



Reimagining Myth, Modernity, and Moral Consciousness in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*

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Abstract

Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy retells Indian mythology in a modern context. The trilogy includes The Immortals of Meluha, The Secret of the Nagas, and The Oath of the Vayuputras. Tripathi does not portray Shiva as a distant God. He presents him as a human figure shaped by choice, doubt and responsibility. Shiva's journey raises ethical questions. These questions relate to dharma, leadership, law, gender and social justice. This paper studies how myth is used as a moral framework. It focuses on governance, war, ecological damage, and scientific misuse. The novel explains supernatural events through social and rational causes. The concept of Somras is central to this discussion. It represents progress as well as destruction. Through close textual reading, this study shows how moral certainty leads to violence. It also shows how rigid systems create suffering. The paper argues that the trilogy rejects absolute ideas of good and evil. It supports ethical thinking based on context and compassion. By combining myth with social concerns, Tripathi makes mythology relevant to the present. The Shiva Trilogy therefore stands as an important text in contemporary Indian English fiction.

Keywords: amish tripathi, shiva trilogy, indian mythology, dharma, ethics, modern reinterpretation.

Introduction

Indian English fiction has shown a growing interest in mythology in recent years. Writers revisit ancient stories to speak about present-day problems. Amish Tripathi is one of the most influential voices in this trend. His *Shiva Trilogy* brings mythology closer to lived human experience. The novels avoid blind worship. They encourage questioning and ethical thinking. Tripathi treats mythology as a form of social memory. He does not see it as fantasy alone.

He views it as a reflection of history, philosophy, and moral struggle. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva appears as a tribal leader. He is not aware of his future role. His identity as the Neelkanth develops slowly. It develops action, conflict and doubt. This gradual transformation gives the narrative depth. The trilogy focuses on moral choice rather than divine fate. Shiva questions tradition and authority. He opposes rigid ideas of right and wrong. His statement "I am not Mahadev. I am a man who is trying to do



what is right” (The Oath of the Vayuputras 376). Divinity here becomes a result of ethical action. It is not inherited power.

The novels also explore governance and law. Meluha comes out sophisticated and well organised. However, its strict regulations lead to suffering. Institutional cruelty is shown by practices like the Vikarma method. The text challenges justice without empathy through these structures. It highlights the dangers of moral certainty. This paper examines how Tripathi redefines myth in modern terms. It studies dharma as a flexible moral process. It also explores themes of gender, war, ecological damage, and exclusion. In *The Shiva Trilogy* human responsibility is discussed through myth bridging the past and present. It challenges readers to reconsider morality in a complex world.

Myth Reimagined as Moral Inquiry

Amish Tripathi redefines mythology as a tool for moral questioning. He does not treat myth as blind belief. He treats it as a space for reasoning. Supernatural elements are explained through human actions and social causes. This makes the narrative grounded. It also makes it believable. The idea of Somras is central to this approach. Somras is described as a substance that increases health and longevity. It appears beneficial. Negative impacts are exposed. Shiva slowly understands this contradiction. He realises that moral value depends on consequences. His reflection “something that gives life can also take it away if used without restraint” (The Secret of the Nagas 214). This movement makes a shift in his ethical awareness.

Tripathi’s takes the idea of myth aligns with Claude Levi-Strauss’s theory of myth. Its structure that addresses social contradictions. Meluha represents discipline, order and perfection. However, this perfection develops suffering. Purity creates exclusion. The narrative suggests moral failure begins within systems that refuse flexibility. Myth here becomes a historical allegory. It shows how modern societies often value more than compassion. Through this method, Tripathi transforms mythology into ethical discourse. Myth is no longer static. It

becomes a living debate on right and wrong. The reader is invited to question authority. The reader is also encouraged to reflect on moral responsibility in the present world.

Dharma as a Flexible Ethical Principle

In the Shiva Trilogy, dharma is not presented as an unchanging law. It is shown as something that evolves with experience. Moral decisions are shaped by situation and consequence. Tripathi avoids portraying dharma as blind obedience to tradition. It becomes a process of ethical reasoning. Shiva’s moral journey reflects this idea clearly. He does not begin as a divine saviour. He is an ordinary tribal leader. His sense of right and wrong grows through conflict and loss. He hesitates before acting. He listens to different voices. This hesitation shows moral awareness. When Shiva declares, “I am not Mahadev. I am a man who is trying to do what is right” (The Oath of the Vayuputras 376), he accepts moral responsibility. Divinity here is not power. It is accountability. The political conflict between Meluha and Swadweep further complicates the idea of dharma. Meluha claims moral superiority. Its rulers believe order must be protected at any cost. Violence is normalized. Personal suffering ignored. This belief system produce injustice. Swadweep reveals the human cost of such thinking. Families are destroyed. Human lives are sacrificed for abstract ideals. Through these incidents Tripathi questions moral certainty. He suggests that righteousness without compassion. Dharma must respond to human pain. It cannot remain fixed or absolute. Ethical action requires empathy, reflection, and the courage to question authority. The trilogy therefore presents dharma as a living moral force. It is shaped by responsibility rather than rule.

Gender, Otherness, and the Ethics of Exclusion

The Shiva Trilogy treats gender and marginal identity as ethical issues. These themes are not decorative. They create moral structure of the narrative. Tripathi uses exclusion to question how societies define purity, worth, and normality. Sati’s character exposes violence of inherited stigma. She is



labelled a Vikarma at birth. No crime is attached to her punishment. Society accepts her suffering as moral necessity. It reveals how injustice becomes normalised. Sati's discipline and silence portray oppression. But her actions challenge this system. She is brave in battle. She is honest in judgement. When she asserts that "a woman's worth is not measured by her birth but by her actions" (The Immortals of Meluha 289), she rejects social destiny. Identity becomes ethical, not biological.

Gender discrimination in the trilogy is closely tied to law. Women suffer because systems refuse flexibility. Honour and purity are valued more than justice. Sati's quiet resistance challenges the moral values imposed on female characters. She proves that dignity does not require social approval. The Nagas deepens this ethical critique. They are hidden from public view. Their bodies mark them as impure. Physical difference becomes moral judgement. Society refuses to see their humanity. Over time, the narrative reverses this gaze. The Nagas are not monsters. They are victims. Their deformities are caused by Meluha's scientific ambition. Progress creates exclusion. Kali's leadership transforms pain into political awareness. She does not seek sympathy. She demands recognition. Her anger is ethical, not destructive. She exposes how perfection produces violence. Her existence challenges moral superiority of Meluha. Otherness, the trilogy suggests, is socially manufactured.

Gender and otherness, Tripathi reveals a system. Societies maintain order by excluding difference. Moral systems survive by silencing the vulnerable. The trilogy rejects this logic. It argues ethical judgement include empathy. Justice fails when it protects purity over people. Through Sati and Kali, the narrative restores moral agency to the excluded. Their presence rethinking of righteousness. Humanity not conformity becomes the measure of ethics.

War, Trauma, and the Burden of Moral Choice

War in the Shiva Trilogy is not presented as heroic glory. It is shown as moral failure. Tripathi focuses on its emotional and ethical cost. Violence creates

loss that cannot be repaired. Victory does not bring peace. It leaves guilt and silence. Shiva begins his journey believing in righteous war. He accepts violence as necessary. Over time, this belief collapses. He witnesses death closely. Innocent people suffer. Children lose families. These experiences change him. His statement that "victory tastes hollow when bought with the blood of innocents" (The Oath of the Vayuputras 412). It reflects this awakening. War becomes trauma, not triumph.

Trauma in the trilogy is collective. It affects entire communities. Repeated conflict normalises suffering. Pain is inherited. Silence replaces memory. Shiva carries this burden. He remembers what others try to forget. Knowledge becomes responsibility. He realises that action cannot be separated from consequence. This trauma developed Somras life. Environmental destruction leads to displacement. Rivers dry. Lands become unlivable. People are forced to move. These losses mirror modern experiences of forced migration. Progress creates refugees. The suffering is slow and invisible. Tripathi connects war with ecological violence. Both emerge from moral arrogance. Both ignore limits. Shiva understands that destruction continues when responsibility is avoided. As he reflects, "Ignorance was bliss, but knowledge demanded action" (The Oath of the Vayuputras 254). Remembering becomes ethical duty. This section shows that moral choice is never simple. Every action leaves a scar. True leadership requires acknowledging harm. The trilogy rejects glorified violence. Accountability insists on it. Ethical action begins when suffering is recognised, not justified.

Ecology, Memory, and Ethical Renunciation

The Shiva Trilogy treats ecological damage as a moral failure rather than a technical problem. Nature is not destroyed suddenly. It is exhausted slowly. Human ambition ignores limits. Progress becomes obsession. Tripathi portrays environmental collapse begins with moral blindness. Somras stands at the centre of this crisis. It promises health, strength, and longevity. Meluha celebrates it as a civilizational



achievement. Yet its cost is hidden. Rivers shrink. Soil weakens. Genetic deformities appear. Communities living near production sites suffer first. Their pain is dismissed as necessary sacrifice. Shiva slowly recognises this injustice. “progress that destroys the future is not progress at all” (The Secret of the Nagas 398).

Ecological violence in the trilogy is closely tied to memory. Meluha survives by forgetting. It refuses to acknowledge damage. Suffering is displaced to the margins. Victims are made invisible. Comfort depends on silence. Shiva refuses this moral escape. He listens to stories of loss. He observes ruined lands. Remembering becomes painful. Yet it becomes necessary. Memory, in the trilogy, is not passive recollection. It demands response. Once Shiva understands the truth, neutrality becomes impossible. “Ignorance was bliss, but knowledge demanded action” (*The Oath of the Vayuputras* 254). Knowledge creates obligation. Moral responsibility grows with awareness. Forgetting becomes an ethical failure.

This awareness leads to renunciation. Shiva’s final decision is not heroic triumph. It is moral sacrifice. Destroying the Somras means losing power, stability, and comfort. It also means accepting uncertainty. “Some evils survive because they also do good” (*The Oath of the Vayuputras* 489). Ethical action requires choosing long-term justice over immediate benefit. Renunciation becomes the highest form of leadership. Shiva does not seek victory. He accepts loss. He chooses restraint over domination. The trilogy rejects glorified endings. It ends with responsibility. Tripathi suggests that true civilisation survives only when it recognises limits. Ethical leadership lies not in control, but in the courage to stop.

Conclusion

The Shiva Trilogy shows that mythology can speak to real human problems. Amish Tripathi does not present gods as flawless beings. He presents them as individuals who learn through mistakes. Shiva’s journey is not about destiny. It is about choice. Throughout the trilogy, moral certainty is questioned.

Systems that claim righteousness cause harm. Law without compassion becomes cruelty. Dharma is shown as something that must change with situation. It cannot remain rigid. Ethics develop experience and reflection. The portrayal of Sati and Kali expose social injustice. They demonstrating how purity leads to inhuman values. Their voices challenge silence. Their presence forces moral rethinking. War is not celebrated in the trilogy. It leaves pain that does not disappear. Violence creates memory and loss. Progress, when unchecked, destroys land and people. Shiva’s understanding comes slowly. Once he knows the cost, he cannot turn away. The decision to destroy the Somras is not heroic. It is painful. It demands sacrifice. Shiva gives up stability and power. He chooses responsibility over comfort. This choice defines leadership in the trilogy. In the end, the Shiva Trilogy reminds readers that morality is human work. It requires doubt, empathy and courage. Myth becomes meaningful when it speaks about suffering. Tripathi’s retelling suggests that mythology gains its lasting value from ethical awareness rather than blind belief.

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