



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 6. Issue.3. 2019 (July-Sept.)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

TINCHARI MAI: A SHERO FROM THE HIMALAYAN HILLS

DEEPIKA PANT¹, SANJAY SINGH²

¹Dept. of English, Kumaun University, Nainital.

pantdeepika2@gmail.com

²Samvad, Managing Editor, New Delhi.

pratapsanjaysingh@gmail.com

doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.63.204>



ABSTRACT

Himalayan states are known for its beauty and grandeur, but one thing that has always been of great concern is alcohol, a deadly disease that has crippled a large section of the men folk in Uttarakhand. It has devastated many families, but a fringe section of society has always opposed it stoutly. Deepa Nautiyal, better known as Tinchari Mai, born in a remote village of Garhwal, Uttarakhand, was a crusader against alcoholism. She also fought against other odds prevailing in the society. Just like any other hero, her journey too was highly painful and tedious, but she never gave up. This tiny spark grew up into a flame amidst many hiccups. The present paper attempts to analyze the life and deeds of this great Shero, who not only fought against alcohol but also against her ill fate. The making of this shero is analyzed on the basic framework and trajectory given by Joseph Campbell in his much celebrated book 'The Hero with a thousand faces'.

Key Words: Shero/Hero, Monomyth, Carlyle, Joseph Campbell, Tinchari Mai.

With the varying degree of intellect and effect on the intended audience, much has been written on the making of great women and men, who transcend the limitations of time and space to become ageless Sheroes or Heroes. The foremost precept in the making of a shero/hero is what they contribute to the world which needs these larger than life luminaries to light the dark spots which appear more often than not across geographies. The existence of such gifted people was meant to show the light of their wisdom to the people who otherwise were destined to grope in the dark and doomed alley of ignorance. It is pertinent here to quote Thomas Carlyle who vindicates this point of view in his famous work 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History'.

They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these (Carlyle 2).

He further opines that,

Great Men, their manner of appearance in our world's business, how they have shaped themselves in the world's history, what ideas men formed of them, what work they did; on Heroes, namely, and on their reception and performance; what I call Hero-worship and the Heroic in human affairs (Carlyle 2).

Looking around, one will definitely find a tiny bit of a Shero or a Hero in every human being with greater or lesser degree of virtues. The positive impact of one's deeds on the people around proves the point. To further boil down this point to the impact aspect, even if one lights the world of a single person who falls astray, it has right to be seen as a Shero/Hero. It too can be perceived as a Heroic deed though not humungous in geographical reach and number of recipients of that feat. Fighting against an immoral practice affecting even a small number of people can conveniently be bracketed as an act of heroism. In fact, they are creations of the time they live in and the challenges thrown upon them. Those, who show mettle to face the challenges successfully despite all odds, become a source of inspiration and a model for others to follow. The greater the challenges, bigger the stature and the impact of the Shero/Hero would be. Above all, in the making of a Shero/Hero they are invariably accompanied by adverse circumstances which test them to the hilt and help them come out shining. The universal presence of such tests, which define the making of a shero or a hero, become the yarn for the fabric called by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* as "The Monomyth" or in other terms "The Hero's journey".

The pivotal point of this 'Monomyth' is the fact that the endeavours of a Shero/Hero include efforts to orchestrate a tiny flame of enlightenment into an all engulfing inferno devouring the evils of the society in that particular time and space and perhaps beyond them. Such deeds of Deepa Nautiyal, a lady from a nondescript village in remote hills of the Himalayas, are the point of departure in analyzing her as a Shero in the current paper. However, before embarking upon Deepa Nautiyal's journey of making of a shero, it is relevant to discuss the socio-cultural milieu including its pernicious facets she had to witness during her formative years.

Garhwal consists of mountains and valleys with an average height ranging from 1200 meters to 3000 meters. Many parts of this mountainous region are snow clad making life difficult for its inhabitants. Therefore, this naturally not so hospitable region and tough weather conditions coupled with socio-cultural encumbrances has made people's life (predominantly of the womenfolk of the state of Uttarakhand) rough indeed. The norms of a patriarchic society and drudgery have always been the most significant indices of the female misery in these hills. Empirical evidences portray the plight of women of Garhwal where they are still forced to bear the burden of domestic chores as well as duties beyond the hearth. Tinchari Mai, born as Deepa Nautiyal, too inherited all the above ailments of the society when she was born to Rupa and Ramdete Nautiyal of Majyur, a village in remote Thailsain block of Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand.

In a society where the birth of a girl child was considered as a curse to the family Deepa Nautiyal must not have been seen as a source of happiness as a new born to her family. Even before lisping of a couple of years old kid could transform into a clear voice to convey her needs clearly, an emotional catastrophe struck her family as her mother Rupa departed to the heavenly abode when she was only two. The destiny did leave nothing to test Deepa as her father too left the world when she was barely 5 years old. Now an orphan with no one to look after her, she was faced with the crisis of her very survival before a generous remote relative decided to adopt her. As was the custom then in the hills of Garhwal like elsewhere in the country in pre-independent India or with certain vestiges even today the scourge of child marriage gripped Deepa.

At the age of seven, when she was hardly able to understand the world before her, she was married to Ganesh Ram, a 17 years her senior, who was havaldar in the British Army.

Too young to understand the meaning of matrimony, Deepa was very happy on her wedding day. Dressed in fine clothes, jewelry and garlands round her neck, her happiness knew no bounds. The sound of the drumbeats and the notes of the pipes fascinated her. Surveying her bridal finery again and again she danced with joy. She would tell her young friends, "See, I am wearing such beautiful clothes today. ...I am really enjoying all this." Oblivious of her surroundings, she enjoyed the lavish wedding feast. When the groom and his party arrived in the village, she rushed out with the other

girls to see the marriage party. When it was time to leave, she ran and sat inside the palanquin and did not weep (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 17-18).

Deprived of good memories of her early childhood Deepa got a guardian like husband with a tender heart, who would bathe, dress and feed his child bride. But the fate had some other designs and Ganesh Ram was killed in a battle when she was still in her teens. "Deepa was inconsolable" (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 19) and she remained for a week in Rawalpindi where her husband was posted. Now a widow, Deepa came back to Garhwal. "There was no one in her natal home and none of her in-laws would be willing to support a "widow" (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 19). Being an orphan and a widow in any space and time are the worst trials for any female and she had to face both without even a tiniest support to cling on. Perhaps this was the moment for Deepa to realize her, "chance moment in the world of space and time, this recognition of, and shift of ...(her) emphasis to, the universal life that throbs and celebrates its victory in the very kiss of ...(her) own annihilation, this *amor fati*, "love of fate," this is where she must have felt "the redeeming ecstasy" (Campbell 20).

Deepa, the unwelcome widow was ill treated as it was and is still common in the Indian society to an extent even today. Treated as a bad omen for a fault of fate she decided to leave life of a household.

One day Deepa left her in-laws' house and went to Lahore. She sought refuge in a temple where she met a sannyasin; the sannyasin initiated Deepa into her fold and gave her the name Ichchagiri Mai. Severing all ties with this world and forgetting the sorrows of her past life, Ichchagiri Mai began life anew (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 20).

Being unwelcome and treated as bad omen were in the words of Campbell "the crisis of appearance" leading to the "call to adventure" for her which eventually led her to a sort of "historical undertaking" (Campbell 42).

Deepa's decision, without any frailties the women across the globe are fallaciously seen with, was firm as proved during her long and arduous journey as a sannyasin. This was the time of transition for her, enormity of which was still in the womb of time. But before that, as empirical observations mark the life of a young widow, it won't have been easy for her to come out of the perilous world which tends to grip and suck the blood like a leech on its easy prey. She must have three choices then, firstly, to fall like a victim to the vices of the world around her, secondly, to behave like an accomplice helping extend the tyranny against folks like she herself was then and thirdly, to become a Shero and invest her efforts for the betterment of the mankind. She opted for a path which only a shero could have decided to tread on. "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of ...wonder" (Campbell 23) and this venturing was meant to bring boons for the society. Her journey, henceforth, was going to be that of the contemplation and comprehension of the world beyond ordinary.

Deepa Nautiyal, now as Ichchagiri Mai moved to Haridwar, the land popular for its religious importance since times immemorial. This stay of about nine months was going to witness the first glimpses of her as a Shero.

In 1947, Ichchagiri Mai went to Haridwar and stayed at Chandighat for a period of 9 months. Seeing the misdeeds of sham ascetics and monks, she became sad. The whole day these men would smoke opium and hashish and drink alcohol. Ichchagiri Mai decided to expose their wicked deeds. This marked the beginning of her real struggle against social evils. Even though she was one against many she continued to oppose them (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 20).

Mai, in the true ascetic life fashioned by heroes of yore like Gautama Buddha and Mahavira, began to travel from place to place and occasionally staying at a few places for brief spells of time. This led her to understand, "a majestic representation of the difficulties of the hero-task, and its sublime import when it is profoundly conceived and solemnly undertaken...." (Campbell 24).

Ichchagiri Mai, who as observed earlier started travelling from place to place until she reached Sigaddi Bhabar in Kotdwara where she built a temporary dwelling for shelter from the vagaries of the weather. "As the time passed by, she began to realize that there was an acute scarcity of water in Sigaddi village. The local women had to carry water over long distances" (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 20). Ichchagiri Mai, whose legend was,

To have seldom rested content to regard the world's great heroes as mere human being who broke past the horizon that limited their fellows and returned with such boons as any man with equal faith and courage might have found (Campbell 174).

Disturbed by the plight of the women of Sigaddi village who were forced to carry water on their heads from long distances, Mai decided to take the matter to the local officials to attract their attention towards this problem. But the officials were unmoved. Mai, bestowed with the indomitable spirit of a real shero now decided to move to Delhi and do whatever it takes to solve the problem.

Not one to give up easily, Mai travelled to Delhi and sat in protest outside Prime Minister Nehru's house. When Nehru came out to go to office she stood in front of his car. The policeman on duty tried to drag her out of the way but she refused to budge. Pandit Nehru then alighted from his car and heard her account of the hardships faced by the women of Sigaddi (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 20-21).

Mai was battling with fever at the time she sat on the protest but she accepted to go to the hospital only when her wish was granted. "What villagers had been struggling to achieve but had failed, Mai achieved single-handedly" (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 21).

In another significant feat, Mai the shero was to take up the cause of education albeit the fact that she, due to her rough childhood never got a chance to acquire education. Mohan Singh, a local teacher gave shelter to Mai who by now grew old and frail though just physically as her resolve was firm as ever, when she moved to Motadhak village from Sigaddi. Mai was told that there was no educational facility in and around the village for the kids.

Even though Mai was illiterate yet she understood the significance of education. She told Mohan Singh, 'Master Baba, I am illiterate but I do not want to see any child being deprived of education in this village. The village will definitely have its own school' (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 21).

To set up the school Mai not only contributed by giving all her money for the cause but all ensured enough amount was raised through donations.

Within 3-4 months the school building was ready. Mai had a stone laid in memory of her late husband whom she loved and respected highly...Today this school has become an intermediate college (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 21).

Nevertheless, detached from the world in true sense she never expected anything for herself for her endeavours aimed at bringing joy to the people, Mai left for Badrinath and from there to Kedarnath where she spent about four years. This sojourn of about four years at Kedarnath, was a sort of interregnum for seeking spiritual insight. Mai returned to Pauri, a place which was to eventually witness her circle of shero duties getting complete. Mai was to reveal her another facet before the world.

The universal goddess makes her appearance to men under multitude of guises; for the effects of creation are multitudinous, complex and of mutually contradictory kind when experienced from the viewpoint of the created world (Campbell 259).

The metamorphosis of a Shero from coming out of the cocoon of a simple life of a human being to acquiring a larger than life stature was now on the brink of completion. The spark moment was not far as one day she accidentally saw a man coming out of a local liquor (Tinchari) shop and dancing wildly on the street in inebriated state. The drunkard also hurled obscenities at a group of women passing by on their way to forest

to collect fuel wood and fodder. Then he passed out and fell into the drain (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 21).

All of this proved a flash point for Mai who was infuriated not only to see the plight of the women being hurled abuses but also the incapacitated state of the drunkard who represented the deplorable condition of most of the males of the society of the region. She went to the administrative officer and narrated the whole incident. However, the official hesitated to take any action against those running the shop. This made Mai, at that very moment, an angry incarnate of Shakti. Announcing before everyone standing there including the official, she said,

Now, see for yourself what is happening right under your nose. You will not do anything. But I will not let this happen again. I will set this shop on fire even if you imprison me. I will give up my life but I will not let anyone sell Tinchari.....Mai got some kerosene and matches and stood in front of the shop. The door of the shop was bolted from inside. Mai banged on the door but it did not open. She then picked up a huge stone and hurled it at the door. The door broke down. She saw some men drinking inside the shop. Realizing that the door has broken down, the men ran helter-skelter. Mai could no longer control her anger and she stepped forward to burn down the shop. No one in the crowd had the courage to stop her. At that time Mai had assumed the fierce form of the goddess Kali. She sprinkled kerosene all over and then lit a match, soon the shop was ablaze and within a few moments it was all over (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 22-23).

After the completion of her task, Mai went to the official's residence to court her arrest. Instead of arresting her officer realized the bigger motif of her action and therefore drove her to Lansdowne. Now Ichchagiri Mai was given the epithet of Tinchari Mai, her most famous name, a name which inspires even today the torchbearers of the crusade against the menace of alcoholism. She went from village to village to keep the flame of struggle against Tinchari burning. She also began to sensitize womenfolk to learn new skills to complement their livelihood. Tinchari Mai worked tirelessly till she breathed her last on 19th June, 1992 (The Emancipated Womenfolk of Uttarakhand 24).

Tinchari Mai, an inspiration for women was truly a shero when her deeds for women, the marginalized section of the hilly society are evaluated. She was a true shero who radiates when seen in the light of what Thomas Carlyle set as indices for great men.

We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; and this not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain, as I say, of native original insight, of manhood and heroic nobleness;—in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them (Carlyle 2-3).

Work Cited

Campbell, J. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Third Edition. New World Library Novato, California. 2008. Print.
Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*. BibliLife Reproduction Series, LLC. Print.
The Emancipated Women-folk of Uttarakhand. A joint presentation of HARC, Dehradun and PRIYA, New Delhi.

Web. 5 January 2018.

<https://www.pria.org/knowledge_resource/The_EmanicipatedWomen_Folk_of_Uttarakhand>.