



**ANCIENT MYTH IN CONTRADICTION TO MODERN MYTH: A  
STUDY OF THE LEGENDARY CHARACTERS IN *THE SHIVA  
TRILOGY* BY AMISH TRIPATHI**

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**Abstract**

Mythology has been a fundamental part of human civilization, serving as a means to explain the world, human behaviour, and the divine. While ancient myths were rooted in religious traditions, supernatural elements, and oral storytelling, modern mythological retellings have adapted these narratives to contemporary sensibilities. The study examines how Tripathi reimagines these legendary figures, shifting them from divine, supernatural entities to humanized historical characters driven by personal choices, rational thought, and socio-political motivations. It also investigates how modern myth challenges the deterministic nature of ancient mythology by emphasizing free will, moral ambiguity, and contemporary ideologies. Through this comparative analysis, the paper aims to

demonstrate how mythology evolves to remain relevant in changing cultural contexts while questioning whether such reinterpretations enhance or dilute the essence of traditional myths. The findings suggest that modern adaptations, like the *Shiva Trilogy*, serve as a link between the past and the present, making mythology more accessible to contemporary audiences. However, they also raise critical discussions on the reinterpretation of sacred narratives and the implications of transforming revered deities into humanized figures.

**Keywords:** Myth, Mythology, Fiction, Ancient, Modern, Shiva.

### **Introduction**

Mythology has long served as an intermediate through which civilizations understand their past, shape their identities, and interpret the world around them. Ancient myths, deep-rooted in religious and cultural traditions, repeatedly convey thoughtful philosophical and moral messages. However, as civilizations evolve, so do their myths. Modern retellings often reinterpret these narratives, adapting them to contemporary sensibilities and perspectives. This relationship between ancient and modern myth is mainly evident in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*, which reimagines the legendary figure of Lord Shiva as a historical hero rather than a divine being.

This study examines the transformation of mythological characters within the trilogy and how they contrast with their traditional depictions. By analysing key figures this research explores the changes in characterization, ideology, and thematic focus that distinguish modern myth from its ancient counterpart. The study also investigates how these changes reproduce contemporary values, such as rationalism, individualism, and social justice, while stimulating the mystical and divine aspects that define ancient myths. Through this analysis, the paper aims to highlight the developing nature of mythology and the impact of modern storytelling on the perception of legendary characters. It pursues to understand whether such reinterpretations enhance or diminish

the essence of these myths and how they subsidize to a broader discourse on mythology's role in culture.

### **Ancient Myth:**

Ancient myths are deeply rooted in religious and spiritual beliefs. They are often passed down through oral traditions and later recorded in sacred texts. These myths explain the creation of the universe, the nature of gods and divine beings, and moral and ethical guidelines for society. They present supernatural elements as unquestionable truths and emphasize fate, destiny, and divine intervention in human affairs. Examples include the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, Greek myths like *The Iliad*, and Norse sagas.

Key characteristics of ancient myth:

1. Divine and supernatural beings play a central role.
2. Oral transmission and later written codification.
3. Explains creation, cosmic order, and moral values.
4. Emphasizes fate and the influence of gods over human lives.
5. Symbolic and allegorical narratives with hidden meanings.

### **Modern Myth:**

Modern myths, while inspired by ancient narratives, often reinterpret traditional stories to fit contemporary values, scientific reasoning, and humanistic perspectives. They may blend myth with history, psychology, and social commentary, making legendary figures more relatable. Modern myths can emerge in literature, films, and pop culture, where gods and heroes are depicted with human flaws and struggles. Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, and superhero stories like *Superman* and *Thor* are examples of modern myths.

Key characteristics of modern myth:

1. Characters are often reimagined as historical, psychological, or moral figures.
2. Focus on personal choice, free will, and rational thought.

3. Blend of myth and history, making divine beings more human-like.
4. Challenges traditional beliefs, often questioning fate and destiny.
5. Created through books, films, and digital media rather than oral tradition.

### **Character Analysis: Ancient vs. Modern Interpretations**

1. Shiva: In traditional mythology, Shiva is the supreme god of destruction and transformation, whereas in the *Shiva Trilogy*, he is a human with exceptional leadership and warrior skills who attains greatness through experience and wisdom. “The legend says that the Neelkanth will be a foreigner. He cannot be from the Sapt-Sindhu. And that his throat will turn blue when he drinks the Somras” (Tripathi, 65-66).
2. Sati: In Hindu mythology, Sati is Shiva’s first wife, embodying devotion and sacrifice. Tripathi’s Sati, however, is a strong warrior and independent thinker, actively influencing Shiva’s decisions and participating in battle. “A woman is not a reward for a man. A woman is a warrior in her own right.” (*The Secret of the Nagas*)
3. Daksha – The Flawed King: King Daksha is a devoted follower of dharma, seen as righteous but strict. In the trilogy, he is depicted as a power-hungry ruler, manipulating traditions for his gain. “The biggest problem in the world is not evil, but the good that believes it is infallible.” (*The Oath of the Vayuputras*)
4. Nandi: Traditionally known as Shiva’s divine bull, Tripathi reinterprets Nandi as a loyal and courageous soldier in Meluha’s army, emphasizing camaraderie over mystical servitude. “Loyalty is a choice. And I have made mine.” (*The Immortals of Meluha*)
5. Parvateshwar – The Duty-Bound Commander: Parvateshwar is not a prominent figure in traditional mythology but represents the Kshatriya ideal. He embodies unwavering loyalty to Meluha, even when it conflicts with Shiva’s ideals.

“Duty is a cruel master. It forces you to do things that your heart does not agree with.” (*The Secret of the Nagas*)

6. Parshuram: In Hindu myths, Parshuram is an immortal sage and warrior. In the *Shiva Trilogy*, he is portrayed as a battle-hardened rebel with a deep sense of justice, making him more humanized and relatable.
7. Naga Characters (Ganesh and Kali) - From Outcasts to Heroes: Ganesh is worshiped as the elephant-headed god of wisdom, while Kali is the fierce goddess of destruction. In the trilogy, they are Nagas - deformed yet powerful warriors fighting against injustice. “A monster is not defined by his appearance, but by his actions.” (*The Secret of the Nagas*)

“Weakness is not in the body. It is in the mind.” (*The Oath of the Vayuputras*)

### **Contradictions Between Ancient and Modern Myth in the Shiva Trilogy**

Ancient myths are mostly faith-driven and absolute in their illustration of gods and supernatural events, modern myths challenge and reinterpret these ideas, often presenting gods and heroes as individuals with human emotions, doubts, and moral dilemmas. Modern myths serve as a connection between tradition and contemporary thought, rewriting how we view legendary characters and their significance in today's world.

The *Shiva Trilogy* by Amish Tripathi exemplifies this transformation, portraying Lord Shiva not as a deity but as a mortal hero whose actions and choices define his legend. This shift raises questions about how myths evolve and whether modern reinterpretations enhance or dilute their original essence.

**Divine vs. Human:** Traditional myths present Shiva as an eternal god, while the *Shiva Trilogy* humanizes him, portraying his rise to immensity through personal choices and mortal limits.

**Supernatural vs. Realism:** Ancient mythology flourishes on divine intervention, miraculous events, and mystical elements, whereas Tripathi's narrative characteristics these miracles to scientific explanations, such as the Somras (a longevity potion) instead of an elixir of the gods.

**Predetermined Fate vs. Free Will:** In traditional narratives, Shiva's actions align with cosmic destiny, but in the trilogy, his journey is designed by his own decisions, reflecting a modern existential perspective.

**Symbolism vs. Historical Interpretation:** The ancient Shiva is heavily symbolic, representing destruction, meditation, and the balance of the universe. Tripathi, however, reinterprets these symbols within a socio-political background, portraying Shiva's war against evil as a historical conflict rather than a philosophical struggle.

## **Conclusion**

Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* presents an attractive relationship between ancient myth and modern reinterpretation, offering a fresh perspective on legendary characters while challenging traditional narratives. Through the trilogy, Tripathi transforms mythological figures into relatable, humanized beings, reimagining divine characters as historical individuals shaped by their choices and circumstances. This approach not only modernizes Hindu mythology but also makes it accessible to contemporary readers, connecting the gap between the past and present.

However, this reinterpretation also produces contradictions between ancient myths and their modern adaptations. While traditional texts portray Shiva, Sati, and other characters as divine and beyond human limits, Tripathi's versions highlights rationality, scientific explanations, and socio-political themes, often differing from traditional beliefs. This contrast reproduces the developing nature of mythology, representing its ability to adapt to changing cultural and philosophical backgrounds.

Finally, the *Shiva Trilogy* illustrates the dynamic relationship between mythology and modern storytelling. By blending myth with history and fiction, Tripathi not only challenges conventional beliefs but also highlights the eternal significance of these legends. His work serves as evidence to the power of storytelling, showing how ancient myths can be reinterpreted to echo with contemporary audiences while continuing to inspire debate and discussion.

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