



CULTURAL PLURALISM VS MULTICULTURALISM AS PRESENTED IN AMISH TRIPATHI'S SHIVA TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

The term “cultural pluralism” has evolved in modern times through Kallen’s essay “Democracy versus the Melting Pot” (1915) in The Nation in which he presented an argument against the “Americanisation” of European Immigrants. It is the sociological term which advocates that different ethnic group must be allowed to foster in society without being forced to assimilate their identity with the relatively larger ethnic groups. Such an approach is opposite to “multiculturalism” which implies forced cultural amalgamation to achieve the goal of utopian social integration. Sometimes the two terms are mistaken to be synonyms. Whereas multiculturalism idealises objective reality, cultural pluralism advocates the tolerance of subjective reality. In society a healthy ambience is the acceptance, not tolerance, of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism as well as Subjective and objective reality. Notably, the major social clashes around the world for the last few thousand years have been due to intolerance towards other cultures. Amish Tripathi’s Shiva Trilogy that fictionalises the pre-historic world of the Sarasvati Civilization or Indus valley Civilization deals with such a cultural clash originating through rigidity and denial of the truth. This article discusses the viability of cultural subjectivity and objectivity, cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, as presented in Shiva Trilogy and its relation with our present society.

Keynotes: Cultural Pluralism, Multiculturalism, Existentialism, Social Pluralism, acceptance and tolerance, quantum theory, subjective and objective reality

INTRODUCTION

“There is your Truth and there is my truth. As for the universal truth, it does not exist.” says Amish Tripathi through the character Aanandmayi in his *Shiva Trilogy*, Volume 3, *The Oath*

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of *Vayuputra*. In the given statement, 'your truth and my truth' is subjective reality while 'universal truth' is objective reality.

In general, objective stands for the absolute truth, something that is completely fact based, measurable, observable. Objective reality or approach is, thus, expected to be ultimate, unbiased and unprejudiced. Hence it will not change. Hassan Waheed, in his essay, "Subjective Objectivity and Objective Subjectivity: The Paradox in Social Science" quotes *Cunningham* (Cunningham, 1973:4) "An objective claim is a 'truth' or a 'fact' that exists outside the bias of the inquirer's thoughts and desires".

On the contrary, the subjective is based on the opinions, assumptions, beliefs, and interpretation of the individual and thus is liable to be biased. In the social context, the goal of all subjective approach is to reach the ultimate objective. This goal is expected to lead a life on the right track by a selection between right and wrong. However, this goal has become a seed of dissension among the various ethnic groups as they claim that their reality and approach is the only truth. Often a particular cultural or ethnic group tries to force the other to accept *their* perceived truth, denying the feasibility of the other.

Amish Tripathi has fictionalised the societies with diverse cultural beliefs against the backdrop of the Sarasvati Civilization in his *Shiva Trilogy*. Such diversity is a truer picture of contemporary Indian society as well as most of the other societies across the globe. The societies of *Shiva Trilogy* include the idealised world of Meluha of Suryavanshi, the Chandravanshi, Naga, Vayuputra, etc. All have their individual cultural belief, code of conduct, propriety and values which they eulogize while looking down upon others. In *Shiva Trilogy*, Amish has compared and contrasted these cultural beliefs, codes of conduct, values and ways of life etc. to establish the fact that there is no absolute right or wrong in cultural context. Only when a community or a person resorts to violence and becomes a threat to humanity, it becomes evil. Harmony can descend to a society only by the acceptance of the alternate realities. Thus, Amish advocates cultural pluralism.

Shiva Trilogy that includes *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011), and *The Oath of Vayuputras* (2013), centres around the theme of the search of evil. The novel is mythic fiction based on the Lord Shiva myth. The search of evil is carried out through the fictionalised mythic character Shiva, a prototype Lord Shiva, the prime deity in Hindu religion. In the novel, it is the mission of the Shiva to find out evil in the society and to eradicate it. This mission of eradicating the evil is akin to the role of the *destroyer* attributed to the Lord Shiva in Hindu Mythology. In order to fulfil this mission, Shiva first has to ascertain what evil is. This search leads to the adventurous story of the novel from one society to another, thus, from one culture to another. It establishes the fact that people are not



evil but their way may be evil, influenced and regulated through their culture. The *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines culture as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.” Throughout his fiction, Amish has first compared and contrasted manners, general customs and beliefs of the people of different cultural groups and has tried to establish the fact that none is completely wrong.

In the trilogy, the culture of Suryavanshi's has initially been idealised and contrasted with the culture of the Chandravanshis. The motto of the Suryavanshi's “Satya, Dharma, Mann: Truth, Duty, Honour” has been contrasted with motto of Chandravanshis that is “Shringar, Saundarya, Swatantrata: Passion, Beauty, Freedom”. In doing so, Amish first idealises the motto of Suryavanshi's, a motto that has created a duty bound honourable society where rules are supreme. It is well-planned; people are well-fed and taken care of. Still it has its own flaws like, law obsessed people that prefer laws to human sentiments, lack of personal freedom and individuality, etc. The motto of the Suryavanshi community can be paralleled with certain ethnic groups in our contemporary society- those who want to bring and drag people under same behavioural and philosophic configuration, thus, killing their individuality. In the lecture, entitled “Existentialism is Humanism” (1945), given by *Jean Paul Sartre*, the leading philosopher of 20th century, the notable idea of the “existence precedes essence” has been presented. He gave this lecture at club Maintenant in Paris, on 29th October 1945. Existentialism advocates the pre-eminence of identity or existence of an individual before anything. The emotional, physical, psychological and philosophical needs of each individual cannot be expected to be the same and if it is so, compelling everyone to follow the same rule and expecting all to act equally, is killing individuality. It is dangerous for a society.

Existentialism advocates personal freedom, person responsibility and a personal discipline through the human consciousness. Human consciousness itself is not an independent entity but is subjective. *Adorno*, in *On Subjective and Objective*, has referred to “subject” as “self-conscious object”. This existentialist philosophy is found in the motto of the Chandravanshis who value personal freedom before everything. In his search for evil, Shiva also begins to nurture the delusion that the way of the life of Chandravanshis is evil as it is completely unorganised. For example; Roads are full of potholes, open grounds have been converted into giant slums where illegal immigrants have pitched their tents on common land, even the narrowest roads are chock-a-block with the cloth tents of the homeless. There is class-conflict between the rich home owning-class and the poor landless who live in the slums. People are poor yet are happy as they have their freedom to live with dignity and individuality. Amish presents this through an incident. After the great massacre at the Suryavanshi- Chandravanshi war, when Shiva finds that Chandravanshi's have no alliance with the terrorists, he convinces himself delusionally that it must be the way of the Chandravanshis that is evil. But when he



goes to Ramjanbhomi Temple at Ayodhya, he comes across an emaciated old man readying to eat. When the old man sees Shiva's staring at him, he invites Shiva to eat with him and offers the larger portion to Shiva with dignity. In these two cultures, the ways of life are different but it does not affect their dignity. Thus, the novel proposes that self-consciousness is not bound to a particular culture or condition of life; it is independent entity unaffected by external circumstances. The picture of the Chandravanshi community is similar to a number of places, states, countries around the world where the government is a failure and ineffective yet the people have their individual dignity.

The natural behavioural pattern of both the cultures has also been presented through contrast. The sobriety of Meluhans has been contrasted against the vibrancy of Swadweepans. Swadweep means the "land of freedom". It is a living embodiment of vibrant life. The Swadweep women's skimpy clothes and their confidence for sexuality are in sharp contrast with Meluhan women who do not show any personal emotion in public. Even the men of Swadweep are fashion conscious. While for Meluhans, moderate and restrained life is an ideal, Swadweepans put value on freedom and passion. The world of Swadweepans is filled with extreme love, coexisting with extreme hate, expressed through extreme loudness and extreme passion. It is something that is completely opposite to the ideal of the Meluhans. In the novel, Amish has shown that both the cultures has their own advantages and disadvantages. None can claim absolutely appropriate. Thus both must be allowed to thrive without any censure. The cultures of Meluhans and Swadweepans can be compared with the cultures of our contemporary society. There are cultures that put so much value on restrain and moderation and believe that vibrant life will lead them to evil. Amish must be trying to annul such belief.

In the fictional work, people of both the cultures live in their own subjective realities and believe it to be the objective reality. They are in discord as long as they look down upon one - another and harmony and peace descends on both the cultures when they accept cultural pluralism. The condition of our contemporary society is similar. Towards the goal of cultural pluralism, people have reached the point of only *Tolerance*, something which is not enough. *Christopher Isherwood*, in his book, *What Religion is in the Words of Swami Vivekananda*, writes about what Swamiji said about tolerance and acceptance. In the chapter titled *The Ideal of a Universal Religion*, he quotes Swamiji by stating that it is *acceptance* rather than *tolerance* which is required. Tolerance means that one thinks that the other is wrong yet one allows the other to exist out of sympathy. Such a belief is bound to create strife. He says that only when we accept that every path is true, society would be at peace, as happens in the case of the Suryavanshi and the Chandravanshi. Parvateshwar, the General and the representative of Meluhans ultimately understands and accepts the Chandravanshi ideal of life along with his own Suryavanshi culture. His grandfather had taken the vow that the men of their family



would always follow celibacy. He did it while protesting against a law that allows the royals to know who their blood-child is and gives them the right to adopt them while the identity of the children of common people is kept a secret. Parents are allowed to adopt a child at a certain age befitting their social status. Such exemption for royals is dereliction of the motto of the Suryavanshi that advocates equality. As the Meluhan ideals is to give priority to duty before anything, Parvateshwar follows celibacy, compromising his love for Aanadmayi but ultimately he lets his individuality conquer the rules, thus achieving freedom of choice. The cultures of the Nagas, Vayuputras, Brangas have equally been vindicated by establishing the fact that everyone's behaviour is swayed by circumstances and temporal compulsions.

Though on the one hand, Amish seems to applaud cultural pluralism yet his work also presents the example of multiculturalism. The cultural assimilation of the Gunas, the tribe of Shiva, when they reach Meluha, has been presented as a growth, a cultural expansion. They are brought into a completely new system of the Meluhans cultural life and are expected to welcome and cherish it as it is superior to their mountain culture. Even at the immigration camp, there is good drainage system, developed cotton clothes, taps for water, bath shop, and soft bed sheets etc. Gunas have their own culture which must be equally valuable for them but they are a small tribe in contrast to the large civilization of Meluha and so they are expected to assimilate in order to bring social integration and conformity. Meluhans believe that their ideal of life uplift the life of Gunas. The tendency of some countries and cultural groups in our contemporary world corresponds to the Meluhans where the larger ethnic or cultural group imposes and even binds the relatively smaller ethnic or cultural group with their rules. The irony of the situation is that when a similar people go to another country, they want cultural freedom for themselves. Thus the dual attitude towards the cultural pluralism and multiculturalism presented in the fiction gives a glimpse of the dualist attitude of the contemporary world. Besides, there surfaces an issue if the superiority or the inferiority of the culture can be measured with the comfortable luxurious life it promises or whether there is some other scale. Whether cultural assimilation should be promoted, or individualism should be allowed to foster.

Cultural dissention is the result of people's obstinate belief in their truth. The perceived truth for an individual is his subjective truth. As the system of faith or reality for a particular cultural group is identical, the term *subjective reality* in this article stands for the subjective faith of a group of people belonging to the same culture and *Objective reality* stands for the ultimate reality. Each cultural group regards their subjective approach as the only way to reach the ultimate reality or Objective reality. Though the terminological and epistemological distinction between the given two terms seems simple yet it is indeed the most ambiguous as the concept of subjective-objective reality is itself overlapping. The idea of objective reality is also vague as objective reality is also influenced by subjective perception. In science, the



Quantum theory demonstrates that “the observer affects the observed reality” which means that the concept of reality is not sufficient in itself. In the book, *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom*, Swami Chetanananda presents the lesson of Swami Vivekananda. It says that everyone looks at the truth from different standpoints which itself is influenced by birth, education, and most important, cultural influence. He asserts that we do not reach from falsehood to truth, evil to self-realisation but from lower reality to higher reality. It can be easily understood through the process of scientific development. One can't claim old technology to be evil when something new has been invented. Every scientific development is truth or objective reality for that particular point of time.

How our subjectivity alters our perception of objectivity can be easily perceived through the example of the tribe called *Nagas* in the *Shiva Trilogy*. In the fiction, Nagas are initially presented as terrorist who have been ambushing Meluha. They are described as sinners and evil owing to their deformed body, despised by all and exiled from all societies. They live in the place called Panchwati, detached from and unknown to all. This place is believed to be a wretched one. They are presented as hideous hooded figures that cover themselves to hide their horrible stature. When it is resolved when both Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis are not evil, Shiva is next deluded into the belief that Nagas are evil. Later, the novel reveals that Nagas' terrorist attack had been self-defence rather than attacks. The deformity in their body is caused due to the side-effect of the elixir called *Somras* that Meluhans consume. On the one hand, it gives Meluhans a long healthy life while it creates deformities in Nagas. Thus, the people who claim them to be sinners were responsible for their deplorable condition. Nagas only attack the sources that produce the elixir. Even Panchwati is a highly developed place. Yet everyone considers them evil as their perception of Nagas was based on their subjective information, swayed by external agents. Notably, the terrorist attack in the fiction doesn't symbolise the terrorism in our contemporary world. There is no attempt to valorise them as the only motive of the terrorist is to create terror by killing innocents. As long as people live in their confined subjective reality, they do not accept the existence of the Nagas but as soon as they become ready to expand the boundary of their perception, reality dawns on them and they accepted the cultural pluralism. The acceptance of deformed Kali and Ganesha as sister and son by Shiva and satire can be taken as an example of the acceptance of the cultural pluralism.

The initial hatred towards the Brangas for killing the holy bird peacock also melts away and turns into sympathy when the reason behind their action is recognised as the only way to save the life of their wards. The reason for the plague every year in their country is also caused by the side-effect of *Somras*. At last, when the root-cause of all the disorders and havoc across the societies is identified, it is found out that the side-effect of *Somras*, the elixir has caused all. When the royalty of Meluha is asked to ban the manufacturing, they refuse and so they

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are finally established as evil. So, according to this work, the only unacceptable subjective reality is something that is a threat to humanity.

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