

Analysis of *Dhauri* by Mahapatra

This poem describes the aftermath of the Kalinga war. As you all have already researched, the war was fought by Ashoka over the conquest of the Kalinga (present day Odisha) empire. Like any other war, this resulted in mass death and loss of loved ones. Mahapatra criticizes both war and man's greed for land and riches, killing innocent people in the process without any consequence. There is a line by Imagine Dragons (an indie rock band) in their song *Demons* which goes, "no matter what we breed, we still are made of greed. This is my kingdom come. This is my kingdom come" which is relevant to the destruction that man's desire for wealth and power causes. For those who haven't hear the song give it a listen!

Coming to the poem, the poet begins by painting a rather grotesque picture in front of us. The large empty fields of Dhauri that were left by farmers to fertile over a period of time, "fallow fields", now hide the dead bodies of the soldiers after war. The field is smeared in blood, and cut down bodies of human beings that are now contributing to the fertility of the soil. They are voiceless bodies because not only they're dead now but because even when they were alive, they had no say in their own fate but were only following the instructions of their king; they were voiceless victims of war.

In the second verse, the poet personifies Earth as hungrily eating away the dead bodies i.e. decomposition. The worms and foxes also feed on the decomposed flesh of the dead soldiers mercilessly. The worms are referred to as tortured because they have an abundance of flesh to consume and are overwhelmed by it. The foxes which generally feed on small weak animals like poultry, rabbits now feed on the genitals of dead defenceless humans to satiate their hunger.

In the third verse, Mahapatra writes how years have passed yet there persists a tone of lamentation in the air. Kalinga has not moved on from the massacre that took place. You can feel the lamentation in the nature from the wind to the waters of the river Daya; nature laments the loss of its children. The lamentation is expressed through the word "keen" which means to wail in grief. Here there is an important background that is relevant. Ashoka also lamented the death caused by him and hence converted to Buddhism to rectify his sin of murder and pillage. He expressed his remorse over a rock smeared in soldiers' blood in Dhauri. Just like Ashoka cried in grief so does nature, and so does Kalinga. The "vain word" implies how Ashoka did not ask for

forgiveness from the people in these rock edifices. These edifices are part of history yet they never stress on the mistakes of a king.

In the final verse, the poet expresses his criticism of the King Ashoka and his lack of sympathy for the remorse that he feels after the war. According to the poet, no amount of remorse in part of Ashoka can compensate for the loss of lives and destruction he had caused. The poet argues how little and insignificant the king/s grief is compared to the collective grief of the people of Kalinga who had lost their loved ones to the war. It can only find a small space in the overburdening and unending sorrow of Kalinga.