

RECONSTRUCTING SHIVA AS THE INDIAN HERO IN AMISH TRIPATHI'S SHIVA TRILOGY

Abstract

The concept of 'Heroism' in many ways is culture specific, in context of the Indian culture the figure of Lord Shiva is one of the most intriguing yet, powerful figures within the annals of Indian mythology. Aim of this chapter is to show Lord Shiva as perfect embodiment of a dynamic 'hero' who in the public eye is not only an exceptional warrior but also an epitome of passion who holds the feminine and the supporting figures of his valor with dignified veneration. It also aims at explaining concept of 'Heroism' both in terms of the Indian society as well as from the point of view of an evolving reading audience who wishes not to idealize a Hero so removed from their moment in time but to look up to a power figure, who despite having ancient roots has the ability to mirror the contemporary fancies along with all its imperfect magnetism.

Keywords: Aim of this chapter is to show Lord Shiva as perfect embodiment of a dynamic 'hero'.

Authors

Dr. Vinita Soni

Assistant Professor

Amity Institute of English Studies &

Research, Amity University

Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India.

The cultural history of human evolution and civilization since time immemorial has stood testimony to the meteoric emergence and establishment of a series of charismatic figures bestowed with unfathomable power and mystery. Rising from the ashes of human imagination and sometimes even from the ravages of historical or political events, such figures have successfully planted themselves within the recesses of human psyche at large through a flawless embodiment of the innermost reflections of human thoughts, emotions, and desires.

However, with the evolution of literature both thematically and conceptually, the figure of near perfect hero has become more inclusive. As literature expanded in its artistic outreach and also began to shift its focus from the classical to the contemporary, this ideology of 'heroism' also underwent considerable change and that too in such a way that literature while appropriating itself to the changing cultures and demanding readership simultaneously started creating different kinds of heroes, who even though were far removed from the classical conventions yet were successful in capturing the popular and collective imagination of the respective eras in which they functioned.

The concept of 'Heroism' in many ways is culture specific, mutating itself continuously in accordance with the culture it represents. In context of the Indian culture, the figure of Lord Shiva is one of the most intriguing yet, powerful figures within the annals of Indian mythology. Worshipped within the Hindu cult as one of the most prevailing religious deities, Shiva has been a key source of curiosity and imagination for not only those within Hinduism but also those beyond it. And one hinge on which this entire secrecy functions lies in the majestic and potent portrayal of the figure of Lord Shiva, not only in terms of the Herculean physical descriptions but chiefly, in the tremendous hold that He is said to have on the functioning of the entire universe as the 'Creator of the Universe' and the 'Destroyer of Evil'. Even though such ideas are a part of the religious ideologies of the Hindu cult, yet to a great extent these are also some of the foundational grounds on which the unconventional and contemporary figure of the quintessential 'Indian Hero' is rooted. This is mainly because despite being a central religious figure, the larger persona of Shiva as a 'Hero' does not limit itself to the divinity attached to Him as a God. It goes much ahead in encompassing the shafts of humanity that further enrich his construction as a most influential figures of Indian mythology who, while on one hand wields incredible power onto the lives of his creation and on the other hand is represented as a mortal form, who is a curious mix of all human emotions and desire coupled with an invincible will. And that is why being a passionate lover, a consummate dancer, a fierce warrior, and a charismatic leader He seems to be the near perfect embodiment of 'Heroism' in the Indian context. This understanding becomes even more complex when Shiva somehow goes beyond his divine self to encompass the humanness of mortal existence. This is illustrated by Amish Tripathi, who despite being a 21st century writer presents an unconventional yet connectable character of Lord Shiva in his 'Shiva Trilogy', and this is done with such dexterity that the entire creation seems to be a miraculous blend of the historical and the mythical. Most unique thing in the entire making is that Shiva does not feature as a mere figment of rich human imagination but a man of flesh and blood who rose to be godlike through his karma. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that even though at the face value the figure of lord Shiva seems impossible in his perfect existence to a modern reasonable, thinking mind yet, he continues to be the classic conjunction of all that is valorous and enchanting for a 'Indian Hero' who has risen to grip the mass psyche in his everlasting magnetism and ageless charisma.

Despite being a work of 21st century creative imagination the book does wonders in creating an astonishingly new model of perception for looking at the age-old conventions of myth and religion which has been all pervasive within the confines of the Indian culture. However, it is this remolding of Shiva as a hero that makes this entire work even more unconventional and newer in its approach towards Indian culture. This is mainly because this intricate portrayal of Shiva as the central figure of the text entails several other creative ideologies which makes the character of Shiva function at several creative levels.

Right from the very onset he is shown to be a Tibetan immigrant, whose ancestry is unknown and yet right from the very first day the events in his life seem to be revolving around a prophetic future which again seems to be repeatedly reflected in his thoughts in *The Immortals of Meluhawhere* he reflects upon the destiny foretold to him by his uncle “Your destiny is much larger than these massive mountains. But to make it come true, you will have to cross these very massive mountains” (Tripathi,4). Not only this, being the chief of his tribe at a very early age, he appears to be a mortal, no doubt but not an ordinary one. This is because while he is at the center of the tribe, he also seems to be the focal point of the sacrosanct beliefs of the clan as he is ordained as the ‘Neelkanth’. Additionally, Shiva is presented as a exceptional warrior, scarred with the battle wounds, he seems to be the perfect embodiment of a hero “he squatted and perched his lithe, muscular body on the narrow ledge extending over the lake. The numerous battle scars on his skin gleamed in the shimmering reflected light of the waters” (Tripathi, 10).

His journey throughout the first book is directed towards a mysterious quest which leads Shiva to find out the underlining purpose of his existence. In the beginning, his curious yet non serious attitude, establish him as an endearing symbol Indian masculinity who despite being oblivious of his importance as a savior, is forever quick and just in all his decisions. The best part of which is that despite being swift all these decisions are balanced and always free of all dilemmas and dogma. Throughout the course of the entire trilogy there are various instances wherein Shiva is seen taking crucial and difficult stands and decisions which are only answerable to the call of greater justice despite being removed from the set codes of the society. For instance, the opinion he holds against the ‘Vikrama Law’ and wants it to be changed as it discriminates and segregates certain members of the society based on their past life sins:

“No, your Highness, interrupted Shiva...I want the entire Vikrama Law scrapped. Nobody will be a Vikrama from now on. Bad fate can strike anyone...Shiva was remaining true to a fundamental cannon of Lord Rama’s principles-the same law applies to everybody, equally and fairly, without exceptions (Tripathi, Meluha279) Or even when he opinionates about the marriage laws within his own tribe “there are many customs in our tribe that I don’t like. And one of the primary ones amongst them is that the leader has to approve the bride of any tribesman” (Tripathi, 285). Even in the second book *The Secret of the Naga* also Shiva is seen putting the cause of justice above the law “laws are not important. What is important is justice. If the purpose of justice is served by breaking a law, the break it” (Tripathi, 252). Apart from these specific instances also the entire trilogy is replete with instances of Shiva taking stances in favor of greater good even if it means standing opposite to the Laws of the land. Having a deep insight into such deliberate attempts of the writer to present his hero not as a idealistic, near perfect ancient hero but as a practical, quick minded figure who invariably exists beyond the dogma of socio-cultural norms and yet stands as an exemplary role model of the perfect member of the society.

In the first book of the trilogy the equation shared by Shiva and Sati is such that it seems to be almost preordained and cosmic “the breath went out of Shiva as he looked at his life staring back at him” (Tripathi, Meluha 146) and further this encounter is intensified “She was breathing heavily, as if she had just danced a duet with Shiva. What she did not know was that her soul was doing exactly that” (Tripathi, 146). All such references are important because they somewhere go ahead in intensifying the personality of Shiva as a most desirable figure for the Indian imagination. On a deeper examination of all such sensitive sentimentalities which are a crucial part of Shiva being a hero what comes to light is that all this more than any other salient factor mirrors the evolution of Shiva as a hero in the making, this is because as the trilogy advances in its description of Shiva's war against evil, so does the intricacy of this relation because in a way it highlights a sense of sincerity and invincible loyalty within the character of Shiva, and this then compliments Shiva's trademark valor, chivalry and bravado “ The Neelkanth's vengeance was not quenched .Screaming Shiva bent down and kept hacking at the Naga's inert body...no articulation of sanity could have penetrated Shiva's enraged mind...But he heard her”(Tripathi,252).Such images are significant because it illustrates how in the midst of all the battle and the associated gallantry, is an element of softness and compassion which not only makes Shiva as a hero more accessible but also makes him more lifelike and believable which is very unlike the traditional, Royal, Epic hero figure who seldom is seen to be emoting so freely at any point on time.

Additionally, it is for such shafts of vulnerability only that the Indianness in Shiva leaves a deep-rooted impact on the Indian psychology which then begins to weave the threads of fancy around this cathartic quality of the Heroism embodied by Shiva and transforms it into His greatest strength. This facet of Shiva's personality is given ample creative space in the final book of the trilogy “the Oath of the Vayuputras” which witnesses the death of Sati in its initial section. It is in this section of the trilogy only that the overall evolution of Shiva as the epitome of Indian Heroism is complete and reaches its ultimate refinement and in the timeframe following this fateful moment it is easily observed that Shiva transforms himself completely “Shiva pulled Sati close as he looked up, crying desperately, screaming incoherently, his heart inundated, his soul shattered. SATIIII! It was a scream that would haunt the world for a millennia” (Tripathi, Vayuputras487).From this point the heroism of Shiva takes a turn and it seems as if the frame work which contained his vivacity throughout the course of the trilogy snapped and unleashed in him an eerie power, which is unseen and unheard of in any of the heroes across generations , and this is because unlike others, Shiva even in the face of his tragedy is able to hold the reins of his reason “Grief had practically unhinged him...The Neelkanth wasn't himself” and yet we see a gleam of decision “Shiva... spoke in a voice that was eerily composed. I will burn down this entire world” (Tripathi, Nagas 504) not only this in all his frozenness the reader is given an insight into Shiva's pain “His soul is already dead...its lying on top of that ice tower” (Tripathi, 504).

A close analysis of all such specific and direct references that give a vivid insight of the making of Shiva as an Indian hero shows how deeply the finer virtues of love and compassion form the foundations of the mass vision of a perfect man who is capable of ruling millions of hearts across generations not only through his valor and bravery but also through his softer shafts of compassion and adoration towards a feminine figure in his life. It is Sati only who through her charismatic presence drives Shiva's heroism throughout the trilogy and her fateful and untimely demise molds Shiva's personality in the future as the destroyer of

evil "Take me with you, Sati. There's nothing left for me to do. I am done...Shiva kept staring at his wife. I can't live without you...You must, said Sati's shimmering image" (Tripathi,550).

Lord Shiva is perfect embodiment of a dynamic 'hero' who in the public eye is not only an exceptional warrior but also an epitome of passion who holds the feminine and the supporting figures of his valor with dignified veneration. In a way the topic and the research have helped the alert literary fraternity to see the archaic concept of 'Heroism' both in terms of the Indian society as well as from the point of view of an evolving reading audience who wishes not to idealize a Hero so removed from their moment in time but to look up to a power figure, who despite having ancient roots has the ability to mirror the contemporary fancies along with all its imperfect magnetism clubbed with a mesmerizing undercurrent of Catharsis. Throughout the research paper one comes across not only a fresh psyche psychological the new figure of an Indian Hero but also the various ways in which Amish Tripathi employs the element of religious anciencey to drive home the concreteness with which this modern-day personality of the Indian Hero is himself visible as a crucial building block of not only contemporary Indian literary tradition but even the Greater literary tradition functioning across the globe.

REFERENCES

- [1] Burrows et al. Myths and Motifs in Literature. The Free Press, 1973.
- [2] Campbell, Joseph. The Hero with a Thousand Faces.. Allen and Unwin, 1978.
- [3] Tripathy, Amish. Immortal of Meluha, Quercus Editions Ltd, 2010.
- [4] ---. The Oath of Vayuputras, Quercus Editions Ltd, 2013.
- [5] ---. The Secrets of the Nagas, Quercus Editions Ltd, 2011.