

Monarchs And Their Sense Of Despair

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Abstract

Monarchs are no more liked in 21st century and many kings were overthrown by republicans in 20th century. In 1917, the Russian Czar was deposed by Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik supporters. But it was not for the first time that a king had to lose his throne. There was a terrible revolt against Charles I in 1649 and he was brutally killed by the British Parliamentarians. His fall was regarded as the victory of republicanism, a term which was given a practical shape by Britishers. His son Charles II took refuge in France for 11 years. As the Britishers were rigid, conservative and traditional in many ways, they failed to adjust with the rule of Cromwell, Lord Protector and his team. John Milton wrote several pamphlets to advocate the principles of liberty and republicanism. But alas! The British Parliamentarians wanted to restore monarchy in the country and hence reached France to request Charles II to return to England. He was restored to British throne in 1660 with some restrictions upon his royal powers that he accepted willingly. Here the example of Queen Victoria (1837-1903) can be cited to prove that certain British rulers have proved worthy of the throne. She worked hard under changing eco-political conditions and for the prosperity of Britain. Quite often she worked for more than fourteen hours a day as a lot of industries were established in her regime in Britain. England was the first industrialized nation in the world and her ships carried a lot of finished goods to several countries of the world. During her regime the East Indian Company controlled India and won several states. So, monarchs have done a lot for society and this is the reason that Queen Elizabeth II still rules in England though several countries have replaced their kings with Prime Ministers and Presidents.

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The monarchs led a life of luxury and their courtiers were often jealous of their political powers. Many Britishers and Cardinals opposed them to gain royal status. Many kings pretended that they were the messengers of God upon the earth and propagated the theory of divine rights of kings. But often they had to struggle hard against their ministers who too possessed lust for that. King Ashoka had to fight against his own brothers for royal throne. It is sad that Alexander, the Greek king, wanted to be world conqueror and wept bitterly after winning the earth as there was no 'second world to conquer'. The kings of China and Japan, fought several wars to prove their supremacy against each other.

Christopher Marlowe described the miseries of Edward II in the pathetic tragedy Edward II. Edward II felt lonely without his bosom-friend Gaveston as the latter had been banished from England due to his moral lapses. After his father's death Edward II recalled Gaveston from exile and the latter felt overjoyed when he returned to England. But the Queen,

the Bishops and the Lords had no liking for Gaveston and hence they revolted against the orders of the king. Naturally the king Edward II became conscious of his royal powers and decided to teach a lesson to the Barons. But the situation became grim for him as he had no experience of looking after the administration. When he decided to fight a war against Barons, he forgot that he had never been to the battle field. Marlowe followed the records of history as the king was responsible for his own miseries. Gaveston was given royal title and the king even arranged his marriage with his niece princess Margaret. Secondly, the king doubted the integrity of his wife Queen Isabella. As Gaveston and Edward II humiliated her publicly, she joined hands with younger Mortimer. The tensions of Edward II reached climax when he had to banish Gaveston under the pressure of Barons. He felt insulted when the Barons raised war against him. Still he thought of his royal powers as a king though he had only Earl of Kent with him as his supporter. He dared to insult the Archbishop of Canterbury. So he was surrounded by enemies on all sides. None was ready to help him in these critical days. After being defeated in the war, he took shelter in the church and thought that the priests that study the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle were really happy uneasy lies the head that that wears the crown. Now he promotes Earl of Spenser against the wishes of his Barons and Queen Isabella. By this time Queen Isabella had developed relationship with younger Mortimer as both of them were eager to possess royal powers. The gap widened between Edward II and Queen Isabella as the latter tortured him in the Berkley Castle. The king was shaved with the dirty water and given no proper food to eat. His agonies were unlimited and he wanted to die. Matrevis and Gurney tortured him in the prison and finally three ruffians killed him. But his son Edward III didn't reconcile with the wicked schemes of his mother and younger Mortimer and ordered for their arrest.

So, the king used to wear the crown but had no moment of joy. Nobody sympathized with him at any moment. Due to wrong judgments he was arrested by the Barons. Conspiracies were generally found in royal palaces and ministers used to have lust for power and money. As many kings didn't have the courage to fight in the battle field. In Edward II the dramatist succeeds in creating pity and fear in the hearts of readers and follows the records of history.

In Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Julius Caesar, Richard II. Henry IV, Henry V, The Tempest etc. Shakespeare described the working of monarchy in his age with due emphasis upon its merits and demerits. Of course, the common people had no force to revolt against the cruel monarchs. In Hamlet Claudius murdered the king of Denmark and got married with king's virtuous wife Gertrude, the mother of Prince Hamlet. Here Shakespeare probes into the wicked psychology of new king Claudius who had no love for Hamlet and the masses. Hamlet, the son of murdered king, fails to understand as to how his father died within a short time. The Ghost of his father revealed the secret of the wicked plan of Claudius who usurped the royal power. As Hamlet plans to take revenge from Claudius, the latter becomes conscious of the real situation. He takes many steps to entrap Hamlet and yet fails in his designs. Through the staging of Murder of Gonzago play he realizes that Claudius is the real murderer of his father. At the same time he passes remarks at his mother and remarks:

Frailty! Thy name is woman. He is really
 perturbed and restless and fees no interest in life.
 Life seems worthless to him at time.

To be or not to be, is the question!

But he does not commit suicide inspite of hostile atmosphere in the court of Claudius. Here Shakespeare to true to human nature and paints the psychology of Claudius when the latter offers prayers in the church to repent. Actually the artist wanted to support moral order in society and hence Claudius is not murdered inside the church by Hamlet. Of course, Claudius is murdered latter by Hamlet as the former had put two cups of poisonous water on the table at the time of fencing bout between Hamlet and Laertes. Hamet feels guilty for killing Polonius for no fault of the latter.

In the tragedy Macbeth Shakespeare described the ambitious nature of military general Macbeth who wished to possess royal powers of the king of England.

As Lady Macbeth instigates him to kil king Duncan, he becomes cruel towards his friend and royal guest and kills him. Now onwards Shakespeare describes the evil effects of this cruel deed. Now Macbeth has no rest and even plans for the murder of his friend Banquo. Macbeth aspires for absolute, royal powers of a monarch and wishes his son to be the net monarch. But he fails to analyze the prophecy made by the three witches. His hands smell of royal blood and his wife does not care for this. She asks him to just wash his bloody hands. But even the perfume of Arabia fails to kill that bloody smell. Macbeth loses his mental balance and utters meaningless words due to real madness. Hamlet pretended to be mad whereas Macbeth becomes semi-mad due to mental stress. After all he has killed two royal friends who had done no harm to him. As there is no peace in the life of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, both suffer a lot of mental agonies. Life has no meaning for them 'An endless sale of suffering with no meaning' and 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow....' There is no tomorrow to remove their mental stress and they are finally doomed inspite of royal powers.

King Lear fails to analyze the virtues and vices of his three daughters Goneril, Reagan and Cordelia. He wants to be told that he is loved by his daughters. Cruel Goneril and Reagan flattered him and pretended to be his most beloved daughters and got their share of royal kingdom. But virtuous Cordelia didn't know the art of flattery and simply replied Nothing. King Lear lost his temper as he never expected this type of rough answer. He replied back Nothing will come out of nothing. Cordelia did not bother when the king offered no dowry to her husband Prince of France as she believed that love can't be measured. When Goneril and Regan had tortured their father, Cordelia came forward to help the miserable king and sacrificed herself for him. The Fool told the king 'May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse.' Dr. Johnson failed to tolerate the untimely murder of Cordelia and wrote another play on the same theme

depicting the victory of virtue towards the end of the play. After all, the concept of poetic justice has got to be followed.

King Julius Caesar killed his friend Pompey as he regarded himself suitable for the throne of Rome. However, his courtiers like Casca, Cicero, Ligarius, Pompey's son and even Marcus Brutus to capture royal powers. Julius Caesar regarded himself firm, vigorous, zealous and the best Monarch for Rome saying-

Cowards die many times before their death. He told his friend Brutus that he is firm like Pole star. On 15th March he was assassinated by Cassius, Brutus and other under the pretensions that tyranny comes to an end now in Rome. Fortunately Antony fails to tolerate the murder of King Julius Caesar and delivers a lecture before Romans to arouse their patriotism and succeeds in instigating them to take revenge of murder of Julius Caesar. As a result there are separate groups of Brutus and Cassius and Antony forms his own group of patriots. Cassius and Brutus commit suicide as they fail to possess supreme royal powers in Rome and then Octavius Caesar becomes king with the support of Antony and other brave Romans. Julius Caesar fails to probe into the psychology of his courtiers and finally meets his doom. However, Shakespeare creates pity and fear in the heart of readers as Julius Caesar didn't deserve such a tragic blow,

In *Duchess of Malfi* John Webster describes the miserable life of widowed Duchess who is tortured by her wicked brothers Cardinal and Ferdinand with the help of vicious Bosola. Young widow Duchess has every right to love her courtier Antonio and get children from him. But Cardinal and Ferdinand wish to possess her property and kingdom. It is true that the widow fails to protect herself due to the wicked deeds of Ferdinand and Bosola. Her life becomes miserable everyday and finally she is killed brutally in the fourth Act. But John Webster shows anti-climax in the fifth to establish the rule of poetic justice. Critics like David Cecil justify the murder of Bosola, Cardinal and Ferdinand in the fifth Act. How can the play end with villains thriving with royal powers? Moral order has got to be established through art.

Once, a king was highly restless and ironically failed to realize the causes of his agonies. He consulted his friends and wise courtiers as to why he was tense all the time. After a few months a sage came to his palace and the king discussed his problem with him. But the sage asked him to reach his cottage after a week. With all his soldiers and courtiers the king reached the forest to meet the sage. Surprisingly the king saw the saint having a tree in his grip. The king asked him as what he was doing with the tree. The sage replied that the tree has taken him in its grip and does not spare him. The king laughed saying that the tree is no problem and how could it control the saint. It is the saint who has captured the tree. Now the saint told him that the king also possesses his land, forces, treasury, soldiers, courtiers, queens etc. and hence his possessiveness is responsible for his agony soon as he gives up his possessive nature, he will be free of all bondages. So, many kings were victims of their pride, jealousy, ego, greed, lust, lechery and other vices. Quite often they defeated the prosperous kingdoms to rob them. The

Romans used to cut the harvest of Egyptians frequently causing wars between the two. Exploitation of one kingdom by another was often the root cause of war between two kings, sense of pride made Duryodhana attack the Pandavas.

A pertinent question has been discussed by Keki N. Daruwalla in one of his poems as he blames king Ashoka for the sufferings of the people of Kalinga. Why did Ashoka attack the kingdom of Kalinga? What made him involve in numberless wars? A lot of soldiers of Kalinga died in the bloodshed and the situation became critical in Kalinga. There was a stage when Kalinga had no brave warriors to continue the war. King Ashoka entered Kalinga with a sense of pride as he came to know the fall of Kalinga Empire. To his dismay only the widows of Kalinga welcomed him. Now there was no limit to his remorse as his ego was responsible for the killing of numberless soldiers. As Keki N. Daruwalla describes, king ordered that no war will be fought in future as the glory of victory is fake and false. He wanted that the message of peace be propagated in his whole kingdom. He aptly realized that war does not solve problems rather it creates many economic and social problems. So Ashoka became a follower of peace. Non- violence, love and mercy and followed Buddhism till the end of his life.

The French king Louis XVI didn't have administrative qualities and failed to observe the growing poverty of the masses in his times (18th century). His Queen Antoinette used to change six gowns every day and failed to realize the practical side of life. When the hungry French people shouted for loaves, she "If they asked her maid-servant What are they crying for? She replied For loaves! The Queen replied don't have loaves to eat, ask them to eat cakes!" How can people buy costly cakes when they fail to buy loaf? So, many foolish and unwise kings invited problems for themselves and the masses. Many French philosophers and political thinkers realized towards the end of 18th century that France was ripe for a revolution. The revolution broke out in July 1789 as the socio-economic conditions of France were unbearable. The French people took out a large procession and broke the gate of the Bastille prison. It was the victory of republicanism and the fall of monarchy. The Jacobins and the Girondists wanted to establish a republic in France with the election of the members of National Assembly. As there was no proper leader, the Jacobins and Girondists regularly quarreled with each other. In spite of the execution of Louis XVI and his Queen (1792), the republic faced the dark consequences of Reign of Terror.

French king Dauphin, as portrayed by G.B. Shaw in Saint Joan is weak and coward though he pretends to be gentle, impartial and righteous. He fails to plan for the freedom of France from the clutches of British authorities. The British Bishops and landlords control France even in 15th century. Joan, the daughter of a shepherd and blessed by the angels, promises to fight for the national liberty. She dares to challenge the lords and bishops for freedom and does succeed to a great extent. But the French bishops and French Lords sell her to British authorities and she is burnt as a heretic. Shaw studied her history as she was declared a saint in 1919 and then blamed the cunning bishops and Lords for her burning. In the Epilogue added to the play, Shaw is bitter towards all the judges and Dauphin who didn't regard

themselves responsible for her burning. He calls it 'personal tragedy and impersonal evolution'. She tries her best to restore the glory and grace of weak French king through the latter fails to protect her from unjust bishops and feudal lords.

In the play Emperor Jones Eugene O' Neill exposes the fake king Brutus who pretends to be a divine authority on the island inhabited by poor black tribes. After escaping from the hands of law he settles on the island and pretends to be a king. Cheating, extortion and exploitation are his main policies. In spite of being a Black, he cheats the innocent blacks regularly and leads a luxurious life. He has hidden his gold and silver in the forest under the particular bricks and plans to carry the same when he deserts the island. But his friend trader Evans warns him against his evil deeds. When the citizens understand his character, they are bound to revolt against him and kill him. But Emperor Brutus Jones is puffed up with ego and hopes to cheat the blacks at every time. As ill luck would have it, the time comes for his fall and the Blacks revolt against his policies.

Evans warns him at the nick of time and the Blacks start playing on their drums Tom, Tom, Tom. The sounds of drums create fear in the heart of Brutus Jones and he runs towards the forest to collect his gold and silver. To his dismay, all the bricks appear the same and his saved money is missing. He feels nervous and desperate and sweats badly. There is no limit to his agony. Now he fails to tolerate the sounds of Tom, Tom, Tom and does not understand what to do? Ultimately his fear becomes his own killer. The Blacks fire three bullets and Brutus Jones becomes a victim of their bullets. As you sow, so shall you reap.

So, the cruel monarchs got defamed due to their wicked deeds. Many kings tried to prove to be patrons of subjects and performed noble deeds. Quite often they were misunderstood by their families and the people. But the historians painted them in true colours. Modern age is the age of democrats and monarchs are generally hated by the voters.

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