

A Study on the Scientific Approach towards Vedic Shaivism in
Amish Tripathi's *The Shiva Trilogy*

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Abstract:

Myth in Indian culture has always been an aura of curiosity. Indian mythology dates back to the times of Lord Rama, Lord Shiva and our firm beliefs in the divine. It also shares with us the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The reality of Ramayana and Mahabharata as true historical events or just an epic story is still arguable. The archaeological excavations give its presence in the structures of the Indus Valley Civilization and the Harappa Cities. Amish Tripathi, the budding Indian writer focuses on such issues of historical relevance in myths. In his works we find the science behind the Vedic customs. The paper attempts to sketch the scientific superiority of the Meluhans people in the novel *The Shiva Trilogy*. It depicts their firm beliefs and application of medicines and science for practicing a better and healthy life. Somras an eternal drink of bliss is an effort made by the Meluhan scientists to uplift the mankind, whereas the irony is that in the process of making the somras they are indirectly destroying the Mother Nature which in a way means demolishing the mankind.

Keywords: Vedic, Myth, Somras, Lord Shiva, Meluha

The word 'myth' is derived from the Greek word 'mythos', which suggests story or word. Myths are moral tales usually set in distant past which are believed as true and which comprises of unearthly, supernatural or legendary characters. Whereas science is a particular discipline or branch of learning, especially one dealing with measurable or systematic principles rather than intuition or natural ability. The magical realms and the mythical trust are sometimes believed to

be true in the veil of superstitions. Every logic or occurrence of any event cannot be a mystery. Scientific logic and experiment is the key to these enigmatic reflections.

Amish Tripathi is an Indian columnist and new generation author known especially for his novels *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas*, *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, *Ram; Scion of Ishkvaku*, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* and *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*. His novels are fastest-selling book series in Indian publishing history. The writer experiments with myth which is something new in popular Indian writing. Amish Tripathi re-narrates the story of Lord Shiva, one of the Hindu Trinity for *Shiva Trilogy*. His *Shiva Trilogy* is a blend with history, science and myth. He is an author of the new era of retelling Indian history or mythology in a contemporary modern context.

Amish Tripathi's remarkable novels in *Shiva Trilogy*, which include *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, shares the same plot structure woven into the mystery stricken fusion of mythology with science. It dates back to the times of the tales of Lord Shiva and Sati. The novels incorporate the ideas of scientific application of nature and its elements in medicinal use during or before 1900BC. It portrays the medicinal usefulness to cure a wound or disease. During that time of history, the well-constructed houses and buildings makes a mark. The health and hygiene of the people of the Meluhans are noteworthy. The technological advances and the war techniques used by the Meluhans are very significant. The scientific approaches made by the people for the upliftment of the Meluhans are noted in the novels. Amish Tripathi deconstructs the character of the mythical Lord Shiva to a powerful human warrior. The jolly and fun-loving nature of the warrior Shiva attracts the readers. Amish Tripathi's *The Shiva Trilogy* includes various instances of the use of medicine and herbs. It also shows instances of chemical reactions as a result of the reaction of different elements.

My paper aims at the scientific study and approaches to myth. For example, when Shiva, the protagonist of the novels consumes the 'somras', his throat turns blue. The chemical reactions, and the properties present in the 'somras' results in the change of the colour of Shiva's neck. The novel also dwells with different other aspects of scientific experiments and its uses by the Meluhans.

The term "popular culture" is coined in the 19th century. The abbreviated form "pop" for popular, as in pop music, dates from the late 1950s. Pop is specific of something containing qualities of mass appeal, while "popular" refers to what has gained popularity; regardless of its style. Popular culture is constantly evolving and occurs uniquely in place and time. It represents a complex of mutually interdependent perspectives and values that influence society and its institutions in various ways. For example, certain currents of pop culture may originate from a subculture, representing perspectives with which the mainstream popular culture has only limited familiarity. Items of popular culture most typically appeal to a broad spectrum of the public. Important contemporary contributions for understanding what popular culture means have been given by the German researcher Ronald Daus. Popular culture also called pop culture is generally

recognized by members of a society as a set of the practices, beliefs and objects that are dominant in a society at a given point in time. Popular culture also encompasses the activities and feelings produced as a result of interaction with these dominant objects. Heavily influence in lives of people in a given society. Therefore, popular culture has a way of influencing an individual's attitudes towards certain topics. Amish Tripathi, the contemporary writer's writings are bestsellers and much popular to the readers. We find in his works the ability to influence individual's attitude especially towards myth. His writings are not at all trivial but are highly researched sci-fi works added with thriller and mystery. In his works he has used graphical representations to enhance his theory and researched idea in the works.

According to Oxford Dictionary, "myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of the history of the people or the explaining a natural or social phenomenon and typically involving supernatural being or phenomenon". Amish Tripathi has used stories from the mythical past of Hindu mythology and gave a new touch to it in his *Shiva Trilogy*. In my research paper I attempt to analyze the myth in Amish Tripathi's novel in the contemporary scenario. I shall also attempt to justify the scientific approach to nature in myth. History is linked with myth. Archaeological excavations have shown the presence of several locations which were some specific mark places of the mythical era. For example marine archaeological explorations of Dwarka, the birthplace of Lord Krishna have found stones structures below the Gulf of Bay. The traces of Kurushetra, where the eighteen days fight between the Kauravs and the Pandavas took place are located in the maps of India. We cannot detest history from myth. The *Shiva Trilogy* consists of *The Immortals Of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. The first novel introduces the readers to all the main characters of the novels, about 'somras', history and about the ancient culture. The second novel talks on large about good and evil, Shiva comes to know what evil is. The third novel contains some philosophical concepts from the Gita and the Upanishads like Karma and Rebirth.

The paper attempts to sketch the science and logic behind the mythical beliefs in the first novel from the *Shiva Trilogy*, *The Immortals Of Meluha*. It analyzes the aspects of physical science and their effects in human life both in the context of myth and in *The Shiva Trilogy*. The word 'Immortal' means living forever, not susceptible to death. So, the title itself suggests the immortality and healthy living people of the Meluha, and they pursue for it through scientific practice.

In *the Shiva Trilogy*, where the place Meluha, the empire of the king Daksha flourished, is rich in its culture and heritage. Meluha is the place of the Suryavanshis, where 'somras' is prepared for them. In *The Shiva Trilogy*, the mythical place Meluha has a reference to history. Meluha is the Sumerian name of the Indus Valley Civilization. Early texts indicate that Meluha is to the east, suggesting that it is either the Indus Valley or India. In this book, the writer describes terrain and landscapes that resemble the Indus Valley. Thus, Meluha, as depicted in *The Immortals Of Meluha*, is a state or an empire which corresponds in resemblance and location with the north-western part of contemporary India and some parts of modern day Pakistan. To the east lies

Swadeep and to the south lies the vast territory and Panchvati and Dandak forest. The writer also reproduces a thorough map for the setting of his novel to provide some historical orientation of the work. It is an inevitable truth that man is mortal. But in *The Immortals Of Meluha*, the Meluhans accessed that potion of drink or medicine, which blesses a person the longevity of life. In this novel, the King of the Meluha Empire 'Daksha' looked merely as a thirty year old man. Daksha's daughter Sati, with who Shiva was immensely in love with was eighty five years of age.

In our present world, we accept this immortality as fables or stories. But, our rich Indian culture and heritage share stories of Rishi-Munis (philosophers) living a healthy long life. In *Shiva Trilogy* we find Immortality is the essence and quest of live. Suryavanshis, the citizens of the Meluha are blessed with the heavenly drink 'somras'. Lord Brahma has used components from the Saraswati River and the Sanjeevani leaves to make the compound. The secret of the 'somras' is known by a few intellectuals of the Mount Mandar. Scientist Brahaspati is the chief in making the compound 'somras'. 'Somras' blesses one with long life and healthy body. Chandravanshis, the descendants of Moon God, wants to consume the blissful drink 'somras'. They are unaware about the preparation method of the drink and thus rising into a battle against the Suryavanshis. The novel depicts the war between the Suryavanshis and the Chandravanshis for 'Somras' which is similar to the mythical story of war between the Gods and the Demons for 'Amrit'. Amish Tripathi through his novel tries to show how even today we fight among ourselves for something which may not be ours. And if we do not get it, we try to destroy it. The contemporary story is parallel to the story of 'somras' which came to the access of the Gods after the churning of the sea.

'Somras' is the divine drink of immortality and can also be called as the blissful medicinal proportion which enhances life. In the novel *The Immortals Of Meluha* the power of the drink is emphasized. The novel accounts the telling of Brahaspati, the scientist of Mount Mandar in Meluha, the existence of Somras to Shiva. The scientist says that "Before understanding how the medicine slows down the ageing process dramatically, we have to understand what keeps us alive".

The fundamental thing that no one can live without is energy, when we walk, talk, think, in fact when we do anything that can be called being alive, we use energy. That similar concept in Hindu mythology is called 'shakti'. Our body needs energy for our survival. The food we eat stores energy, which we can then expand. That is why we feel weak when we do not eat. The conversion of the food into energy is performed by the air we breathe. The air has various gases in it, one of these gases is called oxygen, which reacts with our food and releases energy. If we do not get energy, our body would be starved of energy and we would die. The medicinal drink 'somras' has the property to make us young for our lifetime. The thing that keeps us alive is also which causes us to age and eventually die. When oxygen reacts with our food in order to release energy, it also releases free components called oxidants. These oxidants are toxic. For example, when we leave any fruit out and it deteriorates, this is because it has been 'oxidized' or the

oxidants have reacted with it to make it rot. A similar 'oxidizing process' causes metals like iron to corrode. The same thing happens to us when we breathe in oxygen. The oxygen helps convert the food we eat into energy. It also causes the release of oxidants into our body which start reacting inside us. We rust from the inside and hence age and eventually die. The body tries to store everything that we need from the outside world in order to survive. It stores enough food to survive for a few days without it. It stocks upon water so that a few days of thirst do not kill us. On the other hand, the body does not store much oxygen, the most crucial component of staying alive, to last for more than just a few minutes. The only reason is that despite being an important component, oxygen is also a poison. Hence, it is dangerous to store. 'somras' is believed to have medicinal properties. When this medicine is consumed, it reacts with the oxidants, absorbs them and then expels them from the body as sweat or urine. Due to the 'somras' there are no oxidants left in the body, which results in the long life of the individual. Some ingredients of the 'somras', as marked by Amish Tripathi in the novel is Sanjeevani Tree, and water from the Saraswati River.

Hindu Mythology shares the story of Samudra Manthan. During the time of the churning of the sea (Samudra Manthan), a poison came in force. Shiva swallowed the poison to save the lives of many. The fatal poison resulted in the colour blue of the neck. The spot became the special ornament of the mighty soul. The poison is concentrated with the elements of scorpions, snakes and the impure oceanic water. In the novel *The Immortals Of Meluha*, Amish Tripathi retells another story of a young boy Shiva. In the novel, the reason of Shiva's blue neck is quite different. When Shiva was a child, his uncle Manobhu gave him a medicine. When King Daksha invited Shiva and his Gunas tribe through Nandi, they accepted the proposal and came to Meluha. The 'somras' is given to them by the Doctor Ayurvati. The reaction of both the medicine turned his neck blue.

The 'somras' is assumed to contain components like the Sanjeevani Tree leaves and water from the River Saraswati. The 'somras' with the presence of leafy ingredient behaves as a starch. The starch iodine test is used to test the presence of starch. Starch turns into an intense "blue-black" colour upon addition of aqueous solutions of the triiodide anion, due to the formation of an intermolecular charge-transfer complex. The medicine given by Shiva's uncle may include the components of triiodide anion which consists of salt or iodine atoms. Thus, due to the intermixing of starch (somras) and salt (medicine), the neck of Shiva turned blue. The present story of the novel has mythical implications. It depicts the search or quest for immortality. In the contemporary scenario, people too strive for long lives or immortality. The mythical story of the churning of the sea runs parallel to the churning of the river Saraswati. The water of only river Saraswati can serve the purpose of making the somras. The 'somras', if it would have been passed to the demons, could have devastated the world. Lord Shiva delightfully consumes the poison to save the world. In the present scenario, the protagonist Shiva, a simple young man is portrayed as a savior of the Meluhans. Like Lord Shiva, the almighty, the protagonist's neck too turns blue. Both the Shiva's served the purpose to save the mankind.

The new generation author Amish Tripathi, in his *The Shiva Trilogy* blends mythology with history. It has elements of scientific occurring. The mystery stricken phenomenon in the novel can be analyzed and understood with the realms of science. His novels are an example of sci-fi and include many instances of laboratory and archaeological surveys. The depiction of ancient geography and history in his novels and stating proofs with graphical images shows his vast interest and knowledge of ancient India. He has rationalized the orthodox beliefs on myths. Through his book he has raised the necessary issues of nature depletion. The extinction of the River Saraswati is awareness for us that we should not pollute our environment. Our myth has answers to the issues and insolvable problems we face today. Fight and hatred among ourselves leads to nothingness. Our mythical stories serve as a proof to it. Energy is the outmost source of our livelihood. We get energy from our energy. As in the novel, the medicinal drink 'somras' which provides us with energy is prepared from the components of our mother nature. We must take care of our environment, so that we are blessed with energy which is the outmost source of our long life. In the paper, attempt has been made to analyze the treatment of topographical and environmental aspects in the novel. How the River Saraswati now no more exists in the maps of India. The chemical wastages and harmful effects resulting in the downfall of the river, and the other aspects of the environment can be analyzed scientifically. We also find that the Meluhans are blessed with longer lives than usual human beings.

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