

When Blind Love for Kin Precedes Bounden Duty to Kingdom- A Reflection on King Lear and King Dritharashtra

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Abstract

An individual from his birth till death is destined to play many roles and thereby fulfill his/her expected duties. While doing so one should not compromise one's duty in favour of another benefit especially when it is concerned with both personal and professional life affecting the lives of many. If done otherwise, the consequences would be disastrous as seen through the lives of Lear of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Dritharashtra of *the Mahabharata*. Both of them were Kings but at the same time also fathers whose love for their children overpowered their duty to their country and thereby their sense of taking right decisions as Kings. Dritharashtra's blind love towards his sons especially Duryodhana made him overlook all their misdeeds leading to their death. On the other hand, Lear's blind faith in his two greedy elder daughters' (Goneril and Regan) proclamation of love much against the honest love of youngest daughter (Cordelia) leads to his destruction. Further, blind love for their children by the respective kings leads towards causing dereliction of duty to their countries. King Lear and King Dritharashtra, failing to keep equilibrium between their personal and professional duties, incurred the greatest loss of their life by losing their children. In short, life of King Lear and King Dritharashtra stand as a pointer to the world to show that, the consequences, when love for kin takes precedence over one's duty towards the country, will always be detrimental.

Keywords: Blind love; Dereliction of duty; Wrong precedence; Detrimental effects.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts... (II.vii. 138-141 *As You Like It*)

In this life, from birth till death, an individual passes through various stages of life. Man at a time has many duties to fulfill. His success lies in how he fulfills his duties without compromising one for the other. One cannot imagine a smooth life without conflicts. In other words, it is through conflicts that one evolves and develops in his /her life. But the real art lies in maintaining a balanced mind so as to overcome these conflicts without getting destroyed in the process. A man/woman is at once a son/daughter, husband/wife, father/mother, employer/employee, a friend and so on. All these roles are essential in one's life and should be performed in such a way that one is not affected by the other. The same principle is applicable in the case of a ruler who could also be a son, father, husband etc. A King is a symbol of power, protector and savior of his subjects and above all is bound to discharge his duty without being subjective or partial. For a ruler, his official duties come first before his personal obligations. But history shows that such rulers existed but not in many. On the other hand, there are many instances where kings had foregone their official duty in view of their personal feelings and emotions. King Lear of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and King Dritharashtra of *the Mahabharata* are two such kings whose love for their children overpowered their sense of taking right decisions as kings. Their life shows that how one should not be overpowered by emotions or personal feelings while taking a decision especially when it affects many. Equilibrium should be maintained while taking decisions especially when it is concerned with both personal and professional life.

King Dritharashtra, the king of Hastinapur, was the son of Vichitravirya's first wife Ambika and was fathered by Vyasa. He was blind from birth. Dritharashtra was a strong warrior but due to his blindness his half brother Pandu was made the king. Dritharashtra was married to Gandhari who after her marriage blindfolded her eyes with a cloth so as to see the world as her husband did, with darkness. After Pandu abdicated the throne following a curse, Dritharashtra was made the king of Hastinapur. When he heard of Pandu's death, he was sad but at the same time happy for it meant he had no contenders for his crown.

Dritharashtra's filial love is evident from the moment his first son was born. Dritharashtra was advised by Vidura, Bhishma and other elders to abandon the child due to bad omens during

the birth but his love for his son stopped him. Dritharashtra had hundred sons and one daughter by Gandhari. They were known as Kauravas. He also had another son named Yuyutsu born to Sughada; Gandhari's lady-in-waiting. Later, during the Kurukshetra war, Yuyutsu joins the Pandavas side. King Dritharashtra had already decided that Duryodhana would be the next heir of the kingdom. But with the return of Kunti and her five children (Pandavas) to Hastinapur, there emerged a real crisis regarding succession. Duryodhana was so sure of becoming the next heir but King Dritharashtra against his own wish was forced to consider Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava who was older than Duryodhana. This increased Duryodhana's animosity against the Pandavas and led him to plot against the latter. In all this, Duryodhana had his uncle Sakuni's support and advice. Duryodhana's heinous deeds against Pandavas included sending the latter to house of wax and burning it, inviting them to a game of dice and then cheating them twice by adopting unfair means and sending them away to the forest.

Dritharashtra's blind love for his son enabled Duryodhana to procure his father's permission for all the misdeeds. Another instance of filial love is clear when Bhishma suggested the partition of Hastinapur so as to reduce the increasing enmity between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. In agreement Dritharashtra gave half the Kuru kingdom consisting of arid, scantily populated lands to the Pandavas. Dritharashtra kept the better half of the kingdom for himself so that in future Duryodhana can rule the same. But the Pandavas with their hard work, blessings and support from their elders converted the arid lands into a land of prosperity and beauty. This increased Duryodhana's jealousy and anger leading him to conspire against the Pandavas. Another instance where Dritharashtra's role as a king and as a father failed is the dice game. It was on Duryodhana's persistent urges that Dritharashtra conceded to hold the dice game between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. After the Pandavas lost everything including their wife Draupadi, Dritharashtra along with other elders remained mere witnesses to the proceeding. Even when his son Dushasana tried to disrobe Draupadi in front of the court, Dritharashtra remained silent. When Draupadi began to curse the Kuru clan, Gandhari stopped her and requested her husband to pacify Draupadi. Only then did Dritharashtra realise the consequences and out of fear of Pandavas' wrath against his sons, he granted Draupadi boon which enabled the Pandavas to regain everything they had lost in the dice game. This made Duryodhana very angry at his father. He threatened Dritharashtra to force Pandavas to play another game of dice or else he would commit suicide. Once again Dritharashtra, the father, overshadowed Dritharashtra, the King. This time the Pandavas were forced to spend thirteen years in exile in the forest. Dritharashtra was warned by many regarding the consequences

of all these actions. Also the Pandavas would never easily forget their humiliation. Dritharashtra was constantly asked to remember his responsibilities as a King before his affection as a father. This incident of dice game led to the famous battle of Kurukshetra. After their return from the forest, the Pandavas sought to take revenge for the humiliation caused by the Kauravas. The war continued for eighteen days. Dritharashtra's sorrow increased when each day his sons were killed by Bhima. Everyday Dritharashtra cursed his inability to prevent Duryodhana from going to war and above all of Duryodhana's misdeeds against the Pandavas. At the end of the war, Dritharashtra lost all his hundred sons and was left with only grief and sense of emptiness. Even though he was enraged at Bhima for having killed his sons, slowly he came at peace with the circumstances. After many years as the ruler of Hastinapur, Dritharashtra along with Gandhari, Kunti, and Vidura left for their final journey into the forest. They died in a forest fire in the Himalayas.

Dritharashtra was basically a good natured person. He had always loved Pandavas just like his sons and wished to maintain it like that. But his love for Duryodhana stood out from the rest and made him surrender to the whims and fancies of his son. It actually made him blind towards the duty as a King and upholding the principle of Dharma. Even though he was blind, he was a strong warrior. King Dritharashtra's flaw lay in that he failed to give correct guidance to his sons. Whenever they made mistakes, instead of correcting it, he tried to hide it and go unchecked. This encouraged the Kauravas for they knew that as long as their father, the King himself was on their side no one could harm them. If King Dritharashtra had stopped Duryodhana as and when needed, the battle of Kurukshetra could have been avoided. In the post war life, Dritharashtra lived with the Pandavas loving and guiding them in a fatherly way even while mourning his sons' death. It might be his way of making up for the lost time with Pandavas and fulfilling all his duties as he should have done. This period contributed in shaping him into a more mature and balanced person.

King Lear is one of the most tragic dramas written by William Shakespeare. The opening scene of the play itself presents the hero at a point which initiates his fall. King Lear behaves in an arrogant and rash manner when her youngest daughter Cordelia refuses to say the extent of her love towards him. He seems to be happy and content to hear the responses of his other two daughters namely Goneril and Regan. This shows that Lear fails to see through appearances and reality. Further he values a flattering public display of love over real love. It is evident from the following line: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" (I.i 49). Even at the beginning of the play, it is evident that Cordelia is his favourite daughter and presumably she loves him most but still he wants to hear it from his daughters. Cordelia's refusal to express her love in words

enrages Lear to such an extent that he disowns her. Lear divided his kingdom equally among his two daughters, Goneril and Regan. This attitude portrays Lear as blind and unfair as a father and as a ruler. As time passes, Goneril and Regan show their true colours. They become more conniving and vile and plot against their own father. When Lear realises this he becomes angry and leaves the palace. He wanders as an insane man in the outdoors accompanied by Fool. In a way this enabled him to see another side of human existence and made him more humble. At the beginning of the play, Lear uses the love of others to satisfy his own ego. But his suffering and loss of everything makes him to love humanity and unlearn hatred. Simultaneously, Goneril and Regan along with Gloucester's illegitimate son Edmund turn against Lear. The army of France under the leadership of King of France and his wife Cordelia fight against Edmund, Goneril, and Regan to restore Lear back to his home. Towards the end Lear and Cordelia are put together in prison whereas Edmund, Goneril, Regan all die. In the prison Lear is happy because finally he is with Cordelia. He asks for her forgiveness. This is the moment where Lear is being a father rather than a King. But fate again turns against him through Cordelia's death. Lear is unable to bear this loss and soon stops breathing.

The moment when Lear decided to test his daughters' love for him and divide his kingdom accordingly, he failed both as a King and as a father. Lear is seen as a vain, arrogant ruler in the beginning and his act of testing his daughters' affection just adds to the degree of his pride and absurdity. He failed to see through the fakeness of Goneril and Regan and the sincerity of Cordelia. His blind love and faith in Goneril and Regan ultimately forces him to give up his power. He gets exposed to the harshness of nature which in turn proves to be a blessing in disguise. Lear comes into contact with the humbleness of life and is stripped off his vanity, arrogance and power. His concern for the Fool, Poor Tom shows that he is a compassionate at heart. The period of suffering proves to be purgation for Lear and turns him into a more modest and wise person. But by the time this realization came through, Lear had to face many losses including his beloved daughter Cordelia. All these lead to the tragic end of Lear too.

Life is all about happiness and sorrows, ups and downs, concords and conflicts, and so on. But what is important is to maintain a balance between everything. Similarly this is applicable in relationships especially between professional and personal. In the cases of Dritharashtra and Lear, both are fathers and Kings. Being fathers, they should love their children but at the same time as Kings they have certain administrative responsibility towards their subjects. Both roles should be kept within their precincts but both King Dritharashtra and King Lear failed to do so

leading to their downfall. Their blind affection for their children proved to be fatal for themselves. Further the children whom they loved and believed so much contributed much to their ruin. King Dritharashtra's sons were responsible for many misdeeds against the Pandavas which culminated in the Kurukshetra war robbing Dritharashtra of all his sons. Dritharashtra failed to restraint his sons from doing wrong and instead supported them in all their doings. By the time he realised his mistakes, it was too late. Similarly, King Lear's two elder daughters Goneril and Regan through plotting acquired all wealth and power and led Lear to give up whatever power he had left and leave the palace. Lear's mistake was that he believed that Goneril and Regan loved him most and hence gave all his wealth and power to them. But these daughters' actions led him to the extent of madness and towards the end he lost all his daughters including his beloved Cordelia who was able to give him a bit of relief before her death. Here also by the time Lear realised about his mistakes it was too late. In both the cases we can see how blind love or faith in children overpowered their sense of righteousness. It made them lax in their duty towards their people. They forgot to distinguish between right and wrong and also failed in helping their children to do so. Besides this flaw, both King Dritharashtra and King Lear had an element of kindness and love for others. In Lear's case it is evident in his compassionate treatment of the Fool and Poor Tom. In Dritharashtra's case, he showed fatherly love towards the Pandavas. After the war, like a father, he guided Pandavas in the daily affairs of the Kingdom. Both these characters had positive and negative sides. But the negative side or the flaw outweighed the other and gave a hard blow to their life. Both of them towards the end of their life became wise, humble human beings and met their end in peace. It can be said that their life was a journey from Riches to Rags economically but Rags to Riches spiritually.

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