

Friends and Foes: A Restitution of the Unsung Personas within Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*

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ABSTRACT

The *Shiva Trilogy*, a renowned work of mythological fiction authored by Amish Tripathi, reimagines the legend of Lord Shiva. The series comprises three books: *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas*, and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. These books chronicle the expedition of Shiva, a tribal chief originating from the mountainous regions who is revered as the foretold Neelkanth, the deity associated with annihilation. General Parvateshwar, Shiva's devoted spouse and spouse Sati, is among the characters introduced in the novels who assume pivotal positions in the narrative. Nonetheless, the series also features several neglected combatants whose contributions are vital to the narrative but frequently go unacknowledged. Tripathi adeptly examines the motif of the neglected combatants in this grand epic narrative, a recurring theme that permeates the entirety of the trilogy. The novel envisions the protagonist, Shiva, as a warrior deity whose advent signifies the commencement of a prosperous and tranquil epoch in the city of Meluha. Nevertheless, the novel also offers a less refined perspective on the social hierarchy of Meluha, specifically concerning the neglected combatants of the Naga tribe. In analysing the *Shiva Trilogy's* depiction of the forgotten characters, this paper will examine the author's various approaches to introducing, exploring, and representing this theme. The purpose of this research is to examine the importance of these neglected personas within the *Shiva Trilogy*.

Keywords: Overshadow, Power Politics, History, Postcolonialism.

As the first part in the *Shiva Trilogy*, authored by Amish Tripathi from India, *The Immortals of Meluha* skilfully integrates historical events, philosophical concepts, and mythology to weave an engrossing narrative filled with action and intrigue. Tripathi commences the first volume of the trilogy, *The Immortals of Meluha*, by introducing the warrior Veerbhadra, a member of the tribe of exiled warriors known as the Nagas. Society has ostracised the ferocious and formidable warrior Veerbhadra on account of the serpent tattoo adorning his face, which signifies his Naga ancestry. Veerbhadra's unwavering commitment to safeguarding his people

and his allegiance to his tribe and duty notwithstanding his exile establish him as a hero and a symbol of optimism for a great number of individuals. The central theme of *The Immortals of Meluha*, the forgotten warriors, raises broader inquiries concerning the politics of identity and social organisation. Tripathi illustrates how oppression and exclusion of groups can result from caste and social hierarchy by means of his depiction of the marginalised Nagas. Furthermore, the portrayal of Parvateshwar and his subjects as neglected combatants alludes to more extensive concepts including the representation of power and identity.

The story of the neglected combatants prompts a significant inquiry regarding the influence of cultural representation on our understanding of identity and history. In *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor examines the notion that “Identity offers an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom” (36). In *The Immortals of Meluha*, the Nagas are portrayed as an enigmatic and perilous collective, whose customs and convictions the Suryavanshis regard with scepticism. The cultural hegemony process is exemplified in this demonization of the Nagas, in which one culture attempts to maintain its dominance through the eradication or marginalisation of alternative cultural practices. Thus, the theme of the forgotten characters illustrates the perils that can ensue when particular groups are omitted from the narrative and the significance of cultural representation in determining our understanding of history and identity. The subject of identity formation and maintenance within a social system is an additional crucial element of the theme of the neglected combatants. Nevertheless, their cultural identity is predominantly delineated by their marginalisation from the dominant societal framework, which poses a challenge for them in attaining recognition or credibility within the broader social system. Taylor additionally emphasises that “our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it” (29). The conflict between social exclusion and cultural autonomy underscores the significance of power and representation in determining our sense of self, as well as the perils of a system that excludes certain groups from complete engagement.

The Marxist theory investigates the influence of social and economic structures on social relations and human behaviour. When considering the *Shiva Trilogy*, it is pertinent to apply Marxist theory to examine the influence of economic and social structures on the distribution of power among various groups. An economic structure determines social relations, as stated in the following remark by the eminent Marxist theorist Karl Marx: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (11,12). Marx asserts that consciousness is determined by social existence, emphasising the influence of economic and social structures on human conduct. The manner in which the various nations and communities in Meluha are portrayed demonstrates how their economic and social structures influence them. Tripathi’s depiction of the neglected warriors, including Veerbhadra and others, may be construed as an endeavour to contest prevailing economic and social frameworks while offering an alternative perspective on interpersonal dynamics in Meluha.

The Secret of the Nagas, the second part in the *Shiva Trilogy*, provides a comprehensive account of Naga society by means of the narrative constructed around Kali, a former Naga warrior who was exiled from his tribe. Kali narrates the historical account of the Nagas, an eminent and esteemed tribe that was universally feared and revered. However, the Nagas were marginalised by society as a result of a confluence of betrayal and strategic manoeuvring on

the part of the political class. This led to their loss of power and status. The exile of Kali from his tribe serves to emphasise this dynamic, demonstrating that power and social hierarchy continue to be pivotal factors in determining who is admitted and who is excluded, even within Naga society.

In his engrossing series, Tripathi further explores the complex web of myth and history in *The Secret of the Nagas*. The novel recounts the exploits of Shiva, an ardent warrior deity, as he undertakes a perilous journey to discover the origin of malevolence in the Naga kingdom. In this iteration, the Naga warriors assume a pivotal position in the narrative, functioning as both Shiva's allies and adversaries throughout his quest. Nevertheless, similar to the preceding literary work, *The Immortals of Meluha*, the Nagas are portrayed as an oppressed community that is disregarded and neglected by the majority of humanity. Despite their significant presence in the mythology and history of the region, the Naga warriors are depicted as a marginalised and neglected ethnic group within the novel's narrative universe. Living on the periphery of society, the Nagas are portrayed as aliens and exiles, their existence acknowledged but their narratives left untold. Their estrangement from the dominant castes, such as the Suryavanshis, which regard the Nagas with contempt and consider themselves superior to them, is the source of their marginalisation. This phenomenon is emblematic of a more extensive system of social inequality in which specific factions gain advantages through the marginalisation of others.

The central theme of *The Secret of the Nagas*, the forgotten combatants, is a critique of power hegemony and the way in which social structures can be utilised to exclude marginalised groups. Tripathi underscores the ways in which social inequality is sustained via systemic marginalisation and discrimination by means of his depiction of the Nagas. This is evident in the manner in which the Nagas are depicted: as an inferior group distinct from the dominant castes. The process of othering serves to emphasise the Nagas' distinct social status, effectively depriving them of political representation and influence. An additional crucial element of the forgotten combatant's motif pertains to the inquiries concerning agency and empowerment. Throughout the novel, the Nagas are portrayed as helpless to liberate themselves from institutional discrimination and social hierarchy; they are portrayed as victims of their own predicament. However, Amish brings attention to the matter in *The Oath of the Vayuputras*: "And he was old that the Nagas were born with deformities as a result of the Somras" (14). However, as the story progresses, significant Naga characters emerge to challenge this status quo and fight for their own autonomy. Characters such as Karkotak, Vidyunmali, and Arishtanemi are instrumental in influencing the plot and questioning the prevailing notions of exclusion and hierarchy that characterise Naga society. The critical significance of empowering marginalised groups and acknowledging their agency and power within the larger social structure is reflected in the development of these characters.

Tripathi acknowledges the role of Kritika, a warrior hailing from the Chandravanshi tribe and serving in Shiva's army, in *The Secret of the Nagas*, the second instalment of the trilogy. Kritika is a highly proficient combatant who has rescued numerous lives in combat. Nonetheless, Kritika is subjected to gender-based discrimination and is compelled to engage in combat while wearing a veil over her face. Notwithstanding these obstacles, Kritika maintains her resolve and proceeds to engage in combat with Shiva, showcasing her prowess in the arena and garnering the admiration of her compatriots. Her bravery and fortitude are

palpable as she courageously confronts conflicts and defends her convictions. The substantial impact that she had on the narrative serves as a poignant illustration of the criticality that robust female combatants play in epic stories. According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, “And without a doubt it is more comfortable to endure blind bondage than to work for one’s liberation; the dead, too, are better suited to the earth than the living” (324). Additionally, her devotion to Kali emphasises the strength of faith and the necessity of maintaining one’s convictions.

Feminist theory endeavours to examine the manners in which gender influences power dynamics and social identity. Feminist theory finds relevance within the framework of the *Shiva Trilogy* through its depiction of Krittika, the female combatant compelled to engage in combat while concealing her face with a veil. The marginalisation of women in patriarchal societies is exemplified in the following remark by renowned feminist thinker Simone de Beauvoir: “... her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly” (*The Second Sex*, 731). Beauvoir contends that in patriarchal societies, women are inherently marginalised, and their status is perpetually in doubt. This is demonstrated through the depiction of Krittika, who faces gender-based discrimination and is compelled to conceal her visage during combat. Notwithstanding these obstacles, Krittika continues to be an indispensable member of Shiva’s army and demonstrates her prowess as a warrior. Tripathi’s depiction of Krittika may be construed as an endeavour to contest patriarchal conventions that restrict the involvement of women in public affairs.

The third novel, *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, delves into the motif of the Vasudevs, a group of devoted guardians of the Suryavanshis who have been neglected by history. The Vasudevs, an esteemed and proficient warrior order, have been disregarded and forgotten by the governing elite. Over the centuries, the Vasudevs have amassed an immense store of information and concealed enigmas that have the potential to alter the course of battle in their adversaries’ favour. Illusionously, they remain largely obscured from most of the society.

Detachment and isolation from the rest of society have characterised the Vasudevs for years. Responsible for the safeguarding of the Suryavanshis, they have amassed an immense amount of information regarding the history of Meluha. Vasudevs have been marginalised in society despite their considerable importance. A distinct cultural background and set of philosophies contributed to the Vasudevs’ exclusion. In contrast to most Suryavanshis, they lead an unusual lifestyle. Their adherence to religious principles and customs that are incongruent with those of the Suryavanshis has resulted in their social exclusion. An absence of acknowledgement and gratitude for the Vasudevs’ contributions has ensued due to their exclusion. Their existence and culture continue to elude most of the society; they continue to be an enigma. The Vasudevani language, which is only spoken by the inhabitants of Meluha, is similarly mysterious. A further factor in their exclusion is their expertise in archaic mysteries. Amish reflects on Vasudevs’ skills: “Shiva smiled at the precise engineering skills of the Vasudevs. He had known his mysterious advisors for years. He looked forward to finally meeting their leader” (*The Oath of the Vayuputras*, 80, 81).

As guardians of the Suryavanshi’s knowledge, the Vasudevs have accumulated secrets whose disclosure could alter the course of history. As guardians of the Nagas, the cursed tribe that has evaded civilization for centuries, the Vasudevs are Nagas. Additionally, they have an understanding of the Somras, the immortality elixir desired by the Asuras, the adversaries of

the Suryavanshi. Despite the fact that the Vasudevs have historically shielded the Suryavanshis from their adversaries, their intimate knowledge has rendered them an adversary unto themselves. The history and culture of the Vasudevs have also been lost to time, rendering them an extinct people. Despite their historical significance, their contributions have been disregarded and their narratives have remained shrouded in mystery. They are a group of people who are skilled in various martial arts and possess knowledge of ancient engineering technologies that have been passed down through generations which is evident in *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, “Nandi looked at Gopal. ‘Your tribe is brilliant, Panditji’” (87).

The Vasudevs’ narrative serves as a poignant illustration of the distinctive and frequently overlooked contributions that marginalised and minority communities have made. Amish Tripathi endeavours to offer validation through the statement, “Kali whistled softly. I was not even aware of the chief Vasudev’s name till just the other day and now it looks like I will be meeting him soon” (*The Oath of the Vayuputras*, 157). Their vital contributions have been disregarded by history, society, and governance, notwithstanding their majestic heritage. The Vasudevs demonstrate that attaining personal authority and influence is feasible despite societal disapproval. In the final conflict with the Asuras, their struggle for acknowledgement and esteem was fruitful. This literary masterpiece emphasises the significance of commemorating and paying tribute to the legacies, communities, and cultures that have been neglected in the past.

The novel *The Oath of the Vayuputras* delves more on the concept of the overlooked warriors, with particular emphasis on individuals such as Bhagirath, a courageous soldier from the Shwet tribe, and Bhima, the esteemed commander of the Gunas. Despite being overlooked by society, these individuals play crucial parts in the ultimate confrontation between good and evil, showcasing their courage and unwavering dedication to the cause. Tripathi consistently underscores the significance of the overlooked soldiers in the series, depicting them as essential to the storyline and accentuating their selfless acts of valour. The author utilises a range of literary strategies, such as flashback sequences, character development, and symbolism, to effectively convey this issue. Moreover, Tripathi’s depiction of the overlooked fighters addresses broader concepts of authority, disparity, and societal inequity. Tripathi used flashback flashbacks to enhance the concept of the overlooked soldiers in the trilogy.

Tripathi further explores the topic of the unsung warriors by focusing on the growth of the characters. Characters such as Parshuram and Parvateshwar, who may have been disregarded in society, are endowed with complexity and autonomy, thereby becoming essential to the storyline. Parshuram, as depicted in the *Shiva Trilogy* by Amish Tripathi, might be seen as an overlooked or neglected fighter. Parshuram is a minor character in the second book of the trilogy, *The Secret of the Nagas*, and is referenced just once in the third and final book, *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. Although Parshuram is a legendary warrior in Hindu mythology, he is not accorded any significance in the *Shiva Trilogy*. Parshuram is shown as a devoted disciple of Lord Ram in the book, aiding Lord Shiva and his comrades in their mission to locate and eradicate the Nagas. Although Parshuram has remarkable combat abilities and is renowned as a formidable fighter, he is eclipsed by other characters in the narrative, such as Lord Shiva, Sati, and Parvateshwar. In addition, both the author and the characters in the novel show little interest in Parshuram’s background or his reasons for joining Lord Ram’s army. Consequently, Parshuram is mostly overlooked as a character in the *Shiva Trilogy*, since his

involvement in the narrative is confined to a small number of scenes and mentions. Parshuram, although being a great warrior in Hindu mythology, is not adequately emphasised or developed as a character.

Parvateshwar's persona is characterised by his steadfast allegiance and dedication to Lord Shiva, qualities that evoke the essence of a genuine warrior. He is characterised as a courageous and adept combatant, who leads his people into warfare against the malevolent spirits. As stated by Amish Tripathi:

Parvateshwar spoke softly, *Shreyaansvadharmovigunaha para dharmaat svanushthitat*. Ayurvati smiled ruefully as she recalled the old Sanskrit shloka a couplet attributed to Lord Hari, after whom the city of Hariyups had been named. It meant that it was better to commit mistakes on the path that one's soul is meant to walk on, than to live a perfect life on a path that is not meant for one's soul. Discharge one's own *swadharma*, *personal law*, even if tinged with faults, rather than attempt to live a life meant for another. (*The Oath of the Vayuputras*, 126)

Parvateshwar stays unwavering in his principles and persists in defending his beliefs, even in the face of persistent life-threatening dangers. Nevertheless, as the tale unfolds, Parvateshwar's persona gradually diminishes, and he is assigned a tiny part in the overarching storyline. This is especially apparent in the last book of the trilogy, when he is given less attention and importance in comparison to other characters. The author demonstrates the influence that these overlooked fighters may have on the globe, underscoring their significance and value.

Tripathi used symbols to emphasise the significance of the overlooked soldiers. The snake tattoo on Veerbhadra's face symbolises his Naga origin and the persecution he experiences because to it. Similarly, the veil worn by Kritika represents how gender may be used as a means of subjugating and excluding people. These passages serve to elucidate the backgrounds of characters, such as Veerbhadra, and exemplify the challenges encountered by the Nagas in their battle against their oppressors. Symbolic interactionism highlights the significance of symbols in influencing social interaction and the formation of identity. Through this approach, the author effectively portrays the socioeconomic disparities between various tribes and underscores the significance of solidarity in the midst of persecution.

Postcolonial theory, originating in the 1970s and 1980s, examines the cultural and political impact left behind by colonialism and empire. This text examines the methods through which colonised populations have been oppressed, marginalised, and excluded from prevailing cultural stories. Within the *Shiva Trilogy*, the postcolonial theory is applicable in the representation of the Nagas, who experience marginalisation as a result of their snake ancestry. Homi K. Bhabha, a well-known scholar in the field of postcolonial theory, exemplifies this viewpoint: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha, 101). Bhabha emphasises the notion that the colonised individuals are not alone uprooted from their country and culture, but also neglected by the colonial authorities. This is seen in the way the Nagas are treated, since they face discrimination based on their snake ancestry, which places them outside the prevailing society. Tripathi's depiction of the Naga warriors, such as Veerbhadra, Kritika, and others, may be seen as an effort to revive the neglected historical and cultural heritage of the Nagas.

Theoretical viewpoints in the *Shiva Trilogy* provide a complex and subtle interpretation of the issue of the lost warriors.

In order to summarise, the recurring motif of the overlooked combatants is prevalent throughout Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*. Tripathi highlights the courage and selflessness of those who live on the fringes of society by portraying characters such as Veerbhadra, Parshuram, Krittika, Bhagirath, Kali, and Vasudevs. Although some characters like Shiva and Sati get greater attention, it is crucial to recognise the significant contributions made by lesser-known fighters like as Parshuram, Kali, Krittika, Veerbhadra, and Bhagirath. All of these people have significant roles in the plot and enhance the overall complexity and depth of the narrative. Through careful examination and admiration of these overlooked warriors, readers may get a more profound understanding and recognition of the many intricate aspects and intricacy included in the *Shiva Trilogy*. The author utilises literary methods such as flashback flashbacks, character development, and symbolism to emphasise the significance of these overlooked soldiers and the influence they may have on the world. The *Shiva Trilogy* ultimately pays homage to these overlooked heroes, serving as a reminder to readers of the crucial impact they have in moulding history.

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