

Shiva, the Colonial Agent In the Light of Amish's *The Secret of The Nagas*

Uttam Boruah*

Abstract

“Othering” is a concept which is dominant in postcolonial novels like J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. These are some specimens which best portray the whole mechanism of ‘othering’ in two real postcolonial situations. Amish’s second novel of the Shiva Trilogy *The Secret of the Nagas* locates certain postcolonial resemblances or certain situations in which colonial and postcolonial mindsets or psychology can be found out. A character, who is a refugee himself, forgets his past and real identity and adopts an identity which gives him a status, a transient position. That character is used by the Coloniser to tame the colonies and the people from those colonies, so that they can rule and exploit them. Attribution of certain qualities (or lack of qualities) by the colonial master makes the colonies ‘evil’, ‘uncivilized’ or whatever. This whole process is subject to the process of ‘queering the identity’. Pramod K. Nair, in this context, says, “The ‘First World’ sees ‘Third World’ nations as only recently ‘coming out’.” (175). The colonial power tries to be the guardian of all other states under it. *The Secret of the Nagas* presents a picture of constant occupying of lands/provinces by the Meluhans with the help of, or to say properly, by virtue of Shiva. Shiva, the Bhola hero becomes the ‘colonial agent’ serving for the fulfillment of the colonial agenda.

Keywords: Othering, Colonial Agenda, Colonial Agent.

The aim of this paper is to study the legendary figure of Shiva from the postcolonial context. Shiva, the *samhari* hero of the Puranas – primarily, *Shiva Purana* and *Kalika Purana*, is humanized by Amish Tripathi in his *The Shiva Trilogy* (*The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*). Shiva, being an outlander, could be seen as an agent of the Meluhans.

The Secret of the Nagas presents a picture of constant occupying of lands/provinces by the Meluhans with the help of Shiva. Shiva, the *Bhola* hero becomes the colonial agent serving the colonial agenda. The primary objective of this paper is to understand the circumstances which make Shiva become the agent in the task of perpetuating the colonial cause. This study will also shed light on the untrodden field

* Uttam Boruah is Assistant Professor, Department of English, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Adarsha Mahavidyalaya, Behali, Biswanath - 784184, Assam.

of the history of colonization, and would attempt to formulate notions regarding our 'own people' becoming 'unfamiliar'.

The Secret of the Nagas is the sequel to the first book of the *Shiva Trilogy*, that is, *The Immortals of Meluha*. Shiva's journey from a community leader to a God contributes to the making of the first book of the *Trilogy*. This comes to an end with the Swadweepans' submission to the Meluhans, and initiation into the colonization process. This work is replete with postcolonial issues such as narration, migration, identity crisis, diasporic sense, cultural assimilation and so on.

The Secret of the Nagas presents a full picture of the whole colonization process – how the colonizers occupy lands, how certain discourses help in acquisition of power over colonies and how the most beloved and ideal personality play the greatest deceiver ever, knowingly or unknowingly. People of the *Sapt Sindhu* believed that all their hardships and predicaments would be over when their blue-throated savior would descend from the high mountains. Shiva, the *Guna* leader fulfills all the conditions and requirements as prophesied. This gave Shiva a certain amount of self-confidence that he would be able to provide justice to the people. But the whole idea of justice is disrupted here – the idea which is just for one, can be the cause of humiliation for another. Narration, modification and manipulation are at work in creating the so-called 'truths'.

Shiva, the migrant leader, becomes the *Neelkanth* by dint of the *somras*

offered to him and his community members. He is unable to free himself of the web binding him from all sides. Shiva is the action-hero working out not his mind, but the master plan of the Meluhan King Daksha. Shiva has the bodily prowess to defeat 'evil', the manipulated version of voices raised against Meluha. Daksha proves to be the colonial master with his master plan to rule over the whole of India. Shiva, the molded version of the myth, considers everything to be evil that is against Meluha or which contests Meluha. Shiva carries out the colonial agenda in every state of the *Saptsindhu*.

Colonial agents are those who work as mediators between the colonizer and the colonized. In countries like India, at first they were used as bilingual translators to facilitate communications between the two. But later they became tools of colonization. They were, first and foremost, preys of colonial hunt since they had easy access to the lives and secrets of the natives. The privilege they received due to their exposure to western education and English language made them submit to the colonizer, forgetting the reality of being a native. Sometimes, they were definitely aware of the exploitation their fellow natives were undergoing. But they did not want to lose the privilege they had been enjoying for so long. Fanon, in his "Pitfalls of National Consciousness" says that nationalism fails because of the intellectual laziness of the middle class. Here Shiva is representative of the 'middle class', the link between the colonizer and the colonized. Though Shiva was only a

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tribal leader, his intervention into the Meluhan middle class society made him conform to the middle class values. The colonized raise their voice against the colonizers or protest their progress; but Shiva, being the middle man, puts out the flame of anger.

However, at times the colonial agents were not that much concerned about the predicament of their fellow people because the masters appropriated the colonial agenda in a way that the agents only saw the illusory side of it. In this regard, narration plays a dominant role in showcasing the fascinating sides of their motives as well as presenting and unfolding the nuances of the native history in a way that proves to be helpful in fixing anti-colonial problems. Shiva belongs to this second category of colonial agent, the unaware kind. Though Shiva is an outsider, he enjoys the privilege of being the Neelkanth, the prophesied hero, the God and super-kin to everybody. He has access to the hearts of the people he comes across. His character here cannot be justified as God because of his reluctance to abide by the prophecy and his lack of concern about what was happening behind the veil.

The Neelkanth myth had varied representations. In the novel, we find two different versions of the myth - the Meluhan version and the Swadweepan version. Both believed that their prophesied Neelkanth would defeat evil. For the Meluhans, the Swadweepans and their life ways are evil and vice versa. If

so, then who represents 'good' and who, 'evil'? The Vasudev of Ayodhya put is very beautifully in his remark- "*There is a god in every single one of us. And there is evil in every single one of us. The true battle between good and evil is fought within.*" (107) Shiva was unable to realize this fact until this doctrine was uttered by the Vasudev of Ayodhya. Shiva is shaken by this doctrine when he feels that his task is not only to recognize evil, but to get people to give up their attachments to evil. Though Shiva understands this fact, he does not realize his own attachment to evil, the wrongs associated with the mission he had vowed to carry on.

Colonial agents can be divided into two types: one, agents who came to take an account of the place which the colonizers wanted to dominate. They would come as traders and undertake surveys of the resources – both natural and human, as well as the weaknesses of the natives. They would work as a bridge between the intending colonizers and the colonized. The other one is, the agent employed by the colonizers to rule over the colonized, the one who would make the colonial agenda easy. Shiva plays the role of both. If we assume the Meluhans to be the British, then Swadweep can be considered as symbolic of the Indian Confederate containing smaller, but independent states like Ayodhya, Magadh, Kashi and Branga (similar to the princely states in India).

As we see in *The Immortals of Meluha*, Ayodhya is dominated by Meluha

in the *Dharmyudh* –the holy war of good over evil. Here, the colonial idea of projection works. Colonial agents showed certain character traits which would present the colonizers as superior in front of the colonized. Whereas, we notice the political system in Ayodhya was more liberal, catering to the happiness among people. On the other hand, people’s free will and liberty are curtailed in the name of providing equal rights and facilities. This cannot be an ideal modern state system. But, as we have seen in the pages of history, the colonized was often presented as inferior, pagan, primitive, evil, effeminate and inheritor of dark ways of life. Everything negative was associated with the natives. As opposed to this, the colonizers are inheritors of good ways of life. The Meluhans’ immortality acquired from the heaven’s drink, i.e. *somras*, presents the seemingly long endurance of their ideologies. Shiva, the politically-motivated colonial agent, believes that everything that is Meluhan is good and worth praising; since the Meluhans abided by Lord Ram’s doctrines. Projecting themselves as followers of Lord Ram was a part of their imperial agenda. The colonial agent is educated in colonial ways of life, he feels indebted to those. This situation is well presented by the Tamil writer Kalki in his political satire ‘The Tiger King’: “The boy drank the milk of an English cow, was brought up by an English nanny, tutored in English by an Englishman, saw nothing but English films...” (Kalki 10). Due to the myth going as an undertone, people feel akin to

Shiva. Shiva goes on crossing borders and when he reveals his blue throat from the wrap of his *angvastram*, people are hypnotized. Now they are bound to bow down to the colonial master.

In this colonial mission, Shiva is always passive. He works out the orders of Daksha and the whole machinery. Since Shiva is considered to be the savior, his voice stands for the cumulative voice of the people. Shiva is compelled at first to accept his godhood, so that he would fight for the makers. A large number of euphemisms are used, with the intention of linguistic manipulation. Since godhood is imposed upon Shiva, he is now bound to fight for the betterment and security of the people. Since he has physical prowess and vigor, the destiny of the Meluhan nation depends a lot upon him. On the other hand, the battle between Meluha and Swadweep is termed as *Dharmyudh*, which tries to blur out some obvious aspects- the killings, bloodshed and devastation. Shiva speaks out like a true colonial - “A man *becomes* a Mahadev when he fights for good.” (*TIOM* 346) In a way, Shiva is trying to assert his mission as guided by goodness; on the other, he is trying to justify his identity and stance as somebody fighting for truth.

Lord Ram becomes one of the colonial tools for ideologically conditioning the human mind. He is seen as the ever guiding spirit in the narrative. As a character, he never appears before the audience. But only his name dominates the action of the Trilogy. He is the absent

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presence of the whole action like the invisible figure of Gandhi in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). Murthy is the agent of Gandhi's messages to men and the whole population is moved by his words. His dominant presence is felt, but never seen. Likewise, Lord Ram's existence is also felt, but cannot be seen. People feel that Shiva is the messenger of Lord Ram's doctrines and he has come to establish *Ram Rajya* across the states of the *Sapt Sindhu*. The colonial tool or the machinery named Lord Ram decides the work process of his followers. Though Shiva has come from the Himalayan region, the Meluhan administrative machinery makes him believe in the legend of Lord Ram. Whenever he thinks of some exceptional work going beyond the apparent reality, some imposition pops up in his mind: "Lord Ram be merciful." Knowingly or unknowingly, he starts following Lord Ram's doctrines, in a way, becoming a slave to a whole system of subjugation.

Magadh, Kashi and Branga are states which also cherished a belief in the Neelkanth myth. When Shiva goes to their states, they easily bow down to their Lord and help in fulfilling the colonial agenda. It was like *ashwamedhyagna*, an elaborate ceremony of leaving a horse untethered to tread upon various lands across the earth, with those portions of land being claimed by the King who had performed the ceremony, and let the horse roam at will. If somebody dared to tie the horse, he would have to fight against the said claimant. Shiva plays the role of the horse, one who carries the flag of Meluhan glory

and victory. Parvateshwar, the Meluhan general, plays the constant observer looking at the violations caused in Lord Ram's doctrines. It is not that the colonial agents never did any good to the colonized. There are plenty of instances to prove that the colonizing mission did accrue immense benefits upon the colonized. For instance, Missionaries in Assam helped the natives in reviving the mother-tongue Assamese from the clutches of overpowering weeds of Bengali. They started the first Assamese newspaper *Arunodoi* to give the Assamese people a platform to preserve their language and heritage. Apart from these, they themselves took initiatives in rejuvenating the language by writing the first ever Assamese Dictionary and Grammar. Shiva and his band of trusted lieutenants helped the colonized to overcome their predicaments. For instance, Sati helped the villagers of Ichchawar to get over their fear and trauma caused by the ligers (cross of a lion and a tigress). Parvateshwar and Bhagirath saved the Brangas from the angry attack of the Kashi people. Missionaries in Assam had their own agenda of expanding Christianity among the indigenous people. Shiva and his platoon too have their own agenda of having a psychological influence over the people they came across.

Foucaultian concept of 'panopticon' can be brought in this context. Whatever the colonial agent does, he is always under surveillance. To cite an example out of context, the great Assamese revolutionary

figure, Maniram Dewan, was at first a supporter of the Britishers. Later, he realized his fault and started instigating people against the colonizers. He was condemned to death when his deceit was caught. From this point of view, we can say that the maxim - "once an agent, always an agent" is quite legitimate.

The last great achievement on the colonial agent's part was Shiva's taming of the bandit Parshuram. Parshuram is known for his anger and his vow to avenge the *Kshatriyas*, keeping honour of his mother's words. This is the toughest struggle Shiva has to overcome. In the battle of Madhumati, Shiva and his platoon capture the bandit. Somras is the main cause of this battle. The Brangas were suffering from severe plague and the Nagas had been providing them with a medicine containing rejuvenating herbs. Shiva comes to know that only Parshuram knows the recipe of the medicine, the way by which Somras powder can be kept preserved. This bandit has resemblance with Okonkwo, the revolutionary protagonist of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, fighting alone with his adamant spirit against the colonialist cause. Even his eldest son turns against him, being influenced by the British missionaries. Apparently, even though the missionaries are religious preachers, they are political facilitators, making the colonial cause easier. Okonkwo does not submit to the colonizers and finally gives up his life. On the other hand, Parshuram is caught and kept in prison, until and

unless he comes to know that he is imprisoned by Lord Neelkanth. This is the time of his ultimate submission to the colonial agent. When one commoner realizes that the learned one from his own community abides by some new ideologies and he is thought to be aware of the pros and cons of the newly acquired life ways, he starts following those. The same thing happens in case of Parshuram. Shiva is very near and dear to him and that is why what Shiva proposes, becomes carved on stone. Nidhiram Farwell, the first ever transformed Christian was an ideal for many of the tribesmen and following him, people became converts.

Functions apart, the consequences the colonial agents face, are not welcoming. These agents play their roles throughout their life to make their colonial masters content with the achievements. Shiva, though is not aware of the hidden agenda Daksha had, serves him for so many years. All he has to do is to repay the 'salt debt'. But a day comes, when the colonial agent becomes aware of all the modifications and manipulations the master did, he finally raises his voice. All the illusions are gone now. Since he has realized the machinery that was working behind and the problems he had with his understanding, he becomes violent and asks back the master planner. In return, what we get as the answer from Daksha, shocks us: "I made you. And, I can destroy you!" (308) One who turns his back to the colonizers, will be shot at his back. His life is never secure. When Daksha's conspiracies are

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revealed, he is on the verge of killing Shiva with his knife. This is the ultimate destiny the colonial agent has to meet for all the treacheries and deceits he did with the people for whom he was all.

Colonial agenda is marked by the dominant presence of four Ms. They are—money, missionary, medicine and military. These can be termed as tools of colonization. Money, first of all, is of utmost importance, for the expansion of the colony, employment of new agents and demonstration of welfare. Missionaries, who look aloof from the whole colonial agenda, work in separation for the colonial cause itself. Medicine, on the other hand, is a tool for motivation and persuasion. Colonizers give assurance of better medicinal facilities that would justify their presence. Military, finally, is for surveillance, to maintain law and order apparently, but a strong military base

ensures safety as well as victory in the anti-colonial war. Shiva, as a colonial agent authorizes all these four tools – by offering material benefits to the Gunas, by carrying himself the missionary zeal and ideas, by promising better medicines for Brangan plague and by offering or keeping military assistance to the indigenous people.

The fate of a colony depended mostly upon the agents. Sometimes they appear as traders, sometimes missionaries, sometimes reformers and sometimes colonial negotiators. Both the sides put their faith upon the agent because, for the colonizers they are the manipulators of the thoughts of the colonized and for the Colonized, they are the facilitators. Shiva, unknowingly, like most of the colonial agents, believes in the colonial reformist ideas and serves their purpose. He was never aware of the consequences, and therefore, he becomes the worst victim.

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