

Indigeneity and Eco-consciousness in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy: A Critical Perspective

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The whole globe is plagued today, with numerous hazardous environmental crises such as climate change, global warming, pollution, depletion of natural resources, infertility of land etc. The development of human civilization metamorphosed into urbanization and modernisation, which further led to colonialism and capitalism. The ghost of colonialism and the spirit of capitalism seem to have irrevocably captured the so-called civilized man's psyche. This obsession sparked anthropocentric attitude in man and he started disregarding the value and significance of the other non-human phenomena. He exercises his high-handedness and takes himself as the master or owner of everything surrounding him. Paradoxically, the tribal people- who still inhabit remote spaces in the forests far away from the humdrum of chaotic mainstream spaces- have always been neglected and marginalised by the so-called civilized society. Even the governments cause upheaval in their lives by driving them away from their natural dwellings/habitats in the name of protection and conservation of flora and fauna with total disregard of tribal ways of living which are conducive enough for ensuring the better thriving of nature and its diverse forms. The way the tribes live is not uncivilized rather it is the most natural way to live in harmony with nature. Nature can satisfy everyone's need but not the greed of the one. Tribal literatures can enlighten the man about the ways of living and his umbilical bonding with nature which has been ripped off in the due course of time his by narrowed anthropocentric tendency. Tribal literatures/oratures in the forms of folksongs, folklores, folkdances, myths and legends are replete with natural and decent ways of living, sharing and caring. These forms of oratures delineate man's intimate connection with nature and its varied forms.

The present paper traces the issues of indigeneity, eco-consciousness and diasporic consciousness in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*. Amish Tripathi is one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of Indian English writers dealing especially in the genre of mytho-fiction. He is a highly prolific writer with unmatched acumen for his writing-craft. He has earned wide popularity across the globe with the very publication of the first book of his *Shiva Trilogy* *The Immortals of Meluha* in 2010. The second book in the series, *The Secret of the Nagas* was released in 2011 and the third one *The Oath of the Vayuputras* was published in 2013. The trilogy weaves Myth, history, philosophy, science and technology in a very beautiful, racy and spirited narrative style. Shashi Tharoor comments, "Amish is a fresh new voice in Indian writing steeped in myth and history, with a fine eye for detail and a compelling narrative style." Amish's *Shiva Trilogy* is unlikely the established discourse. 'Instead of working on the grand style of myth-making, he strips the myth of that archaic resonance. His gods are humanised and his language is lively, racy and elegant' (Mukherjee 2).

Shiva the leader with his Guna tribe had for long inhabited the banks of Mansarovar Lake at the foot of Mount Kailash, Tibet by the time 1900 BC. But he and his tribe people had to be busy battling with Prakratis tribe for their survival. Shiva was fed up by the repeated invasions of the Prakratis. He was much concerned about the safety and well-being of his tribe.

We fight almost every month with the Prakratis just so that our village can exist next to the holy lake. They are getting stronger every year, forming new alliances with new tribes. We can beat the Prakratis but not all the mountain tribes together! (*The Immortals of Meluha* 3)

Shiva and his tribe had already received invitation from Nandi, the emissary of Meluha. The words of Nandi came flooding back to Shiva, "Come to our land. It lies beyond the great mountains. Others call it Meluha. I call it Heaven. It is the richest and most powerful empire in India. Our government has an offer for immigrants. You will be given

fertile land and resources for farming. Today, your tribe, the Gunas, fight for survival in this rough, arid land. Meluha offers you a lifestyle beyond wildest dreams” (2). This very gesture of Nandi tempts them to relocate themselves in an alien land called Meluha. When the Meluhans help Gunas fight the Prakritis, this very gesture of the Meluhans wins the heart of Shiva and he ponders over accepting the invitation of the Meluhan emissary. But Shiva as a leader never becomes bossy. He gives the due credit to his tribe. He respects their emotions and understands their sensibilities. He lives for them. Shiva says-

I want to go with them to Meluha. But this cannot be my decision alone.

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

Not this time This will change our lives completely. . . . Anything will be better than the pointlessness of the violence we face daily. But the choice to go or not is yours. Let the Gunas speak. This time I follow you. (6)

He always seeks their opinions. He is quite unlikely the modern day community or political leaders who go to any extent to realize their selfish ends with little regards and concerns for their subjects. Shiva exhibits the spirit of collectivism that is inherent in tribal lifestyle. Individualism has no place in his persona. The Gunas’ respect for their leader Shiva is not based on conventions but it is because of Shiva’s sterling persona and character. He has fought for them through thick and thin. They speak in unison, “your decision is our decision” (6). The phenomenon of existing unfavourable conditions and the prospect of better life in an alien space have always lured man to undertake such an odyssey. Hence, they embark on a journey that is going to shape their destiny altogether. Nevertheless this emigration was voluntary and not coerced. Shiva’s march along with his tribe for an alien land Meluha marks a distinct diasporic consciousness. However, ‘this diasporic tribe has a different consciousness in comparison with the traditional feelings of a diasporic community. The honour and respect they have received

make them forgetful of their native homeland. The ideas of displacement, dislocation, alienation, exile, nostalgia, rootlessness, desire for the homeland and identity-crisis are hardly associated with them' (Mukherjee 8). As soon as the Gunas relocate themselves in Meluha as Tibet immigrants, a medicinal healing drink is offered to them with which Shiva's throat turned blue. Meluhans called him Neelkantha, their fabled saviour who will help solve Meluhans' serious problems and resolve conflicts with Chandravanshis.

Shiva is produced before Meluhan King Daksha and here he comes to know about the healing drink Somras which was administered to him and his tribe on their arrival to Meluha. He comes to know that Somras turned his throat blue. It is the Somras which ensures the sound health and longevity of the Meluhans. The king informs Shiva that the Chandravanshis feel jealous of them since they don't have enough Somras and they keep devising plans to destroy Somras and the Meluhans. The king highlights-

One of the key ingredients in the Somras is the waters of the Saraswati. Water from any other source does not work. . . . The scientists can't explain it. . . . That is why the Chandravanshis tried to kill the Saraswati to harm us. . . . They diverted the course of the Yamuna so that instead of flowing south, it started flowing east to meet their main river, Ganga. (110)

The forced manipulation of the natural course of rivers and tussle for river waters in the book echoes the present day water war between India and China. The Sino-Indian water dispute is well-known today. The waters coursing down through the Himalayas are vitally important resource for both the countries. The ever-burgeoning population and economic growth calls for enormous water supply. The river Brahmaputra courses down from Tibet and crosses the border into Arunachal Pradesh but China claims it as Southern Tibet (Ho 24). The misappropriation and misuse of natural resources be it land, rivers, minerals or forests leads to untoward occurring. The reports on China's plan to construct a mega-dam just at the point where the river

Brahmaputra enters India is shocking and alarming. Amish highlights that how an exceptionally enormous amount of water is used for the production of Somras to ensure surplus quantity to meet even the future needs of the Meluhans. Such egocentric practice of the Meluhans backs the anticipation of the out-breaking of World War III over water. Kanakhala, the Prime Minister of Meluha highlights the pathetic condition of river Saraswati. The Saraswati doesn't reach the sea now and ends in an inland delta just south of Rajasthan (112).

The second book of the Shiva Trilogy *The Secret of the Nagas* delineates miserable status of the Nagas. The inhumane, ignominious and inconsolable treatment towards Nagas by the main stream elites is vividly portrayed. The Nagas are physically deformed and ostracized tribes inhabiting dense forests of Panchavati. (The third book clarifies that excess consumption of Somras by the parents caused deformity in their babies even before their birth, in the wombs of their mothers). During his tracking and tracing the whereabouts of Shiva, Ganesha (the Naga) encounters a callous incident. Two Magadhan soldiers tussle with a tribe woman and drag her child away. She becomes the victim of their cold-blooded thrashing. This episode substantiates the mentality of the elites in the society towards the natives and tribes.

In the wild and unsettled lands between the Ganga and Narmada lived scattered tribes of forest people. In the eyes of the civilized city folk living along the great rivers, these tribes were backward creatures because they insisted on living in harmony with nature. While most kingdoms ignored these forest tribes, others confiscated their lands at will as populations grew and need for farmlands increased. And a few particularly cruel ones preyed on these helpless groups for slave labour. (The Secret of the Nagas 34)

These lines resonate the modern day condition and status of the tribes across the globe. The elites look down upon them and consider them as scum, unwanted and uncivilized. They are still exploited. Their meagre resources are encroached and snatched away by the elites and the people in power. This colonial mentality is so deeply ingrained and is still

potent enough to devour humanity and harmony. The text vividly portrays that how the tribal children are kidnapped by the royals/elites for Bull-racing game. "They [the tribal children] would shriek out of fear and their weight was inconsequential. The children would be tied to the beasts. If the bull went down, the boy rider would be seriously injured or killed. Therefore, tribal children were often kidnapped to slave away as riders. Nobody important missed them if they died" (34-35).

To gain more information about the Nagas, Shiva and Sati come to Kashi where a Branga community lives. The Brangas perform a strange ritual by using the blood of peacock. A riot broke out in the wake of the killing of a peacock. In the furore, Parvateshwar, the Meluhan Head of armed forces was badly injured. Divodas, the leader of the Branga community in Kashi provides a herb to heal Parvateshwar's injury. Ayurwati, the Meluhan Chief of Medicine was shocked to find the herb in Kashi. She was terribly stunned as this herb is only available in Panchavati, the capital of the Nagas. When compelled, Divodas divulges that he receives the herb from the Nagas to treat wide spread plague which is adversely affecting his Branga people. This portrayal substantiates the inherent traditional ecological knowledge of the tribes dwelling in nature which could be a great assistance in understanding and tackling environmental crises and impending disasters. This traditional knowledge and eco-culture cannot be ensured if the tribes are driven away.

When realization dawns upon Shiva that the Nagas are not evil, he undertakes a journey to Panchavati through Dandak forest with Kali, the Naga queen and Ganesha, the Lord of the People. Kali enlightens all the tribe members and Meluhan soldiers about Dandakaranya.

That the Dandak forest is largest in the world. That it stretches from the Eastern Sea to the Western Sea. That it is so dense that the sun hardly ever cracks through. That it is populated by monstrous animals that will devour those who lose their ways. That some trees themselves are poisonous, felling those stupid enough to eat or touch things better left alone. (332)

During the course of their journey to Panchavati, Ganesha cuts down many bushes and plants to create a path for the convoy. After having covered the path Ganesha sows seeds of the same plants to ensure replenishment. “The bushes have grown back completely. It’s almost as if they had never been cut” (340). They have high esteem towards natural bounties. Neither do they exploit nor waste or misuse the herbs. They rather ensure the replenishment of the used up herbs and plants. The same concerns echo in Easterine Kire’s novel *When the River Sleeps*, wherein she portrays the indigenous cultural construct of the Tenyimia Nagas, whose harmonious relationship with diverse natural phenomena and non-human forms of life equip them with a distinct knowledge ‘of the natural environment that reflects their concerns for the sustainability of local resources (Satapathy and Bhattacharya 2).

The third instalment of the Shiva Trilogy, *The Oath of the Vayuputras* delineates disastrous portrayal caused by wars and by utter disregard and apathy of humans towards natural phenomena and resources. It exhibits the horrible spectres in the forms of smoky chaotic disruption of the world, dried rivers, polluted atmosphere and water bodies and loss of peace. Brahaspathi, the Meluhan scientist underscores the changed dynamics:

When Somras was being made for just a few thousand, the amount of Saraswati water used didn’t matter. But when we started mass producing Somras for eight million people, the dynamics changed. The waters started getting depleted. . . . The Saraswati has already stopped reaching the western Sea. It now ends its journey in an inland delta, south of Rajasthan. (The Oath of the Vayuputras 17)

Brahapathi further highlights that Somras production “generates large amounts of toxic waste” (18-19). He further elaborates the problem.

It cannot be disposed of on land, because it can poison entire districts through ground water contamination. It cannot be discharged into the sea. The Somras waste reacts with salt water to disintegrate in a dangerously rapid and explosive manner. (19)

Hence, the toxic waste is released into “a river high up in the Himalyas

called Tsangpo, where the Meluhans decide to set up a giant waste treatment facility”(19). The cold water of Tsangpo river dilutes the poisonous impact of the waste to a great degree. However, when the river enters India in the form of Brahmaputra river, the rising temperature reactivates the dormant toxin in the water. As a result it causes plague among Branga people when they consume waters of the Brahmaputra river.

After having studied the repercussions and impacts engendered by Somras manufacturing and its consumption, Shiva decides to destroy the Somras Manufacturing plant by launching nuclear weapons like Brahmastra. Shiva makes proclamation:

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. (119)

The launching of Brahmastra and Pashupathiastra brought about total destruction of humanity and the environment. Being equipped with missiles and nuclear power can be a cutting edge in the field of defence but its detrimental aspects cannot be overlooked. Today, several countries are equipped with devastating weapons and these fatal arms await an insensible order/command to crumble and collapse the whole globe into something that cannot be recorded, documented, portrayed or depicted in any form.

The paper can be concluded by highlighting the fact that non-human entities are animate enough and they call for our sincere, sensible and caring approach towards them. The paper has shown that how homocentric world view has disrupted the entire ecosystem and ripped off the symbiotic relationship between human and non-human entities. Ecocentrism is the only way to be adopted wherein the nature is the

centre of existence and man is an integral part of it. Man is not the nucleus but a part of this wide ecosystem. Man has always fought for his rights but he never pondered over the rights of nature and its diverse non-human phenomena. Non-human entities have their rights and man must draw a line in order to safeguard their rights because human lease of life can be extended only by ensuring the existence of nature and all non-human forms. In the light of this context indigenous way of living and practices need to be adopted and revered rather than relegating it as something backward. Tribes worship plants, trees, herbs and animals. They have high esteem towards natural bounties. Indigenous way of living has always been ecocentric. They use natural resources minimally and never try to hoard them and thus ensure sustainability. Their knowledge about the medicinal properties of the plants and herbs needs to be treasured and practised. The ray of hope lies in the practice of ecoculture and ethno-eco-culture.

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