



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Literature

“IS HEROISM MASCULINE? A STUDY OF HEROIC POEMS OF CHĀRAN LITERATURE”

KEY WORDS: Chāran Literature, Heroism, Masculinity

Gadhavi Ashariya Mohan

PhD Research Scholar at Department of English, Faculty of Arts, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara.

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to understand the concept of heroism in the heroic poems of Chāran literature. Dingal language, an art of rendering poetry with its distinct meters and rhythms, was primarily used by the Chāran poets to motivate the kings and their troops in the battlefield. Since heroism is primarily associated with masculinity, the heroic poems vividly depict valor and courage as quintessential masculine virtues, highlighting the embodiment of these traits in the protagonists of Chāran literature. By employing the masculinity studies and heroism as theoretical bases, the paper will illustrate how the connection of heroism and masculinity is established in the heroic poems of Chāran literature.

Every rational individual has his/her favourite heroes from the various fields of life. A plethora of questions arise in our mind, such as, what is the essence of heroism? What are those characteristics that one must display to become a Hero? What is the rationale behind the concept of "Heroism"? Though the heroes have individual persona, some quintessential characteristics unite all the heroes into a common classification which separates them from every day, mundane, villains, and anti-heroes.

Often, attributes like bravery, courage, determination, sacrifice, strength, loyalty, selflessness, compassion, valor, gallantry, conviction, perseverance, flaw, and fortitude are associated with heroism. These traits of hero resonate with the masculine hero of epic poems like Iliad, Beowulf, Ramayana, and medieval chivalric poems as well. In fact, the concept of heroism and masculinity goes hand in hand. Masculinities is a set of qualities and behaviours typical of men. According to the dictionary of Merriam Webster masculinity is, "the quality or nature of male sex: the quality, state or degree of being masculine or manly." ("Masculinity"). Cambridge dictionary defines masculinity as, "the characteristics that are traditionally thought to be typical of or suitable for men." ("Masculinity").

Looking at the aforementioned definitions of masculinities in various dictionaries, it is explicit that masculinities is defined from the male perspective since the concept of masculinities is not a monolithic one, but a polyolithic. Masculinity, in a general sense, is a social construction. It functions differently across different cultures and historical periods. We all know by now that sex is biological whereas gender is a social and cultural construction. Since masculinity is about the social expectations of manhood, there is no single fixed definition but it varies according to time and space. Beynon argues that the social and cultural factors responsible for the construction of masculinity are historical location, age and physique, sexual orientation, education, status and lifestyle, geography, ethnicity, religion and beliefs, class and occupation, and culture and subculture. (Beynon 2002, 10). According to Doyle, there are six changing historical masculinities which are, the heroic, the spiritual, the chivalrous, Renaissance man, the hedonist, and the he-man. (Cited in Beynon 1989, 59-61).

Various philosophers, sociologists, and theorists, ranging from Sigmund Freud to Seth L Schein have either contributed their views on heroism with a strong masculine bias or have emphasized masculine attributes in classical heroes. In the early conceptions of hero, emphasis was laid on the physical qualities of strength, power, bravery, and display of masculinity. Seth L Schein, a scholar of Homeric epic, gender, and interpretation, has expressed his views on heroism with strong masculinity. Schein, discussing the early form of heroism in his work *The Immortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*, argues that heroism in the epic period was

reserved exclusively for those heroic men who were venerated for their strength, courage, and ability to slay enemies on the battlefield. Schein argues that Homer's attitude toward the concept of heroism can be seen in a figure who was worshipped in hero cults, a warrior 'who lives and dies in the pursuit of honor and glory.' (Schein 1984, 69).

Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist who developed psychoanalysis, has also contributed his strong masculine views on heroism. Freud, in his work *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, discusses the concept of narcissism and shows the hero as a figure to be achieved by the Oedipal fantasies. (Freud 1914, 25). Freud, in his next work *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, has depicted a hero as a group leader who is searching for the elements which maintain the cohesion of a group. Here, the leader is no longer a childhood hero of his earlier works, but he has been depicted with a new narrative. In the context of primitive heroic leadership, Freud observes that "the primitive form of human society was that of a horde ruled over despotically by a powerful male." (Freud 1949, 90).

The intimate link between the concept of hero and masculinity is also seen in Chāran literature. Chāran literature is a vast body of literature written in Dingal language. Dingal literature and Dingal language exist largely because of this caste. Though it was started by the tongue of Chārāns (in oral tradition), but in its creation, Bhaat, Raval, Motisar, Meer, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Dalits and Vaniks too included. Thus, we can say that Chāran literature is a vast body of literature that transgressed the boundaries of caste and religion.

Heroism is an integral part of Chāran literature. Chāran poets were court poets and they often used to give company to their patron king on the battlefield. Sometime Chāran poets used to compose heroic poems during an ongoing war as well. They used to immortalize the great deeds of their patron kings by composing heroic poems, celebrating the valorous deeds of their patron kings. During the ancient period of Chāran literature, poets like Aasa, Humpakaran, Harsur, Aalha, Sivdas, Pasait, Khengar, Todarmal etc have composed many war poems, where the leading hero is depicted as strong, courageous and fearless, who is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of his community or his own gains. For example, poet Sivadas in his work *Achal Das Khinchi Ri Vachnika* describes the heroic deeds of Achal Das Khinchi on the battlefield. The work is based on a historical war called the war of the Gagrion, which was fought between Hoshang Shah and Achal Das Khinchi in the year 1423 and it continued for fifteen days. Here, poet Sivadas has depicted both the Achal Das and Hoshang Shah heroically. The bravery of Achal Das on the battlefield is described in the following manner by Sivadas:

सातल सोम हमीर कन्ह जिम जळउहर जालिय /
चढिय खेत चहवाणि आदि कुलवट्ट उजालिय //
मुगुल चिहुर सिरि मंडि वण्णि कंठे तुलसी वासी /

भोजावत भुजबहहि करहि करिमर कालासी //
गढ खंडि पडति गागुरण, दिह दखे सुरताल दल /
संसारि नांव आतम सरणि, 'अचल' बेवि किधा अचल //
-(Sivadas 1991,264)

Achal Das, like his predecessors Soma, Satal, Hamir, and Kanha, fought bravely on the battlefield and thus brightened his whole clan. Wearing a Tulsi garland in the neck, he vowed to fight till his last breath. Achal Das, with his muscle power, annihilated the enemies with his sword like a black serpent. Seeing a terrible crisis on his fort of Gogron, he didn't surrender but fought bravely on the battlefield. In this way, Achal Das got fame and honor both on earth as well as in heaven. (Translation mine).

During the Middle Ages of Chāran literature, heroic poems were at its peak. Many wars took place during the medieval period. Consequently, Chāran poets had abundant content to compose the heroic poems. Poets like Karamasi Mevad, Sooja, Isardas, Dursa Adha, Kalyandas, and Mala Sindu were the prominent heroic poets of medieval Chāran literature. Dursa Adha, in his work Birud Chhihatari, portrayed Maharana Pratap as the hero of his poem. Poet Isardas has composed a great heroic poem of medieval Chāran literature, titled as Hala Zala Ra Kundaliya. In this epic poem, Isardas describes two heroes – Hala and Zala, the uncle and the nephew, on the battlefield. The strength of both the warriors is compared with that of a lion. As the poet says:

वयण घण साँभले रहे किम वीसमो /
सुपह सादूल कुणि गिणै आपा समो / (Isardas, 2000 31)

How can Jasaji, a hero like a lion, stay calm on the battlefield after listening to the thunderclaps of enemies? Because a manly hero, like a lion, does not consider anyone equal to him. (Translation mine).

In the following verse poet Isardas compares his hero Jasaji with an eagle, which is a symbol of fearlessness and victory. Poet says that his hero is like an eagle, standing alone on the battlefield. As Isardas says:

छोह करतालियाँ चिडकला छड्डी /
अभंग जसवंत जुघ गुरड नहँ उड्डी // (Isardas 2000, 35)

With the claps of hands, the sparrows fly away but with the claps of swords on the battlefield, he (Jasaji) is standing like an eagle. (Translation mine).

CONCLUSION:

As above illustrated, from the ancient Chāran literature, through medieval to the modern Chāran literature, we find that all the characters in the heroic poetry of Chāran literature, are men. Chāran poets have portrayed their heroes with strong masculinity. On one hand, the heroes of Chāran literature are depicted as strong, brave, courageous, powerful, fearless who are ready to die for the sake of his community and thus they achieve respectable status after their death in the war. Through this paper, I have made an attempt to understand the connectivity between heroism and masculinity and have noticed that the concept has a strong masculine bias and this bias has also been heavily seen in heroic poems of Chāran literature.

REFERENCES

1. Allison ST and Green JD. 2020. "Nostalgia and Heroism: Theoretical Convergence of Memory, Motivation, and Function." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11:1-13.
2. <http://doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577862>.
3. Beynon, John. 2002. *Masculinities and Culture*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
4. Byrski, M. Christopher. 2007. "The Hero in Sanskrit Drama." In *The Concept of Hero in Indian Culture* edited by Heidrun Brückner, Hugh van Skyhawk, and Claus Peter Zoller, 33 - 44. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
5. Douglas, Harper. n.d. "Hero: Search Online Etymology Dictionary." *Etymology*. Accessed April 18th, 2022.

6. www.etymonline.com/search?q=hero.
7. Doyle, J.A. 1989. *The Male Experience*. Dubuque: W.C. Brown.
8. Freud, Sigmund. 1914. "On Narcissism: An Introduction." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol XIV* edited by Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson, 67 – 104. Translated by James Strachey, and Anna Freud. Toronto: Hogarth Press.
9. Freud, Sigmund. 1949. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Translated by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press.
10. Freud, Sigmund. 1939. *Moses and Monotheism*. Translated by Katherine Jones. New York: Alfred A Knopf.
11. Isardas. 2000. *Hala Zala Ra Kundaliya*. Rajkot: Tirthankar Rohadiya.
12. Schein, Seth L. 1984. *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*. London: University of California Press.
13. Sivdas, Gadan. 1991. *Achaladas Khinchi Ri Vachnika*. Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute.
14. Sussman, Herbert. 2012. "Man as Warrior." *Masculine Identities: The History and Meanings of Manliness*. Oxford: Praeger.
15. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus. 'Masculinity'. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*. Cambridge University Press. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/masculinity>.
16. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. 'Masculinity'. *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster.
17. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/masculinity>.