

Approaches to Hindu Mythology in the Select Novels of Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*

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Abstract

Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*, *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas*, and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* represents a significant shift in contemporary Indian mythological fiction. This paper examines Tripathi's approach to Hindu mythology, where he re-explains divine figures from the Puranas, Vedas, and epics as historical human beings raised to godhood through extraordinary deeds and choices. Reference from original sources such as the Shiva Purana, Bhagavata Purana, and concepts from the Vedas and Upanishads, Tripathi "humanizes the divine" by the foundation of myth in logic, history, and science. Key mythological events like Samudra Manthan and the identity of Neelkanth are retold with rational explanations, while retaining core dharmic values of karma, dharma, and the fight between good and evil. The trilogy also challenges binary notions of Deva and Asura by presenting perspective-driven morality, reflecting teachings from the Bhagavad Gita. By situating the narrative in a fictionalized Sapt Sindhu civilization linked to the Indus Valley, Tripathi bridges mythology with Indian history and makes ancient philosophy accessible to modern readers. Thus Tripathi's approach does not seek to substitute scripture but to act as a bridge by using mythological fiction to revive interest in original texts and to convey the idea that divinity is achieved through action, not birth.

Keywords: Amish Tripathi, Shiva Trilogy, Hindu Mythology, Mythological Fiction, Neelkanth, Dharma, Indian Literature

Amish Tripathi is a contemporary Indian author who reimagined Hindu mythology for modern readers. His debut series, the Shiva Trilogy, consisting of *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011), and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013), brought

ancient Indian epics into mainstream fiction. His approach is unique because he treats gods as human beings who achieved greatness through their actions. In the original scriptures like the Vedas, Puranas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata, Lord Shiva is portrayed as a divine, supernatural being - the destroyer in the Trimurti, a yogi who meditates on Mount Kailash, and the husband of Goddess Parvati. Amish Tripathi's approach is to "humanize the divine". He proposes a central idea: "What if the gods were not gods to begin with? What if they were humans like us, but performed extraordinary deeds?" As mentioned in the author's note and interviews referenced in many school and college textbooks on contemporary Indian literature, Tripathi states that he drew inspiration from original texts but chose to interpret them through logic, science, and history.

Instead of magic, Amish gives scientific and historical explanations. The "Somras" is explained as a medicinal drink, not divine nectar. Shiva's blue throat comes from drinking poison during the Samudra Manthan, but here the poison is symbolic of absorbing society's problems. This connects back to the Samudra Manthan episode from the Bhagavata Purana and Mahabharata. In the trilogy, Shiva starts as a tribal chief from the Guna tribe. He is called to Meluha because of the Neelkanth prophecy. The book references the original concept of Shiva as Mahadev and Neelkanth, but presents his journey as one of duty, leadership, and choice. This aligns with the idea in the Shiva Purana where Shiva is both a householder and an ascetic. Original texts often describe the battle between Devas and Asuras. Amish retains this framework but blurs the line. The Nagas, traditionally seen as villains, are shown as a persecuted community. This reflects a modern reading of dharma from the Bhagavad Gita - that good and evil depend on perspective and action, not birth.

Tripathi weaves concepts from the Vedas and Upanishads like karma, dharma, and the pursuit of a better society. The Meluhans follow the path of Dharma and Sapt Sindhu

civilization, which textbooks link to the Indus Valley Civilization. This grounds mythology in Indian history. According to references in contemporary literature textbooks, Amish's Shiva Trilogy made mythology accessible to youth by using simple language and a thriller format. He did not change the core values of the original texts, but retold them to answer modern questions: What makes someone a god? Is it birth or karma? His work sparked renewed interest in reading original scriptures. As noted in supplementary readings on modern Indian writers, Tripathi's method is called "mythological fiction" - respecting the source but filling gaps with imagination. Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy does not replace the original Hindu texts. Instead, it acts as a bridge. He takes characters and stories from the Puranas and Vedas and presents them as human epics. His approach shows that mythology can be both sacred and relevant, teaching that "Evil is not born, it is created" - a theme that echoes the moral teachings of our original texts.

Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), the first book of the Shiva Trilogy, retells the story of Lord Shiva not as a supernatural deity, but as a mortal who rises to divinity through action. His approach is to "demystify" mythology by giving historical and logical explanations to events found in original Hindu scriptures like the Shiva Purana, Bhagavata Purana, and Vedas, while keeping the core philosophy intact. "He drank the poison that emerged during Samudra Manthan to save the world. His throat turned blue." — Bhagavata Purana, Canto 8, Chapter 7. Tripathi gives a scientific cause to a divine act. The "poison" becomes a corrupted medicine, and the blue throat becomes a physical side-effect, making the myth relatable.

The legend of Samudra Manthan is referenced as an ancient war where Devas and Asuras fought. The "poison" and "nectar" are reinterpreted as chemical discoveries which is adopted in the novel *The Immortals of Meluha*. "The Devas and Asuras churned the ocean of

milk using Mount Mandara... first came Halahala, the poison.” — Bhagavata Purana, Canto 8, Chapter 6-7. Amish treats the Puranic story as history. Magic is replaced with early science and metallurgy, suggesting ancient Indians had advanced knowledge.

Shiva begins as the chief of the Guna tribe. He is invited to Meluha based on a prophecy. His divinity is earned through leadership, war, and sacrifice. “Shiva is described as Mahadeva, the greatest among gods, a yogi, and destroyer in the Trimurti.” Shiva Purana, Rudra Samhita. Amish uses the line from the Katha Upanishad: “Uttishtha Jagrata”, “Arise, awake.” The idea is that any human who follows dharma can become like Shiva. Divinity is the state accompanied by karma, not birth.

The central conflict is between the orderly Meluhans who follow Dharma and the Chandravanshis, Nagas who are branded “evil.” “It is not the birth but the actions that determine whether one is a Deva or Asura.” Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 16. The author reflects the Gita’s teaching that good and evil are choices. This makes mythology relevant to modern questions of morality.

Meluha is based on the Indus Valley Civilization. The people worship the river and follow strict laws of purity. “The land between the seven rivers was considered sacred in the Rig Veda.” — Rig Veda, Nadistuti Sukta, 10.75. He grounds mythology in archaeology and history, making the gods part of India’s civilizational past.

Amish Tripathi’s approach in *Immortals of Meluha* is not to contradict the original texts, but to reinterpret them. He uses the framework of the Puranas and Vedas but filters them through reason, history, and human psychology. His core message, drawn from the spirit of the Upanishads and Gita, is: “Gods are not born. They are made by their deeds.” Thus the novel acts as a bridge, introducing young readers to original mythology by presenting it as an epic human story first.

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