

Beyond the Myth: Transformation of Shiva from an Immigrant to the Neelkanth in the Shiva Trilogy

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Abstract: Lord Shiva, the destroyer of the evil, is popularly known as 'Mahadev' (the God of Gods) in the entire Bharatha Varsha. According to the Indian Mythology and the Puranas, his existence is much earlier than Lord Ram, the Suryavanshis, the Chandravanshis, Devas, Asuras, and even before the formation of the earth itself. But in Amish Tripathi's well celebrated mythical-fantasy, "The Shiva Trilogy" he is a Legend who turned into a God and lived around 1900 BC more than 1000 years after the rule of Lord Ram. In his trilogy, Shiva is a foreign immigrant with a 'blessed' blue throat who accepts his destiny, transforms as the Neelkanth and ultimately proves himself as a worthy Mahadev. This paper aims to study the role of the Vasudev Pandits and the impact of their conversations in transforming Shiva into the Neelkanth.

Key Words: Evil, destiny, transformation, Mahadev, Neelkanth, Vasudevs, Nagas, Somras, balance, conversations

INTRODUCTION

Amish Tripathi's mythological fantasy fiction, "The Shiva Trilogy" contains series of novels titled "The Immortals of Meluha", "The Secrets of Nagas", and "The Oath of Vayuputras". The trilogy projects the life journey of an immigrant Tibetan tribal leader named Shiva who ultimately becomes the Mahadev by courageously accepting his destiny as the Neelkanth. He strongly stands and fights against the evil and finally succeeds in taking the evil out of equation.

When Amish Tripathi is asked about 'the purpose of God', he answers that in his "Immortals India" as "God is a role model who dwells among us and who reaches us through His example what we are capable of becoming." So, he humanised Lord Shiva and tried in every way to prove that this legend actually had lived in past with flesh and blood and achieved the status of a God with his exceptional deeds. For him God is not born from a mother's womb in his words:

"A man becomes a Mahadev when he fights for good. A Mahadev is not born as one from his mother's womb. He forged in the heat of battle, when he wages a war to destroy evil." (Book-1: "The Immortals of Meluha", Page 346)

At the same time, he clarifies his concept of God through the character titled the Mithra, the chief of the Vayuputras. When Shiva has gone to Pariha in order to get the *Brahmastra*, he meets the Mithra in private. The Mithra is already convinced himself that Shiva is a suitable Neelkanth, the saviour of the age from evil. He says to Shiva like this:

"We don't become gods because we think we are gods. That is only a sign of ego. We become gods when we realise that a part of the universal divinity lives within us; when we understand our role in this great world and when we strive to fulfil that role. There is nobody striving harder than you, Lord Neelkanth. That makes you a God." (Book-3: "The Oath of Vayuputras", Page 403)

THE ROLE OF VASUDEVS IN TRANSFORMING SHIVA

In the Trilogy the Vasudevs are the tribe left by the previous Vishnu, Lord Ram. Their role in the psychological transformation of Shiva into the Neelkanth is clearly seen in the entire trilogy. Shiva meets six different Vasudev Pandits at various temples throughout his journey in quest of his destiny. These Pandits do not just worship the great Vishnu, they serve at the temples of the three main Gods in Hinduism—Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahadev. They firmly believe that the trinity balances the life and ultimately, the world. The six temples are—1. Lord Brahma Temple at Meru, 2. Lord Mohan Temple at Mohan Jo Daro, 3. The Rama Janmabhoomi Temple at Ayodhya, 4. Lord

Narasimha Temple at Magadh, 5. Lord Viswanath Temple at Kashi, 6. Lord Matsya Temple at Vaishali, finally 7. Lord Vishnu (Ram) Temple at Ujjain.

Considering the dream conversation with the Pandit of Meru and telepathic conversation with the Chief Vasudev at Vaishali, we can find eight contexts in which Shiva interacts with them and has a deep philosophical, enlightening conversations. All these conversations have a pattern and are interwoven in an interesting way. The following are the factors that can be observed in them.

Except some physical changes, all the Vasudev Pandits look very similar in their appearance with flowing white beard and white mane. They wear saffron dhoti and angvastram. The wizened faces have the same welcoming smile. They are the only aged men that shiva has seen in the entire Meluha.

They are very conscious about the two main purposes of their existence— one is to serve the Mahadev of the age in his mission; another is, one among them would become the next Vishnu whenever the time demands. They cleverly have chosen not to influence the Neelkanth in his decisions. As they know that Shiva is not the Neelkanth appointed by the authorised Vayuputras, the Amartya Shpand. But they can see all the qualities of a Mahadev in Shiva. So, they have waited patiently for Shiva to discover the answer for the question posed to every Mahadev— “What is evil?”. If he arrives to the right answer, then they consider it would be the time to end evil and Shiva is one who has been chosen by the *Parmatma* for this task. So that, they can accept him as a Mahadev and can work under his command to destroy the evil. But they have furnished all the guidance needed by Shiva from time to time. Along with it, they speak their opinions and give suggestions to Shiva.

Also, the transition in the character of Shiva takes place in various stages and his knowledge about India and its culture has developed accordingly. His opinions about evil and his mission as the Neelkanth have also changed gradually. Whenever the Vasudevs have any conversation with Shiva they talk only certain things and answer limited questions related to the context, depending on Shiva’s state of mind. If Shiva asks about any further queries, they simply skip the conversation by saying, “That conversation is for another time”. Because they think that Shiva is not yet ready to

receive what they are going to say or their talk may influence Shiva’s decisions.

At the end of each conversation, Shiva forms an opinion of his own and sometimes takes an important decision. Besides, the Vasudev pandits discover new aspects related to Shiva and those made them to believe that Shiva is the real Neelkanth. Apart from these significant transitions in the Mahadev and the Vasudevs, readers can also observe the foreshadowing of the events which would change the course of action in the novels.

When Shiva meets the first Vasudev pandit at the temple of Lord Brahma, he is just an immigrant with a blue throat covered with beads. He doesn’t bother about the identity of the Pandit and only cares the aesthetic architectural designs of the temple. But the pandit feels something about Shiva and recognises him as his *Karmasathi*, “the fellow traveller in Karma”. Here, one can feel that the Pandit is not an ordinary man.

His meeting with the second Vasudev pandit at Lord Mohan Temple, creates some curiosity in him to know about the identity of the Pandit and he promises that for the next meeting. The interaction with the Pandit also helped Shiva to understand Sati better and he takes his first decision as the Neelkanth—abolishing the law of Vikarma, not just for Sati but he strongly feels that it is an unfair law. Now, the Pandit observes that Shiva is unknowingly following the path of Lord Ram that the law is equal to everyone.

The third conversation happens after Shiva’s wedding before the attack on Mount Mandar. It is a dream interaction with the same Pandit whom he met at Meru. The Pandit says as it is a dream, he can only tell what Shiva already knows or what lies in his sub-consciousness. The talk goes on ‘context of the knowledge’ and the colour of the leaf. Here, the Pandit tries to give a hint to Shiva, that whatever seems to be the solid fact and evidence may not be the truth. Though the Pandit says that he cannot reveal his identity, he unveils it by comparing the waves of black and white with positive and negative energies. The Pandit appears in complete white waves and Shiva is surrounded with the black ones. A confused Shiva gets the answer from the Pandit like this:

*‘Because we balance each other.
The Vishnu’s role is to transmit positive
energy, and the Mahadev’s role is to*

absorb the negative. Search for it. Search for negative energy and you will fulfil your destiny as a Mahadev. (Book-1: "The Immortals of Meluha", Page 300)

However, Shiva is not yet ready to believe himself as a Mahadev. The later course of actions like the destruction of the Somras factory, the assumed death of Brihaspati pushes him to wage a war against the Chandravanshis. He is convinced that the Chandravanshis with the support of Nagas cause all these troubles. So, they are his enemies, his task as the Neelkanth is to fight against them and it is the real task left unfinished by Lord Ram.

The fourth interaction with the Vasudevs happens at the Rama Janmabhoomi Temple, Ayodhya. It is right after the war with the Chandravanshis. Shiva realises his tremendous mistake of considering them as the evil. He is terribly devastated with guilt, unable to look even into the eyes of Lord Ram's idol. Shiva talks to the Pandit and says that being different is not evil. After listening to this statement, the Pandit thinks that Shiva can be a worthy Mahadev, and consoles him by saying the story of Lord Rudra, the previous Mahadev. Shiva asks and gets the answer for his question, 'why the Neelkanth is required?'. He is required to answer the most important question— 'What is evil?'. Shiva is suggested not to take any hasty decisions in the recognition of the evil. At the end, the Pandit observes the hidden third eye on the forehead of the Neelkanth.

Shiva actually follows the suggestion of this Vasudev. After the meeting, the same Naga who attacked Sati at Meru again appears and causes trouble. Shiva strongly feels reaching Nagas through Brangas is the only solution to find evil. He starts his journey towards Kashi, where some Brangas are sheltered. This time he wants to make sure of himself before deciding anything.

The fifth conversation takes place at the Lord Narasimha Temple, Magadh on his way to Kashi. Looking at the idol of Lord Narasimha, Shiva feels if he were born today, he would be rather treated a Naga, *hence feared not revered*. They discuss the topic of consistency, and Shiva asks the Pandit about the Masculine and Feminine way of life that Shiva has heard in his earlier conversation with the Vasudevs. Both are important for the balance of life, if one declines another follows like a cycle. Masculine way of life is '*life by laws*' like Suryavanshis, *laws are unchangeable they must be*

followed rigidly. Hence, their *code of life is Truth, Duty and Honour*. On the other hand, feminine way of life is '*life by probabilities*' like Chandravanshis, *they are comfortable with contradictions*. Hence, the code for success in such system is Passion, Beauty and Freedom. Both the systems have their own advantages and disadvantages. Shiva realises every human being contains the Suryavanshi and the Chandravanshi traits and is a combination of both masculine and feminine way of lives. The most important thing is to know how to balance those impulses. (Chapter-3 'The Pandit of Magadh' from "The Secret of the Nagas")

Finally, Shiva gets to know that the task of the Neelkanth is not just finding out evil but he has to convince the people to give up their 'attachment to evil'. At the end of the conversation Shiva is left unanswered for two questions one is how do the Vasudevs can read his mind? and why would anyone be attached to evil? The Vasudev Pandit impresses with Shiva that he can also read the minds.

The next meeting with the Vasudevs takes place at the Temple of Kashi Vishwanath. A little mind conversation occurs when the Vasudev Pandit doesn't want to come in front of Shiva, as he is surrounded by the gathering. Shiva thinks about fear that Lord Rudra's idol projects. The Pandit gives a telepathic reply, "*Lord Rudra needed fear to achieve his goals*" (Page-77, "The Secret of Nagas"). The exchange is ended in the middle as the Vasudev Pandit senses Parvateshwar's life threatening situation and warns Shiva indirectly.

The actual sixth conversation with the pandit of Kashi occurs just before the birth of Karthik. Shiva starts the discussion with a question on past life sins. Shiva doesn't believe the concept as there is no solid evidence to prove this. The Vasudevs don't give him an obvious answer, because they don't have the one. But they believe that it helps the humans to live this life in a useful and careful way. Then, Shiva is answered his question regarding the mind reading concept, which is promised in the previous interaction. He is told about the radio waves and the transmitters that the temples located at certain height can catch. Only the well trained persons can read, but Shiva is an exceptional one who can listen to the thoughts without any training.

As soon he realised that he can talk with any Vasudevs who are interested in listening to this conversation, he immediately addresses the Vasudev

of Magadh temple and asks him to answer what does he mean by “the attachment to evil”. The Vasudev helps Shiva to dig it deep, if he believes that everyone is a god (Har Har Mahadev) and god lives in every human, he has to believe the very corollary of that thought. Shiva unwillingly accepts the truth.

*“There is evil in every single of us.
The true battle between good and evil is
fought within us.*

*And the great evil connects itself
to the evil within us. Is that why people get
attached to it?” (Page- 107, “The Secret of
the Nagas”)*

The commanding voice of another yet to know Vasudev speaks at the end and reminds to hand him over the medicine which ensures the safety of his unborn child. From the tone of the voice, Shiva guesses he would be the leader of Vasudevs. Later, he comes to know that it is Gopal, the Chief of Vasudevs from Ujjain. Now, the burden of the Neelkanth has increased, he thought his task is to find evil and do everything to destroy the evil. That would be an easy task, but convincing the people to give up their attachment to evil without providing any alternative good is not so easy.

The seventh meeting with Vasudevs is a telepathic conversation at the temple of Lord Matsya, Vaishali. It is with the chief of Vasudevs, Gopal, whom he has heard at the previous meeting. Before that Shiva misunderstands the Vasudevs for providing him the Naga medicine, which means they are associated with each other. But, after meeting Parasuram, a dacoit of Branga, his perspectives on Nagas contradicts. His anger on Vasudevs is also pacified as they ultimately helped his son’s healthy birth.

In fact, he comes for the advice of the Vasudevs about the Nagas. The concept of evil has become a confusing thing for Shiva. First he thought the Chandravanshis are evil, then the Brangas for fundings the Nagas. Obviously, the Nagas for their terrorist attacks on temples and killing the pandits; most importantly, for attacking the Mount Mandar, destroying the Somras factory and killing Brihaspati. As he has travelled almost every part of India, he knows that the people he has met so far are not at all evil. If the Nagas are also not the evil persons, then the evil must have not aroused yet. So, the Neelkanth is not needed. But, he realises an important thing that evil, he has been searching eagerly, is need not to be a person or group of

persons. It is a power, which influences the people like good and serves a purpose too.

*“And the institution of the
Mahadev acts as the balance, the control
for that purpose. To take Evil out of the
equation at the correct time.*

*That is what Lord Manu said. It
was just a line in his commandments. He
said that the destroyers of Evil would
understand what he means. My
understanding of it is that Evil cannot and
should not be destroyed completely. That it
needs to be taken out of the equation at the
right time, the time when it rises to cause
total annihilation. Do you think he said that
because the same Evil may serve the
purpose of Good in another time?” (Page-
260, “The Secret of the Nagas”)*

Here, the Vasudev clearly gives a hint that the ultimate good can turn into an ultimate evil. Now, Shiva is left with two questions—what does Lord Manu mean by good and evil are the two sides of the same coin? And what exits at the end of the path of the Nagas? He decides to give a chance to the Nagas after all, they deserve a hearing. Though he extremely hates a single Naga who is responsible for the assassination of Brihaspati, he doesn’t want to judge every Naga as evil.

The final conversation happens at Ujjain, the city of Vasudevs with the chief Vasudev, Gopal. Before this eighth meeting, Shiva unfolds many things like the mysteries of Maika, Sati’s relation to Kali and Ganesh; utmost, the secret of the Nagas, which answered his obvious question ‘what is evil?’. He discovered that the most celebrated good of the generation has turned into a great evil and causing all the troubles. The Somras is the reason for the deformed births and sufferings of the Nagas, the plague and deaths in Branga, the near extinction of the river Saraswathi, the drastic fall of the birth rate in Meluha etc. But, before going forth, Shiva requires some more clarification; hence, decides to meet the Vasudevs in their city.

This conversation unwraps many things including the identity of Shiva, how the Vayuputras release the Neelkanth, the mystery behind his hidden third eye and his blue throat, his uncle, Manobhu’s relation to the Amartya Shpand; also, though he is not appointed through the Vayuputras, his uncle

Manobhu's training and his destiny made him the Neelkanth. A confused Shiva asks them if they always know what the evil is, why they did not reveal him earlier. Then the Vasudev clarifies that they clearly know that Somras is going to be evil, but they don't know 'when'. It is the task of the Neelkanth to discover the right time to take the evil out of equation. They feel this is the time, cause despite many deviations the Neelkanth has arrived to the correct conclusion. Thus, he is accepted by the Vasudevs as a Mahadev and now are ready to serve under the Neelkanth to take the evil out of equation.

The total interaction clarifies the future action plan of the Neelkanth, he decides to do everything to end the reign of the Somras. We can also notice that this is the end of the intellectual conversations between the Mahadev and the Vasudevs. Their eternal partnership for the common good starts then onwards. The Vasudevs give all the help required to end the evil. They supply their war weapons, elephants, army for the war and the hidden Vasudev Pandits in the temples throughout India work as the communicating networks. Their presence helps the Neelkanth in getting the powerful *daivi astra*, 'Pashupatiastra' from the Vayuputras.

Devdutt Pattanaik, in his work titled "Ramayana Versus Mahabharata: My Playful Comparison" says, "Divinity in Hinduism is the human potential to rise above over animal nature." In the trilogy, even the great Maharshi like Brigu, intentionally makes mistakes and supports himself using divi-astras to attack the Neelkanth and his group at Panchavati, thinking that it is for the sake of larger good. But, Shiva, who with the help of the Vasudevs transforms as the Neelkanth, doesn't encourage even a smaller mistake for the larger good. So, he sets Parvateshwar free, when he chooses his loyalty to fight for Meluha. This attitudinal development in Shiva makes him more divine. Finally, Shiva wins the war at the cost of losing his Sati, the love of his life.

CONCLUSION

In Indian Mythology, the 'trimurthi' balances the life on earth. Brahma creates life, Vishnu protects the life and spreads the good, and Maheswara (the Mahadev) destroys the evil. The cycle repeats continuously. Amish Tripathi, in his trilogy tries to project the same formula in the form of Brahma, the great scientist, invents the Somras (the good), Vishnu (Lord Ram) distributes the Somras equally for the progression of the society. But, the very

progression creates imbalances in the society, the good turns into evil. Here comes a Mahadev (the Neelkanth) to lead the people away from the evil and destroys the source of that evil (the Somras). In order to attribute some logical and scientific aspects to the popular myth, Amish Tripathi deliberately made many changes in the story of Lord Shiva that has been told from ages together.

However, his imagined systems of Vishnus (the insiders) and Mahadevs (the outsiders) blended well in his trilogy. The collaboration of the Vasudevs and the Neelkanth has brought the desired balance in the society. Shiva at the beginning is just a tribal leader, doubts whether he deserves a destiny at all, remembers his uncle's words, "*Your destiny is much larger than these massive mountains.*" (Chapter-1, "The Immortal of Meluha") and starts his Journey to Meluha for the sake of the safety of his tribe. But, the courage that Shiva has shown and the guidance the Vasudevs have provided clearly made him as the Neelkanth, not just his blessed blue throat. The non-believers in the Legend Neelkanth like, Parvateshwar, Kali, Brihaspati also trusted Shiva and worshiped him as a Mahadev, purely by his deeds. Thus, we can say the Vasudevs played a key role in the psychological transformation of Shiva.

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