

QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY- GOOD OR EVIL? : A REVIEW OF AMISH TRIPATHI'S *SHIVA* *TRILOGY*

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Abstract

From the times immemorial long life and immortality has been a yearning on the part of Humans and there are ample evidences in Literature. For most of literary history, the dominant perspective has been that the desire for immortality is misguided. Some authors assume that scientific progress will eventually lead to immortality. Famous Indian writer Amish Tripathi has explicitly expressed this longing for longevity in his book series 'Shiva Trilogy'. He has recreated Indian Mythology—in his book series Shiva Trilogy. The most important character is the rough-hewn Tibetan Shiva who has blue throat as an advantage over others. Amish has dexterously designed the journey of this ordinary man to Mahadev—the God of the Gods. The Indian society believed in the myth of Neelkanth, so do the people of Meluha. People had been waiting for ages for Mahadev, they believed in the selfless blue throat man—Neelkanth as their redeemer, as their saviour, as their protector and as destroyer of the evil, who is coming to put the evil out of equation, but what is that unknown evil, nobody knows.

“Flexibility in a society allows change, so that all its members have the space to discover their true selves and grow to their potential. And if every person in a society achieves his true potential, society as a whole also achieves its true potential.”

(The Immortals of Meluha)

Keywords: Divine Drink, Immortality, History, Mythology, Somras, Evil.

Introduction

From times immemorial longevity and immortality is a yearning on the part of humans and there are ample evidences in Literature in general and *Shiva Trilogy* of Amish in particular. For most of literary history, the dominant perspective has been that the desire for immortality is misguided. Some authors assume that scientific progress will eventually lead to immortality, and for this reason humans living in the far future are often depicted as having attained this goal, as in 1592 play *Dr. Faustus* or as in 1932 sci-fi novel *Brave New World* or in Arthur C. Clarke's 1956 novel *The City and the Stars*. In the 1978 novel *Up the Walls of the World* by Alice Sheldon, an immortal Cyborg uses her powers to promote feminist values. Octavia E. Butler's 1980 novel *Wild Seed* contrasts the different forms of immortality of its two immortal characters representing masculinity and femininity, respectively. In both *Up the Walls of the World* and *Wild Seed*, immortality is portrayed as desirable provided that it is combined with love and togetherness. Besides Scientists and Philosophers—who present this idea of longevity and immortality—literary writers often represent Immortality in their works of art. Famous Indian writer Amish Tripathi has explicitly expressed this longing for longevity in his book series 'Shiva Trilogy'. So far, out of the six novels to his credit, three are in Shiva Trilogy: *The Immortals of Meluha* was written in 2010, *The Secret of the Nagas* in 2011 while *The Oath of Vayuputras* came out in 2013. The Ram Chandra Series comprises *The Scion of Ikshvaku* published in 2015, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* appeared in 2017 and *Raavan: The Enemy of Aryavarta* was written in 2019. Undeniably in these books he has recreated Indian Mythology by restructuring the Indian myths as per his own perception of the history and mythology.

The most important character is the rough-hewn Tibetan Shiva, whose journey starts when he visits Srinagar with his Guna tribe as their Chief and during their quarantine period a drink was

served by Ayurvati, the chief surgeon, to all the 200 immigrants from mount Kailash. Whole Guna tribe catches fever except Shiva, whose throat turned blue after consuming that medicine. Due to this blue throat people called him *Neelkanth*. Amish has dexterously designed the journey of this ordinary man from Shiva to Mahadev—the God of the Gods. Since the people in Indian society believed in the myth of Neelkanth, they acknowledged this selfless blue throat man—Neelkanth as their redeemer, as destroyer of the evil. Second major character is daughter of King Daksha and Verrini, the princess of Meluha, Sati who was a seasoned swords-woman though discriminated against as a Vikarma. She could not reciprocate her love to Shiva as Vikarmas were considered outcast in this seemingly perfect society of Meluha. Shiva genuinely believes this law is unfair and evil because we can't punish some people saying that they carry their past sins to this life and so he banishes the law, not for Sati but he truly empathizes with the pain and injustice meted out to Vikarma people.

Ganesh is Sati's elder son, Shiva doesn't like Ganesh because he thinks Ganesh has killed his best friend Brahaspati but Sati unconditionally loves Ganesh. He is a powerful Naga with mysterious origin and known as Lord of the People in Panchvati. In fact he is the abandoned child of Sati. Another sufferer at the hands of society is Kali, his Mausi and the twin sister of Sati who was born with two extra functioning appendages. Though denounced by her parents, she was embraced by the Nagas and her exquisite martial skills made her Queen of Nagas.

Daksha, the Meluhan Emperor, who introduced Shiva as the *Neelkanth* and appreciated his efforts to banish Vikarma, due to his own vested interest as he grabbed this opportunity to tie the wedlock of Shiva and Sati. With the aid of righteous Shiva, Daksha realised his personal interest of becoming emperor of India. But towards the end of the trilogy he hires assassins to ruthlessly murder Shiva. Parvateshwar is the Head of Meluhan Army; in-charge of infantry, navy, special forces, and police. He is a staunch Suryavanshi and a non-believer in the myth as he believed in Lord Ram only. The chief surgeon Ayurvati is believed to be the best in her profession and is respected because she believes that swadharma is the

worship to eternity. She is the first to notice the blue throat of Shiva when she administers Somras to him and bows before him as the Neelkanth. But the most important character in Shiva Trilogy is the Somras. The longevity in the Melunan society is the blessing of this Divine Drink. It is credited for the prosperity, success and hegemony of Meluha over others but at the same time it is responsible for creating victims in the form of Brangas or Nagas and their unending woes and sufferings.

The distinction between good and evil, in fact begins with Meluhans and Ayodhyans—the Suryavanshis and the Chandravanshis. ‘Truth, Duty and Honour’ is what the Suryavanshis believe in and ‘Adornment, Beauty and Liberty’ is what Chandravanshis believe in. Both are democracies but with ideological differences. The former believe in solar calendar while the latter believe in lunar calendar. The former lead disciplined and ideal life in words and deeds based on the principles of Shri Ram while the latter also worship Shri Ram but believe that all have liberty to live life as per their choices and preferences. The former is autocratic while the latter is democratic. Their ideological conflicts diverted them to focus on the larger conflict, what is evil. The public interests were swept under the carpet and resulted in throwing the burden of the roost upon Nagas, the people born with physical deformities. They were exceptionally skilled warriors but not accepted by the society since they were considered a race of cursed people, who were born to suffer.

Indian Mythology always attracts writers writing in English, but the fear of criticism restricts most of them, they turn cautious and fail to catch the nerve of the young readers. Amish Tripathi’s brilliant writing skills succeeded in giving modern touch to the blend of history and mythology and arousing a sense of reading amongst the Indian youth by adding colours of suspense, thrill, adventure, love, war. The more you serve with simplicity the more creative it becomes, as the renowned scientist Albert Einstein states “If you cannot explain it simply, you don’t understand well enough”. The Shiva Trilogy by Amish Tripathi is an ample evidence of simplicity and creativity put together.

In the first part of the Trilogy where Shiva is searching for

Evil it appears that Suryavanshis are good and Chandravanshis are evil. But when Shiva looked at the tormented eyes of Anandamayi, he realised the pain, and the flames of agony burned his conscience. It dawned upon him that Chandravanshis are not evil. “They’re just different. Being different isn’t evil”. (IOM, 391)

Then the needle of suspense turns towards Brangas, who ruthlessly murdered the sacred peacock for the reasons best known to them only. Then the Nagas are targeted as the prime evil suspect. “...the Nagas helped a man in need, in the interests of justice, that’s not how evil is supposed to be” (SON, 274). But soon it is unveiled during attack by ligar and his fleet that the Nagas were the sufferers not because they were evil but because they were left at the mercy of fate at the hands of the Evil. Herein Shiva realises that evil serves a purpose. Vasudev Pandit introduces that the institution of Mahadev is required to attain a poise, to act as the balance and to control the root cause of the evil. Evil is not to be destroyed completely, but it needs to be taken out of the equation at the right time. And it is time to take Somras, out of equation.

Shiva is shocked and surprised when Ayurvati asks him to take bath every 2 hours, and to change clothes. His mind is stormed with the questions—What is this divine drink? How it prolongs life? How are all Meluhans so young and energetic? How his frost-bitten toe revived? The pandora’s box is opened when Brahaspati during Shiva’s visit to Mandar reveals its formation by mixing with sacred water from Saraswati, the life-force of Meluha. The chief scientist describes how it reacts with oxidants in body, releasing toxins in the process, that come out through sweating or urine, which instantly needs to be removed by changing clothes or bathing. Explaining the preparation of somras, Brahaspati the chief scientist of Meluha tells Shiva that a number of rare ingredients are first discovered like the water from the river Sarswathi, the sanjeevani petals from the sanjeevani tree are medically treated and a kind of mixture is prepared in the form of powder which on consumption results in longevity and immortality. The eventual effect is that aging stops and agility, valour, vitality and youth are maintained. Oscar Wilde in his very arresting book—*The Picture of Dorian Gray* – talks about the immortality, where he has said that due to

the possession of persistent youth you feel life as worth living and enjoying.

The whole society of Meluha worshiped Saraswati as it was the eternal source of the divine drink. Even Meluhan army benefitted with the pleasing effects of this divine drink as their wounds in the battle healed quickly, they remained young, so fought battles with renewed strength. King and high gentry benefitted as it increased their ruling period. It is well established fact that the craving for immortality is a yearning on the part of almost all humans at least once in life and the inhabitants of Meluha are no exception. Even Daksha feels contended that his society is blessed with the formula of everlasting happiness as use of this drink prolongs life of citizens and permits them to enjoy eternal youth with mental and physical health. It is also to be seen that Meluha does not witness natural death. Vayuputras, Brangas and Nagas are efficient in effectively creating a brown paste that helps in getting rid of complex problems that take place in internal organs during pregnancy as happened during Kartik's birth. This heavenly drink—Somras—also brings wonders on the wounds, fractures, treating internal as well as external injuries, reviving dead organs, nullifying effect of poison and rejuvenating amputated parts of the body as is evident during the treatment of the general Parvateshwar, Sati and Meluhan infantry, the only precaution is this mixture must be applied at specific intervals otherwise it does not remain effective and curable. The people of Meluha are very tight lipped about the formula of preparing Somras so as not to give other kingdoms any advantage over them and to establish their superiority over other kingdoms in general and Ayodhya in particular. Due to the effects of Somras Meluhans excelled as a superior race in India and are envied by the rest of the empires except Nagas.

The drink also made the nation physically and economically healthy and prosperous, army a threat, scientists matchless in innovations, citizens progressive and all the credit goes to the consumption of Somras. Meluhans are quite organized they can relentlessly work for hours more than any normal human could work. They are ridden of all diseases. The intellectuals in Meluha are as youthful as any young person would aspire to be. This is

possible only when a country has such a provision to make its people immortal, that in turn makes their country outshine other countries in terms of pelf and power. Following the dictums of Lord Rama country provides equal wealth and equal opportunity to everyone. The Meluhans are economically affluent and stable majorly due to the availability of life-giving Somras.

Somras contributed to the strength and valour of brave Meluhan captain. He was almost dead in one of the battles had Somras not shown wonders. None other than Somras has blessed him with longevity by postponement of his death. Of late he has accepted that Lord Neelkanth is in the land of Meluha to carry forward Lord Ram's legacy and thus becomes his ardent devotee and stops using Somras, yet when it comes to side with his Lord, the destroyer of the evil or Meluha, that generates evil, he adheres to his principles and chooses to die proudly for his motherland at the hands of Neelkanth.

Good and evil move together. What seems good today may turn evil when it crosses the limit. These are the phases of life, of nature, of eternity, and we the living beings need to identify the right time when this good turns evil. It doesn't require uprooting the evil, just to put it out of equation. Nandi compares Meluha to heaven and boasts it to be the richest, the wealthiest, the greatest and the most powerful empire of its time. (IOM, 2) But when power over-powers you and starts corrupting mind, it turns suicidal/disastrous. The use of Somras intoxicated the minds of Daksha and Bhrgu to the extent that clearing of large forest areas for the production of Somras or consuming the holy water of Saraswati, the life-line of Meluha and dumping the toxic wastes thus produced in mountains and rivers never appeared to them as a threat to mankind.

There is always hairline difference between the need and the greed. When Somras was a need to serve humanity, it was an eternal bliss, but as soon as its after-effects appeared in the form of large-scale extinction of sanjivani-trees or drying up of river saraswati, the divine warning worked invisibly. But the unending greed to prolong life and postponement of death is contrary to Creation and Nature. French Algerian philosopher Albert Camus

believed that Utopia is contradictory to creation and reality. Meluhans and Daksha presumed that their kingdom is an approximation to Utopia and to imaginatively perfect countries. But contrary to their belief, there are a number of problems Meluhans face just because of the consumption of that formidable drink. It was quite alarming that Meluhan women faced challenges in conceiving or the risk of stillborn or deformed babies, who were dumped to unknown alleys. Scientifically the overdose of Somras to maintain youth resulted in growth of extra organs in the newborn babies who were termed Nagas. It accumulated slowly alike the evil that creeps up slowly. Bhraspati rightly opines that when you battle evil, the problem is not time, but the will to combat the evil. That is why, there is a saying that excess of everything is bad, how good it may be at a particular point of time as it disturbs the balance of creation and plays havoc with nature, as evil never comes alone it is always followed by umpteen side effects but with a dead slow process.

Conclusion

A great philosopher and Czech writer Milan Kundera in one of his novels *Idle Hearts* contends that desire for a prolonged life is an ever-lasting fantasy. While chasing this ridiculous illusion we eliminate all possibilities for the humans becoming Immortal, leave alone any disturbance in the balance of nature. Amish Tripathi almost opines and sounds a similar view-point. Momentary pleasure apparently gives you feeling of eternal bliss but later or sooner it becomes the greatest evil. Bhrigu and Daksha used it as an instrument and in their whimsical pursuit did not even realise that Somras has turned to be the greatest evil for others. So this love to prolong life and youth and to become immortal will actually lead to the obliteration of human race. So, the question is, what it is that basically immortalises humanity, is it our passion to chase our dream reverie or fantasy or it is our positive contribution to the upliftment of masses that fills them with eternal happiness. The answer to this lies in the LATTER. Even Bruce Lee in one of his articles elucidates that making the life worth remembering is the only key to the immortality.

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