

Empowering the Marginalized in Tripathi's "Shiva Trilogy": A Foucauldian Perspective

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Abstract

*The present paper elucidates the portrayal of some Hindu deities in the literary creations of Amish Tripathi. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas*, and *The Oath of Vyauputras*, Tripathi portrays the wretched condition of some Hindu gods and goddesses. The study explores the causes behind the subordination of Hindu deities. Replacing the canonical thinking of highlighting the supernatural qualities of deities, those texts expose the hidden realities behind the marginalization of some Hindu deities like, Ganesh, Kali, Sati, and all the Nagas, whose real identity was lying behind the curtain. The spotlight of the present research is to answer the causes of the subordination of major Hindu deities in Tripathi's "Trilogy." This issue is explored with the theoretical parameter of the Foucauldian perspective of power, knowledge, and resistance.*

Key Words: Voice, voiceless, marginalization, deities, trilogy

Introduction

The sequel of three novels: *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas*, and *The Oath of the Vyauputras* is "Shiva Trilogy." Amish Tripathi in this trilogy re-writes the ancient myth of the God Shiva with modern flavor. Tripathi presents all the ancient Hindu deities as human beings with flesh and blood. All the deities in his texts are (ab-)normal human beings without any supernatural qualities.

Tripathi opens his first book, *The Immortals of Meluha* introducing Shiva, who belongs to the 1900 BC Tibetan Guna tribe and lives at Mt. Kailash near the Mansarovar Lake. He looks like a tired and depressed warrior due to continuous attacks from their enemies, Pakratris. His body is wounded and full of scars. Shiva drags Marijuana in a chillum made of Tibetan Yak bone to release his pain and tension. He uses colloquial tribal language, which is similar to the slang of modern people. Gunas are rescued by Meluhan warriors who claim themselves as the Suryavanshis, decedents of the Sun. Shiva meets Sati, a widow and Vikarma woman. Sati is the only daughter of King Dakshya. She is presented as an ill-fated and outcast woman so she is called Vikarma. She is not allowed to do any romantic activities.

The Secret of the Nagas is the second book of the trilogy. This book follows the first book where Ganesh and Kali are introduced as outcasts and deformities. The secret of their and all the Nagas' cursed life is revealed in this book. Ganesh is born with an Elephant head and a disabled body so his identity is denied and secretly sent to the land of Nagas. Similarly, Kali the twin sister of Sati is also ostracized and sent to Panchavati (the land of Nagas) due to her deformity.

The third book, *The Oath of the Vyauputras* also follows the second book. In this final book of the "Shiva Trilogy", the evil of Somras is revealed. Shiva declares war against King Dakshya and his state. All the marginalized characters fight to save themselves and their identity.

Tripathi in "Shiva Trilogy" portrays God Shiva as a normal human being fighting against his enemies. In Hindu mythological texts, God Shiva is presented as a supernatural being with supreme qualities. Ganesh is worshipped as a leader of Shiva's Gana so he is called Ganapati. Goddess Kali gets superior status among all the Goddesses due to her aggressive and intolerable nature against evil forces. By the same token, Shiva's Sati is worshipped as a Goddess of grace and a selfless devotee. This paper highlights the aforementioned issues to answer; why the God of all Gods, Shiva is presented as a normal human? Who subordinates Ganesh and Kali? What is causes behind subordination? How Shiva fights against the evil? Why Sati is called Vikarama (career of bad fortune and untouchable)? How all the Gods and Goddesses are empowered by their struggle and fight against evil? Etc.

In "Shiva Trilogy," Amish Tripathi presents God Shiva as a human with flesh and blood. Unlike supernatural God Shiva, Tripathi's Shiva is a warrior of Guna tribe from Mountainous area. He is a frustrated fighter who release tension dragging Marijuana. Similarly, Tripathi's Sati belongs to Meluhatribe and ill fated daughter of Suryawansi king, Dakshya. She is no more devotee of Shiva. Rather, she is also a great warrior and called a Vikarama woman (a woman with bad fortune due to sin in previous life). In the same token, Ganesh and Kali are by burn ugly and disable whose identity is denied. Tripathi portrays all the above characters by breaking the cannon of mainstream belief of all those deities but despite their (ab-)normality, they continuously revolt against that injustice. So, it is hypothesized that depicting the bleak condition of supreme deities and their constant struggle and revolt against the evil forces, Tripathi intends to empower all of them to fight against injustice and evil energy. By presenting great deities as a (ab-)normal human being with blood and flesh and their revolt, Tripathi teaches us about human roles and responsibilities to fight against the evil forces of our societies. The justice is possible with the true human struggle and revolt. Those, who fight for the truth and justice are the true Gods of modern society.

The major objectives of this research paper is to explore the marginal position of supreme deities as an (ab-)normal human and their continuous struggle as well great revolt to release from the injustice upon them and empower the entire humanity.

Vaishnavi and Srividhya begin their article entitled "Reinventing Sati and Sita: A Study of Amish Tripathi's Central Women Characters from a Feminist Perspective" citing the famous anecdote of Swami Vivekananda. They quote Vivekananda, "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing" (qtd. in Vaishnavi 507). Their main purpose citing this line is to show the importance of women in every aspect of our life.

Nandhini in "An Archetypal Study of Amish Tripathi's Novels *The Immortal of Meuha*, *The Secret of Nagas* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" study about archetypal beliefs of common people. They pointed out that modern people believe in the mythical elements, rituals, traditional cultures and practices such systems in their real life as well. They talk about the Karma of modern people which leads them in the path of success and failure. If they practice good functions then they get progress in their life. Otherwise, they move to the wrong path and fall back. At the same time Nandhini also highlights their belief that people suffer in their present life due to their sin in the past life.

In the same token, Sanjana Antil studied about mythical elements in Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy. In her article, "The Significance of Mythopoeia in Amish Tripathi's the Shiva Trilogy." Antil minutely surveyed the mythical elements existed in *The Immortals of Meliha*, *The Secret of Nagas*, and *The Oath of Vyauputras*. In this article she has analyzed the gods and goddesses of the Purana and the deities of Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy.

The issue related to the archetype and cultural practices of Shiva, Sati, Ganesh, and Kali is explored by many researchers but the issue about the marginalization and depiction of Gods and Goddesses as a (ab-)normal human being is a virgin area of research.

Empowering the Marginalized in "Shiva Trilogy"

In "Shiva Trilogy", most of the characters are adopted from Hindu mythology and portrayed as ugly in physical appearance, disabled, diseased, handicapped, and helpless people striving for their authentic rights. Some of them are ostracized by their parents, companions, relatives, society, state, and enemies. While analyzing all these characters in Foucauldian terms, they are called 'subservience'.

The protagonist of the "Shiva Trilogy" is Shiva. He is presented as a normal human being with flesh and blood. But the Original Indian myth often describes Lord Shiva, the Destroyer of Evil, as living in Mount Kailash along with his tribe. Henrich Zimmer describes the followers of Lord Shiva as, "They probably represent the hosts or ganas of the God, his followers, and attendants, who in countenance, figure, attire, and attributes, resemble the divinity himself. Some carry musical instruments, a tambour, a flute...correspond to the five hosts of Shiva's followers, each host being represented by a single individual" (133-34). Shiva's companions are always portrayed as demons and devils who dance in the cremation pyre. In Hindu religious texts, God Shiva is announced as, "Shiva! The Mahadev. The God of Gods. Destroyer of Evil. Passionate lover. Fierce

warrior. Consummate dancer. Charismatic leader. All powerful, yet incorruptible. Quick of wit – and of temper” (139). In “Shiva Trilogy”, Tripathi has re-created and re-defined Shiva as a human being and fierce warrior who represents the poor tribal name, the Gunas. The Gunas are portrayed as human beings with limitations, who are at times assaulted, humiliated, and tortured by their enemies called, Pakratris.

The Immortals of Meluha introduced Shiva as a warrior of a fearsome tribe called the Guna. The Guna people live near Mansarovar Lake in Tibet which is a very remote mountain area. In the Hindu religious book, this place is taken as the residence of the God Shiva and Goddess Sati. This place is ecologically beautiful, peaceful, and pure. The area of Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash symbolize holiness where Shiva contemplates deeply in his meditation. In this sense, people still believe that this place generates meditational waves for every individual. In opposition to this belief, Tripathi in “Shiva Trilogy” re-defines this place as a remote and rustic where barbaric tribes fight each other to rule this land. At the beginning of *The Immortals of Meluha*, the Guna people are frequently attacked by the Pakratris who want to rule over them.

Foucault criticizes traditional power models; power is not about simply saying no and oppressing individuals, social classes or natural instincts, instead power is productive. It shapes forms of behavior and events rather than simply curtailing freedom and constraining individuals. He argues in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*: “if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?” (36).

Power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun, something that does something, rather than something which is or which can be held onto. In *Power/Knowledge* Foucault states, “Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain [. . .] Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization [. . .] Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (98).

Power is conceptualized as a chain or as a net that is a system of relations spread throughout the society rather than simply as a set of relations between the oppressed and the oppressor. Individuals should not be seen simply as the recipients of power, but as the place where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted. In *The History of Sexuality Volume One*, Foucault states that “where there is power there is resistance” (95). It allows to consider the relationship between those in struggles over power as not simply reducible to a master–slave relation, or an oppressor–victim relationship. Where power is exercised, there has to be someone who resists. Foucault goes as far as to argue that where there is no resistance it is not, in effect, a power relation. Resistance is written in to the exercise of power. In order to analyze a power relation, one must analyze the total relations of power, the hidden transcripts as well as the public performance.

If we deeply contemplate over Guna people and their leader, Shiva, all of them are powerless people who live in the rustic area and are tortured by the opponent group. Shiva's body is covered with wounds and scars due to the continuous warfare. He looks

helpless, tired, frustrated, and seeking some way to save his people from his enemies. Shiva is presented as a subaltern hero who tolerates the utmost domination and plans to rescue his people from their agony. Shiva defends his people against the enemies and raises his voice against this subordination but no one listens. At the beginning of *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva takes chillum both in his joyous and depressed state of mind. He gasps marijuana while thinking of the repeated, unannounced attacks of the Pakratis, the enemies of Shiva's clan. While introducing Shiva in *The Immortals of Meluha*, Amish says:

[...] The numerous battle scars on his skin gleamed in the shimmering reflected light of the waters. Shiva remembered well his carefree childhood days.[...] On the normal day, Shiva would have smiled at the memory from the cheerful past that had been overwhelmed by the angst of the present. [...]. Shiva bought Chillum made of yak bone to his lips and took in a deep drag. Any other day, the marijuana would have spread its munificence, dulling his troubled mind and letting him find some moments of solace. (1-2)

Shiva reveals his inner yearning to release his people from the fear of Pakarits. Shiva looks nostalgic about his childhood days. His childhood days were carefree and romantic but now he has got great responsibility to save his tribe. Now, he looks frustrated and alone. He drags marijuana to release his tension and frustration.

The possibility for resistance is an elementary condition for every conceivable relation of power. Foucault maintains, "resistance is a necessary precondition for the operation of relations of power. He insists resistance must be a precondition for power, without such forms of contestation and struggle there would be only complete domination, subservience and obedience" (78). Power and the potentiality of resistance are hence thought to be coterminous. Power cannot be treated as complete control or absolute subservience. It is only through the articulation of resistance that power can spread through the social field. Resistance is an internal property of power. It is a condition of operation that remains inherent to power itself. Resistance is everywhere and at every level. There is no power without potential refusal or revolt.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault points out the relationship between power and knowledge. He opines:

Power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another: that there is no power relation without the correlation constituting of field of knowledge nor knowledge that does not presuppose and constituted as the same time power. (27)

In Foucault's terms not only Shiva all the Gunas are powerless and tired people waiting for the suitable episode of resistance. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva is the only hope of all the Guna people but there was no one to address his voice and desires. In front of Pakratis, Gunas were always subordinated and presented as weak and poor. They have sacrificed their property, wealth and family members to save their land. When some

Meluhan warriors accompanied Shiva, his hope to save people aroused. He intends to get the power for the resistance against all the evil forces so Shiva accepts the proposal of Meluha warriors. The Meluha warriors represent the power and hope of all the Guna people who could release them from utmost suffering. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva narrates:

We fight almost every month with the Pakratris just so that our village can exist next to the body lake. They are getting stronger every year, forming new alliances with new tribe. [...] by moving to Meluha, we can escape this pointless violence and may be live a life of comfort. What could possibly be wrong with that? Why shouldn't take this deal? It sounds so damn good? (3)

Shiva wants to be free from the subordination and frequent attack of his enemies. He reveals his fear of losing his tribe from Pakratris. Their enmity is pointless and dangerous. They are forming new alliances with other tribes to win the war with Gunas. He plans to release himself and his people from the everlasting fear of Pakratris. While observing Shiva's decision to emigrate from Tibet using Foucauldian lenses, Shiva evokes his desire for power, revolt and knowledge to release the trouble human beings from the pound of ignorance and violence.

In the same token, Hindu mythology takes Sati as the devoted wife of Shiva. Sati, Parvati, and Kali make Shakti. So, Hindu people called Shiva's Shakti to indicate Sati. Tripathi in "Shiva Trilogy" re-defines Sati as an ill-fated woman. Sati is called Vikarma. The word "Vikarma" denotes untouchable. The Vikarma woman has to suffer in the present life because of the sins done in the previous life. When Shiva arrived in the land of Meluha, he falls in love with Sati. Dakshya and other all the Meluha people warned Shiva to be far from Sati because she is declared as Vikarma. In this sense, Sati is also subordinated by the entire patriarchal society. She is considered as ill-fated and cursed woman when she gave birth to a deformed baby. Sati also loved Shiva but she suppressed her voice because her voice was denied to listen. Shiva challenges the law of Vikarma and abolishes it. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva opines, "That sounds pretty ridiculous to me. A woman could have given birth to a still born child simply because she did not take proper care while she was pregnant. Or it could just be a disease. How can anyone say that she is being punished for the sins of her previous birth?"(96). Sati has become the victim of Vikarma system. In her young age she has lost her husband and son.

Foucault asserts that knowledge produces power and power produces knowledge by reciprocating each other. Michel Foucault's reflections on power, subject, identity, discourse and knowledge have been re-structured and have deconstructed the contemporary world and its belief. Foucault introduces his reflections on power by criticizing the traditional beliefs on power: power is oppressive and negative. Power is productive. It produces knowledge, subject, truth, identity and even reality. Power is not an institution but it is a strategic relation. Power is not associated with any agent. Resistance co-exists with power. There can be no power relation without resistance. Foucault appreciates the reciprocal relation between power and knowledge. He describes

discourse as the location where power and knowledge intersect. Discourse generates the subject. Foucault's entire philosophy is based on the assumption that human knowledge and existence are profoundly historical. The Meluhan society and culture outcasted her and banned happiness in her life. "Shiva Trilogy" depicts Sati as a subaltern woman due to fate and sin of previous life. Shiva falls in love with Sati. She was Vikarma woman so she was not able to express her love and desire in front of the society. Whereas, Shiva rose his voice and fought against such bad practices and married with Sati. So, it is clear that if subaltern people get agency to express their desire they can get victory over dominant group.

Ganesh is worshipped as 'Ganapathi' and most widely worshipped Hindu God. He is known as Lord of 'Ganas' since Shiva has made him as the leader of his host friends. He is also believed as the Lord of all obstacles since it is believed that he removes all the obstacles in every endeavor. So, Hindu devotee worship him at first in every occasion. There are many stories in Hindu mythology about the birth of Ganesh but it is accepted that Ganesh is created from the dust of Parvati's skin and he is not created by Shiva. In "Shiva Trilogy" Tripathi re-creates the story of Ganesh who is created by Sati's dirt-Somras. The effect of Somras taken by Sati during her pregnancy period made Ganesh with "the head of an elephant". In Tripathi's Trilogy, Ganesh is Sati's son born through her first marriage and Shiva is not his father. Ganesh is portrayed as an abandoned child who yearns for the love of his mother, Sati. The new mechanism of power is more dependent upon bodies. It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labor, rather than wealth and commodities. By means of surveillance power is constantly exercised. The common conception is that power is attributable to and exercised by agents and is exercised on agents. Power is a total structure of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Foucauldian power is impersonal, purely relational and blind. His kind of power is neither force nor capacity nor domination nor authority. It is not attributable to anyone or anything. Power is impersonal because it is neither possessed nor exerted by individuals, groups, or institutions. Foucault termed power as a complex set of relations. Power is the sum total of influences that actions have on other actions.

The scene in which Ganesh introduces himself to his mother in *The Secret of the Nagas* clearly denotes his agony on being isolated and separated from his mother, "'Ugly, aren't I?' [...] 'Is that why you abandoned me?' soft tears were rolling down the Naga's cheeks. 'Because you couldn't even bear to look at me?' (221). "Shiva Trilogy" presents Ganesh as a subaltern man striving to get parental love and care. He belongs to the Naga community which is declared as the community of sinners and outcasted evil people by the Meluha tribe. Ganesh, the Lord of People in "Shiva Trilogy" suffers a lot since he is a Naga. Yet he overcomes his struggles with determination and is portrayed as a brave warrior, a lovable brother, and a devoted son at the end of the story. Ganesh is ostracized by his family and society because he was born disabled and ugly. He was sent to the land of Nagas after his birth. Sati was also unknown of this secret. When this secret is revealed, Ganesh got love and care from his mother and father.

Kali is the Goddess of justice. Hindu mythology takes Kali as the Goddess of Shakti (power) and her posture signifies aggression and revolt against injustice. But Tripathi has re-created Kali as a Naga Queen who is abandoned by her parents solely because she is a Naga child. In this sense, she is also a subaltern character abandoned by her parents due to her ugly appearance. Ancient Hindu stories define Kali as a replica of Sati. Whereas, in *The Secret of the Nagas*, Sati and Kalitalk to each other as a stranger, "Sati stared at Naga Queen. 'I swear I don't know. Who are you?' The Naga Queen shut her eyes, took a deep breath, and spoke with the scream at her command. "Then listen, oh exalted princess. I am your twin sister, Kali. The one whom your two-faced father abandoned!" (223) Kali wants to expose the secret of her life but Sati was unknown of all the secrecy. So, Kali clarifies to her sister about the bad deed of her father, Dakshya.

In "Shiva Trilogy" Kali is ostracized by her parents due to her deformities and ugly appearance. In *The Secret of the Nagas*, Tripathi narrates, "There were small balls of bone which ran from her shoulders down to her stomach, almost like a garland of skulls. On top of her shoulders were two small extra appendages, serving as a third and fourth arm. One was holding a knife...the color was jet black...face was an exact replica of Sati" (223). Kali describes the cause behind her ugly appearance which is also the Somras which her mother took during pregnancy period. She shows aggressiveness towards her cruel father who denied Kali by birth and secretly sent her to Naga state.

While linking Foucauldian concept with the "Shiva Trilogy", Kali is a self-conscious woman resisting for her identity. Kali, Ganesh, and other Naga frequently attack Meluha's land to stop the injustice against deformities and disabled people who have compiled to live in Panchavati (Naga's land). Kali's strong willpower and determination make her the Queen of Nagas. She is portrayed as a courageous woman, a fearsome warrior, and a wise queen. She is re-created by Tripathi as the exact replica of the archetypal Kali of Hindu myth in her physical appearance and this idea is further enhanced by Tripathi through his imagination. Tripathi has re-created Kali to celebrate feminine power and focus on the ability which lies hidden inside her disability. In "Shiva Trilogy" Kali is presented as an ugly woman with fierce rage against her own father who represents the supremacy of patriarchal society. She is an intelligent and conscious woman fighting for her authentic identity.

The final book of the trilogy ends with the great war between Shiva, Sati, Kali, Ganesh, the Chandrawansi people, and the Meluha tribe. Sati, Shiva, Ganesh, and Kali fought furiously to stop the main cause of the subordination of people in the name of caste, rules, ill practices, and class. At last, they got the solution to their suffering which is to stop manufacturing Somras (an anti-oxidant drink of God). Sati, Ganesh, Kali, and all the Nagas were outcasted due to the side effect of Somras but the mainstream society accused them of their fate and punish them. The destruction of the Somras company turns out to be the solution to the discrimination of the people in the name of ill practices. In *The Oath of the Vyauputras*, Shiva opines, " [...] Just removing the knowledge of the

Somras was not enough to stop the drink of the gods. If it had to be wiped out from India, its very foundation needed uprooting "(556). Shiva plans to destroy Somras industries which were secretly run in India. Shiva, being a member of a marginalized tribe fought to save and free his tribe. He has supported the helpless and powerless people from all gender, class, cultures, and tribes to establish peace and harmony.

Conclusion

To sum up, all the deities at the beginning of the "Shiva Trilogy" are hungry for power and suffering in terms of their caste, customs, ill practices, and outcast from their family, society, and states. "Shiva Trilogy", portrays God Shiva as a frustrated Tibetan barbarian who belongs to the fearsome warrior clan called Gunas. Similarly, Sati, daughter of king Dakshya is introduced as Vikarma (bad carrier of their fate and ostracized from society). Tripathi has depicted Kali as a warrior, a Naga Queen who is abandoned by her parents solely because she is black and born with deformities. Similarly, Ganesh who is also known as Ganapathi is the most widely worshipped Hindu God is presented as an outcast and born with deformities. All the Naga people live in Panchavati which is believed as the land of cursed and out casted people. They fought against their injustice and raised their voices against their subordination. Shiva left the land of Gunas and immigrated to the land of Meluha to be free from the frequent attack of Pakritis. He fought against the ill practices of the Vikarma system and release Sati from such bad systems. Shiva married Sati to challenge those bad systems. Ganesh is accepted by his mother, father, and brother. Kali is also accepted by her sister, Sati, and accompanied by her sister-in-law in the war against the ill practice of contemporary society. The main cause of the wretched condition of all the characters became 'Somras.' So, the destruction of 'Somras' company has helped to re-establish all the subordinated characters from their marginal position. Tripathi has depicted the subordinated deities in the "Shiva Trilogy" and empowered them with knowledge, creative consciousness and ultimately able to re-established humanitarian society by waging the war against injustice.

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