



Leadership Masterclass for Youth in Amish Tripathi's Mythological Fiction: The Shiva Trilogy

Shivani¹ and Dr. Saurav Bhattacharyya²

¹Research Scholar, University Department of English, Jai Prakash University, Chapra

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Prabhunath College, Parsa (Saran), Jai Prakash University, Chapra)

Abstract : Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy—consisting of *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010) *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013)—depicts Lord Shiva not just as a deified figure but as an actual human being who progressed from being the chief of a Tibetan tribe through his journey from being Neelkanth and ultimately becoming a person who exemplifies leadership. Though the trilogy does not serve as an historically accurate retelling of how Lord Shiva became Neelkanth, it does contain numerous practical lessons regarding the art of ethical decision-making, duty (as expressed through karma), humility, justice, and human agency. Through a close analysis of key figures of the trilogy (Shiva, Sati, Parvateshwar) and the dilemmas they faced (Somras, the Naga), this article identifies seven common traits exhibited by the leading characters. The analysis of the transformational journey of Shiva provides evidence that true leaders gain their leadership by virtue of their actions alone and not merely through their birthright. Therefore, the lessons learned from the Shiva Trilogy are particularly useful for young readers who will be facing the challenges of navigating ethical dilemmas in the 21st Century. Based upon the message contained in the Shiva Trilogy, it is concluded that ancient Indian wisdom, skillfully packaged in an enjoyable format, provides a body of knowledge that can be readily applied by future generations in leading by example.

Key words: Youth reader, Leadership, Mythology, Fiction, Protagonist, Novel, Ethical dilemmas.

1. Introduction : To achieve any significant task or action, there has always been a persistent requirement for a pioneer or predecessor, commonly referred to as a leader. This individual possesses the capability to guide and has the vision necessary to lead a team. He must be well-equipped with wisdom and knowledge, and should be able to exert his influence whenever necessary. The term 'leader' is derived from the Old English word '*lædan*', which means 'to go before as a guide'. It was first utilized in English during the 14th century to denote a person in charge, with various other interpretations emerging later. Leadership is not an innate trait; rather, it can be learned or refined if one is dedicated to reaching great heights. Throughout history, the world has seen numerous charismatic leaders, including notable figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, and Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, among many others.

The book titled ‘Shiva Trilogy’, which comprises three volumes: *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas*, and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, contains numerous valuable lessons on leadership. In these mythological narratives, the main character, initially depicted as a young tribal leader, gradually evolves into the most prominent leader of his era, thanks to his exceptional qualities such as being a remarkable team player, possessing vision, demonstrating empathy, exhibiting honesty, making sound decisions, and considering the welfare of every individual and society as a whole.

Set in 1900 BCE, the trilogy depicts Shiva as a common Guna tribesman who relocates to the technologically sophisticated Meluha, consumes the divine Somras, gains the blue throat, and is recognized as the Neelkanth—the annihilator of evil. What transpires is not a divine intervention but a raw human narrative filled with doubt, love, betrayal, conflict, and moral dilemmas. Tripathi consistently underscores through Shiva’s journey that “a man becomes God by his deeds, not his birth.” Academics have started to extract leadership lessons from the series. Deshmukh and Dwivedi (2016) associate Shiva’s characteristics with Karma Yoga as described in the Bhagavad Gita. Santra and Bano (2025) emphasize its model of ethical leadership that prioritizes “humanism over divinity.” Manoranjani (2019) portrays Shiva as the quintessential “savior-leader” who ascends through virtue and action.

This research paper endeavors to highlight several leadership lessons akin to those presented in the trilogy. It contends that the trilogy serves not merely as entertainment but as a leadership laboratory for young readers—demonstrating that leadership is a choice, a habit, and a moral journey, rather than an entitlement of birth or authority.

2. Leadership Masterclass for Youth

(i) Team Playing Spirit

The very first lesson in leadership that stands out to the reader is when Shiva, our main character, shares his dream of leaving their homeland for what the foreigners call a ‘heavenly’ developed country. He addresses his tribesmen, saying, “I have no secrets from you. You all know about the invitation from the foreigners,” as he gestures towards Nandi and the Meluhans. “They fought alongside us today and have earned my trust. I want to journey to Meluha with them, but this decision can’t rest on my shoulders alone.”

‘You are our chief, Shiva,’ said Bhadra. ‘Your decision is our decision. That is the tradition.’

‘Not this time,’ said Shiva holding out his hand. ‘This will change our lives completely. I believe the change will be for the better. Anything will be better than the pointlessness of the violence we face daily. I have told you what I want to do. But the choice to go or not is yours. Let the Gunas speak. This time, I follow you.’

This is a fantastic example of true team spirit, where a leader encourages their followers to express their thoughts. In doing so, everyone feels like they’re making their own choices, which leads to better understanding and stronger relationships. When decisions are forced upon people, they often feel overlooked and inferior. However, when they’re included in the decision-making process, they feel valued, which fosters better teamwork and ultimately leads to success. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in the novel as well.

Shiva's character really grows throughout the novel, embodying all the qualities of a true leader. He doesn't just sit back and give orders; he's always ready to put himself on the line alongside his men, which is the essence of what makes a leader truly great. He leads by example, saying, “If they are willing to shed their blood for me, then I must be willing to shed my blood for them.”

(ii) Visionary/ Trend Setter/ iconoclast

The second significant leadership quality imparted by the Shiva Trilogy is the concept of being an iconoclast. A true leader is someone who rejects the futile, irrational, and traditional customs. In the novel, Shiva, the main character, exemplifies a genuine leader by opposing the malevolent practice of Vikarma in Meluha. This law dictates that any individual, whether male or female, who contracts an illness, or a woman who gives birth to a stillborn child or a child with deformities, is denied participation in religious ceremonies and is deemed untouchable. Such individuals are prohibited from remarrying and are expected to endure their suffering in silence, as it is believed to be a consequence of their past life's transgressions. Throughout the narrative, Shiva ultimately abolishes this law. He critiques the Vikarma law by stating, "That sounds pretty ridiculous to me. A woman could have given birth to a stillborn child simply because she did not take proper care during her pregnancy. Or it could just be a disease. How can anyone assert that she is being punished for the sins of her previous birth?"

"I genuinely think the Vikarma law is unfair. I have felt it from the moment I found out about it."

(iii) Empathy

A true leader can only guide their followers effectively if they truly understand their mental and emotional states. When a leader can empathize with their team, they can provide real solutions to the challenges that arise. One of the key lessons in leadership from the Shiva Trilogy is the importance of empathy, which is beautifully illustrated through the protagonist's experiences. A poignant moment occurs when he expresses the deep emotional struggle of a mother who has to leave her newborn child behind. While the Maika system is a noble approach that ensures children grow up in a consistent environment, regardless of their parents' financial or social status—since it maintains confidentiality and offers equal education, with castes determined later based on merit—Shiva still feels the heartache of that mother. He reflects, "But I guess not too many mothers would have been happy with this. I can't imagine a woman willingly giving up her child as soon as he is born with no chance of meeting him ever again."

(iv) Honesty

One of the most admirable qualities of a great leader is honesty. A leader who truly embodies this trait can set a powerful example and attract followers; it's only through being open and sincere that he can earn their loyalty. In the Shiva Trilogy, the character Shiva is a perfect representation of integrity and honesty; he resists the allure of worldly pleasures and is upfront about his true feelings, earning him the title 'Neelkanth.' Because of this quality, he consistently wins the hearts of everyone he meets. He says, "At this moment, I'm not claiming that I can meet all your expectations, nor am I saying that I can't. What I'm really saying is that I will do my very best."

The novel presents several moments where Shiva is candid and straightforward. In a chat with Panditji, he pointed out that his transformation into Neelkanth wasn't something that happened overnight; it was actually set in motion by his uncle. "It's not just fate at play, Panditji," Shiva explained. "And it's not some grand plan from the Parmatma that led me to become Neelkanth. I have a feeling my uncle had a hand in it. But how he managed that is still a bit of a puzzle." "What do you mean?"

I remember my uncle giving me some medicine when I was a kid. From a really young age, I dealt with these intense burning sensations right between my brows. Thankfully, the medicine he provided helped ease that discomfort. Even though the throbbing still lingers today, it's nowhere near

as bad as it used to be. I can still hear him saying as he mixed the medicine: “We will always remain faithful to your command, Lord Rudra, this is the blood oath of a Vayuputra.” Then, he pricked his index finger and let a drop of blood fall into the potion. That was the mixture he handed to me, telling me to rub it into the back of my throat.

(v) Communication Skills

One of the most desired qualities of an influential leader is his communication skills. Communication is something which is the vehicle of connecting people and if one is good in articulating one’s emotions at right time in right way then it can have a charismatic effect on listeners. All the great leaders are great orators as well and it is impossible to be an impactful leader without this quality.

Shiva shows the utmost skills of communication whenever it is required at every place in the story. When the villagers were frightened because of the Nagas, to boost their morale he demonstrate the best of him, “Shiva had the presence of mind to realise that superstition can be countered by another stronger belief. He climbed the carriage pedestal to stand tall. The villagers stared at him. He ripped off his cravat and threw it away. He didn’t need it anymore.

‘I am the Neelkanth!’

All the soldiers looked up mesmerised at the destroyer of evil. They were overjoyed to see him truly accept his destiny. Those ignorant of the Neelkanth’s arrival beheld the living legend in a daze.

‘I am going to fight these terrorists,’ roared Shiva. ‘I am going to show them that we are not scared anymore. I am going to make them feel the pain we feel. I am going to let them know that Meluha is not going to roll over and let them do what they want.’

Pure energy coursed through the huddled mass that stood in front of Shiva, straightening their spines and inspiring their souls.

‘Who’s coming with me?’

A true leader is also the one who motivates his followers and creates leader. He is the one who makes them realise their actual potential by sheer virtue of communication, Shiva does in the novel when it was the need of the hour,

“Who is Mahadev? Roared Shiva.

They listened in rapt attention, hanging on to every word.

‘Does he sit on a pitiable height and look on idly while ordinary men do what should be his job? No!’ Some soldiers were praying inaudibly.

‘Does he lazily bestow his blessings while others fight for the good? Does he stand by nonchalantly and count the dead while the living sacrifice themselves to destroy evil? No!’

There was pin-drop silence as the Suryavanshis absorbed their Neelkanth’s message.

‘A man becomes a Mahadev when he fights for good. Mahadev is not born as one from his mother’s womb. He is forged in the heat of battle, when he wages a war to destroy evil!’

The army stood hushed, feeling a flood of positive energy.

‘I am a Mahadev!’ bellowed Shiva.

A resounding roar arose from the Suryavanshis. They were led by the *Mahadev*. The *God of Gods*. The Chandravanshis did not stand a chance.

‘But I am not the only one!’

A shocked silence descended on the Suryavanshis. What did the Mahadev mean? He is not the only one? Do the Chandravanshis also have a god?

‘I am not the only one! For I see a hundred thousand Mahadevs in front of me! I see a hundred thousand men willing to fight on the side of good! I see a hundred thousand men willing to battle evil! I see a hundred thousand men capable of destroying evil!’

The stunned Suryavanshis gaped at their Neelkanth as the import of his permeated their minds. They dared not ask the question: Are we gods?

Shiva had the answer: Har Ek Hai Mahadev!’

The Meluhans stood astounded. Every single one a *Mahadev*?

‘Har Har Mahadev!’ bellowed Shiva.

The Meluhans roared. *All of us are Mahadevs!*

The primal energy coursed through the veins of each Suryavanshi. They were gods! It didn’t matter that the Chandravanshis outnumbered them ten to one. They were gods! Even if the evil Chnadravanshis outnumbered them a hundred to one, victory was assured. They were gods!

Har har Mahadev!’ cried the Suryavanshi army.

‘Har Har Mahadev!’ yelled Shiva. ‘All of us are gods! Gods on a mission!’

(vi) Decision making

This quality is an essential component of an effective leader. A leader must make precise and occasionally difficult decisions, as we learn from the Shiva Trilogy. Once a leader has made a decision, it demands significant courage and dedication to carry it out. Shiva, as a compassionate leader, must decide to destroy somras and does everything necessary to accomplish this task.

“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 the 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.”

3. Relevance to Contemporary Youth and Leadership Development

In the present, the new and old both generation will encounter some serious hurdles due to the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, the ongoing climate crisis, growing societal divides, and escalating mental health issues. The Shiva Trilogy provides a helpful lens for navigating these challenging times: it highlights the need for empathy during divisive moments (like the integration of the Naga), encourages us to question harmful societal norms (as seen with the idea of Somras), champions humility in the face of success, and fosters a sense of responsibility rather than entitlement.

The young-adult audience that Tripathi aims for, which includes people between the ages of 14 and 30, really connects with the trilogy because it makes complex philosophical concepts feel more accessible and relatable. This makes it a fantastic resource for universities and corporate training programs, as they could significantly enrich their courses by using the trilogy as case studies—providing a much more engaging option compared to the usual dry textbooks. Additionally, the character of Sati stands out as a strong example of gender-inclusive leadership, motivating young women to confidently step into their rightful roles in society.

4. Conclusion :

Amish Tripathi has achieved something remarkable: he has reimagined ancient mythology as a practical leadership curriculum that is free from preachy overtones. Rather than delivering sermons, Shiva exemplifies the lessons—attaining divinity through perseverance, emotional challenges, love, and tough choices. The central theme of the trilogy is empowering: anyone can reach the level of Mahadev by following the principles of karma, justice, humility, and courage. For young readers, this narrative transcends mere fiction; it acts as both a mirror and a roadmap. Hidden within its pages is a masterclass in leadership waiting to be uncovered. All that is needed is to open the first book, meet the blue-throated outsider, and begin the adventure. Har Har Mahadev!

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