

Manifestation of the Sacred Sound OM in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*

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ABSTRACT

Manifestation is perceived as material existence in this article. Materialism advocates that only Physical matter can hold the fundamental reality. The materialistic concept advocates that the validity of the existence of anything depends on whether it can be perceived through the senses or not. It is an empirical approach. Modern age is predominantly an era of materialism. An intense tendency of materialism is widely being witnessed in Indian Mythic Fiction of 21st century where along with the myth, the philosophy or spiritual essence associated with it is also manifest. Among other examples, this article would focus on how Amish Tripathi has converted the Sacred sound OM into a material value in his fiction series *Shiva Trilogy*.

Keynotes: Materialism, OM, the primeval sound, Physical manifestation, myth, mythopoeia.

According to the holy Bible,

“In the beginning was the word, the word was with the God, and the word was God...All things were made by him (the word) and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3)¹

This reference to the holy word shows that a certain sound at a certain frequency was the beginning through which everything else originated. It is connected with God itself. The ancient Vedic sages discovered this sound to be ‘Aum’ or ‘Om’, the primordial sound, the 1st breath of creation, the echo of the universe and vibration of very existence. The great sage Patanjali speaks of

God as the actual cosmic sound of 'Aum' that is perceived in meditation. OM may be considered to be the echo of the Big Bang.

D.K. Hari and D.K. Hema Hari write in this reference: "When this *Srishi* i.e. creation, came into being, *Hiranyagarbha*, the cosmic egg broke open with a *Brahmanda Visphotak*, Big Bang. The universal explosion that occurred at the moment would obviously have also been accompanied by a sound. Otherwise, it would not be a bang."²

The divine authority of the sacred word is not restricted to the Vedas but has reference in other faiths too. *Aum* of the vedas became the sacred word *Hum* of the Tibetans, *Amin* of the Muslims, and *Amen* of the Egyptians, Greek, Romans, Jew and Christians.³ Its meaning in Hebrew is 'sure, faithful'.

A 21st century author, Ashwin Sanghi, has clipped the prefix *Omni* – to *Om* – as in the words 'omnipotent', 'omnivorous', 'ombudsman', 'omen' etc. in his mythic fiction *The Krishna Key*⁴. He has tried to establish that the word OM has relations with the attributes presenting the infinite.

In India, the school of Materialism is quite old. It developed around 600 BC with the works of Ajita Kesakambali, Payasi, Kanada, and the Cārvāka School of Philosophy, the early proponents of atomism. Buddhism and the Jain school commenced the Atomism tradition. According to the Cārvāka School of Philosophy, "there is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in other world..."⁵ (Sarva-Darshana-Sangraha, chapter 1). It denies any existence beyond Atom or physical matter. This predominance of the physical matter must have been the reason why Indians use symbols, allegory and personification in abundance.

Al Biruni, a Persian scholar, wrote in his book *Kitab-ul-Hind* in 1032 CE:

“The Hindus can never speak of anything, be it an object of the intellect or imagination, without representing it as a personification, an individual.”⁶

As the process of creation in Hindu mythology is intrinsically linked with the concept of Lord Shiva, the primeval sound is naturally connected with him. Thus, Omkarnath is also an attribute to Shiva. In Amish Tripathi’s mythic fiction *Shiva Trilogy*, he has created mythopoeia through the archetypes associated with the Shiva myth. In his fiction, Shiva is neither a God nor a superhuman but a common person who raises himself with heroic qualities. A perfect spectacle of the mythic world has been created by Tripathi through different attributes of Lord Shiva, for example, Shiva’s abode Kailash, his cosmic dance, fierce warrior skills, forbearance, compassion, his blue throat (Neelkantha), etc. However, without the cosmic Sound OM, the profile of Shiva is incomplete. Amish has done it in his novel in a unique manner.

The transcription of the sound OM differs from language to language, still, it is only the sound that matters and not the transcription. Amish’s novel is set in 1900 BC, the period when the Sarasvati or Indus valley Civilisation is said to have collapsed. Yet, in Amish’s English fiction, the sound OM appears in Devanagari script in spite of the fact that the early sign of the script is from the 1st century CE. Admittedly, it is fictive license.



The Om or Aum symbol in Devanagari

Amish’s unique approach in the novel concerns the physical materialisation of the sound. The character Nandi says:

“This is an ancient symbol that some people used for the word Aum...Aum is the holiest word in our religion. It is considered

the primeval sound of nature. The hymn of the universe. It was so holy that for many millennia, most people would not insult it by putting it down in written form."⁷

However, the sound has been represented through the Devanagari Script to make its existence durable as the written record is more enduring than the oral one.

Nandi says these words while informing the protagonist, Shiva, after an attack on him by the people of a race called Chandravanshi. In the first volume of the Shiva Trilogy; *The Immortals of Meluha*, there is a clash between two races, the Suryavanshi, the descendants of Sun and the Chandravanshi, the descendants of Moon. The two races possess different ideals. Throughout Volume 1 of the Shiva Trilogy, it has been maintained that the Chandravanshi are evil until the end of the part when it is established that they are not actually evil but merely different. The Suryavanshi are the people of the state Meluha, a Utopian empire founded by Lord Ram -its denizens are forever young because they know how to prepare Somras, an elixir. These two races are in perpetual conflict over the river Sarasvati. All races believe that a god, Neelkanth, one with a blue throat would appear finally to remove all their difficulties. Miraculously, Shiva appears as such a character whom everyone accepts as God Incarnate. Shiva, in reality, as a messiah, is groomed by an institute.

Amish links the hostility and the alliance between the two races with the symbol OM. The novel suggests that the symbol was devised by Lord Bharat. The legend says that Bharat was the son of Dushyanta and Shakuntala after whom our nation, Bharat, is known. In the Shiva Trilogy, he has been described as a great, all conquering Chandravanshi ruler respected also by the Suryavanshis, the opponents. He marries a Suryavanshi princess in order to end the continual feud; the written symbol OM is created as the symbol of unity between the two races.

Lord Bharat, according to *Immortals of Meluha*, transcribes the word 'OM' into physical form and mandates the symbol with the ordained sound. In most of the civilisations, there is a transcription of every prevalent sound. However, the sound 'OM' and its script are connected arbitrarily in this novel. There is no phonological relation. Once again, the argument can be that it is a work of fiction. Moreover, our perception of sound also depends on the language we use. For example, the cock, whatever region it may belong to, utters the same sound but to Hindi speaking people, it is 'Kuk-ru-ku' while English speaking people perceive it as 'Cock-a-doodle-do'. Yet this sound-language-perception relationship is not quite a plausible explanation for sense-perceived manifestation of the word.

The novel presents the top half of the OM in white, representing the Chandravanshis, while the bottom half is coloured in red and represents the Suryavanshis. The emergent common path is orange. As the symbols of the two races are the moon and the sun respectively, the half-moon holding the small sun is also present at the top right of the symbol:



The Symbol OM in Shiva Trilogy

The mandate to attach the divine sound with the form is to signify that the alliance between them was sanctified by the almighty God but later on, the pact was broken and the symbol was forgotten. Tripathi writes, "The word Aum reverted to its original form of pure sound without a written representation."⁸ There is another sample too, a black OM made of the figures of three serpents, the symbol of the evil Naga race, the people with deformities but tremendous strength and skill. In this work, only the Nagas have the knowledge why they opt for the symbol.

Though throughout the Volumes 1 and 2; *The Immortals of Meluha* and *The Secret of Nagas*, the serpent black OM symbol has been maintained to represent their devilish black nature, towards the end of Volume 2, it is established that they are not really devilish or evil but only different.

In the Preface to his book *Spiritual Heritage and Cultural Symbols of India* Jhaver P. Shreeni was describes the value of symbols:

“On seeing a symbolic item, a vivid picture of that country and era emerges in the mind. Symbols of sovereignty and power over the world’s temporal and spiritual life-emblems of divine and human sovereignty; a symbol must necessarily suggest more than what it expresses.”⁹

Although Amish has created the word for the sound arbitrarily, still, it is an interesting proposition, almost credible and palpable through his art of fiction.

NOTES

1. Yogananda, Paramhansa. *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Yogada Satsang Society of India (Kolkata, 1946), p. 237.
2. Hari and Hema Hari, D.K. *Understanding Shiva*. Bharat Gyan & Sri Sri Publication Trust (Banglore, 2010), p.45.
3. Ibid, p. 237.
4. Sanghi, Ashwin. *The Krishna Key*. Westland Ltd. 2012. P. 160.
5. Sharma, Chandradhar. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Private Limited, (Delhi, 1987), p. 42.
6. Ibid, p. 76.
7. Tripathi, Amish. *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), Westland Ltd. P.56.
8. Ibid, P. 58.
9. P. Shreeniwas, Jhaver. *Spiritual Heritage & Cultural Symbol of India*. JAICO Publishing House, (Mumbai, 1999), p. 11.