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THE CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS: THE MANIFESTATION OF THE CULTURAL IMAGE OF
THE MAHADEV IN AMISH TRIPATI'S SHIVA TRILOGY

SHEELU ALEX

External Lecturer, Government College of Nursing, Ernakulam
Email: 3augsheelu93@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

The course of history is continuously re-written through the respective perspective of its individual historian. The legends and the myths, which often form part of this history, is also not free from this transformation. Hence a conflict between the traditional and the modern perspective is witnessed in every historical as well as mythological text. This paper seeks to analyse the cultural image of Shiva depicted in Amish Tripati's Shiva trilogy that inspired the non-Suryavanshis to join forces with him, in the light of Samuel Huntington's concept of the clash of civilisations. Samuel Huntington's concept of the clash of civilisations states that the major source of conflict in the post-cold war period is the religious and the cultural differences. The holy war depicted in the Shiva trilogy is the battle to end the use of the evil of the times, the *Somras* by the Suryavanshis. The objective of this paper is to establish that in the Shiva trilogy, it is the cultural similarity of Shiva with the Chandravanshis, the Nagas and the Meluhans of the frontier, more than the religious awe, which evades conflict and allies them with him, against the Suryavanshis. The life of the Suryavanshis and the city of Meluha, is far more superior to Shiva and his Tibetan premises.

Keywords: history, myths, cultural image, clash of civilisations

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History is never omnipotent and over the course of ages, history is continuously written and re-written. It is an acknowledged fact that history contains not merely recorded facts but also fictionalised ones. History need not be written by a court historian or an academician dedicated to its course. Quasi-stable facts, passed down by word of mouth, can also find a concrete space in the pages of history especially if these facts seep into the picture as myths. Such myths establish themselves as the subjective facts that mould history and the life of human beings according to the timely need of the society. However, it is not always the blind faith that enables the acceptance of myths. It can be debated that it is possible to push the myths down the throats of the less privileged in the society. But what make these myths easily acceptable are the continuity of its propagation as well as the meagre element of truth latent in the mythical facts.

A common characteristic witnessed in both the fictionalised history and the mythologized history is the conflict between tradition and modernity. In its essence, history is about interpretation and analysis of

facts rather than its accumulation. Therefore, the oral history and the written history vary from person to person. Let us take for example the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. In the British records of history, this historical event is registered as the first act of Indian rebellion. However, in the Indian records, this is codified as the first war of independence. Why is the same event recorded as two different aspects in the historical records of two countries? It is because of the difference in perspectives. According to the British, the Indians belong to the category of the barbarians and hence should be civilised. Therefore, the rules and the regulations laid down by the British were intended to civilise the Indians. However, for the Indian, the existing culture dictated the ways of their life and hence could not tolerate the invasion of an alien culture. The practices of the British, who considered themselves modern, were unacceptable to the Indians. This difference in attitude calls for the difference in the historical records.

The clash between tradition and modernity can be witnessed not only in the historical records but also in the accepted beliefs, practices, myths and mythologies that have transformed themselves into history over the course of time. One example of such a myth is the Paleolithic concept of the sex – strike discussed by Knight. The myth discusses menstruation as an effective tool employed by the women of those times to fulfill their requirements. During the Ice Age, emphasis was laid on meat as food, procured mainly through hunting. Hunting, being an activity that requires high levels of violence and mobility, appeared difficult for women. However, they had to persuade men to give them the meat procured by hunting, to satisfy their hunger. Unlike today, the men were not under any obligation to provide the women and the children with food. Therefore, the women as a clan decided to replace the oestrous cycle with the ovulatory cycle enabling heavy menstrual bleeding. Women who were emotionally and physically close synchronised their menstrual cycle and the women bleeding posed a sort of sex-strike. This created a notion that the presence of blood is inauspicious and prevented the men from eating the animals hunted raw. They brought the animal to their tents, cooked it on fire thus removing the blood and in the process sharing it with the women. This myth established the superior position of women in the ancient times. However, in the later times, this menstruation which provided women with a superior status became the cause for the outcaste status attributed to them. The women with the menstrual flow were excluded from the temples as well as the auspicious rituals as they were thought unclean. A similar instance of myth is the one associated with the birth of the child. In the ancient times, giving birth was seen as a miracle performed by women. However, in the later times, despite the existence of clear scientific theories, this superior status caused the downfall of the women when the society held her responsible for the birth of female children.

The myths associated with religion, which is essential to hold the devotees in unity, are themselves not free from the shackles of conflicts. The conflict between perspectives can be witnessed even in the religious texts that are to persuade the devotees to think that their religion is more appropriate than the other religions and hence inspire them to stand together. A significant example of this controversy is the existence of three hundred *Ramayanas* by A. K. Ramanujan. Certain *Ramayana* among them pose Ravan as the virtuous hero in contrast to the existing idea of him being the villain. A contemporary instance of this conflict of perspectives is the presentation of the image of Shiva in different versions of the Shiva mythology; recorded, fictionalised and televised. In the serialised version of the Shiva mythology, *Har Har Mahadev*, Shiva is portrayed as a cold and distinct character, an impartial God in his extremes, who can see into the future and control his emotions to keep promises but mostly remain composed until he opens his third eye. The expression of love is controlled and not channelled to one person. The calm and composed Lord Shiva cannot bring about destruction and needs the aid of Veerbhadra, who appears with the opening of the third eye, to bring about the downfall. However, the visualisation of Lord Shiva is more human and gentle in the serialised version of Hanuman mythology, *Sankat Mochan Mahabali Hanumaan*. In the fictionalised version of the Shiva mythology written by Amish Tripathi, the Shiva trilogy, Lord Shiva breaks all the boundaries set by the traditional narratives and appears as an expressive man, both in terms of love and anger. In the trilogy, Shiva and Veerbhadra exist as two different individuals. Unlike the previous narratives, he is no longer a recluse but openly expresses his love for Lady Sati. Upon Sati's death, he does not take the help of Veerbhadra to bring

about destruction, but uses the *pasupatiastras* himself even when the Vayuputra tribe does not grant him the permission to use them.

Despite the sea of differences in the portrayal of the *Mahadev* in the recorded, the fictionalised and the televised versions of the Shiva mythology, there are also certain characteristics attributed to the *Mahadev* that remain unchanged in all these narratives. In all the narratives, Lord Shiva is the *bolanath*, the simple-minded, easily forgiving and blessings bestowing God. The immense power and the destructive power of Shiva are also emphasised. Dressed in primitive clothes of animal skin with a snake around the neck, he is referred to as the first man. He owns no house but seeks shelter in the open nature. A characteristic trait of Shiva that is predominant in all the narratives is the aversion of Shiva towards the hypocritical rituals and the extreme pleasures of life.

The *Neelkanth*, depicted in the Shiva trilogy by Amish Tripathi, encompasses all these characteristics. However, unlike the other narratives, the Shiva of the trilogy is not a God. He is portrayed as a Tibetan tribal man, who is raised to the position of a God through the intervention of his uncle Manobhu and the Emperor of Meluha, Daksha. Here, the throat of Shiva turned blue not on account of consuming the poison to save the universe but because of a special treatment performed on him by his uncle Manobhu, who wanted him to reveal himself as the *Neelkanth* at the right time. Unlike the Prajapathi Daksha of the mythology, Emperor Daksha of Meluha accepts Shiva as the Lord and offers his daughter's hand in marriage to the *Neelkanth*. The Shiva of the trilogy is not a recluse but reveals his interest in Sati quite openly.

This paper seeks to analyse the reason for the Chandravanshis, the Nagas and the Meluhans of the frontier joining forces with the *Neelkanth* in the holy war in the light of Samuel Huntington's concept of the clash of the civilisations. Samuel Huntington's concept of the clash of civilisations states that the major source of conflict in the post-cold war period is the religious and the cultural differences. The Shiva trilogy of Amish Tripathi belongs to the post-cold war era in terms of its production and its reception. Though the themes dealt in the book is from the ancient myths and the mythologies of Shiva, mainly the *Sivapurana*, the themes are conceived in a modern sense. The book conceives of a world devoid of God, a world in which everyone is a God. Even Shiva or the *Neelkanth* who is addressed as a God is in a state of dilemma if he himself is the *Mahadev*. Unlike the *puranas*, Shiva and Veerbhadra are two distinct individuals. The *Neelkanth* executes the destruction of Meluha in the end and not Veerbhadra. The conception of Sati is far above the picture portrayed by the *puranas*. Lady Sati in the trilogy is bolder than the lady envisaged by the *puranas* though she does not display any knowledge of being the *Adi Shakthi*. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to establish that in the Shiva trilogy, it is the cultural similarity of Shiva with Chandravanshis, the Nagas and the Meluhans of the frontier, more than the religious awe, which evades conflict and establishes unity. The life of the Suryavanshis and the city of Meluha, is far more superior to Shiva and his Tibetan premises.

The Meluhan city is ordered, structured and organised in a clever manner. All people are satiated in terms of basic amenities. The Suryavanshis in Meluha are stringent followers of Lord Ram and his principles. One of the important norms established by Lord Ram is the Maika system. The mothers give birth to the child in Maika after which they sever any relation with the child. The child, according to his/her ability, becomes a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, a Vaishya or a Shudra and is given to families depending on the caste earned by the children. The Naga children are those born with deformities. It is believed that the deformities are caused by the sins of their previous births. Consequently, the Naga children are ostracised by the society and sent to Panchavati. The children of the Naga parents are expected to accompany them but many of them prefer to send their children away and stay at Meluha. Another norm followed in Meluha is the *vikarma* system. *Vikarmas* are also outcastes punished by the sins of their previous birth. They can remain in the society but are untouchables. Anyone who touches them is expected to undergo a *shudikaran* lest they will be infected with evil fate. Sati, the daughter of Emperor Daksha and the wife of Shiva, is such a *vikarma*. She is believed to have lost her child in birth and hence ostracised as a *vikarma*.

Moreover, the people of Meluha are conservative and lack free and open expressions. The streets and the houses are painted in grey and dull colours, symbolising their rule bound dull lives. In contrast to the

Kingdom of Meluha, the land of the Chandravanshis is replete with colours and heartfelt expressions. Chapter Twenty-Five of the novel, *The Immortals of Meluha*, describes the city in detail.

Ayodhya was nothing like Devagiri. At first glance, it promised much. The outer walls were thick and looked astonishing powerful. Unlike the sober grey Meluhan walls, the exterior of Ayodhya had been extravagantly painted with every possible colour in god's universe. Each alternate brick, however, was painted in pristine white, the royal colour of the Chandravanshis. Numerous pink and blue banners festooned the city towers. These banners had not been put up for any special occasion, but were permanent fixtures adorning the city. (*The Immortals of Meluha* 371)

However, in contrast to the outer structure and the beauty, the interiors of Ayodhya shocked any Meluhan. Krittika describes it as a "functioning pandemonium" (*The Immortals of Meluha* 371).

All the roads except the *rajpath* were not properly paved and looked like dirt tracks. There were encroachments over the city where the immigrants pitched their tents giving way to giant slums. Despite the dirt and squalor, all the Ayodhyan houses had an individual allure which the Meluhans lacked. The Ayodhyans lived their lives without the slightest tint of self-control. The common people either laughed like they had just gulped an entire bottle of wine or fought as if their lives depended on it. They expressed their feelings freely, unconcerned about the voyeuristic eyes around them. The Meluhans even refused to embrace freely in public. In this context, the feelings of Anandmayi, the princess of Ayodhya, can be contrasted with that of Parvateshwar. The exposed clothing of Anandmayi irritated Parvateshwar until he witnessed the way she fought with weapons. The efficiency with weapons impressed any Meluhan as did Parvateshwar. The Meluhans gave importance to order and efficiency than beauty and freedom.

The army of Meluha is efficient with Parvateshwar in command. The Ayodhyan military possessed efficient officers but had no good commanders to bring them under one umbrella. The Ayodhyans had the freedom to live their lives and choose the rules, in turn affecting the way the armies function. When Shiva is shocked about the existence of another King in Ayodhya, King Dilipa says,

We aren't like the obsessive Suryavanshis. We don't insist on everyone following one single law. Every kingdom has the right to its own king, its own rules and its way of life. They pay Ayodhya a tribute because we defeated them in battle through the great *Aswamedh yagna*. (*The Secret of the Nagas* 14)

King Dilipa also says that people should be allowed to decide what is good for them rather than the state. An important incident in this regard is the old, shrivelled man in the temple premises who offered food to Shiva. The man looked as if he hadn't eaten food for weeks. He had a wound on the ankle which had festered because of humidity and neglect. With his left hand, he balanced a banana leaf with a piece of bread and some gruel. At the first sight, Shiva understood that the food in the old man's hand were those distributed at the cheap restaurants in the name of donations. Intense anger surged through the nerves of Shiva before he calmed down thinking of the Suryavanshi system that would soon be established in Ayodhya and the consequent developments that would follow. However, the subsequent conversation with the old man transformed the attitude of Shiva. Shiva realised the sublimity of the system in Ayodhya when the man was ready to share the little food he had with Shiva.

When the identity and the lifestyle of Shiva are compared to the life of the Suryavanshis and the non-Suryavanshis, it is revealed that he shares more characteristics in common with the non-Suryavanshis. Shiva and his tribe, the Gunas, prior to the migration, were used to the rough terrains and the harsh weathers. However, on arrival in Meluha, they were allotted rooms, forcibly given medicine along with many rules to follow. In the novel, *The Immortals of Meluha*, it is evident how Ayurvati, the doctor, commanded Shiva to follow certain rules to maintain his health. In contrast, the kingdom of Ayodhya, housed people in slums spread over the public places not as a symbol of degradation but as a man's freedom to choose how they should live. This is proven by the encounter of Shiva with the old man on the way to the temple.

Another point of importance is the difference in the way the Suryavanshi and the Chandravanshi kingdoms were ruled. Emperor Daksha staunchly established his rules over the kingdom in the name of Lord Ram's principles. He also wished to extend his powers to the neighbouring kingdoms. In contrast, King Dilipa acknowledges the possibility of existence of another king within the same kingdom. This trait of Dilipa is similar

to the vision that holds together the Guna tribe. Shiva does not establish his rule over the Guna tribe. Moreover, he is not their ruler but their protector. The Gunas willingly accepted him as their leader similar to the way a section of Chandravanshis accepted Dilipa as their king.

The Suryavanshis and the non-Suryavanshis differ in their expression of emotions. Anandmayi is vivid in the expression of her love for Parvateshwar. However, Parvateshwar views this extravagant attitude as immodesty. Kali, the twin sister of Sati, a Naga clutches the weapon everytime she hears of an attack without contemplating on the situation. The ruler of Lothal, rejecting the norms of Meluha, associated with the Nagas. In terms of the expression, Shiva is more like the non-Suryavanshi because he openly expresses his love for Sati. Inability to stand firm in one decision on account of emotions is also a characteristic that distinguishes Shiva and the others from the Suryavanshis. Parvateshwar, the true Meluhan, severs bond with Shiva and joins the forces of Meluha. Anandmayi, a Chandravanshi, pledges to stand with Shiva even if her husband quits, later joins the views of her husband. A similar tendency can be seen in the life of Shiva. Shiva promises the *Vasudevs* and the *Vayuputras* that he will not use the *pasupatiastras* except as a threat, but he bows down to his emotions following the death of Sati to seek revenge.

Over the course of the discussion, it is revealed that it is not the religious title of the *Neelkanth* that provides Shiva with the advantage of a huge allied force in the holy war. It is the cultural similarity with the Chandravanshis, the Nagas and the Meluhans of the frontier that came to the aid of Shiva. A significant example is the change of allegiance of Parvateshwar. Parvateshwar accepted and addressed Shiva as the Lord but this religious title had no power to persuade Parvateshwar to join forces with Shiva. The pull of the Meluhan culture was stronger than the faith in the *Neelkanth* legend. The *Neelkanth* legend was also not strong enough to stop Shiva from using the *pasupatiastra*. The fierce emotion of the tribal culture which lacks restraints upon individuals, forced Shiva to act upon his emotions and herald the destruction of Meluha as a revenge for the death of his wife, Sati.

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