krishna known as an epitome of Dharma does not shy away from taking recourse to the worst of treachery.

On the other hand, Shakuni displays the ultimate Dharma, when he does not leave the side of Duryodhan knowing it very well that he was the reason of the death of his father king Subala and his 99 brothers. According to scholars, “Dharma signifies the behavior that goes in accord with the order of the Universe, and includes, duties, laws, conducts, virtues, and the right way of living.” Going by this definition, Shakuni proves to be more on the side of Dharma. Shakuni shows what the qualities of a friend in need are. Even after being promised the kingdom of the Pandavs, and their friendship, he chooses to be with Durjyodhan. If we consider this side of his character, we are filled with profound respect for him. The undaunting selflessness of Shakuni shows that he is a true hero. He could have easily led a life of splendor and royalty had he the friendship of the Pandavs and Krishna, but he stuck back to the promise he made to his father Subala. He proved to be the best son as well as a friend in need of the Kauravs. In fact, he revels in the fact that even for a day, he had stolen the dreams of Rukmini, Krishna, Yudhishthir and Draupadi. There was clearly a breach of trust in the Pandav camp, as even Yudhishthir, considered to be the most virtuous of the Pandav brothers took recourse to deceit and false play, when he sent Krishna knowing well of his communicative and diplomatic prowess, to Shakuni and persuade him lose the game of Dice by false means. In this instance, Yudhishthir displays his side of Adharma, thereby leaving several open-ended questions regarding the hypocrisy associated with the Mahabharat, especially the role of Krishna as a mediating source between the Kauravs and the Pandavs.

As such, Shakunir Pasha on one hand is the deconstruction of Shakuni shown in an all black avatar to one who has more white shades and virtuousness; on the other hand it reconstructs the characterization of Krishna from a god-like icon to one of a shrewd

politician who used his supernatural powers to start what in history is the greatest war fought- the Kurukshetra war. It goes without saying, that there is a huge anticlimax in this scene, where after confronting and tempting Shakuni to lose the game of Dice, and failing nonetheless, Krishna returns empty handed like in the darkness of the night, unseen by anyone. This pretentiousness in Krishna is a reconstruction in ways, as it creates a different connotation of Him in the minds of the audience. Krishna displays no qualities that a God is bestowed with, since he secretly comes to negotiate with his enemy in the darkness of the night, bribing him to lose the game of Dice by questionable means.

Perhaps through Shakunir Pasha, the audience start to question the real intentions of Krishna. In this context we can also refer to Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses" where he says that though Krishna himself preached people to follow 'Yoga' he himself was not a 'Yogi'. Moreover, many critics allege that if Krishna is epitome of omnipresent God, he must have known from the beginning what the answer of Shakuni would be when the former asked him to lose the game of Dice. So there was actually no need to go to the Palace at night to pacify Shakuni. Secondly, in his Godly avatar he could have created a situation where the 'bastraharan' of Draupadi would not take place and prevent the Kurukshetra war. There are as many opinions as much as myths surrounding the story of Krishna. However, it goes without saying that the play, the undernoted nuance of Ajitesh Bandopadhyay left the audience to ponder a lot after the play ended. There are several open-ended questions that paralyze the minds of the audience as he begins to question the true essence of Right and Wrong. And herein lies the greatness of Ajitesh.

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