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Paradigmatic Heroism: Campbell's Archetypal Heroes In Bakha And Balram Of Lower Class
And Caste

Abstract

Classic are forever praised to perpetuate the epitome of goodness in the language and literary standards. Popular fictions, on the other hand, appeal more to the readers of the modern era as they can relate with the text. The Untouchable a classic of India, projects the intolerances among the human groups during the colonial era. The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga's, on the other hand, portrays the contemporary India which appears to be not only indifferent to the differences in caste and class but also shows visible coldness towards many other evils in the society. Both are victims of the societal indifferences of caste and class. Eventhough, the characters belong to different time periods, they exhibit a heroism that is similar to Campbell's observations. According to Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces, a hero's journey in the early myths and epics consists of three main facets: "departure—initiation—return," which Campbell describes as "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return." When Anand inverts the pattern of Campbell's Monomyth, Adiga follows a more classic pattern of the hero's journey, showing that the authors present their own interpretations of archetypal heroism. The paper, thus attempts to bring down the relevance of Campbell's theory from the mythological

elevated stories to those considered to be of lower caste and class and thus nullifying the logic of the latter.

Keywords: Archetypal Hero, Myth, Classic, Balram, Bakha

A hero is a principal character in a story, around which the whole plot of a story revolves. His thoughts, actions and opinions influence the readers. The characteristics of a hero vary at different scenarios. For instance, in a mythology, the hero may be from a divine ancestry. The same applies for a hero in an epic who is known for his valour, bravery and determination to win. The qualities of a hero had either exceeded or reduced as literature has evolved over time.

Joseph Campbell, one of the leading authorities in comparative mythology has observed the monomythic element in almost all mythical heroes, which extends from Odysseus to Buddha. According to him, the hero, in mythical narrative, moves forth, from the realm of common day affairs to a region of mystic wonders, thereby ensuring his victory. The hero later comes back from the adventure with some super powers that makes him superior to his fellow men.

Through framing the Monomyth, Campbell lays out many other layers. The journey of the hero begins in the ordinary world, from where he departs at the call of an adventure. He later crosses a guarded threshold with the help of a mentor, who leads him into a supernatural world. Here, the laws and order to which he was exposed to in the ordinary world does not apply. Further, the hero embarks on a journey of trials, where he is supported by many. The trial is the greatest challenge faced by the hero, rising to which he will receive a reward, mainly a boon. Later, the hero will decide to return with this blessing to the ordinary world. However, he faces more trials on the road back. Upon his return, this blessing

is used to improve the hero's ordinary world, in what Campbell calls, the “application of the boon”.

According to Ameer Khdaire;

“The usefulness of Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is confined to his formula of the hero’s journey, the Monomyth, which consists of three main facets: “*departure—initiation—return*,” which Campbell describes as “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.” The three facets each have sub-stages that the hero undergoes, not all of which are applicable for every hero, as Campbell himself notes.” (5)

In the modern literature, almost all the stories consist of Campbell’s Monomyth, although there are variations in the same. Literature has taken a sharp turn from where legendary characters ruled literature. The topic discussed in the novels, changed from victory tales to more social and personal issues. The nature of the hero and their response to a social situation also took a major toll. According to the theory of Ben Caplan in the article *Creatures of Fiction, Myth and Imagination*, “the difference between authors and myth-makers is one of propositional attitude: authors make believe their work of art whereas myth-makers do not make believe their myths; rather they genuinely believe their myths.”(334)

The archetypal narrative, which consists of the stages “Departure” “Initiation”, and “Return” are still the main motifs in most of the works in literature. While “Departure” deals with the hero on a quest or adventure, “Initiation” shows the immense trials the hero faces along his way. The end shows the “Return”, of the hero from his great adventure.

Mulk Raj Anand’s, classic, *Untouchable* narrates a day, in the life of Bakha, the son of a sweeper, an untouchable. During the early 19th century, people established their superiority over the other through the Caste System. The Brahmins who stood at the topmost

layer found it amusing to torture those who didn't even belong to the caste system- the untouchables. Bakha in the novel is intelligent but innocent, humble but unproductive. The novel consists of many minor incidents of tragedy that the boy undergoes just because he is an untouchable. While Lakha, his father tries to accept the abnormalities of the society, Bakha wants to step out and be treated as a proper human being. Later, as India developed along its time the stringent rule of the caste system was released, but that didn't put an end to other rising toxicities like corruption.

The novel, *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga can be seen as a version of the modern Indian, which shows Balram Halwai, who is of the lower class. The story perpetuates the various abnormalities in India, including corruption, class and caste domination, vulnerability of the servant class and many more. However, the story ends when Balram, who began as a servant, ends up being the master and that too, through unfair means.

Balram and Bakha are attacked by the problems of caste and class, which is in fact the whole theme of both the novels. The paper takes a turn to prove the illogicalness of class and caste by taking the theory of Campbell, from the dominant mythological tales and executing the same in the story of the so-called people of lower origin.

The archetypal characteristics insisted by Campbell in mythical and epic narratives is also evident in the characters of the novels Bakha and Balram, who just seem to be opposites of each another. When Bakha in the *Untouchable* became a victim of the atrocities based on class, Balram in *The White Tiger* even though experiences the same, later on becomes successful in his life. The question asked by Bakha in the *Untouchable* of 1935, "Why are we always abused?" is still relevant in the 21st century as seen in *The White Tiger* where the beings are proclaimed to have "only two destinies: eat or eaten up".

According to Khdair

“Jung describes a collective unconscious, which “does not derive from personal acquisition but is inborn [;] this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals.”... “the archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.” In other words, the archetype is an individual’s conscious expression of the collective unconscious imbued with elements from the individual’s perception.” (3)

Eventhough, the characters belonged to different time periods, they exhibit a heroism that is similar to Campbell’s observations. When Anand inverts the pattern, Adiga follows a more classic pattern of the hero’s journey showing that the authors present their own interpretations of archetypal heroism. The paper, by isolating the social and cultural aspects in the novel, attempts to prove that either way the hero maintains the features of a conventional hero that appears in the early religions, myths and epics of the world.

In order to apply the theory of Monomyth to Anand’s *Untouchable* and Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, a restructured form of Campbell’s template is put into force. The first stage of the hero’s journey, the separation stage, includes five subsections: ‘The Call to Adventure,’ ‘The Refusal of the Call,’ ‘Supernatural Aid,’ ‘The Crossing of the First Threshold,’ and ‘The Belly of the Whale.’ In the first stage the hero undergoes a deviation from the known world and realises the existence to many other things which are unknown to him. The second facet of the hero’s journey involves trials that the hero undergoes, which includes, ‘The Road of Trials,’ ‘The Meeting with the Goddess,’ ‘Woman as the Temptress,’ ‘Atonement with the Father,’ ‘Apotheosis,’ and ‘The Ultimate Boon.’ The third and final stage of the hero’s journey, according to Campbell, is The Return. The third stage of consists of: ‘The Magic Flight,’ ‘The Crossing of the Return Threshold,’ ‘The Master of Two Worlds,’ and the

‘Freedom to Live.’ In the present period of time, most of the literature lack many of the features stated above as a requirement for an archetypal hero, in order to retain the element of originality. Therefore only certain factors of the Archetypal Heros are taken into consideration to analyse.

The heroes of the *Untouchable* and *The White Tiger*, in their journey towards attaining knowledge of themselves, follow a basic outline of Campbell’s hero’s journey. Even the deviations from the paradigm underscore the adherence to the pattern of “*departure—initiation—return.*”

According to Campbell in the process of *Departure* the first factor is the “Call to Adventure”. He says-

“...This is an example of one of the ways in which the adventure can begin. A blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. As Freud has shown, blunders are not the merest chance. They are the result of suppressed desires and conflicts. They are ripples on the surface of life, produced by unsuspected springs. And these may be very deep—as deep as the soul itself. The blunder may amount to the opening of a destiny.” (46)

The *Untouchable* narrates a single day in the life of a Scavenger boy. The incident that marks the conflict which calls the hero to adventure is when Bakha is walking down the street, far from home savouring on his jalebis “defiles” a Brahmin man by his touch. A crowd gathers around the scene and Bakha is blamed for his carelessness and was scolded by the Brahmin. His moment of perplexity is the first evidence of the hero’s blunder.

“To Bakha, every second seemed an endless age of woe and suffering. His whole demeanour was concentrated in humility, and his heart there was a queer stirring. His legs trembled and shook under him. He felt they would fail him...” (Anand 40 - 41)

In a similar manner, Balram experiences the departure of normality from his life when he is taken off from school to work for the stork in order to pay the family loan. The white tiger, who was adorned of his intelligence at school was made to work in a tea shop and to smash coal. Later he goes away to Delhi to fulfil his dreams. His friends from school mock him saying-

“What is that creature that comes along once in a generation? One boy asked loudly.

The coal breaker, another replied

And then all of them began to laugh” (Adiga 37)

However, both Balram and Bakha are seen helpless sufferers of the situation. When Bakha decided to justify his fate as “For them I(Bakha) am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!” (Anand, 43) and Balram “said nothing” (Adiga 58).

As the departure come to an end, next is the stage of “initiation” where the “Road of Trials” begin. Here:

“Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favourite phase of the myth adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and

secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage.” (Campbell 39)

It was after the incident at the street that Bakha came to realize his plight realisation hit on him like “a ray of light shooting from darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance dawned upon him. It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind. Everything that happened to him traced his course up to this light and got the answer.”(Anand 43)

It was only after this incident that he became conscious of everything that was happening around him. Bakha began to see into the reality of every situation and the hypocrisy of the upper caste unveiled before his eyes. One such incident is where Bakha observed how the upper class Hindus “feed their cows on mere reminders of food and even on grain, sifted from the cow dung.”(Anand 45)

The difficulties that Bakha had to face after that knew no bounds. A psychological transition is seen in Bakha who turns away from being innocent through his experience. The first instance of Bakha’s hatred for the system is evident through his reaction when the Brahmin priest abused his sister, Sohini and later blames her of defiling him. He became ruthless and deadly pale but in fact, did not have the courage to do anything. The helplessness of poverty made Bakha beg for food at the house of a high caste Hindu woman’s. She too comes screaming at Bakha for polluting her house. Bakha was tested to such an extent, where she asked her son to relieve along the way, where the sweeper was cleaning, so that he can clean it away. Bakha was entitled to do the job to earn his bread. Later, the mother of a son belonging to an upper class Hindu, accused Bakha of have defiled his son, as he was carried home by Bakha when he got injured while playing cricket. As Chelliah says, “Instead of being thankful to him for his cleaning the dirt, the society disregards him as dirt, treats him

badly and squeezes him economically. The outcastes are prohibited from taking directly from the well, entering the temple and they are denied education also. Throughout the day, on many occasions, Bakha is exposed to both verbal and physical abuse and humiliation for doing nothing the so-called duty-cleaning and sweeping the dirt.”(3) “Colonel Hutchinson, a priest from the church, finds Bakha lonely and takes him to church where he asks Bakha to confess his sin so that he can be converted to the Christian religion.”(Jadhav 3)

However in all these situations Bakha did not do the least- React. “Bakha and his kind become restless in the beginning but finally come to terms with their condition they hope that the future would bring something new and good for them.” (Chapter IV 3). A typical hero is expected to respond at his subjugation. However, this behaviour of the hero is an inversion of that of an archetypal hero. However, it is this behaviour of Bakha that leads to the final restoration.

Balram in *The White Tiger* had to face the same humiliation in a different way. His masters, for whom he worked as a driver, humiliated and considered him less than human at many instances. He had to face a lot of trials in order to prove his honesty to his masters. An instance of the same is where Ms Pinky drunk and drove their car and run over a human child. Balram was later asked to take responsibility of the murder which he was expected to accept as some privilege.

“The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul, and arse.” (Adiga 170)

Balram’s incorrect pronunciation of words like ‘Mall’ and ‘Pizza’ were sources of amusement for the masters. Another session of the trials is when Balram had to face the torments and harsh behavior of Mukesh, the brother of Ashok, his master. Mukesh went to the extent of making Balram look for a one rupee that accidentally fell off his pocket, so that

Balram doesn't get it, a trail which the white tiger won graciously. Although Balram didn't have the assistance of a supernatural power in all these instances, his humbleness along with the aid of other human beings like his brother Kisan, the Nepali Watchman, Ram Presad and many others helped him overcome his trials.

Another feature in the stage of Departure includes atonement with father. According to Campbell-

“The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of being. The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands —and the two are atoned.”

Although Bakha is sent away from his house by his father, who asked him to “get out of my(his) house. And don't come back! Don't let us see your face again!” (Anand 109). Bakha surrendered to his father's abuse and took flight. But the image of his father remained in him until the end of the story. After listening to Gandhi's enlightening speech, where the lower caste were talked about with respect and appreciation, Bakha decides to “go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us !”(Anand 148)

In Balram's case, the sequence worked in a different way. He was in good terms with his father from the beginning and everything he did had a motive that his father had instilled on him. His father used to say, “my whole life I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine- at least- should live like a man.” (Adiga 26) The rich life of Balram at the end of the novel itself is a realization of his father's dream. It happened by Balram's need to separate from the life he was born into and the need to direct his own actions. As he says at the end of the novel-

“Yet... even if they throw me in jail... I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant.”(Adiga 321)

The opposition to Campbell's method of an archetypal hero was itself a way to adhere to his views.

“The ultimate boon”, a feature of initiation is exhibited in different ways in both the novels. In *Untouchable*, the boon is realised when Bakha rush forth to watch the event where Mahatma Gandhi addresses the crowd. “The word Mahatma was like a magical magnet to which he was going. He hasn't paused to think” (Anand 126). This narration here exactly fits the criteria where, “The ease with which the adventure is here accomplished signifies that the hero is a superior man, a born king.” (Campbell 159) Eventhough, Bakha, didn't change to a superior man, he felt empowered and happy when he realised that there was someone to look into and talk about the issues he faced.

The moment when Balram ceased to act unlike the conventional drivers, who safeguarded their masters and stood faithful to his money. Balram became superior to the other passive drivers, when he slit his master's neck and later took the car for a spin. He felt like a winner himself, who broke out of the cage of servitude, which haunted him, his whole life.

The final phase “return” determines the end of Campbell archetypal heroes. A feature in the same is “The magical flight”, where according to Campbell,-

“If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron.”

After listening to Mahatma Gandhi, Bakha felt excited and happy. Gandhi becomes the supernatural power who strengthens the downtrodden. When Gandhi detailed on the ways where the so called untouchable should behave like accepting only grains and not rotten grains which are courteously offered. It was parallel to Bakha's thoughts and he in turn wanted to say,

“Now, Mahatma ji, Now you are talking” (Anand 139)

Mahatma's words along with the words of Iqbal Nath Sarashar , a poet, who talks about a machine with a flush system, so that nobody has to handle faeces . The journey he takes back to home is symbolic of the reformation he longed for all along the time. As E.M Foster said , “His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand” .(Chelliah, 43), Bakha life doesn't literally turn to being one devoid of caste inequality. However, the light of hope that sprouted in his heart at that moment, which he decided to share with his father is when the hero takes its true archetypal form.

The journey of Balram from Delhi to Bangalore proves the archetypal hero in him. Balram had so much presence of mind and wit that saved him from getting caught. “In conclusion, although Balram breaks the rules and frees himself from bondage, oppression, and servitude, he ends up being another capitalist who starts a taxi business and uses the same corrupt means to get richer: violence replaces one capitalist master with another capitalist master and hence the unjust system remains unchanged.” (Al-Dagameh 8) However, the journey back to his homeland and the rich life he leads after that makes him as perfect archetypal hero.

Thus, the archetypal heroes extend it from the age old epic tales to the contemporary novels, proving that Campbell's observation has its relevance even in the current phase of literature

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