

## A Critical Study of Archetypal Hero in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*

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**Abstract:** This paper is a critical analysis of Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* in the light of the key concepts of archetypal literary criticism. The paper attempts to explore the idea of archetypal hero through the narrative of *Shiva Trilogy*. Shiva, the protagonist of the trilogy has been projected as a mythical counterpart of lord Shiva. He appeals to the people of his clan to stop drinking 'Somras' -the water of eternity. This appeal of the hero sounds rather ambiguous. However, as the narrative moves on, the ambiguity begins to gradually resolve on its own. The relevance of the narrative of *Shiva Trilogy*, to the present situation of the world lies in its meticulous exposition of the concept of Good, Evil and Greed. The myth of 'Somras' has been used by the novelist to bring home the idea that the excessive greed among the humans to exploit the 'Good' to its extreme leads to the birth of 'Evil'. Within the mythical frame of the narrative, the novelist delineates the contemporary situation of crisis caused by an imbalance between the good and the evil.

**Keywords:** Archetype, Myth, Hero, Good, Evil.

### Introduction

The writers of fantasy fiction have always been very meticulous in the portrayal of the protagonist of their narratives as the fantasies are mainly hero centric. A hero becomes the source of inspiration and motivation for the human race. A hero represents universally admired qualities such as courage, wisdom, patriotism, kindness and self-abnegation. He epitomizes the ethos and culture of his nation. He also reflects his culture and civilization. The classical age preferred the hero to be a male warrior or a soldier such as Achilles who primarily aimed at the achievement of honor and greatness. Later on the Spiritual qualities were added as in Spencer's medieval romance, *The Faerie Queene*. The age of chivalry focused more on the protection of the weaker sections of the society. The concept of the hero kept on evolving over the centuries leading gradually to the emergence of the common man as hero in the twentieth century.

The mythical records in different cultures are seen as the manifestation of values, beliefs and philosophies that fulfill the national interests of the people. In this regard, the bible encompasses the Christian values and philosophies. Similarly, the Puranas, Upanishads, The Mahabharata and The Ramayana are understood as the manifestation of Hindu religious exhortations. The mythological characters are the symbolic representation of these conventional values and are considered as a cultural beacon of any nation. Apart from this, through these mythological characters, certain philosophical ideas like the mysteries of birth, death and destiny are reflected in the mythical stories. The simulation of such characters in literary productions, on the allegorical grounds and literal meaning are known as 'archetypes'. The term

archetypes, “ denote the recurrent designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes and images which are identified in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams and even in social rituals” (Abrams 12).

This paper attempts to critically analyze the concept of archetypal hero through Amish Tripathi’s *Shiva Trilogy*.

There are certain common patterns in which the hero of a fantasy can be placed. The hero is usually shown as an orphan in fairy tales such as Snow White and Cinderella. The parents of this orphan may be dead or lost. This hero may be an abandoned child like Oedipus. The orphan may also fit into the ‘ lost prince’ or ‘ hidden Monarch’ archetype (Campbell).

Joseph Campbell says that once the hero is destined for greatness, he necessarily undergoes a difficult childhood during which his status as a hero is ignored, unknown or forgotten.

The hero of a fantasy fiction is born to accomplish a unique task with an exemplary spirit of endurance and self-abnegation. His typical mission is to save the world, or at least his own community from the impact of evil, embodied in a satanic villain. Right from his birth the hero is marked out as a ‘ chosen one’ by a prophecy, which is revealed to him at the appropriate time. In the words of Burrows et al., “ The hero is often seen in savior terms as one who conquers evil and thus frees his people from destruction and death.” ( *Myths and Motifs in literature* 225)

In *Shiva Trilogy*, Tripathi presents several models of heroism- Shiva – the great hero, Sati the wise and brave warrior, Parvateshwar the traditional knightly quest hero, Nandi’s ardent enthusiasm makes him among the heroes of *Shiva Trilogy*. There are many other characters in *Shiva Trilogy* who exhibit courage when it is required. However, Tripathi’s main focus for hero is on Shiva. Shiva’s type as a hero is well depicted in W.H. Auden’s essay, “ the quest hero” . Shiva “ resembles the hero of the epic, a man of hidden powers” (31). Shiva also shares the second type given by Auden in the same essay. He is the one “ who owes his success, not to his powers, but to external forces” (31). Shiva is provided with endearingly human peculiarities and this makes him a very modern hero.

Shiva does not resemble the hero as a God-like form of a man. He has human attributes with related strengths and weaknesses, being drawn on the lines of Adam and Everyman. His conflict with Prakrits in saving his tribe, his conduct with his friends, and his less-than-perfect home life in Himalayas, all signify Shiva’s everyman status. Shiva undergoes many transformations and eventually comes out as a competent leader and future general who can challenge the villain and his cohorts. He is depicted as a traditional clan head that is fighting for his clan and knows nothing of the world outside. He is an archetypal ‘ innocent’ who moves towards, or rather falls into knowledge like Adam or everyman. His progression leads him to say, “ I was thinking that the primary source of Evil is human greed. It’s our greed to extract more and more from Good that turns it to Evil.” (*Oath*, 133) Shiva, similar to many fairy-tale heroes, is not aware of

the events going on in his life and desires to know more about the prevailing circumstances. Shiva, turning to Ganesh says, “ ...I need to know more. I have to know more.” (*Oath*, 52)

Shiva is a conventional hero of romance, larger than life, a fighter, a leader, a lover and a healer. Offering many models of heroism, Tripathi makes it clear that his chief protagonist is Shiva by suggesting the reader to observe him more fully from within. Shiva is introduced first to the readers as the one with a blue mark on his throat and then is revealed to be the one elected to face the evil and bring it to an end.

Shiva, like many fairy-tale heroes, is an orphan and is brought up by his uncle lord Manobhu. This uncle of Shiva taught him the lessons of his life and made him aware of the purpose of his life. Lord Manobhu's teachings kept on haunting him throughout his journey. He trained Shiva for his journey against evil. It is again Lord Manobhu whose prepared medicine is responsible for the blue throat of Shiva, revealed by Mithra when he says, “ your uncle and I made the medicine together” (*Oath*, 398). Shiva acknowledges his uncle's endeavor in training and educating him, “ I was trained by him, no doubt. He taught me ethics, warfare, psychology, arts” (*Oath*, 113).

Shiva's main mission was to bring the end of an Evil. *Shiva Trilogy* is unique in drawing its Evil. Here the Evil is generated through the unequal and unchecked production of Somras, the drink of eternity. Shiva was ' Chosen' to bring the production of Somras in equation. Shiva, like the traditional quest hero, is not sure of himself. He says, “ ‘ I' m not sure, Bhadra. I haven' t made up my mind as yet” (*Oath*, 37). Shiva doubts his uncle's choice and clearly reveals that he is not sure of himself. He says, “ So, a congenital event just set me up for this role? My uncle could have got it all wrong. I could still be an erroneous choice and maybe I will not achieve the purpose set out for me” (*Oath*, 112). Shiva is in the state of confusion. He, like a typical hero of fairy tales, does not consider his life as the grand plan of Parmatma. He says, “ Neither is it the grand plan of the Parmatma that I emerged as the Neelkanth. I suspect it was my uncle's doing. Though how he did all this is a mystery to me” (*Oath*, 108).

Shiva is destined to accomplish a task. He is ' The chosen one.' Campbell writes, “ Hero hood is predestined, rather than simply achieved” (35). In spite of his apparent ordinariness Shiva is called upon to play the role of the ' chosen one' . Gopal says that Shiva was not marked for any set task. Yet somehow he was given the vayuputra medicine at the right age. He also arrived in Meluha at the appropriate time and was given the Somras that made his throat turn blue. He was not even trained for the role of neelkanth. Nobody gave him the answer to the key question. Everyone refused to say anything that would create a bias in his mind. All were very careful in their communications with him regarding his task. And yet, he arrived at the right answer. Gopal says that this is an ample proof to justify that Shiva has been the Chosen one and sent by Parmatma to end Evil. (*Oath*, 203)

Shiva also fits into the knight archetype which is primarily associated with chivalry, courtly romance and the protection of the innocent and weak. Shiva is the voice of the voiceless people. This is evidenced when Ganesha says, “ Baba's mission is to fight for the oppressed; to be the voice of the voiceless” (*Oath*,

41). Knight archetype has spiritual connotations. Allegiance and self-sacrifice are the Knight's virtues, along with a natural dexterity to accomplish difficult tasks.

Shiva also possesses hidden depths, unknown even to himself. He could foresee the future events. In his own visionary dream he saw Sati, his love and life, in a battle field sitting:

Calmly atop a thick pile of wood. Her metal armour had been secured around her torso, carved arm bands glistened in the dusky light, her sword lay by her side and the shield was fastened on her back. She was prepared for war. But why was she wearing a saffron *angvastram*, the colour of the final journey? (Oath 354).

As the story advances, his dream becomes the reality of his life and he loses Sati with her death in the battle field.

The heroes of fantasy are chosen for a mission. They are entrusted with a task to accomplish. Shiva in *Shiva Trilogy* is also chosen for a task. His mission is clearly expressed in his proclamation that was prepared to be pasted on the walls of temples. The proclamation goes as follow:

To all of you who consider yourselves the children of Manu and followers of the Sanatan Dharma, this is a message from me, Shiva, your Neelkanth. I have travelled across our great land, through all the kingdoms we are divided into, met with all the tribes that populate our fair realm. I have done this in search of the ultimate Evil, for that's my task. Father Manu had told us Evil is not a distant demon. It works its destruction close to us, with us, within us. He was right. He told us Evil does not come from down below and devour us. Instead, we help Evil destroy our lives. He was right. He told us Good and Evil are the two sides of the same coin. That one day, the greatest Good will transform into the greatest Evil. He was right. Our greed in extracting more and more from Good turns it into Evil. This is the universe's way of restoring balance. It is the Parmatma's way to control our excesses. I have come to the conclusion that the Somras is now the greatest Evil of our age. All the Good that could be wrung out of the Somras has been wrung. It is time now to stop its use, before the power of its Evil destroys us all. It has already caused tremendous damage, from the killing of Saraswati River to birth deformities to the diseases that plague some of our kingdoms. For the sake of our descendants, for the sake of our world, we cannot use the Somras anymore. Therefore, by my order, the use of the Somras is banned forthwith. To all those who believe in the legend of the Neelkanth: follow me. Stop the Somras. To all those who refuse to stop using the Somras: know this. You will become my enemy. And I will not stop till the use of the Somras is stopped. This is the word of your Neelkanth. (Oath 120)

## Conclusion

The hero of fantasy, whether he is a knight or an everyman archetype, or a combination of both in modern attire, wakes into awareness when the time demands and aligns himself with the good forces.

Whether or not he is overtly religious, he follows the mode of sacrifice to restore his world to a state of peace and prosperity, achieving self-realization in the process.

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