



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Comparative Reading Of The Depiction Of Shiva In The Backdrop Of Hinduism In Amish Tripathi And Namita Gokhale

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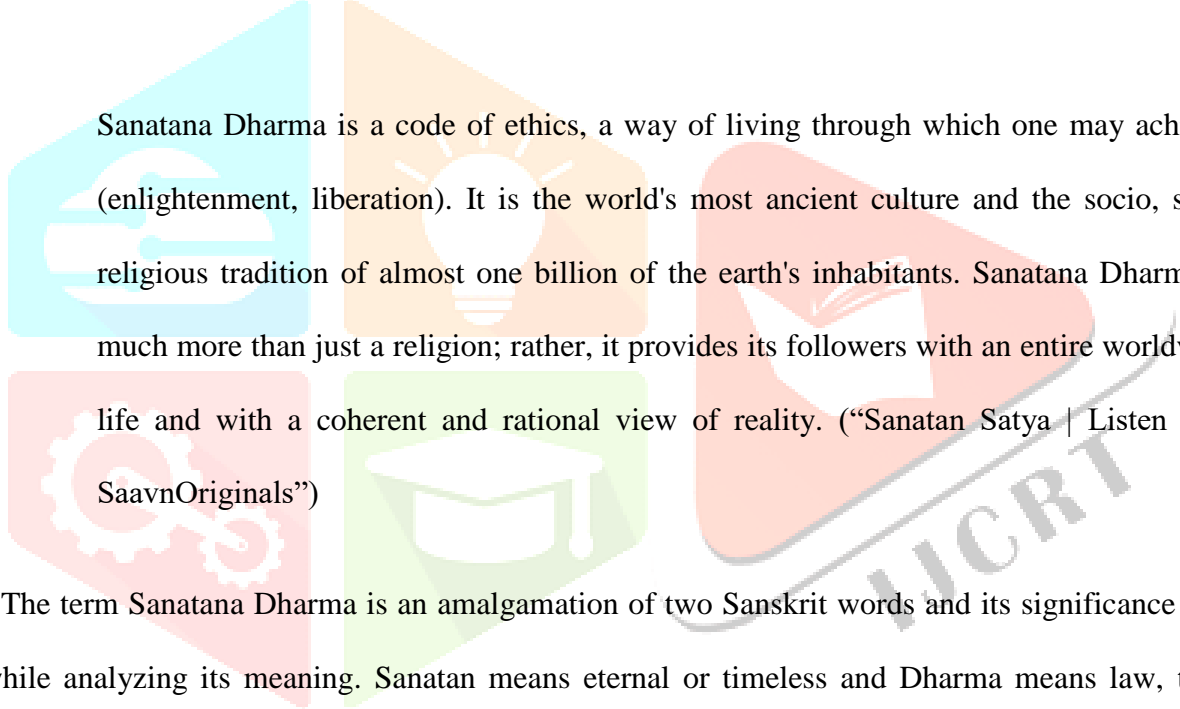
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Abstract:

Shiva and Hinduism are expressed by different authors from India in different languages from time immemorial. Amish Tripathi is the one who popularized Shiva and many other gods to the people of English reading community with his *Shiva Trilogy*. Shiva Trilogy includes three novels: *The Immortals of Meluha*(2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013). Here Shiva the mythical character and his family is narrated in the backdrop of Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism. He used science and technology in this novel to depict Shiva in a different light. Amish's Shiva's human quality and appearance is accepted by more than 40 million readers of the world. Shiva is also presented by Namita Gokhale but is completely in contrast with Amish's Shiva and she depicted Shiva as god as per Hinduism with all its rituals and belief (bakthi) and this book was also read by many as she is a powerful writer. Both of them selected Shiva as their hero because of his wide acceptability by all alike.

Key words: Shiva, Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma, God, and Myth.

Hinduism in the contemporary terminology would refer to a pagan religion with occult traces practiced in south Asia with loose set of rituals and idols. To be acquainted with the term Hinduism one would have to rummage around 5000 of years' history that reached into its zenith at the remarkable term Sanatana Dharma. Sanatana Dharma is a way of living without a particular originator. For those who are unacquainted with this fabulous way of living, the term Hinduism may be in resonance with other religions like Islam and Christianity. But through the incisive investigation in history, one will get to be on familiar terms with numerous characteristics of Sanatana Dharma, which is later termed as Hinduism and popularized among the colonized society and throughout the world. Sanatana Dharma has the quality of accepting all the good it came across during its journey of development and renovates itself with the accepted good.



Sanatana Dharma is a code of ethics, a way of living through which one may achieve moksha (enlightenment, liberation). It is the world's most ancient culture and the socio, spiritual, and religious tradition of almost one billion of the earth's inhabitants. Sanatana Dharma represents much more than just a religion; rather, it provides its followers with an entire worldview, way of life and with a coherent and rational view of reality. (“Sanatan Satya | Listen on JioSaavn SaavnOriginals”)

The term Sanatana Dharma is an amalgamation of two Sanskrit words and its significance would make clear while analyzing its meaning. Sanatan means eternal or timeless and Dharma means law, thus Sanatan Dharma means eternal laws for sustaining the life. To put it in another way it is a law to administrate the life of people based on the innate natural reality of a particular locality. It is devoid of sectarian leanings or ideological divisions. The meaning of Sanatana Dharma can be roughly summed up as the natural, ancient and eternal way of life. Sanatana Dharma has a value system or code of conduct with spiritual freedom as its nucleus. Even though it has a democratic nature considering the freedom it gives to its followers, here there is specific importance to its rules and rituals. But its dynamic nature has the quality to receive whatever it sees acceptable from other cultures, which demands some kind of modifications in its existing way of life based on the circumstances and time.

Even though Hinduism is monotheistic, believers of god in this religion believe in umpteen numbers of gods. Sometimes gods are higher in number than Hindus. “Followers of Hinduism may worship multiple different gods, although it's not a polytheistic religion because all these gods are believed to be manifestations of the one Brahman.” (“The History of Hinduism (Article) | Khan Academy”) Hinduism has descended from the Vedic ‘religion’. However Hinduism is not a religion in the sense in which Christianity or Islam is. The term Hindu, Hinduism etc. came, based on geographical distinctiveness. While describing the term Hindu one will realize that it is a pure geographical identity.

Hinduism or Hindu comes from, a Hindu being someone who practices Hinduism. The name for what we now call the Indus River in Sanskrit was Sindhu, and Sindh is still a region in the Indian Subcontinent. The version that the Persians said was Hindus and this got converted to Indus in Latin. So really, Hinduism is the term for the cultural and religious practices of people beyond the Indus River.” (Khan Academy, “Hinduism Introduction: Core Ideas of Brahman, Atman, Samsara and Moksha | History | Khan Academy”)

Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* retold the story of the past and Indian myth, but it also speaks of present India, with a modern and scientific perspective. Figures from Indian mythology are transformed into human characters and mythological story of the epic is retold as ancient mythical history of India. To develop a modern sensibility about the great mythical stories are operate through science and technological ideas. While examining the traits of leadership of the hero Shiva in *Shiva Trilogy* with special reference to Shiva myth shows that mythical Shiva's duty, virtues and ethical development are same as the god Shiva of the ancient Indian philosophical perspective. Both mythical Shiva and Amish's Shiva sets the persona of virtuous leader and they enlightens the path for achieving the same. Their leadership roles are presented in a transformational manner with competence and wisdom.

Shiva Trilogy, a novel set in 1900 BC, portrays the story of Shiva, the human being; turn out to be the god to the people and becomes god to them through his deeds. During the development of the story, in the last book *The Oath of the Vayuputras* Shiva is considered as both the human and the god to the reader. The story of *Shiva Trilogy* is centered on Shiva and Sati. In Hindu mythology Shiva's birth continues to be a mystery and

almost same is the case of His avatars, as those are quiet extreme. His better half Sati, who is also known as Sakthi in mythology is also an ultimate and eternal reality, like a feminine Brahman.

As per Hindu mythology, the name Shiva comes out of three sounds (shabda) they are:

“Shiva is Sha + ee + Va

Sha stands for *Shareeram* or body

ee stands for *eeshwari* or life giving energy

Va stands for *vayu* or motion” (The Art of Living, Who is Shiva?)

In Shiva Trilogy Shiva who is the leader and inspiration to his tribe became source of energy and power to the Meluhans. Amish’s Shiva elevates his position with his humanistic qualities like generosity, intelligence and determination and this persona made him a real hero. Ritika Paul describes the portrayal of Shiva as a human being in her article, “Shiva for All Times: A Study of Amish Tripathi’s The Immortals of Meluha” as: “Indians worship God in four forms-Nirgun (Nirakaar-formless God), Aakar (in a form i.e. Lord Vishnu, etc.) Avatar (incarnation of God i.e. Lord Ram, etc.) and a man who becomes God or discovers God within him (Gautama Buddha). Amish Tripathi took the fourth type and portrays Shiva as a human being of flesh and blood, makes him like an ordinary being or common people.” (425-26) But still Buddha is worshipped by many as god and even some worship his idols, even though Buddha is against idol worship and that is the state of Shiva in *Shiva Trilogy*.

Amish’s Shiva inhales chillum, it is candid concerning mythical Shiva who is a graveyard dweller and his “ganas” are also living in an uncivilized manner. Devdutt Pattanaik explains Mahadev as a God of ecstasy inhales the smoke in his *Seven Secrets of Shiva* “made from leaves of Cannabis Indica, a narcotic that is considered illegal by most governments around the world” (7SS 117). The very same Shiva is also acclaimed as the Neelkanth, the saviour of the world, when all the other gods were waiting for the ‘amruthu’ or mythical nectar, Shiva was different and who saved the world by drinking the ‘kalakooda’, the poisonous drink came from the ocean while churning the ocean. He was constantly different and was ready to receive all the negatives, so he is known as the destroyer, who destroys all the negatives and make the world a better one. In *Shiva Trilogy* too Shiva is the destroyer and who finds out the negative in Meluha, that is the ‘somras’; and to make

the society into equilibrium he destroys it from current use and preserves the knowledge of somras secretly for later good.

Iyengar (1989) inferred that the worship of Siva during the Stone Age existed in the form of 'Linga worship' which was carried forward by the Aryans during the Vedic period from 1500 to 500 BCE.s Amish Tripathi has adopted the original myth of India and has re-narrated them in his writings. He used his ideas related with religious myths such as rebirth, heaven and hell, angels and demons, fate and freewill, sin, Satan and salvation into his creative writing. But the author's presentation of myth does not alter the belief or faith of the original, but gives an opportunity to reread the myths of Shiva from different perspectives.

Here the first question is who is Shiva?, and how Tripathi's Shiva and mythical Shiva related with each other. In his debut novel *The Immortals of Meluha* Tripathi conjures up to a prudent and an apt answer to the question Who is Shiva, "Shiva! The Mahadev; The God of Gods, Destroyer of evil, passionate lover, fierce warrior, consummate dancer and the most important Charismatic leader". (2011). The bedrock of Hindu spiritual microcosm believes in Shiva as the supreme god, who is not born, one among the Trios, who has no beginning and end.

Considering myth there are different and varied text in different time place and context, because there are many myths with regional variations. Here in his text Tripathi took the mythical stories of Shiva, mainly the variations from north India and he amalgamated his own ideas about religion, myth, karma, dharma, and the philosophies he came across his life, throughout applied in his *Shiva Trilogy*. "... Amish has mastered the art of gathering, interpreting and presenting India's many myths folklores and legends, and blending all of that into fast-paced thrillers that change your views about gods, cultures, histories, demons and heroes, forever."(Hi Blitz)

Tripathi presents his Shiva with a touch of modernity. But the acute analysis of Hindu mythology reveals that his Shiva is almost same as the Shiva existed in myth, believed by the people as their god. In the case of spirituality, yogic nature, dance, views, capabilities, attitude towards his devotees both the Shiva are same. But exceptions are there in Tripathi's Shiva's modern approach in some matters. "Amish's mythical imagination mines the past and taps into the possibilities of the future. His book series, archetypal and stirring,

unfolds the deepest recesses of the soul as well as our collective unconsciousness.” (1 TIM) At the beginning of the first book of the trilogy *The Immortals of Meluha* he begins with the words:

“Om Namah Shivaiy.

The universe bows to Lord Shiva. I bow to Lord Shiva.”(Tripathi 1)

Which gives the idea that Tripathi believes in the God Shiva. He himself stated it very clearly in one of his interviews. His childhood was in a religious atmosphere so he could get a lot of ideas regarding mythology from his family, and he was a believer when he was a boy. Later he became revolutionary and atheist and then after a period of time he moved back and became a theist. The reflection of all these things influenced his writing of this Trilogy. This novel is the result of the radical thought of the author that all gods were once human beings who lived in the ancient times because of their adventures, intellectual achievements, their love for their fellow human beings and their concern for the protection of their tribes; they were elevated to the level of divine beings.

The author has decided to depict the awe inspiring greatness of lord Shiva. According to Tripathi “Shiva was not a figment of a rich imagination, but a person of flesh and blood.” (Tripathi1) He became god only because of his karma. As Shiva’s deeds were much higher to that of a common human being, the common people can’t believe him as a human being, instead they believed him as godlike or ‘god’ and later this became story and passed from generation to generation as myths. This is how Tripathi presented Shiva at the beginning and the story progress with the same view. Shiva’s karma and philosophy made him a god to the people and at the end of the story reader can understand him as godly or an avatar as per the belief who appears when the chaos in the world reaches to its zenith.

In contrast to Amish, Namita Gokhale begins her *The Book of Shiva* with Shiva’s 108 names and its meanings and a detailed description of mythical Shiva and Ganesha. She explains Shiva as an eternal glorious god granting boons and removing fear as per the belief of Hinduism. She narrated Shiva completely in parallel with the Hindu belief. Gokhale claims in the introduction that “... the immensely popular television mega-series on the Hindu gods are an appropriation of technology and media by an ancient and uninterrupted

culture.”(8). In 1980s and 90s serials based on the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha appeared in our national channel Doordarshan and Namita opines that it causes the “revival of both moderate and fundamental religious forces in India”(8). From the historical period to the present gods are alive in India. Shiva the god of death and resurrection is part of Holy trinity of Hinduism.

Doordarsan always tries to spread Indian culture and motto that is unity in diversity based on dharma. To establish such an ideology it used some moral stories from the Hindu epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha with gods and goddesses are its characters. Gokhale argues that the Illiad and the Odyssey lost their immediate relevance because it is not spread as Hindu epics. And in the same way retellings of Hindu epics in the form of popular fiction also makes the epics contemporary.

“Shiva first appeared in the historical consciousness in the figure of Pashupati, on the seals of Mohenjodaro, 2500BC”. (Gokhale 9) Over the period of time this image changed but not completely. The Greeks who came into India around 300BC found that Dionysus, their god is like Shiva. This similarity is considered as convenient cultural annexation during Alexander’s Indian campaign. Over the period of time many tribal myths tend to be appropriated with Shiva worship. Rudra-Shiva cult had an influence of Shamantic tradition of Siberia and central Asia. Shamantic ethos leads to “pre-Buddhist traditions of the ancient religion of the Bon-po, and was also concurrent with the local shamantic religious systems of the aboriginal tribes of India”. (Gokhale 12)

As per Hindu belief Shiva is a god with many names and unknowable mysteries. Shiva in the form of Rudra is considered as harbinger of rain and prosperity. So it is very easy to connect the tribal with god Shiva who wears garland of skulls and encircled by serpents, holds the power of life and death. Shiva also known as Pashupati “is the lord of the animals, a figure of protection in the pastoral economy” (Gokhale 25). This too made him god of tribal people or aboriginals of India, as he is closely associated with their life.

In Hindu mythology it is believed that “The sage Narada had read her (Sati) palm and predicted that she would marry a naked yogi free from desire and worldly attachments, a self-born god without mother or father” (Gokhale 32), that is Shiva. Ghokale along with other Hindus believe that Shiva is the supreme god, but leads

his life with simplicity, an exception from all other gods, is the best to be attribute to the tribal's god. Virasaiva saints personalize Shiva as a deity for a social reform to an over-rigid brahminical hierarchy. The same case is there in Kerala too and as part of social reform in Kerala Sreenarayana Guru installed the idol of Shiva in Aruvippuram in 1888 and mentioned it as Ezhava Shiva and he aimed that Shiva is same for subalterns and elite alike.

The divine family of Shiva is considered as an inevitable part of Hindu pantheon. The two sons of Shiva-Parvati are not born out of womb; Ganesh, genetically engineered son and Kartik, mythic form of artificial insemination. In the last paragraph of the chapter titled "The Divine Family of Shiva" Ghokale speaks "Shiva accepts all his devotees, divine or diabolical without demur. It is said he who is rejected by everyone will find refuge with shiva."(75) Shiva is accessible to any at any time make him favourite god of Hindus. As he is a god of mountain, leading a simple life leads him to mainstream of Hinduism. Ghokale argues for spirituality rather than believing in mere ritual practices in the chapter titled "Shiva in the Druvana".

Namita Ghokale gives a detailed description of the god Shiva and Shaiva belief and she explains why people of all strata attracted with god Shiva. "The art, sculpture and iconography associated with shiva have a stark simplicity and sublimity that distinguish it from the more decorative styles associated with the rest of the Hindu pantheon". (119) These influences are visible in classical and folk literary tradition and this also helped Shiva to connect with tribal people and thereby use him to create a dominant single powerful god to all. This is the same reason that Amish Tripathi also selected god Shiva as his hero and even if both of them presented Shiva in different light but reached at the same destination.

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