
The Posthumanist Paradigm and Scientific Mythopoesis: A Critical Reading of Somras in Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*

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Abstract:

This paper interrogates the convergence of posthumanist ideation and scientific mythopoesis within Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*, focusing on the biochemical elixir Somras as the narrative's fulcrum of corporeal transformation and civilizational advancement. Somras is conceptualized not merely as a mythical panacea but as a posthuman catalyst that blurs ontological boundaries—between the mortal and immortal, the divine and the scientific. Informed by Donna Haraway's 'cyborg myth' and Jacques Derrida's theory of the *pharmakon*, this study situates Somras as both a prosthetic augmentation and an ethical provocation, rendering it simultaneously redemptive and catastrophic. The novel's mythological apparatus is deployed to probe techno-scientific possibilities, ecological dilemmas, and moral thresholds, thus reframing immortality as a contingent, politicized, and biologically engineered state. Shiva, reimagined as an ethically evolving subject rather than an inherent deity, becomes a liminal figure whose embodiment destabilizes traditional mythic authority and reorients divinity within a humanist matrix of agency and consequence. Through this critical lens, Tripathi's speculative reconstruction of ancient India emerges as a mytho-scientific crucible for interrogating human enhancement, historical contingency, and the ethics of progress, thereby illuminating the profound philosophical entanglements at the intersection of science, myth, and posthumanist thought.

Keywords: Cyborg Myth, *Pharmakon*, Techno-scientific, Ecological dilemmas, Destabilizes, Reconstruction, Historical contingency, Embodiment, Posthumanism, Bioethics, Artificial divinity.

Introduction:

In an era increasingly shaped by the confluence of biotechnology and mythic

reimaginings, the boundaries between the sacred and the scientific are undergoing radical reconfigurations. Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*, the inaugural novel in the Shiva Trilogy, is a pivotal literary artifact that exemplifies this intersection, engaging with the conceptual frameworks of posthumanism and scientific mythopoesis. At the heart of this narrative lies Somras, a symbolic and literal elixir functioning as both a biochemical agent and a civilizational ideal. Through the consumption of Somras, the Meluhan society achieves prolonged youth and vitality, blurring the demarcations between mortal limitation and divine possibility.

Tripathi's mythic revisionism is not a nostalgic return to the past but a speculative projection of future anxieties and hopes. His fusion of ancient Vedic knowledge systems with contemporary discourses of scientific rationalism and ethical introspection constructs a unique literary paradigm—one that transcends temporal binaries and reorients myth towards a posthuman horizon. As we navigate an age where gene editing, artificial intelligence, and life-extending technologies are no longer the domain of speculative fiction but lived realities, *The Immortals of Meluha* resonates as an urgent philosophical narrative. This paper, therefore, seeks to critically examine Somras as both a metaphor and mechanism of techno-cultural evolution, assessing its ramifications through the interwoven lenses of scientific mythopoesis and posthumanist philosophy. The Somras is not merely a narrative convenience; it is a trope that materializes the anxieties of a future that has long been seeded in ancient lore. In its very essence, it challenges the sanctity of the human form and brings forth a dialectic where faith collides with logic, and where tradition must reconcile with transformation. Tripathi's vision of Meluha is more than a fictional civilization—it becomes a reflective metaphor for our own world where techno-ethics, ecological balance, and cultural memory constantly negotiate identity and agency.

Scientific Mythopoesis and the Reimagining of Divinity:

Tripathi's narrative pivots on a radical hermeneutic of Indian mythology, wherein ancient rituals and cosmic orders are stripped of their metaphysical fixity and reinterpreted through the lens of speculative science. Somras, the so-called drink of the gods, emerges as a metaphor for biotechnological intervention. As the narrator notes, "Somras was not divine. It was science—dangerous, imperfect, and powerful" (15), highlighting the deserialization of sacred substances into posthuman pharmacology.

This perspective aligns with Jacques Derrida's concept of the *pharmakon*—that which is both remedy and poison. Derrida writes, "*Pharmakon* means remedy, poison, and scapegoat. These meanings are indissociable" (70). In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Somras cures but also corrodes: it grants longevity but induces sterility, deformity, and ecological catastrophe. This pharmacological ambivalence positions Somras as a techno-mythical substance whose potency must be ethically interrogated rather than ritually revered. Myth thus becomes a critical tool for exploring the implications of human enhancement technologies. Mythopoeia here is no longer a backward-looking act of cultural preservation but a forward-facing vehicle for philosophical exploration and ethical critique.

Furthermore, by grounding the divine in scientific plausibility, Tripathi democratizes godhood. No longer reserved for a select metaphysical few, divinity becomes accessible through biochemical means. This inversion not only questions traditional theologies but invites the reader to contemplate the moral cost of playing gods in a world still grappling with inequality and ecological decline. It shifts the terrain of faith from mysticism to a discourse of empirical agency. Somras reconfigures divinity as a techno-cultural construction, thereby allowing a new kind of transcendence—one that is immanent, volatile, and accessible. This transformation marks a key shift in how mythology can function in postmodern narratives: not merely to affirm divine order but to question the very basis upon which such order is constructed.

Posthuman Embodiment and the Politics of Enhancement:

Shiva's metamorphosis is not mystical but biomedical; the ingestion of Somras accelerates cellular regeneration and enhances immunity. His iconic blue throat—*Neelkanth*—is a side effect, not a spiritual phenomenon. Shiva questions his elevation: "Why me? Is this my destiny?" (49). His doubt reflects a posthuman epistemology where the body is neither divine nor fixed but is open to technological modulation and socio-political inscription.

As Donna Haraway proposes in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, "the cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family but of a polymorphous, information-rich, promiscuous, and permanently partial identity" (163). Shiva embodies this cyborgian identity—part man, part engineered being—whose divinity is narratively constructed, not inherently possessed. Moreover, the Nagas, mutated and ostracized beings born as by-products of Somras, challenge the dichotomy between the enhanced and the abject. Their presence disrupts the sanitized aesthetics of perfectionism and introduces a more inclusive and contested vision of the posthuman.

In Braidotti's framing, "posthuman subjects are not autonomous individuals but assemblages of human, non-human, technological, and natural forces" (56). The Nagas, with heightened abilities and altered physiologies, serve as subversive posthuman figures, destabilizing Meluhan ideals of purity and perfection. Their marginalization exposes the darker underbelly of enhancement—those who do not conform to the ideal are exiled, despite their capabilities. The question then arises: who defines enhancement, and who is sacrificed at the altar of perfection? Posthuman embodiment is not simply about exceeding the human condition but reckoning with the socio-political apparatus that conditions such transcendence. The marginalized posthumans, like the Nagas, reveal the hidden architecture of biopolitical control, and in doing so, force us to reconsider the very ethics of evolutionary privilege. In this light, posthumanism is not merely a celebration of future possibilities, but a reckoning with the asymmetries and exclusions that such futures might entail. The novel invites its readers to consider how power, aesthetics, and utility intersect to determine which bodies are valued, normalized, and rendered divine.

Civilizational Logic, Ethical Decay, and Ecological Collapse:

Somras serves not only as an enhancer but also as an instrument of statecraft,

controlled by the Suryavanshi elite and administered through priestly technocrats. Its monopolization mirrors Michel Foucault's concept of *biopower*, which he defines as "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (140). Through Somras, the Meluhan state dictates who lives, how long they live, and at what ecological cost. The state's control of Somras effectively renders bodies as sites of discipline and productivity, subject to surveillance and systemic exploitation.

The environmental degradation caused by the production of Somras—especially the drying of the Saraswati River—echoes the Anthropocene crisis, where unchecked technological progress leads to planetary destabilization. Braidotti warns, "Our technological advancements are no longer sustainable if divorced from ecological accountability" (83). In this sense, Somras becomes a cautionary symbol for contemporary scientific endeavors: the relentless pursuit of progress often ignores systemic consequences. Tripathi offers a prescient critique of this techno-utopia: the very source of life (the river) is sacrificed for life extension, reflecting a tragic irony of posthuman ambition. The ecological fallouts from Somras consumption serve as a literary allegory for climate change and resource depletion in our world.

Moreover, the socio-political structure in Meluha represents a bioethical dilemma. The state determines access to enhancement, marginalizing dissent and alternative identities. The creation of a utopia for a few necessitates the exclusion and suffering of many—a reflection of real-world disparities in access to medical technology, clean environments, and institutional power. This selective enhancement constructs a precarious hierarchy that privileges uniformity and vilifies divergence. The Nagas, again, serve as a haunting reminder of those discarded in the ruthless efficiency of techno-progress. Through this portrayal, Tripathi highlights how civilizations, in pursuit of perfection, may fail to recognize the inherent dignity of diversity and imperfection—qualities essential for a truly inclusive future.

Shiva as Existential Hero and Posthuman Saviour:

Unlike traditional deities, Tripathi's Shiva is existentially rooted, a leader made through choice, pain, and transformation. His journey embodies Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, who affirms life not through divine ordination but through self-overcoming. Nietzsche writes, "Man is a rope, fastened between animal and *Übermensch*, a rope over an abyss" (60). Shiva walks this abyss: he is a migrant, an outsider, a man remade by medicine and myth, who embraces leadership not from entitlement but from ethical compulsion.

He resists apotheosis. "I am not a god. I am a man," he states, situating himself firmly within the mortal realm (78). Yet, in his moral courage and reflexive awareness, Shiva transcends traditional divinity and becomes a posthuman archetype: neither man nor god, but a liminal being of ethical action and technological embodiment. He accepts that power must be wielded responsibly, with an acute awareness of its repercussions on life, nature, and community. He interrogates not only the utility of power but the conditions under which it is granted and exercised.

In doing so, Shiva becomes a model for contemporary leadership in a posthuman age—where identity is fluid, ethics are central, and divinity is measured not by birthright but by choice and consequence. His recognition of the dangers of Somras and his determination to abolish its misuse positions him as both a redeemer and a reformer. This ethical vigilance, rather than divine supremacy, is what qualifies him as a posthuman savior. His mythic stature emerges not from supernatural feats but from moral clarity, intellectual humility, and the courage to act against systemic inertia—qualities desperately needed in real-world governance and science-driven leadership.

Conclusion:

Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* masterfully orchestrates a confluence of ancient mythic traditions and postmodern philosophical inquiries, establishing a fictional universe where the mystical Somras becomes emblematic of humanity's ceaseless quest for transcendence through science and will. As a narrative artifact, the Somras does not merely function as a relic of divine favor but instead becomes a techno-scientific prosthesis, interrogating the very constitution of life, death, and ethical responsibility.

In this recalibrated mythos, the elixir mirrors Rosi Braidotti's posthuman assertion that "life is not bound to the human as its centre or its measure" (60). Rather, life is framed as an assemblage of biological, ecological, and technological interdependencies, a perspective that finds embodiment in the metabolically enhanced. Tripathi reclaims myth not as static hagiography but as a dynamic epistemic apparatus through which contemporary concerns—biotechnological intervention, social stratification, environmental decay—are explored and critiqued.

By fusing the narrative structure of Indian epics with speculative biology, *The Immortals of Meluha* reimagines the epic hero as a site of contestation and moral evolution. The mythic and the molecular converge, constructing a world wherein salvation lies not in the abandonment of the human, but in its posthuman reconstitution. The narrative suggests that mythology need not be imprisoned within the contours of divinity; it can be retooled to accommodate the evolving structures of knowledge and being. Through the alchemical alloy of ancient wisdom and scientific speculation, Tripathi's narrative invites readers to reconsider the very foundations of what it means to be human, and what it might mean to transcend that definition. Ultimately, the novel serves not just as a fictional adventure but as a philosophical inquiry into our own desires for immortality, control, and reinvention in an increasingly technologized world.

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