

Self-Realization In Devdutt Pattanaik's Shiva To Shankara: Giving Form To The Formless

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The sacred stories of a particular culture can be termed as mythology. The mythological stories help people to lead a righteous life with noble principles. Indian religious systems propagate ethics. The noble notions and guiding beliefs of Indian culture can be termed as Indian ethos. These aspects can lead a person to live a fruitful life on the world. Devdutt Pattanaik is an Indian mythologist and an author of more than fifty books including the important ones such as *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata*, *The Book of Ram and Shiva to Shankara: **Giving Form to the Formless***. His writings have focused upon religion, mythology and management. The present study aims at an analysis of *Shiva to Shankara: **Giving Form to the Formless*** of Devdutt Pattanaik so as to highlight the significance of self-realization in one's life. In Hinduism, self-realization means becoming aware of one's true self. The self is identified with the eternal soul and it is not associated with worldly matters. In this work, Devdutt Pattanaik to decodes the profound philosophical meaning behind the phallic symbol of Lord Shiva. The present study analyses how the characters such as Daksha, Brahma, Taraka, and Bhasmasura have failed to realize their true selves. Realizing one's true self is prerequisite to liberation from Samsara that is life cycle: Birth, Death and Rebirth.

Keywords: Mythology, Myth, Indian Ethos, Hinduism, Self-realization, Shiva, Renunciation, Detachment, Soul, and Liberation.

Introduction

The mythical stories are passed down from generation to generation orally and they are predominantly sacred in nature. These stories are considered to be true by the followers of particular culture. They explain the nature and function of the world. They bring reasons for the social customs and cultural practices. Even they formulate certain codes for people to lead a peaceful and fruitful life. These myths serve as an effective medium for inculcating the moral values in the minds of people. Indian mythology consists of several stories which are primarily found in religious texts like the interpretations of Vedas and Puranas. Generally, all religious and philosophical systems propagate ethical elements. Indian ethos refers to the fundamental

beliefs and noble notions of Indian culture which can help a person to lead a good life on the world. Devdutt Pattanaik is the renowned and prolific author and mythologist. Some of his notable works are *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata*, *The Book of Ram and Shiva to Shankara: Giving Form to the Formless*. The present study aims at an analysis of *Shiva to Shankara: Giving Form to the Formless* of Devdutt Pattanaik so as to highlight the significance of self-realization in one's life. In Hinduism, self-realization means becoming aware of one's true self. The self is identified with the eternal soul and it is not associated with the worldly matters. The present study analyses how the characters such as Daksha, Brahma, Taraka, and Bhasmasura have failed to realise their true selves. Realizing one's true self is prerequisite to liberation from Samsara the cycle of life: Birth, Death and Rebirth.

For instance, Daksha, one of the sons of Brahma, is known for his pride. His arrogance is reflected in his attachment with his superior position. He takes part in a meeting which is attended by all the divine beings. Everyone pays their obeisance to him and Daksha is quite content with it. However, Lord Shiva does not stand up and respect Daksha. This act of Lord Shiva has angered Daksha. He thinks that Lord Shiva is insulting him but Shiva's act is neither out of disrespect nor out of hatred. He remains indifferent to the worldly matters such as social status. Devdutt Pattanaik depicts skilfully Daksha's arrogance:

Daksha, the patriarch of Vedic culture, commanded the respect of all. One day, he was invited to a gathering of gods. As Daksha entered, proud and noble, all the gods rose. They joined their hands to salute this supreme patron of the yagna. Daksha was pleased. He swept a glance around the assembly, accepting the salutations of the gods. Then his glance fell upon a solitary, seated figure and his expression darkened. He looked upon Shiva who continued to remain seated. Shiva did not want to insult Daksha, but he remained seated because he was oblivious to Daksha's exalted position. He was not impressed by the arrival of the patriarch, nor was he disdainful. He was simply indifferent, untouched by it all. (11)

Daksha is unaware of his true self. He does not realize the truth that he is defined only by his constant soul. He believes that his identity is determined by external factors such as the social status, pride and respect which are transitory in nature. As a result, he seeks validation from the external world and he expects that all should pay respect to him. Without realizing one's self, one gets trapped in the Maya, the illusory assumptions. The false assumptions and ego of an individual certainly can bring harmful effects to him or her.

At the beginning of the creation, Lord Brahma emerges from the lotus which grows from Lord Vishnu's navel. Being alone, Brahma is afraid and confused. He wants to know the purpose of his existence. He starts creating the world in order to know about himself. At first, he creates four sons known as Sanat Kumars and then he creates ten sons. Brahma splits himself and he creates a woman named Ushas. Devdutt Pattanaik writes:

Lonely, confused and frightened, he wondered who he was and why he existed. In his quest for answers he went about creating the world. From his mind he moulded four sons, the Sanat Kumars. They were mere boys. They were unwilling to multiply and populate the world. They ran away. So Brahma created another set of sons, the ten Prajapatis. These were willing to multiply but did not know how. So Brahma split himself into two. From his left half emerged a woman called Ushas, the dawn. As soon as Ushas appeared before Brahma, Brahma

experienced an insatiable sensory thirst that needed to be quenched. Overwhelmed with yearning, Brahma lunged at his daughter, desperate to unite with her. (35)

When Ushas appears before him, he is consumed by the desire to possess her. He has created her for understanding his true self. However, instead of reflecting on his inner self, he seeks to possess her. Brahma grows four heads to always look at her. When she flies upwards, he develops a fifth head. Lord Shiva takes a form known as Bhairava and beheads his fifth head to elevate him to a higher state, free from any baser passions. Though Brahma is the God of creation, he becomes entangled in the illusion and fails to realize his inner self until Bhairava forces him to do so. Similarly, humans define themselves through false identities and do not understand the truth that those are illusory and transitory. Their true identity lies within their inner selves. Lust can be properly channelized otherwise it can do harm. Fortunately, Bhairava beheads the fifth head of Brahma to control his passion. It teaches the important lesson to humans that the baser passion lust can be controlled and suitably dealt with. It can invite troubles to a person and it is a significant aspect in the process of self-realization.

An asura named Taraka desires to obtain power. He performs tapasya to achieve his goal. Satisfied with his penance, Lord Brahma appears in front of him to grant a boon. Taraka asks for the boon of immortality but Brahma refuses to bestow as death is inevitable. Taraka cleverly asks for another boon that he should die at the hands of a six days old child, believing that this is impossible. Devdutt Pattanaik writes:

Once, an asura named Taraka was desirous of attaining power to be able to defeat the gods and control the world. He decided to perform tapasya to achieve his goal. He sat still, completely absorbed in his penance, refusing to react to any worldly stimuli, with no thought of time. Such was his concentration that God appeared before him in the form of Brahma. 'What boon do you seek, Taraka?' asked Brahma. Taraka's single-minded pursuit was to acquire siddhis and material gains that would enable him to be master of all he desired. Rather than use the moment to liberate himself from the cycle of rebirth, Taraka asked Brahma to make him immortal. When Brahma firmly replied that it was not possible since all living organisms must eventually die, Taraka asked for a boon that would make him almost immortal. 'If I must die, let it be at the hands of a child who can fight battles when he is six days old, on the seventh day of his life.' (57)

After receiving this boon, Taraka becomes invincible. He has defeated the gods and rules all the three worlds. Eventually, he is killed by the six days old child, Karthikeya, son of Lord Shiva. Tapasya is done to purify the mind, to understand the reality, and to realize the self. He misuses tapasya (deep meditation) for a wrong cause. Though he has the ability to perform intense tapasya, he uses it for gaining power and material wealth and not for spiritual growth. He does not recognize the truth that worldly things are temporary and illusory. Unfortunately, he believes that the true contentment lies in the worldly affairs. However, true contentment can be attained only through self-realization that is breaking the life cycle and attaining moksha or salvation.

Similarly, another asura named Bhasmasura seeks power. His destructive desire is portrayed adeptly by Devdutt Pattanaik:

He performed severe penance and invoked Shiva. 'You have pleased me with your devotion,' said Shiva. 'Ask what you will and it shall be granted.' That was what the asura was longing to hear. 'If I so much as place my hand on the head of another, may he be reduced to a heap

of ashes, my Lord,' he asked. Bound by his promise, Shiva said, 'So be it.' The wily asura was keen to test his new-found power and he decided to try it out on Shiva himself. (108)

He performs tapasya in order to attain great power. He succeeds in it and Lord Shiva comes before him to grant him a boon. Bhasmasura asks Lord Shiva for a boon that if he places his hand on the head of someone, then he or she should turn to ash. Empowered by this boon, Bhasmasura wants to use this power against Lord Shiva at first. Lord Vishnu approaches Bhasmasura in the form of a female enchantress Mohini to seduce him. Consumed by the desire, he dances with her. When she makes a dance movement by placing her hand on her head and urges him to follow the same, he too does the same and turns into ash. It brings to death and destruction to Bhasmasura who has not realised that the true and permanent contentment lies in the union with the eternal and everlasting soul (Paramatma).

Like Taraka, Bhasmasura also uses tapasya for an immoral and ignoble cause. His desire for power and woman leads him to his downfall. Since, he is blinded by the Maya, he runs after worldly matters. He is unaware that these are temporary and illusory. They do not enable him to lead a better life. Humans should realize that the self is not defined by ego but it is only identified with the eternal soul. The real bliss lies in the union of the individual soul with the Universal Soul. The worldly matters and pleasures associated with them are not permanent and they are illusory ones. Hence humans should dissuade from the worldly pleasures and aim for the union of their souls with the Universal Soul. From the analysis, the readers could understand that when one attains self-realization, then he or she is free from delusion and leads a fruitful life. Devdutt Pattanaik has delineated vividly about the significance of self-realization and the importance to lead life righteously to break the life cycle, Samsara and attain moksha or salvation.

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