

An Adversity that Led to Achievement: Analyzing Dhruva's Rise from Humiliation

Ranjan Sigdel

Lecturer, Department of Sanskrit Sahitya, NSU, University Campus, Dang

Email: ranjansigdel@gmail.com

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Abstract

This essay explores the story of Dhruva, a legendary prince in Hindu mythology, who overcame humiliation and achieved cosmic reign through his grit and unwavering devotion. This essay examines the story of the prince Dhruva not from Bhagavata Mahapurana but from a long poem by a contemporary Nepali poet Panthi. In this version the content, theme, language and styles are almost identical to its source tale i.e. Bhagavat Mahapurana. However, in many verses the gem of poetic genius of poet Panthi clearly shines through. The essay focuses on two key aspects of Dhruva's story: his humiliation by his step-mother, which prompted him to embark on a spiritual journey, and his attainment of cosmic reign, which symbolized his elevation to the highest level of spiritual realization. The essay analyzes the themes of adversity and perseverance that underpin Dhruva's story and shows how they offer valuable insights into how a feeling of humiliation could potentially lead one to achieving ultimate goal.

Keywords: myth, divine, Dhruva, emotion, humiliation

Introduction

Dhruva is a mythical legend of Hindu mythology who is portrayed as an epitome of grit and success. Several poems and fictions and films have been made based on this character over the centuries. Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam is one among such. It's a long narrative poem written in Sanskrit by a contemporary Nepali writer Bhima Kanta Panthi. The content of this poem is derived from a famous tale "Dhruvopakhyan" in Bhagavat Mahapurana. Dhruvopakhyan which literally means a "narration of Dhruva" depicts major life events surrounding the legendary prince Dhruva.

The storyline is linear. It begins with Dhruva's childhood experience and describes his all major life events in a chronological order. There are a total of 8 cantos in this work. The first, second and third cantos are more relevant to the purpose of this piece. The first canto describes the circumstances that led to Dhruva's humiliation and his determination to achieve a position higher than that of his brother and, the second is

centered on Dhruva's quest for divine grace and the hardship he subjected to himself during the pursuit. The third captures the emergence of the god Vishnu and his divine blessing of Dhruva's cosmic reign. The analysis of Dhruva's rise from humiliation is grounded on these three chapters. This paper bases the theory of grit propounded by the great psychologist Dr. Duckworth to prove that an adversity can indeed lead someone to achieve his success.

A cursory look of the work in question may give a reader familiar with the source tale an impression of a banal rephrasing but a close examination will reveal the distinct marks the poet has added in his version. However, one thing that jars with the modern reader's taste is the verbatim inclusion of the tedious narrative digression and absurdly fantastic mythical account of the source.

Methodology

The study has utilized a qualitative research methodology, specifically a literary analysis approach. The primary data source was the text of Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam, which was analyzed using a close reading technique. The analysis focused on identifying the key themes, motifs, and narrative elements that underpin Dhruva's story and how they relate to the human experiences of adversity and become a cause for their potential rise.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through a careful reading of the text of Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam, with a focus on the sections relevant to the research question and objective. The study also drew on secondary sources such as academic articles and books that discussed the themes of Hindu mythology and spirituality, as well as literary criticism of Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam and similar works.

The scope of the study

This study aims to explore, whether a negative emotion can potentially lead to the success using Dhruva's story as reference. To achieve this purpose this study is limited to examining the part of the story where Dhruva's experiences of humiliation and the events that led to his ultimate achievement of the cosmic reign.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the essay is the concept of grit and resilience and its role in achieving success. This concept is proposed by various scholars and researchers across different fields. One prominent figure who has extensively studied and written about grit is Dr. Angela Duckworth, a psychologist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania. In her work *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance* published in 2016 AD Dr. Duckworth defines grit as the ability to persevere in the face of adversity, setbacks, and challenges.

The concept of resilience generally refers to the ability to bounce back from adversity, overcome challenges, and thrive in the face of difficult circumstances. Dhruva's

story is analyzed based on this concept of grit and resilience, whereby he overcomes humiliation and despair. She places importance of grit over talent and skill to achieve success.

By examining Dhruva's experiences through the lens of grit, the study seeks to shed light on the various aspects and components of grit, such as the psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. It aims to explore how grit can be cultivated, nurtured, and enhanced in individuals facing challenges, and how it contributes to their overall success. We can directly connect it to the theoretical framework which emphasizes grit, resilience, inner transformation, and overcoming challenges.

Review of literature

While the story of Dhruva is well-known in Hindu mythology, there has been limited scholarly analysis of his rise from humiliation and the factors that contributed to his eventual achievements. And in case of the Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam no single and complete or critical study has been carried out focusing this work so far. Some fragments of whatever has been made on it are presented below.

Timilsinia (2073) has shed some light on Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam in his Ph.d. dissertation "Jagadambika Vaibhavam Mahakavyasa Sāhityikam Anuśīlanam (A literary investigation into Jagadambika-Vaibhavam epic). Jagadambika Vaibhavam is another similar work by the poet Panthi published in 2056 BS. Dr. Timilsina in his thesis has presented a brief overview of Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam. His discussion about it is centered on the following topic. The source of Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam and how it qualifies as a court epic. The purpose of the creating Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam, its theme, narrative, characterization, the use of literary prosody and embellishments and emotions. However, his study includes nothing that supports this study.

Panthi (2055 BS) in the preface Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam has sought to distinguish this poem from other similar works. Under the title of "Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam - Mahakāvyaśya Samkshipta Paricaya (A brief introduction to Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam epic) he has discussed three key aspects. First, he has delved into the poet himself, exploring his genius and contribution. Next, he has explored the distinctive features of the work in question. Finally, he has offered a justification for the seemingly non-representative title. Yet a critical study focusing on Dhruva's journey from adversity to achievement is lacking in this study.

Ātreya,(2055 BS) in the same preface of Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam, has contributed to the discussion by providing an eight-page analysis titled "Kavi Pandit Bhima kanta Panthi: Parichaya ra kāvya-Yatrā" (Learned poet Bhima Kanta Panthi: An introduction and his poetic journey). Although in this analysis, he explores the poet's background and poetic abilities content related to paper is nowhere in his discussion.

Adhikari (2077) however, has sought to assess the poem in question in his essay entitled

"Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam Mahā-kāvya mā Vihangam Dristi" (A bird's eye view on Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam) in the biennial journal yet this study is mostly digressive. It has not offered anything significant except for a banal retelling of the tale and a trite eulogy of the poet not anything useful for this study at least.

Discussion

As the study in question aims to highlight the psychological fact that an adversity could even lead to one's success the following discussion establishes how this fact is actual. It has explored the story of Dhruva with reference to the verses of Jagadīśvara-vaibhavam and demonstrated that these particular psychological facts can be traced in the characters of even the legendary tales. It's necessary to have an understanding of the basic storyline. Hence a summary of first three cantos have been provided here that are relevant to the study.

A Summary from first canto

The story begins with the introduction of the king Uttanapada and his royal family. It proceeds with the description of his personal relationship with his close family members; his wives and sons. He had two wives/queens Suniti and Suruci. Suniti was his elder wife and Suruci was younger. They had a child each: Dhruva and Uttama. The king favoured his younger wife Suniti while the elder Suniti was fallen into neglect. The king was helpless before his younger wife Suruci. It was Suruci who would frequently stay with Uttanapada be it in the royal courts or in private rooms. Once two princes happened to enter the royal court during their gameplay, where both the king and the queen were presiding on the throne. Seeing the parents sitting there Uttama ran towards them and climbed over but when Dhruva attempted, the step-mother pushed him down rebuking. She said although he was a prince he still didn't deserve to sit on the throne. If he really wished to do so, he would have to do be reborn as HER son or from her womb. These bitter words had not only humiliated Dhruva, but also had humiliated his mother, Suniti. This public humiliation of his mother and his own was not something bearable to the child. He ran towards his mother with eyes filled with tears. Unfortunately, the mother was too weak to fight back against the insult. In her desperation she encouraged the child to go the jungle and acquire divine favor through Tapasya, a penance and attain a position higher than that of Uttama. Although Suniti told Dhruva to perform Tapasya she hadn't actually meant to send him to the jungle. But the resolute child took her words seriously and left for the jungle at night evading the notices of his mother and the royal guards. On his way to the jungle, he encountered the celestial sage Narada who tried his best to bring the child back to the palace. Dhruva's resolution was too firm to be swayed by any persuasion. The sage instead gave in to Dhruva's arguments and determination and ended up advising him the process and method to be followed during his pursuit. This event marks the conclusion of the first canto.

A Summary from canto two:

This canto captures essentially two episodes. The first presents King Uttanapada's experiences of emotional turmoil in the wake of Dhruva's sudden disappearance from the palace with a subsequent comforting assurance by sage Narada. The second consists of the description of Dhruva's incredible feats and daring exploits, such as avoiding food and water completely for a month and even ceasing to breathe for two full months, thereby controlling the breathing air of all living creatures across the planet while in meditation. He could cause the earth to be compacted wherever he set foot. This outlandish deed of Dhruva unleashed a state of terror across the world. The unprepared and terrified humans along with the deities turned to the supreme god. The god explained the reason behind this unusual phenomenon taking place and assured them with a resolution. Then the Supreme god set off to where Dhruva was meditating. Here concludes the second canto. This canto opens, however, with a continuation of the immediately preceding event i.e., the instruction by sage Narada to Dhruva to be followed in the process of practicing meditation. Admittedly, the narrative sequence that is divided into two cantos is too closely connected to be separated into distinct parts.

Summary from canto three:

This canto describes only one major event that of the divine blessing of Dhruva's celestial reign which marks the culmination of his pursuit. It begins with the supreme god Visnu approaching Dhruva. The storyline is as follows: The sudden appearance of the god disturbed Dhruva's meditative visualization. As soon as Dhruva opened his eyes to check the reason for this obstacle, he was speechless with amazement. He saw the god smiling right before him. He then collected himself and began to praise the god verbally. The god was already pleased with his fervent devotion. The omniscient knew the purpose of his *Tapasya*. So, he blessed Dhruva with more than what he had wished for. The blessing consisted Dhruva's uncontested reign for 26000 years in a celestial domain known as Dhruva Loka.

Thus, it's clear from this summary that adversities can lead a person to a level that he never imagines to attain. Had Dhruva not been subjected to his stepmother's humiliation he would never have achieved the position of Dhruva Pada. This story shows that our greatest strengths often emerge from our greatest struggles, and that our response to adversity is what ultimately determines our success. Let's dive into themes of the text to gain insight into Dhruva's ups and downs.

Stepmother's humiliation

Dhruva was denied the love and fair treatment that a child naturally seeks from his parents. He may not have expected a motherly affection from a step mother. However, his expectation of love from his own father was genuine. The stepmother had humiliated Dhruva in front of his father. The way she spoke to Dhruva was shocking for the child. The following verse captures this humiliation:

वत्स त्वया न च ममोदरमन्वभावि सामान्ययोषिदुदरादजनि क्षितीशात् ॥

आरोढुमिच्छसि नृपासनमेहि मूढ तप्त्वा तपो ममपुनर्जठ राधिवासम् (Pnathi, 2055, P. 8).

The tone and words of his step mother were filled with resentment and disdain. By emphasizing that Dhruva is not her biological son and reminding him of his birth to a woman of lower status, Suniti seeks to undermine his legitimacy as a contender for the throne. Her use of the derogatory term "little blockhead" suggests a deep-seated resentment and perhaps a belief that Dhruva is naïve or foolish for aspiring to a position beyond his station. Suniti's proposition for Dhruva to undertake severe austerities and be reborn from her womb is a manipulative and unrealistic demand. By setting this condition, she places an insurmountable obstacle before Dhruva, making it nearly impossible for him to achieve his aspirations.

Dhruva's Father's helplessness

Dhruva was indeed denied the love and fair treatment that a child naturally seeks from his parents. He may not in fact have expected a motherly affection from a step mother. However his expectation of love from his own father was genuine. But his expectation crumbles down when the father remains silent before her mistreatment. This is how the father's helplessness is presented:

इत्थं विमातृमुखनिर्गतदुर्वचोऽसौ श्रुत्वा पितुर्मुखमपश्यदतीव दीनः ॥

पत्नीवशंवदतया जनकेऽप्युदारे दण्डाहतोऽहिरिव रोषवशं जगामः (Pnathi, 2055, P. 8).

Dhruva's father did not object to the mistreatment inflicted upon Dhruva by Suniti. His lack of protest and his cowardice in the face of Suniti's mistreatment indicates a failure of his parental responsibilities and a display of weakness. By choosing not to speak against Suruci's actions, he effectively condones the unjust treatment of his own son. This inaction reveals his timidity and helplessness before Suruchi as he fails to fulfil his duty as a father. He stands as a silent witness of this abuse.

Dhruva's despondency

The mistreatment of his step mother made Dhruva utterly despondent. A sense of dejection is filled into Dhruva's heart when he loses his faith in his father. He approaches his mother and cries intensely for an extended period. When she asks him why he is crying, Dhruva is unable to articulate his feelings because his anguish has overwhelmed him. Dhruva's intense crying and the subsequent inability to express his emotions to his mother indicate a deep-seated distress and emotional turmoil within him. This despondency is depicted in this way:

मातुःसकासमुपगत्यरूरोददीर्घं पृष्टस्तयापि गलरूद्धतयैव नोचे ॥

बालं निजाङ्कमुपनीय जगाद माता केनाद्य तेऽप्यकृतं वद मेऽनुगृह्य ॥ (Pnathi, 2055, P. 8).

This bitter insult completely shatters Dhruva. The mother took him in her arm and lovingly asked the reason behind his crying yet he won't utter a single word to her. This

silence and continuous crying made her anxious. This event shows how deeply Dhruva was dejected. The bitterness in her voice had greatly impacted the Dhruva. The following verse captures Dhruva' helplessness.

Dhruva' grit and resilience

Dhruva was not an ordinary child who would succumb to minor adversities, and his mother played a pivotal role in transforming his dejection into determination. Although a queen she had no courage to fight back against her cowife's mistreatment. In a way she was helpless too. She couldn't help crying and in her desperation she said to him to go the forest and perform Tapasya to be blessed with larger kingdom than that Uttama would possibly have. The following verse shows how Suniti reacts to her son's dejection:

सत्यं जगाद सुरूचिर्हि तपस्तपेति किंवा न सिद्ध्यति कृतं तपसां जनानाम् ॥
 तस्मात्तपोऽर्जय हरिं हृदये निधाय राज्यं भविष्यति तवोत्तममुत्तमीयात् ॥
 सत्यं जगाद सुरूचिर्हि तपस्तपेति किंवा न सिद्ध्यति कृतं तपसां जनानाम् ॥
 तस्मात्तपोऽर्जय हरिं हृदये निधाय राज्यं भविष्यति तवोत्तममुत्तमीयात् ॥ (Pnathi, 2055, P. 9).

The inspirational words of his mother kindles a fire of determination and ambition within Dhruva. Although. the mother Suniti had not intended to send the little child to the forest but the resolute child took her words seriously and sneaked out of the palace. This is how Panthi describes in his poem:

"इत्थं सपत्न्युपरि रोषवशेन राज्ञी बालत्वमप्यविगणय्य तपो निदेश्य ॥
 कुत्रापि कर्मणि जगाम सुतस्तुपुर्यां स्तप्तुं तपो वनमगान्मनुजैरदृष्टः" ॥ (Pnathi, 2055, P. 9)

Sage Narada encountered Dhruva midway. He tried to persuade Dhruva to return home. He used every possible strategy for the purpose. Narada reminded Dhruva of his tender age and difficult nature of penance yet the child was too determined to be swayed or scared by any means. The insult had shattered his heart beyond recovery and he was resolute enough to attain whatever he had wished for:

मात्रोपदिष्टिमिति ते तपसिप्रवृत्ति राराधनं भगवतोऽप्यतिदुष्करं हि ॥
 आजन्ममृत्युवधियोगसमाधिनापि नैवाप्नुयन्तिमुनयः किमुमानवास्तु ॥(Panthi 2055, p 10)

Narada instead gave in to his arguments. Dhruva then ventured into the dreadful forest. The measures he took there during the worship of the god was even more severe. "For the first one month he took just Ber fruits as his food every three days. He subsisted on just fallen dried leaves for the next month and in the third month it was the water that he took once in a 9 days. This shows how resolute he was to obtain what he had desired. Panthi depicts this exotic feat in this way:

मासं नयन् त्रिदिवसैर्वदराशनोऽन्ते २।२४

मासे परेऽपि पतितैस्तृणशुष्कपर्णैः राहारयन्नगमयद्विवसैः स षड्भिः ॥

तद्वृत्तीयमपि मासमपः प्रपीय । नित्ये चरन् स्वनियमान् नवमे दिनेऽन्ते (Panthi, 2055, p 24-25)

The context offers an instance that resolution and grit is something that drives a person to success. Dhruva's such severe measures finally led him to achieve what he had wished for. In fact, attained more than what initially he had desired.

Achievement of Dhruva

Thus, Dhruva's perseverance finally pays off. The god Vishnu appeared before him in the 6th month and blessed him with more than what he had wished for. Dhruva achieved a position far greater than that of his half-brother Uttama. He was granted Druvapat; a large celestial kingdom achieved by no one ever. The god also predicted that future circumstances would turn in his favor and the present kingdom also would be his. Thus, Dhruva's humiliation culminated into his success.

Thus, it is clear that Dhruva's determination and unwavering resolve were instrumental in his ultimate success. Despite facing mistreatment from his stepmother and feeling neglected by his father, Dhruva did not allow himself to succumb to despair. Instead, he channeled his emotions into a powerful drive to seek the blessings of Lord Vishnu that eventually provided him a position far higher than what he was denied by his envious step mother. .

Conclusion

In conclusion, Dhruva's story offers a powerful example of how adversity can lead to achievement. Dhruva's initial humiliation and rejection by his step-mother could have broken him, but instead, he channeled his pain and anger into a powerful spiritual practice, which ultimately led him to divine realization and cosmic reign. The entire episode of Dhruva's struggle to overcome his experience of humiliation can be analyzed in terms of psychological theory of Conservation of Resources" (COR) which suggests that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources, including physical, social, and psychological resources.

By analyzing Dhruva's rise, we gained an insight into the nature of grit, determination, and final achievement. Dhruva's story reminds us that our greatest strengths often emerge from our greatest struggles, and that our response to adversity is what ultimately determines as shown by Dr. Duckworth to our success. Moreover, Dhruva's story highlights the importance of faith, devotion, and perseverance in the face of hardship. By following in Dhruva's footsteps, we too can overcome adversity and achieve our highest aspirations.

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