

Archetypes and Mythical Tropes in *Things Fall Apart* and *Kanthapura*

Kshetrimayum Momo¹, Dr. Sangeeta Laishram² and Khundrakpam Nirupama³

¹Ph.D Scholar, NIT Manipur

²Assistant Professor, NIT Manipur

³Assistant Professor, Ideal Girls' College, Manipur

E-mail: ¹mkshetri03@gmail.com, ²sangeetalaisram7@gmail.com, ³nirukhundrakpam@gmail.com

Abstract—Myth and archetype concerns itself with creation. Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe are not only the masters of literature but also of myth making. In this paper the authors endeavor to explore how these authors have fused their magnum opus with myth and how they have made use of the archetypes drawn from their respective cultures. The authors have invoked Joseph Campbell's classification of archetypes in order to have a better understanding of their role and functions in their novels. The two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Kanthapura* are discussed as per Campbell's classification of the monomyth or the hero's journey. The authors will try to identify the various phases of development of the heroes in these two novels and compare their journeys with that of the established archetypes as are listed by Campbell in his work *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*.

Keywords: Myth, Archetype, Creation, Monomyth.

Introduction

An archetype is a basic model from which copies are made and hence a prototype. Generally speaking, it is the abstract idea of a class of things which represents the most typical and essential characteristics shared by the class; thus a paradigm or exemplar. "An archetype is atavistic and universal, the product of 'the collective unconscious' and inherited from our ancestors." [1] Myth, on the other hand, is a story which is not true. Myth is always concerned with creation and explains how something came to exist. The history and meaning of myth is an ever-evolving one. In the current usage, myth would signify a fiction which conveys a psychological truth. Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe are great myth makers. Mythopoeia or myth making is the conscious creation of a myth. The present paper will deliberate on how these two great litterateurs have created their own private mythologies, inspired by their rich culture and heritage.

Mythical tropes and archetypes play an important role in the works of Achebe and Raja Rao. The archetypes that they have used in their novels are deeply embedded in the cultures and heritage of their people. The authors of this paper will base the article on their understanding of Joseph Campbell's work *The*

Hero with a Thousand Faces. Campbell, in his work, has dealt with the mythical archetypes that connect a story to its heritage of storytelling.

Exploring the Mythical Tropes and Archetypes

The first archetype that Campbell identifies is that of the centrality of the hero's position. The hero has to go through various trials and tribulations in order to empower himself:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. [2]

The essence of the hero's character is rather that of self sacrifice than of bravery. Mythic heroes face hardships and separation from their people for their sake. Initially, he is usually an egoistic and self centered person who has to undergo various trials in the process of which his egos are destroyed and he attains a new identity. His transition usually entails his separation from his family and community. He crosses over to a new and unfamiliar world, challenging himself, from which he eventually returns to the ordinary world. A mythic hero can be anybody but he has to be capable of sacrifice in order to achieve his goal.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is exiled from his native village of Umuofia but ultimately he finds his way back to his village after seven long years, only to end his life to escape from the consequence of killing a white man. Okonkwo functions as an archetype as well as a mythic hero for Achebe to bring out colonial experience. Okonkwo's downfall is the symbol of the destruction of the indigenous tradition and culture by the onslaught of the colonial forces.

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao has depicted Moorthy as someone who is regarded as the young Gandhi by his fellow villagers. The innocent Moorthy's martyrdom elevates him to that of the

mythic hero. His sacrificing nature is testified by his conversation with the Mahatma:

Mahatma Said, 'You wear foreign clothes my son.' – 'It will go Mahatmaji.'

'You perhaps go to foreign Universities' – 'It will go Mahatmaji.'

'You can help your country by going and working among the dumb millions of the villages.' – 'So be it Mahatmaji.' [3]

Moorthy's alienation from his group when he is arrested is another example of why he is considered as a mythic hero. He becomes an archetype of the heroes of India's struggle for independence from the foreign yoke.

In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell refers to the protective figure as the second archetype. According to him, this figure extends supernatural aid to the adventurer:

For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of his journey is with the protective figure (often an old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces which he is about to pass.....what such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny. [2]

The Mahatma acts as the protector in *Kanthapura*. Even though he isn't a character in the novel, he influences the hero's character right from the start of the novel. Moorthy's character are guided by the Gandhian principles, so as is his quest for freedom from the colonial servitude. It's these principles which lend him courage to fight the colonial rule of the British.

Campbell has listed the threshold guardian as the third archetype. This mythical archetype of the guardian is a kind protector who –at the entrance to the zone of the magnified power. Such custodian bound the world in four directions – also up and down – standing for the limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the member of the tribe. [2]

The threshold guardian is the first barrier that the hero faces on his onward journey. This character is rather the hero's protector, someone who makes the hero stronger, than being the story's antagonist. He/she readies the hero for his final challenge to the arch villain. The function of the guardian is to test the hero's worthiness to begin his journey and also to warn him of the perils that lie ahead of him.

Okonkwo's temper serves as his threshold guardian in *Things Fall Apart*. Most of his and his family's hardships are brought upon by his short temper and his irrational and ill advised deeds. His hardcore belief in manliness, violence and domination proves to be his undoing. A prime example of how his belief affects his personality as well as his relationship with others is when he beats his second wife on the eve of the New Yam Festival over a trivial issue:

Okonkwo's second wife had merely cut a few leaves of it to wrap some food and she said so. Without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping. His anger thus satisfied, Okonkwo decided to go out hunting. [4]

In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, the policeman who arrests Moorthy serves as his threshold guardian. The Red-Man is Moorthy's arch enemy, who is hell bent on preventing him from achieving his dream of an independent India. The policeman serves as the tool in the hands of the Red-Man, the first impediment that the mythic hero in the character of Moorthy has to overcome in order to face his enemy in the final challenge of his journey.

The herald is the fourth archetype identified by Campbell. This character announces the challenge which sets off the journey of the hero on. The herald can either be a character or an event capable of upsetting the equilibrium of life that the hero has lived so far.

Rangamma plays the role of the herald in *Kanthapura*. In the novel when the supporters of Moorthy are hounded by the police, it is Rangamma who inspires them to continue their fight:

We shall fight the police for Kenchemma's sake and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of Mahatma. [3]

Her declaration is instrumental in inspiring Moorthy's followers and the villagers to carry on the fight and follow his footsteps.

In *Things Fall Apart*, it is not a character in the novel that acts as the herald but rather an event. When Okonkwo Chops off the head of the messenger, this event serves as the herald of the events to follow:

In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body. Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: 'Why did he do it?'

He wiped his machete on the sand and went away. [4]

It is this incident that announces the impending tragedy that is about to befall Okonkwo and lead him to take his own life.

Campbell also made a reference to the fifth archetype as that of the shape-shifter. This particular archetype refers to characters whose role and personality keeps on changing, often in significant ways. Inconsistency is the core of this archetype. It's usually a person of the opposite sex and maybe the hero's romantic interest. It sometimes acts as a catalyst in possession of a changing character that forces the hero to

change. But the normal function of this character is usually to bring suspense into a story by forcing the hero as well as the readers to question their beliefs and assumptions. Any characters in the story as well as the protagonist and the antagonist may demonstrate at different times in the story the attributes of a shape shifter.

The role of shape shifters is prominent in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Kanthapura*. In *Kanthapura*, Patel Range Gowda is a typical shape shifter who represents the common man in the novel. He is quick to reject the Gandhian principles, which, according to him, is meant only for people with superior ethics. When he agrees to help the Congress it is because of his allegiance to the Hindu faith and since the Mahatma has been projected as the reincarnation of Lord Krishna, he has to pay his support by dint of his faith:

All I know is that what you told about Mahatma is very fine, and the Mahatma is a holy man if the Mahatma says what you say, let the Mahatma's word be the word of God. [3]

Mr. Brown and Rev. Smith play the role of the shape shifter in *Things Fall Apart*. Mr. Brown is the representation of Achebe's attempt at crafting the portrait of a colonial functionary by tempering his bad traits with the good ones. On the other hand, Rev. Smith, Brown's successor, is a jealous, vengeful and manipulative man who stands in stark contrast to his predecessor who is portrayed as always benevolent, if not beneficent. Mr. Brown won over the converts because he lends an ear to the villagers' stories, beliefs and opinions whereas the Reverend is an illustration of the colonial intolerance and despise of the native culture. His character is critiqued in the following lines:

Mr. Brown had thought of nothing but numbers. He should have known that the kingdom of God did not depend on large crowds. Our Lord himself stressed the importance of fewness. Narrow is the way and few the number. To fill the Lord's holy temple with an idolatrous crowd clamoring for signs was a folly of everlasting consequences. Our Lord used the whip only once in His life – to drive the crowd away from His church. [4]

The final archetype that Campbell refers to is that of the villain. The villain is a negative figure, representing things that is despicable and worthy of elimination. Usually the villain takes the form of an antagonist but not all antagonists are villains as sometimes an antagonist is just another person whose goals are opposed to those of the protagonist. The villain is a worthy opponent of the hero and it's against him that the hero must struggle. In the ensuing conflict between the two either of them is destroyed or rendered impotent. The villain is not consciously negative, rather he sees himself as a hero. The role of this archetype in the novels under discussion is significant. The villain archetypes in these novels are the white colonizers against whom the protagonists struggle. But apart from the white colonizers, the protagonists also encounter certain minor characters that function as the villain.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the District Commissioner functions as the villain archetype. He is representative of the white colonial government in Nigeria. He is the prototypical racist colonialist and imagines himself an expert on native African customs and cultures despite having little respect for them. He plans to record his experiences and produce an ethnographic study on local African tribes. This ambitious project proclaims his superior attitude towards the natives. His casual reaction when told about the death of Okonkwo and his rigid ideas concerning the native people are indicative of his colonial mindset:

In the many ways in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about the book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. [4]

The Reverend James Smith also acts as a villain in *Things Fall Apart*. He has far lesser respect and love for the indigenous natives than anyone else. He looks down upon the natives as savages in need of civilization:

He [Mr. Smith] saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as battlefield in which the children of light were locked in moral conflict with the sons of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal [idol]. [4]

In *Kanthapura*, the villain archetype is represented by the colonial British. The protagonist, Moorthy and his followers' revolt is the archetypal journey that India, as a nation has to undergo. Moorthy's struggle suffers a tragic end but nevertheless it also gives birth to a new vigor and dreams about an independent India.

Conclusion

Thus, in the two novels under discussion, *Things Fall Apart* and *Kanthapura*, Achebe and Raja Rao have fused myth with literature and the archetypes that they have been drawn from their respective cultures and traditions. Both the authors have deployed different archetypes to evolve and work out fresh connections and interpretations.

References

- [1] Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*. Penguin Books: Great Britain, 2013, pp. 51.
- [2] Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New World Library, 2008, pp. 30, 69 – 71, 77 – 78.
- [3] Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*. Penguin Books: India, 2014, pp. 49, 80, 153.
- [4] Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann: UK, 2008, pp. 42, 150, 165, 167-168