

A JOURNEY THROUGH PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS IN SHIVA TRILOGY

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Abstract :

Shiva Trilogy, a mythological fiction authored by Amish Tripathi, is an intellectual contemplation over many philosophical thoughts scattered over the series in the form of dialogue between the key characters. Throughout the Trilogy, Shiva the protagonist of the novel tries to find answer to the philosophical question 'What is Evil?'. This one question gives birth to many other questions like what is the nature of Good and Evil? what is our karma? what purpose does creation and destruction serves? Amish Tripathi has discussed these and many more abstract ideas and ethical dilemmas by placing them in a mythological framework. The legendary deity Shiva, is reimagined as a simple tribe leader struggling to search and destroy evil. His path towards divinity is enlightened with many philosophical reflections. This research paper tries to arrange and analyse those scattered references to make Shiva Trilogy a journey through awakening and inner clarity.

Keywords : Shiva Trilogy, Philosophy, Good and evil, Karma, Creation, Destruction, Mahadev.

Introduction :

The Shiva Trilogy, a highly popular mythological fiction, authored by Amish Tripathi, comprises a set of three novels: The Immortals of Meluha, The Secret of Nagas, and The Oath of Vayuputras. The series chronicles the journey of the legendary God Shiva, who dwells on Mount Kailash and ascends to Meluha, the land of pure life, in search of his destiny. In Meluha he emerged as their potential saviour, Neelkanth, destined to discover and destroy evil. The legend of Lord Shiva, the mythical god of destruction, forms the narrative scaffold for reimagination. Using mythology for communicating complex philosophical concepts in a simple and relatable way is a trend in literature. Amish Tripathi the author of mythological fictions has fully utilised this trend in his popular series of Shiva Trilogy. He trusts that writing must serve a higher purpose beyond mere storytelling. His books serve as vehicles to convey his philosophy. Without philosophy a book remains only a body without a soul. Shiva Trilogy is philosophical treatise conveying timeless wisdom and contemplative truths. Such concepts are conveyed through dialogue, and ethical discussions, amongst the key characters of the novel, scattered on various pages of the series. This research paper throws light on the key philosophical ideas on the nature of good and evil, role of destiny and karma, importance of the balance of creation and destruction.

Nature of Good and Evil :

Eternal struggle between good and evil and their interdependent nature forms the underlying theme of the novel. Everything exists in the world to serve a purpose. If good

serves a purpose, that means evil also serves a purpose. Shiva ignites a beautiful thought. “Har Har Mahadev. All of us are Mahadevs. There is a god in every single one of us”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.113) Gopal the chief Vasudev pandit explains Shiva that, the corollary for this beautiful thought would be “there is god in every single one of us. And there is evil in every single one of us. The true battle between good and evil is fought within. And the great evil connects itself to the evil within us”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.113) This explains why people get attached to it. The discussion further continues for another time where Shiva gets confused about who is exactly the evil. He travelled all over India and everywhere he finds good people. They are different from each other but not evil. To help Shiva understand the true nature of evil, Gopal clarifies, “Lord Manu had said it’s not people who are evil. True Evil exist beyond them. It attracts people. It causes confusion amongst its enemies. But Evil is too big to be confined to just a few”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.276) Shiva understood that “Evil is a power as strong as Good. That it doesn’t work by itself, but uses people as its medium. These people, maybe even good people, find purpose in serving Evil”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.276) But what he does not understand is, how can it be destroyed, if it serves a purpose? Making things simpler, Gopal further elucidates, that the institution of Mahadev has to maintain the balance between good and evil. He has to take evil out of equation at correct time. Because evil cannot be and should not be destroyed permanently, it keeps rising again and again. It serves the purpose of good in another time. Shiva kept brooding on the thought for many days on what Lord Manu had said, “Good and Evil are two sides of the same coin”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.278) One day Ganesh unveils the thought, by telling shiva to take it as a clue. It is difficult to search for the whole coin but it is possible for the Neelkanth to find one side of the coin. “Search for Good. And you shall find Evil as well. The greater the Good, the greater the Evil”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.347) At another time Gopal illuminates Shiva with a philosophical book called ‘Bhagavad Gita’ that encapsulates what he wants to convey. “Excess should be avoided, excess of anything is bad”. (Tripathi, 2013, P.97) “Good is not enjoyed excessively. Or else the universe will re-balance itself by creating Evil to counteract Good. That is the purpose of Evil: it balances the Good.” (Tripathi, 2013, P.97) There can’t be a good that does not imbalance the universe. Our being alive itself creates imbalance. We human beings, being gifted with intelligence, can consciously choose good and improve our lives. We can also stop evil before it destroys us completely. But we forget, “that many times the Good we create leads to the Evil that will destroy us”. (Tripathi, 2013, P.98) At such a point Mahadev has to emerge to direct people away from good that has become evil without offering anything in return. If the good is removed too early from society, the march of civilization may get obstructed and if it is removed too late, there is a risk of complete destruction of society.

Destiny and Karma :

Shiva’s uncle Manobhu, a Vayuputra member, has recognized in him a potential candidate to become Mahadev. He knew that the greatest Good of their civilization, Somras has turned evil, and time has come to destroy it. Only Mahadev can convert a battle of good and evil into a holy war, so he made Shiva capable of identifying evil and convincing people to give up their attachment with it. He trained Shiva to make ethical choices and developed

his moral clarity. About karma, his personal deeds, he tells Shiva, “It is your karma to fight evil. It doesn’t matter if the people that evil is being committed against don’t fight back. It doesn’t matter if the entire world chooses to look the other way. Always remember this. You don’t live with the consequences of other people’s karma. You live with the consequences of your own”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.144) Manobhu counsels young Shiva to always listen to his heart for moral clarity. When Shiva would find anything wrong happening around him, however small or powerless he may appear in front of it, but he must protest. If one tries to fight, there is a chance that the situation remains the same. But there is also a chance, however small, that the situation may change. But if one doesn’t even try there is no chance for change. It is not his karma to run away without fighting back. Shiva realises that, “A man becomes a Mahadev, only when he fights for good. A Mahadev is not born from his mother's womb. He is forged in the heat of battle, when he wages a war to destroy evil”. (Tripathi, 2010, P.344) After many years while standing in front of the Suryavanshi army, ready to attack the Chandravanshis, pointing his army Shiva roars that there are hundred thousand Mahadevs standing in front of him. Since they are on the side of good and willing to battle evil. All such people are capable of destroying evil. Anyone who wants to fight and destroy evil can become a Mahadev.

The Trilogy is guided by the philosophy of Karma. Man’s karma is the sculptor of his destiny, shaping his life. Shiva trusts that man’s karma in his life carves a path towards happiness or despair. Meluhans assumes in, karma extending over many births. If a man’s karma in the past life is not good, the Parmatma punishes him in his present life for those sins. His good fortune in the next life depends on his good karma in this life. Shiva on the other hand had revolutionary set of ideas. He asserts that there are no past life sins. We have one life and that is the only reality. Any other thing is theory. One must believe in the theory that gives us peace and reject the one that causes pain. “I don’t believe anything till I’ve seen the proof. For anything without proof, I think we should believe the theory that gives us peace. It doesn’t matter whether the theory is true or not”. (Tripathi, 2011, P.110) For Shiva, we are sure about only this life, and this moment, since we know nothing more than that. Whereas Sati had an objection on Shiva’s theory. For Sati, The Nagas or the Vikarmas deserve their cruel fate, as they are paying for their past life sins. Finding the concept completely illogical, Shiva tries to convince sati, by illustrating her, how Vikarma is a system created by humans for the peaceful governance of society. In a way it is designed to control people. It makes those who suffer or are oppressed, blame themselves for their misery. The system therefore propagates suffering as a form of atonement and at the same time does not allow one to question the wrongs done unto oneself. It is completely random that some people suffer and some gets far more than they deserve. Shiva rejects the role of Parmatma. “I think the Parmatma does not interfere in our lives. He sets the rules by which the universe exists”. (Tripathi, 2013, P.57) He allows things play out naturally. He lets His creation to make decisions about their own lives. This world is our ‘Karmabhoomi’ and we need to choose our karma thoughtfully. Shiva introduces an empowering thought. “When you know that your fate is completely random, you have the freedom to commit yourself to any theory that will empower you”. (Tripathi, 2013, P.57) This way if one decides to challenge his

destiny, his opponent would not be some judgmental Lord Almighty, who may seek to punish him, but the limitations of his own mind. This will empower us to fight with our fate.

Another piece of karma philosophy is voiced by Kartik, the younger son of Mahadev. Fate has determined that Somras has turned evil. Maharshi Bhrigu, wants to punish himself with death, for the sin he committed, by supporting the Somras. But Kartik calls it an easy way out. Instead of escaping through death he advises Bhrigu to set things right by balancing his karma. He has a vast storehouse of knowledge. The Somras is not the only subject he excels at. He can compile his wisdom in a book form naming it 'Bhrigu Samhita'. Bhrigu's karma is to spread his knowledge throughout the world, whether others choose to listen or not is their karma. Kartik do not want a bad deed to arrest his wheel of karma. He doesn't want Bhrigu to banish himself from this world as a punishment for his sin. Instead, he wants Panditji to stay in this world and do some good, so that he can cleanse his karma. "One cannot undo what has happened. But the inexorable march of time offers the wise opportunities for redemption. I entreat you, do not escape. Stay in this world and do your karma". (Tripathi, 2013, P.526)

Purpose of creation and destruction :

Amish Tripathi has quoted ancient thoughts of philosophy, to express his view on the purpose of creation and destruction. One philosophical thought blames desire for all suffering and all destruction. Because desire creates attachment. Attachment to this world, and when one does not get what he wants or get what one doesn't want, it leads to suffering. This creates anger. That turns to violence and wars, ultimately causing destruction. "So, if you want to avoid destruction and suffering, you should control your desire". (Tripathi, 2011, P.383) We need to give up maya or the illusion of this world. Another set of philosophical thoughts from Rig Veda says that in the beginning of this world there was nothing except darkness and a primordial flood. Then out of darkness, desire was born. From then desire became the primal seed, the germ of creation. And after that Prajapati, the Lord of the Creatures, created the Universe and everything in it. So, if this point is considered, desire becomes the root of creation as well. This way desire becomes the source of creation as well as destruction. It is not possible to destroy anything that has not been created and also anything that has been created, has to be destroyed at some point of time. "That is the purpose of desire. It is for creation and destruction. It is the beginning and the end of a journey. Without desire, there is nothing". (Tripathi, 2011, P.384)

Extending the thought, the novel asserts that greed is the primary source of evil and all human suffering. "It is our greed to extract more and more from the Good that turns it into Evil". (Tripathi, 2013, P.133) But it is very difficult not to be greedy, to willingly control one's desires. The Somras which has served for many thousands of years both as good to some and evil to others. It will soon perish for all its practical purposes. Its destination is back to where it began. "If you aren't back to where you began, all it means is that the journey isn't over. Maybe it will take one lifetime. Maybe many. But you will end your journey exactly where you began" (Tripathi, 2013, P.133) This is the nature of life. The universe will

also end its journey exactly where it began. It will end in an infinitesimal black hole of absolute death and on the other side of that death, life will begin once again in a massive big bang. Thus, it will continue in a never-ending cycle. "Creation and destruction are the two ends of the same moment. And everything between creation and the next destruction is the journey of life". (Tripathi, 2013, P.97) It would be the biggest folly, to think that this path would lead us somewhere. "The purpose is not the destination but the journey itself. Only those who understand this simple truth can experience true happiness". (Tripathi, 2013, P.134) The destination or even the purpose does not matter. Gopal tries to elaborate this to Shiva by throwing light on the destiny of Somras. Somras has created so much of good for millennia and then descended into creating evil in equal measure. Then a Neelkanth would rise to end its journey. Does that mean, Somras has achieved nothing in the larger scheme of things? By comparing the destiny of Somras with the cycle of water, would make it easier to understand. The water cycle always ends exactly where it begins. It serves the good purpose of sustaining life on earth. Excessive rain when it causes flood, diseases and death becomes evil for some. "So, the journey of water from the sea back into sea serves a purpose as it makes the journey of life possible on land. Similarly, the journey of the Somras served a purpose for many". (Tripathi, 2013, P.135) It has given purpose to the life of Mahadev to end the journey of the Somras. It has given purpose to Vasudevs to serve the Mahadev. "Rather than the destination it is the journey that lends meaning to our lives". (Tripathi, 2013, P.135) Everyone walking on this path would lead to consequences, both good as well as evil. One thing we all must understand that, we are not in the control of our own breathing. We should realize the truth that we are 'being breathed'. "We are being kept alive because our journey serves a purpose. When our purpose is served, our breathing will stop and the universe will change our form to something else, so that we may serve another purpose". (Tripathi, 2013, P.136)

Conclusion :

Indian mythology is a timeless treasure trove of profound ancient wisdom guiding humanity towards righteous actions. Reading Shiva Trilogy is an exploratory journey through deep philosophical inquiries embedded within an engaging story. Shiva being depicted as a human, who becomes divine through his ethical actions and moral choices emphasizes the potential divinity in every individual. The debates between characters illustrates the nature of evil, the dynamics of karma and the cyclical nature of life through creation, preservation and destruction. Amish Tripathi has effectively transformed such age-old philosophies into living narratives leading readers from ignorance towards enlightenment. The trilogy serves as a medium for value education and ethical leadership for the contemporary readers. This journey through philosophical reflections in Shiva Trilogy illuminates the path towards inner clarity and personal transformation.

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