

In Search of the Hero(es)within the Genre and Beyond

Bikramjit Sen

Shri Ramswaroop Memorial University
Institute of Humanities and Natural Sciences
Shri Ramswaroop Memorial University
Lucknow

Abstract

A hero is an individual who in the face of danger combats adversity through feats of ingenuity, bravery or strength often sacrificing their own personal concerns for the greater good. While heroism requires quick thinking and decision making, true heroes often also display an impressive amount of patience.

Keywords: Natyashastra, Genre, Hero, Gita, Mahabharata, Naayaka

In this work, I have used Natyashastra written by Indian sage Bharata as a tool to study Krishna as a heroic character. Natyashastra is the most detail and elaborate of all treatises on dramatic criticism and acting ever written in any language and is regarded as the oldest surviving text on stagecraft in the world. With its kaleidoscopic approach, and wider scope Natyashastra has offered a remarkable dimension to the growth and development of Indian classical music, dance, drama, and art. As per the guidelines given by Bharata Muni in Natya Shastra for an Uttama Naayaka(male hero) Krishna's heroic character from the Indian Epic Mahabharta is spotted to possess qualities of a Dhirodhata(brave and haughty), Dhiralalita(brave and sportive), Dhirodhata(brave and magnamious), and Dhiraprashaanta(brave and calm). From the 10th Century AD, Krishna had become a favourite subject in performing arts and regional traditions of

devotion. Krishna's character is a character of a real hero, worshipped in many parts of the world.

INTRODUCTION

Hero is any person noted for courageous acts or nobility of character. Such a person in opinion of others is the possessor of special achievements, abilities, or personal qualities and is regarded as a role model or ideal. Generally, the principal male character in a story, play, film etc. is a hero. There is always a common, ideal hero a person may have in mind. The common stereotypical view of a **'true hero'** would tend to be big and muscular. Hence, women are more commonly seen to be less heroic and more of a household slave. Heroes would commonly be seen to be male as they would have the courage to fight for what they believe in. Shakespeare's Hamlet is an example. Prince Hamlet is not like the other tragic heroes of his period. Initially, after King Hamlet's murder, Hamlet- The Prince of Denmark starts to assume his father's younger brother and his uncle King Claudius as his father's murderer because his father's ghost tells him so, but in order to test the Ghost's sincerity Hamlet also later, is seen enlisting the help of a troupe of players who perform a play called The Murder of Gonzago to which Hamlet deliberately adds scenes that recreate the murder, the Ghost of King Hamlet described. Prince Hamlet calls the revised play The Mousetrap, and the ploy proves a success. As Hamlet has hoped, Claudius' reaction to the staged murder reveals the King to be conscience stricken. Claudius leaves the room because he cannot breathe, and his vision is dimmed for want of light. Convinced upon his conviction that Claudius is a villain, Hamlet then, resolves to kill him.

A hero (masculine) is a person or main character of a literary work who in the face of danger, combats adversity through feats of ingenuity, bravery or strength, often sacrificing their own personal concerns for a greater good. The definition of a hero has changed throughout time. Courage and bravery leap into mind first whenever we think of heroism. The heroes have a courage that is unshaken despite anything that comes in the path of their focused success. Heroes always have a sacrificial tendency in order to put others first as true leaders. **Sacrifice** is such a quality that stands unique from all the other virtues which makes a hero noble in his deeds. True

heroism contains modesty. Heroes generally do have strong conviction. While heroism requires quick thinking and decision making, true heroes often also display an impressive amount of patience. Other than selflessness heroes are caring for others in general. Compassion is a virtue that may lead to heroism. For a hero the word “Impossible” always decomposes to yield “I am possible.” A hero is unflinching in his or her determination and believes in his ability without the whiff of dubiety. Being focused is also one of the most prominent qualities of a hero. Virtuosity is the key aspect of a hero’s character. The heroes are selflessly dedicated to their task and will thus focus their actions towards its achievement. A hero is considered to possess fierce loyalties in the sense that he is faithful to whatever tasks he takes up. Whatever a hero maybe- a warrior, a preacher, wisdom is always an attribute that all of them possess. Above all, a hero is not born, he is self-made.

KRISHNA AS A HERO

Within the Indian epic Mahabharata whose traditional authorship is attributed to the Indian sage Vyasa, Krishna was the son of the Yadava chief Vasudeva and his wife Devaki. Hence he was known mostly as Vasudeva Krishna or Vaasudeva .Krishna is one of the most beloved figures in Hinduism, which, because of its open nature has often been defined as a way of life rather than a religion. One of the most powerful incarnations of Lord Vishnu, the Hindu deity who considerably plays the role of a Preserver of this Universe, Krishna is also the most popular Gods amongst masses who consider Lord Krishna as their philosopher, guide, hero, teacher, friend and protector. Lord Krishna plays a very vital role in thoughts and beliefs of Hinduism, influencing not only the philosophy and its mysticism, but also the literature, culture, heritage and overall, the entire way of human life. From his initial days as a little kid in Gokul, to an adolescent in Mathura and later as a King of Dwarka, Krishna is a hero and will always make many worship him in admiration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lord Krishna is the 'deity who lived as man' (**Patro, 2015**). According to **Patro (2015)**, Hindu scriptures declare that Krishna is an avatar; God in human form who came among mortals to save mankind and society from the morass it had created for itself. Krishna's sole concern was to uphold 'dharma'. He was an embodiment of humility; pleasing and bewitchingly charming with his trademark smile. Krishna is the only God in Hinduism whose childhood is emphasized upon in his mythology. His childhood consists of a number of stories for which he is widely known.

Krishna, the holy deity has come to be known as one of the most worshipped deity mostly in the Hindu pantheon. Krishna is a deity who is associated and celebrated along with a number of deities in India. He is perhaps the only deity to be worshipped in all forms of man that is from an infant to a teenager to a wise man.

The epic Mahabharata describes the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The Gita is the discourse given by Krishna to Arjuna just before the war is about to begin. Krishna is identified as God (bhagavan). His words contain the essence of Vedic wisdom, the keystone of Hinduism. (**Pattanaik, 2015, My Gita: Pg 2**)

Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the nineteenth-century Bengali mystic, said that the essence of The Gita can be deciphered simply by reversing the syllables that constitute Gita. So Gita, or gi-ta, becomes ta-gi, or tyagi, which means 'one who lets go of possessions.' (**Pattanaik, 2015, My Gita: Pg 2**)

Likewise we do find the quality of sacrifice within most heroic characters. In the protagonist of the Indian mythological book The Mahabharata also, we do find a great sacrificial tendency. Krishna is a Tyagi, reflecting one of the greatest, unique virtues present in a hero's character. As heroes have a tendency to put others first as a true leader, Krishna puts his immense faith in Arjuna while the Battle of Kurukshetra on-goes, in The Mahabharata.

OBJECTIVE / PURPOSE OF MY RESEARCH

My research aims to purposively bring forth Krishna as a heroic character, present within the literary pages of The Indian Mythological Book ‘Mahabharata’ by utilizing the world’s oldest treatise on performing arts, which is more than 2500 years old and which includes 200,000 verses by Sage Ved Vyasa; namely Natyashashtra .The objective of this research study is to exactly trace out all those elemental traits present within Krishna’s character that makes him, one of the greatest heroes to have existed in all times.

JUSTIFICATION

Unlike others, by utilizing the parametric tools given in the old, Sanskrit literary text of Natyashastra by Bharata muni in context to a mythological Naayak(male hero), I have tried scientifically analyzing Krishna’s heroic character by deliberately correlating the characteristic-traits present within Krishna’s charming personality to those that have been systematically prescribed by the Indian Sage Bharata in his book the Natyashastra for an Uttama male hero or Naayaka.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: NATYASHASTRA

Natyashastra is the most detail and elaborate of all treatises on dramatic criticism and acting ever written in any language and is regarded as the oldest surviving text on stagecraft in the world. Written by the great dramatist of ancient India, Bharata, Natyashastra is reckoned as the poetics of Indian drama. Bharat muni in his Natyashastra demonstrates every aspect of Indian drama. With its kaleidoscopic approach, and wider scope, Natyashastra has offered a remarkable dimension to growth and development of Indian classical music, dance, drama, and art. It is certainly not an overstatement to say that Natyashastra indeed laid the cornerstone of the fine arts in India. The commentaries on the Natyashastra are known, dating from the sixth or seventh centuries. The abhinavabharati is regarded as the most authoritative commentary on Natyashastra as Abhinavgupta provides not only his own illuminating interpretation of the Natyashastra, but wide information about pre-Bharata traditions as well as varied interpretations of the text offered

by his predecessors. Written in Sanskrit, the vast treatise consist 6,000 sutras. The Natyashastra has been divided into 36 chapters, sometimes into 37 or 38 due to further bifurcation of a chapter or chapters.

Concept of Naayaka in Bharata's Natyashashtra

Bharata talks about the Naayaka in his chapter on Prakriti. The chapter is on Prakriti or the Nature of human beings or characters/ paatra-s. He begins by laying them into three main categories.

1. Uttama
2. Madhyama
3. Adhama

As this chapter only talks about Naayaka, henceforth I am only taking into consideration the prakriti(nature)of the male/purusa patraa-s/character-s. It is interesting to note that Bharata gives vichakshana for uttama characters, and, visharda for madhyama characters, that are supposed to be proficient enough to make professional use of it.

If going by Abhinavagupta's concept of Guna-s we get two major types of it; namely Sahaja and Aahara. Abhinavagupta states that the Guna-s, which one is born with are Sahaj Guna-s, and one which he acquires through experiences are Aahara Guna-s.

The adhama characters possess qualities contradictory to the uttama character in its entirety. Thus they neither possess sahaja as well as aahara guna-s. In the characters of uttama variety, the sahaja guna-s scores over the aahara guna-s, whereas in the characters of madhyama variety the aahara guna-s exceeds the sahaja guna-s.

A significant point, which I observed was that nowhere in the list of qualities of the superior female character, we find presence of intellect, skilful, proficient in arts etc. This itself highlights the Naayaka (or male hero's) importance from the point of view of any plot of literature.

The word Naayaka in rhetoric means the hero of a poetic composition. In the Natyasastra, Naayaka has been defined as, “One who relieves himself from any contingency and triumphs over all hurdles and appears to be the protagonist amongst all the other male characters of the play.”

Bharata goes on to mention the four types of Naayaka. All the four types have been identified amongst the *uttama* and *madhyama* variety. They have been divided into the following –

1. *Dhirodhata* – Brave and haughty
2. *Dhiralalita* – Brave and sportive
3. *Dhirodata* – Brave and magnanimous
4. *Dhiraprashaanta* – Brave and calm

One wonders as to what the word “*dhira*” could mean. It could mean brave, courageous, firm, resolute etc. Whatever the word “*Dhira*” means, it is to identify the *naayaka* and highlight him in the plot. Thus it is obvious from the definition that he does possess some special qualities and therefore the word *dhira* has been used to justify his uniqueness.

Bharata talks in detail about the various types of *naayaka* on the basis of *vaisikopacaara*. The term “*vaisik*” means a person who associates oneself with the harlots (*ganika-s*). Bharata also means the same with an addition that he is also well versed in various arts. But *Abhinavagupta* makes more sense as he says that a man who is a skilled lover and knows the minute details about lovemaking is a *vaisaka*. Thus Bharata elaborates on all such qualities needed for a man to entice a woman, to keep a harmonious relationship with his partners etc. A prominent example of this is Krishna who maintains his relationship with all his wives pretty well. Bharata concentrates a lot on the appearance and behavioural aspect of a *vaisaka*. He divides the qualities into three sections –

1. Physical
2. Acquired
3. Psychological

The most significant division of the vaisaka where the Naayaka has been categorized into the following:-

1. Catura
2. Uttama
3. Madhyama
4. Adhama

ANALYSIS

(The Mahabharata, Book 2: Sabha Parva : Sisupala-badha Parva : Section XLIV)

(p. 88).....After Sisupala had ceased, Krishna addressing all the kings in the presence of the Pandavas, **spoke these words in a soft voice**— ‘Ye kings, this wicked one, who is the son of a daughter of the Satwata race, is a great enemy of us; and though we never seek to injure him, he ever seeketh our evil. This wretch of cruel deeds, ye kings, hearing that we had gone to the city of Pragjyotisha, came and burnt Dwaraka, although he is the son of my father’s sister. While king Bhoja was sporting on the Raivataka hill, this one fell upon the attendants of that king and slew and led away many of them in chains to his own city. Sinful in all his purpose, this wretch, in order to obstruct the sacrifice of my father, stole the sacrificial horse of the horse-sacrifice that had been let loose under the guard of armed men. Prompted by sinful motives, this one ravished also the reluctant wife of the innocent Vabhru(Akrura) on her way from Dwarka to the country of the Sauviras; this injurer of his maternal uncle, disguising himself in the attire of the king of Karusha. **I have patiently borne all these sorrows for the sake of my father’s sister.** It is, however, very fortunate that all his hath occurred today in the presence of all the kings. Behold ye all today the hostility this one beareth towards me. And know ye also all that he hath done me at my back. For the excess of pride in which he hath indulged in the presence of all these monarchs, he deserved to be slain by me. I am ill able to pardon today the injuries that he hath done me. Desirous of speedy death, this fool had desired Rukmini. But the fool obtained her not, like a Sudra failing to obtain the audition of the *Vedas*.’”

.....The powerful Sisupala, having heard these words, laughed aloud and spoke thus, --‘O Krishna, art thou not ashamed in saying in this assembly, especially before all these kings that Rukmini(thy wife) had been coveted by me? O slayer of Madhu, who else is there than thee, who regarding himself a man would say in the midst of respectable men that his wife had been intended for somebody else? O Krishna, pardon me if thou pleases, or pardon me not. But angry or friendly, what canst thou do unto me?’

‘And while Sisupala was speaking thus, the exalted slayer of Madhu thought in his mind of the discus that humbleth the pride of the Asuras. And as soon as the discus came into his hands, skilled in speech the illustrious

p. 89

one loudly uttered these words,-- ‘ Listen ye lord of earth, why this one had hitherto been pardoned by me. As asked by his mother, **a hundred offences (of his) were to be pardoned by me. Even this was the boon she had asked, and even this I granted her.** That number, ye kings, hath become full. I shall now slay him in your presence, ye monarchs.’ Having said this, the chief of the Yadus, that slayer of all foes, in anger, instantly cut off the head of the ruler of Chedi by means of his discus. And the mighty-armed one fell down like a cliff struck with thunder.

According to Bharata’s one type of *uttama Nayaka*(male hero), *Dhiraprashaanta*(brave and calm); Krishna’s heroic character from the above passage very well justifies his excellence as a *Dhiraprashaanta*.

Here, in the above extract from the Book 2 of The Indian Epic Mahabharata, we can also find Krishna’s character as a *Dhirodatta*(Brave and Magnamious) which is Bharata’s another type of *uttama Nayaka*.

The Mahabharata

Book 6: Bhishma Parva

Bhagavat-Gita Parva

Section XXXV (Bhagavad Gita Chapter XI: Vishvaroop Darshan Yog)

Verse 5

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: My dear Arjuna, O son of Prtha, see now My opulences, hundreds of thousands of varied divine and multicolored forms.

Verse 6

O best of the Bharatas, see here the different manifestations of Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, Asvini-kumaras and all the other demigods. Behold the many wonderful things which no one has ever seen or heard of before.

Verse 7

O Arjuna, whatever you wish to see, behold at once in this body of Mine! This universal form can show you whatever you now desire to see and whatever you may want to see in the future. Everything – moving and non-moving – is here completely, in one place.

Verse 8

But you cannot see Me with your present eyes. Therefore I give you divine eyes. Behold My mystic opulence!

Verse 47

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: My dear Arjuna, happily have I shown you, by My internal potency, this supreme universal form within the material world. No one before you has ever seen this primal form, unlimited and full of glaring effulgence.

Verse 48

O best of thee Kuru warriors, no one before you has ever seen this universal form of Mine, for neither by studying the Vedas, nor by performing sacrifices, nor by charity, nor by pious activities, nor by severe penances can I be seen in this form in the material world.

Verse 49

You have perturbed and bewildered by seeing this horrible feature of Mine. Now let it be finished. My devotee, be free again from all disturbances. With a peaceful mind you can now see the form you desire.

Taken into consideration the above compiled verses from the Book 6 of The Mahabharata, we can find Krishna as a Dhirodhata (Brave and haughty) Uttama Nayak as per Bharata's underlined parameters of a uttama nayak's types .

According to **Pattanaik(2015)**, the epics simply end with the death of their protagonists : Ram dies in Book 7 of the Ramayana while Krishna dies in the Mausala Parva, Book 16 of the Mahabharata; Arjuna dies in Book 17. Ram walks into the river Sarayu, and a stray arrow kills Krishna. Both have a smile on their lips when they die for they know death is not the end: another life awaits.

Most heroes do have this tendency to exit the gates of mortal life with a serene smile. Similarly Krishna also as a Dhiralalita (Brave and sportive) just does/repeats the same without any lapses as can readily be observed in the character of an Uttama Naayaka.

CONCLUSION

The visualization of asuras either as villains, anti-heroes or even wronged heroes persists even today amongst writers on mythology, who see asuras as old tribal units overrun, even enslaved and demonized, by yagna-performing Vedic people. Asuras are even seen as embodiments of our

negative impulses and devas as personifying positive impulses. We overlook the fact that in popular Hinduism neither devas nor asuras are given the same status as ishvara or bhagavan. (Pattanaik, 2015, My Gita : 125)

Right since Krishna's childhood till all events of his life in the matured adulthood, people of different types find a sort of a strong association with this protagonist of The Mythological Epic - Mahabharata. He is not only restricted onto the pages of a literary text, but is in actuality well beyond that, having acclaimed the status of ishvara or bhagavan. His character's immortal words filled with great zeal have been running within the veins of people and he has become a part and parcel of many lives. Krishna's heroic persona has become a way of life, a means of living and survival because the path that Krishna as a Naayak lived, traversed, and propagated in his life is simply not just restricted onto any particular genre but in reality's sphere, well beyond that.

REFERENCES

Web Sources

I have collected both objective, quantitative and qualitative data regards to Krishna's character from the following cited sources in MLA format: -

1. www.dictionary.com/browse/hero
2. www.123helpme.com/the-ideal-hero-view.asp?id=152202
3. www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=4451
4. www.inc.com/bill-murphy-jr/5-qualities-of-incredibly-heroic-leaders.html
5. www.google.co.in/amp/www.personalitytutor.com/qualities-of-a-hero.html/amp?espv=1
6. www.indiaopines.com/lord-krishna-hero-villain-mahabharat-1/
7. www.narthaki.com/info/articles/art128.html.
8. www.academia.edu

Books

1. Patro, J.B.22 Nov.2015. “ The Life and Times of Krishna : The Diety Who Lived As Man.’’
2. Pattnaik. Devdutt. my GITA, pg.-244. Thomas Press India Ltd, Faridabad, 2015