

## Calibrating the Personality Traits of Shiva- 'The Neelkant' in Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*

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**Article Received:** 03/6/2022,

**Article Accepted:** 11/06/2022,

**Published online:** 12/07/2022,

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.7.05

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### Abstract:

Rewriting mythological stories has revitalized the genre of mythology. Amish Tripathi is one such talented contemporary Indian writer who has added appeal to the rewriting of mythological tales. His significant works, the *Shiva Trilogy* and *Ram Chandra* series have gained widespread popularity. The thrust of the paper analyses the traits and characteristics of the protagonist Shiva in the first book of the *Shiva Trilogy- The Immortals of Meluha (IM)*. It also studies how Shiva's character develops from being the chief of the Guna tribe, a mortal being, into Shiva- 'The Neelkanth'. An attempt has also been made to apply the Big Five Personality Traits theory of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism as given by D.W. Fiske on the character of Shiva in the chosen novel.

**Keywords:** Amish Tripathi, *The Immortals of Meluha*, Personality Traits, *Shiva Trilogy*, Trait theory

Shiva! The Mahadev. The God of Gods. Destroyer of Evil. Passionate Lover. Fierce warrior. Consummate dancer. Charismatic leader. (*The Immortals of Meluha* XVI)

Everyone has a purpose at birth and must serve their goal before death. It may be anything, from a simple task such as planting trees to a humongous task of fighting against societal corruption. Important life lessons are learned during the process of doing the job and not after the completion of the study. These lessons learned during the process will help mold their character and personality, enabling them to accomplish their life's purpose. Literary writers across the globe have reconnoitred this motif through their fictional characters in novels.

Amish Tripathi, a widely read and recognized writer among the contemporary Indian Writers in English, has fantasized his readers through the depiction of the mythical character of

Shiva in his Shiva Trilogy. While his writing style is effortless to understand, there is clarity in the ideas he conveys in the novels. An essential aspect of his writing is that his stories propound ideologies that are befitting the betterment of society. The book *The Immortals of Meluha (IM)*, the first book of the Shiva trilogy series, narrates the story of the initiation of the purposeless barbarian Shiva into a revered all-powerful god with a purpose— 'The Neelkanth'. The current paper discusses the traits of Shiva during his initiation and transformation into 'The Neelkanth.'

Tripathi has admirably recreated and rewritten the myth of Shiva based on contemporary Indian society. He described the various places Shiva visits like Meluha, Ayodhya, and Kashi. The landscapes trigger the imagination of the readers. Tripathi portrays characters with a myriad of emotions. His colloquial language for Shiva's conversations makes Shiva resemble a human being rather than a divine being and more relatable to the reader.

Tripathi has excellently crafted the character of Shiva in the first book of the Siva Trilogy. The current paper also demarcates how Shiva- 'The Neelkanth' exemplifies the big five personality traits propounded by D.W Fiske. D.W Fiske developed Trait theory, or Big Five Personality Traits, in 1949. The trait theory is a suggested taxonomy or grouping for personality traits. The five personality traits indicated by D. W. Fiske are discussed in detail in the article "The Big Five Personality Traits" by Kendra Cherry as follows:

1. Openness – his trait features the characteristics such as imagination and insight. They are curious and are always eager to learn new things. They are focused on tackling new challenges and are also very creative.
2. Conscientiousness – this trait includes a high level of thoughtfulness, goal-driven behavior, and reasonable control of their impulses. They plan, and they are also considerate of how their behavior might affect others.
3. Extraversion – mostly spelled as Extroversion, is characterized by excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness, and high amounts of emotional expressiveness. They are outgoing and tend to gain energy in social situations. For extroverts, being around people make them feel excited and energized.
4. Agreeableness – this personality features attributes such as trust, altruism, kindness, affection, and other pro-social behaviors. With this trait, people tend to be more cooperative. They usually have a great interest in others, care about others, and feel empathic for others. They assist others who need help.
5. Neuroticism – this is a trait characterized by sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability. They usually experience a lot of stress, tend to get upset quickly, and worry about many different things. (n. p.)

The above traits enable identification and assessment of the emergence and effectiveness of an individual into a leader as they undertake various tasks in their life.

John C. Maxwell stated, "A leader knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way." This quote befits Shiva as he knew what he was doing, how he should do it, and how he would do it. He portrayed many significant traits throughout the novel in his role as The Neelkath in society as a leader and his personal life. Shiva 'The Neelkanth' - as a societal leader, displayed the traits of a considerate decision-maker, a reformist, a conscientious leader, and an effective orator. In his roles in his personal life, the salient characteristics were the artistic 'Nataraj,' an ardent lover, and a dependable friend.

### **Shiva: A Considerate Decision Maker**

Being a leader is a complex undertaking, and not everyone can succeed. Making decisions is critical in whatever job or task they are given. When making crucial decisions, a good leader is open-minded and considers the thoughts and perspectives of others. When making decisions, they feel the welfare and benefit of the group, not simply the requirements of an individual in the group. This attribute determines a leader's success. A leader must occasionally make complex but correct judgments. They need boldness when conveying their decisions and firmness to ensure that everyone agrees with them, not by force, but by reasoning why the decision was made correctly. Throughout the novel, Shiva is found to be a benevolent leader.

A leader should be aware of each team member's talents and weaknesses. A leader must understand what the team desires. To know everything going on, one should be with the group. Shiva was a great leader and the Guna tribe's chief. In 1900 BC, the Guna tribe lived at the foot of Mount Kailash in Tibet. They were constantly at odds with Paris, a tribal group attempting to overrun the Guna tribe's village. As the tribe's chief, Shiva was obligated to provide a tranquil and pleasant life for the Guna tribe; he thought the life they were experiencing was not worth living because it was a life of hardships of constant war and fear of getting conquered by others.

What could go wrong with that? Why shouldn't we take this deal? It sounds so damn good! (*IM 3*)

So, Shiva thought of moving away with the Meluhans who had come to their village to invite them to their land Meluha. But, he refrained from revealing his thoughts to the foreigners (the Meluhans) and his tribe because he wanted to have surety that they could trust the Meluhans. When Paris had planned an ambush, one of the foreigners, Nandi, came to help out Shiva and the Guna soldiers to fight against the Pakratis. The Pakratis had to retreat because the battle ended in favor of the Gunas. Only after this incident did Shiva decide to relocate with his tribe to Meluha.

This confirms Shiva's quality of being a considerate leader who listened to the opinion of his tribe members before making a decision. The tribe knew about Shiva, who helped them to win their most significant military victories through his genius and sheer personal bravery'. The tribes agreed to immigrate to Meluha and established Shiva as their leader. Shiva's

thoughtfulness and goal-oriented behavior exemplify conscientiousness's prominent five personality traits. He also displays the trait of openness when he decides to try out new experiences.

### **Shiva: A Reformist**

Shiva did not believe in useless, illogical, and orthodox traditions. Vikarma is a law that stated that any person, male or female, who was suffering from a disease or a lady who had given birth to a dead child or if the child was born with some deformity, then she had no right to be a part of any religious ceremonies and was considered an untouchable, She was not permitted to marry again and was supposed to suffer silently. Since their sufferings were considered to be the result of their past life's sins. Nandi (Captain in Meluhan army) tried to explain the concept of karma; the lawyer worked on karma.

'Their karma, my Lord.' Said Nandi, his eyes suggesting the obvious.'

Shiva found this explanation ridiculous. His thought on this was very different. His thought was as follows:

'That sounds ridiculous to me. Women could have given birth to a stillborn child simply because they did not take proper care while she was pregnant.'

Nandi was utterly shocked and dumbfounded by Shiva's thoughts on the law. He was disappointed in Shiva for not understanding the fundamental concept of Meluha. He also could not gather the courage to oppose Shiva. But Shiva consoled Nandi by saying it was just his opinion on this particular law. As the novel progresses, he does end the karma law when Lord Daksha (Emperor of Meluha and father of Sati) asks Shiva to marry his daughter. According to the law, Sati was karma; she could remarry. But, Shiva was the Neelkanth, so he had the authority to change the direction;

'No, your Highness,' interrupted Shiva. 'That is not what I meant. I want the entire vikarma law to be scrapped. (*IM* 282)

Shiva had wanted to change this law from when he knew about it. So, he took this opportunity to end the power of the karma law from society so that everyone was treated equally. Tripathi portrays Shiva as a reformer as he was able to bring changes in the Meluhan society with his thoughtfulness which is also evidence of his prominent five personality traits of conscientiousness.

### **Shiva: An Empathic Leader**

Shiva was also surprised by the Maika system that was practiced in Meluha. Maika system was a practice in which all the children grew up in the same environment irrespective of their parents' financial condition or social status. The parents' caste was kept a secret, and all the children later received the same education. Based on their merits, their castes were allocated. Although the system was based on values, Shiva felt, "But not many mothers would

have been happy with this. Though the Maika system had advantages, the mother being separated from the child was too saddening, according to Shiva. This shows another quality of the leader: empathy towards others. Compassion towards others helps one understand what exactly others are going through. An ideal leader needs to be empathetic to understand others and their perspectives. Likewise, Shiva, a perfect leader, empathizes with the mothers separated from their newborn children, showing his prominent five personality traits of agreeableness.

### **Shiva: A Conscientious Leader**

Honesty is the best quality, a famous proverb, and one of the essential qualities a leader must possess. Shiva reveals this quality in many instances in the novel. When Lord Daksha requests Shiva's help to destroy the entire race of Chandravanshis by waging war against them. But, Shiva shocked them with his reply,

Shiva was confused. 'But I don't understand, your Highness. What exactly would I do?'

'I don't know, my Lord. We only know our goal and that you will be our leader. The path we take is up to you.'

*(IM 118)*

Shiva held onto his stance even when Lord Daksha tried to persuade him by saying, "if that man is you my Lord' said Daksha, his moist eyes opened wide in devotion and faith,' he can change the entire universe'" *(IM 118)*. Shiva replied, "I am not so sure about that, your Highness,' said Shiva with a weak smile.' He was thoughtful before deciding to take action. He knew what he could and could not do and was honest. When Lord Daksha persuaded him to war with the Chandravanshis, Shiva agreed that Meluha was something worth fighting for, but he put forward the condition that,

" But to begin with, I want to spend some more time understanding your society before I can be sure how I can help. I am assuming that from now on, nothing will be hidden from me, nor will I be misled." *(IM 122)*

Shiva wanted to be honest and expected the others around him to be honest. He wanted to be sure he was doing the right thing and did not want to be misled because many lives depended on him. Shiva pays attention to details which exemplifies his conscientiousness trait.

### **Shiva: An Effective Orator**

The most desired quality of an influential leader is communication skills. Communication enables one to connect with people, and if one is good at articulating one's emotions at the right time in the right way, it can have a charismatic effect on the listeners. A true leader is also one who motivates his followers and creates leaders. He is the one who makes them realize their actual potential by sheer communication; Shiva does so in the novel the need arises: "Who is a Mahadev?" roared Shiva." There was a pin drop silence. Then Shiva continued, "does he lazily bestow his blessings while others fight for the good? Does he stand by nonchalantly and count the dead while the living sacrifice themselves to destroy evil? No!" *(IM 346)*.

All the Suryavanshi soldiers were taking in Neelkanth's message. They were keenly listening to what Shiva was saying, "A man becomes a Mahadev when he fights for good. Mahadev is not born as one from his mother's womb. He is forged in the heat of battle when he wages war to destroy evil!"(IM 346).

Shiva's words brought a flood of positive energy into the soldiers.

'I am a Mahadev!' bellowed Shiva

'But I am not the only one!'

A shocked silence descended on the Suryavanshis. What did the Mahadev mean? Is he not the only one? Do the Chandravanshis also have a god?

He was trying to kindle passion in the Suryavanshi soldiers; he wanted them to feel that they had the power to destroy evil by themselves if they believed in themselves.

This is an example of a motivational speech a leader would give their team members before a vast and challenging task. The leaders' speech should bring out everyone's energy and spirit to accomplish the work. Such motivational speeches are the ones that drive the team to work with full enthusiasm. This speech of Shiva made the soldiers fight for themselves; it made them fight against evil. It made them believe they were the Mahadevs and could win any war. This speech shows that Shiva was a great orator with assertiveness, one of the features of the prominent five personality traits of extraversion.

### **Shiva: An Ardent Lover**

In his personal life, Shiva's personality evolves with the novel's progress. The love story of Shiva and Sati was theatrical. Tripathi has explained their love so that even readers feel the development of love between them and fall in love with the characters. Tripathi describes the unrealized cravings of Shiva's heart,

Shiva walked back to the temple steps. (IM 48)

Shiva falls in love at first sight. Tripathi describes Sati as a self-empowered warrior and a woman who could save herself from any danger. She was an ideal woman of the ancient period. Tripathi explains her in the following way,

She rode a chariot, guiding the horses expertly into the courtyard, while a lady companion by her side held on to the railings. Though covered in angavastram, her body still ignited Shiva's imagination into sensing the lovely curves beneath.

Have mercy on me!!!! (I BEING 48, 49)

The last line proves that Shiva had fallen head over heels in love with Sati at first sight.

When Sati walked out of the temple, the Nagas tried to attack Sati. Shiva wanted to defend her, but she showed her fighting skills.



Surprised, Shiva flashed her a quick, admiring smile. Her eyes flashed right back, acknowledging the unexpected yet providential partnership. (*I'M 51*)

After the Nagas backed off, while Shiva was nervous, talking to Sati, his language and thoughts made Sati feel offended.

'No, not that,' said a smiling Shiva. 'It's just that in our society, women don't fight. You don't wield your sword too badly for women.'

O hell! That came out all wrong.

'Excuse me?' she said, a slightly belligerent tone creeping into her voice, clearly upset about the for-a-women remark. 'You don't fight too badly either for a barbarian.'*(I being 54)*

Although Shiva had meant to appreciate her fighting skills, his incorrect use of words created a misunderstanding between them. But in the novel, a good understanding develops between them. They get married.

In the battle of Koonj, when a fire arrow (legendary poisoned arrow of the Naga tribe) was aimed at Shiva, Sati jumped in front of Shiva, and the hand slammed into her chest with brutal force. She fell to Shiva's left, limp, and she was motionless. He was all furious and raged like a wild elephant towards the Naga, who shot the arrow and decapitated the Naga. Even then, Shiva's vengeance was not quenched. His deep love for Sati is evident in these events.

When Sati was carried away, he wanted to follow her, but Parvateshwar stopped him. He knew Ayurvati was one of the best doctors who would somehow save Sati. Yet he was afraid that he would lose Sati even before they could spend some time together.

Shiva sat nursing and cared for her without leaving her for a minute. He was scared that wild horses would drag her away from him if he were not there by her side until she opened her eyes.

Even when Ayurvati had given up hope for Sati's recovery, Shiva did not lose his hope. After Sati recovered, Ayurvati compliments Shiva for his firm belief, and Sati acknowledges the same,

'Oh no,' said self-conscious Shiva. 'I did nothing. It was Sati's fighting spirit that saved her.'

*(I'M272)*

This proves that Shiva and Sati's love was strong and withstood even bad times. They were there for each other. They expressed their love openly and mutually respected each other. Shiva's affection displays the prominent five traits of agreeableness.

### **Shiva: The Artistic Nataraj**

Lord Shiva is known for his dance. Before any dance performance, he is worshiped as Nataraja (God of dance). In the novel, while Sati was practicing dance, Shiva happened to be there, and he overheard the conversation of Guruji (Dance teacher) criticizing Sati's lack of emotions while dancing. Shiva also agreed with Guruji and gave his thought,

‘Oh, not much. Just a little,’ said Shiva to Krittika (A close friend of and attendant to Sati) with a smile before turning rapidly back to Sati. (I BEING 77, 78)

Shiva wanted to impress Sati and was careful not to insult her, showing his dancing skills. So with Sati's permission, he began his performance. The description given by Tripathi is in such a way that the reader can visualize the performance,

He held his pose for some time; his glowing face indicated that Shiva was withdrawing into his inner world. His right hand moved effortlessly forward, almost as if it had a mind. Its palm was now open and facing the audience. Somehow, the posture seemed to convey a feeling of protectiveness to a surprised Sati. (I BEING 78, 79)

This description was just about what Shiva did even before he could start dancing. Even the Guruji was surprised by his flexibility; the emotions expressed in the dance were very mesmerizing,

The dance conveyed the various emotions of women. In the beginning, it gave her feelings of joy and lust as she frolicked with her husband. The next emotion was anger and pain at the treacherous killing of her mate. Despite his rough masculine body, Shiva managed to convey a grieving woman's tender yet strong emotions. (I'M 79)

When Shiva finally ended the dance, Sati, Guruji, and Krittika stared at him dumbfounded. Guruji being the first to speak, questioned Shiva, asking who he was, while Sati questioned the pose he did before starting the dance. Shiva explained the Nataraja pose and what it does: "It depends on what I want the energy for. The Nataraj pose helps me respectfully ask for energy for a dance that wants to come to me. If I wanted the energy for a thought to come to me, I would have to sit cross-legged and meditate" (IM 79). Guruji was impressed and said, "You are the Nataraj, the lord of dance" (IM81). Shiva, thus, evolves as an artistic dancer. His prominent five personality trait of openness is seen here.

### **Shiva: A Dependable Friend**

Shiva was a person who valued his friends. He was willing to do anything for his friends. He trusted them with all his heart. He wanted his friends to treat him as an average person, not a person based on his designation. When Bhadra (also known as Veerabhadra, a childhood friend and a confidant of Shiva) stood in all attention until Shiva passed the gate, Shiva's reaction was, "Why does he keep forgetting that he has been my closest friend since childhood? My becoming of chief hasn't changed anything. He doesn't need to be unnecessarily servile in front of others" (IM 3). This showed that Shiva did not care much about his designation and did not expect special treatment from his friends. When Shiva became the Neelkanth, he met Brahaspati (Chief Meluhan scientist) on Mount Mandar (where the Samaras are made). When Brahaspati explained the working of Samaras to Shiva, Nandi, and Kanakhala



(Prime Minister of Meluha), he cleared a few of Shiva's doubts. While conversing, he noticed that Shiva hesitated to question a few things, so Brahspati asked the others to leave them alone. Shiva and Barhaspati start chatting. Shiva began to like Brahspati.

Shiva noticed that Brahspati was not submissive or excessively deferential on discovering that he was the Neelkanth. Like Parvateshwar, Brahspati called Shiva by his name and not 'My Lord'. However, Shiva felt that while a distrustful surliness drove Parvateshwar's attitude, Brahspati's was caused by an assured affability. (*IM* 131)

Once when Brahspati also felt comfortable with Shiva, he started to consider Shiva, his friend. They both were comfortable having each other around.

Throughout the novel, they grow very fond of each other. When Sati challenged Tarak for a trial by fire, Brahspati saw Tarak exercising with two partners and was afraid for Sati's safety. He offered to kill Tarak for Sati's security. "I'll assassinate him tonight. She will not die tomorrow." Shiva turned in stunned disbelief toward the chief scientist. "Brahspati? What are you saying?" (*IM* 230).

According to Brahmin rules, a Brahmin should not kill anyone as it would corrupt their soul. But Brahspati was ready to do it for Shiva.

'Sati is too noble to meet a fate such as this. I am willing to sacrifice my life and reputation for her.'

'But you are a Brahmin. You are not supposed to kill.'

'I'll do it for you,' whispered Brahspati, emotions clouding judgment. 'You will not lose her, my friend.'

Shiva came close to Brahspati and hugged him. 'Don't corrupt your soul, my friend. I am not worth such a big sacrifice.'

Brihaspati clung to Shiva.

Stepping back, Shiva whispered, 'In any case, your sacrifice is not required. As sure as the sun rises in the east, Sati will defeat Tarak tomorrow.' (*I BEEN* 230, 231)

This scene shows how Brahspati and Shiva valued each other and their relationship. They both are ready to do anything for each other. Later, when Brahspati was killed, "He swore a terrible vengeance. He vowed to bring upon the Naga a death that would scare him for his next seven births. That Naga, and his entire army of vice, would be annihilated. Piece by bloody piece." (*I BEEN* 311). This was the bond between Brahspati and Shiva, where he was ready to erase an entire race to avenge the death of his friend. These shows the prominent five personality traits of neuroticism, where the individual shows deep emotions in stressful situations.

Thus, book one in the Shiva Trilogy unravels Shiva's big five personality traits, which are tabulated below.

Book	Sphere of Life	Role	Characteristic	Big Five Personality Trait with example
Book1: <i>The Immortals of Meluha</i>	Social	Leader	Considerate Decision Maker	Conscientiousness (e.g.) Emigration of Guna tribe to Meluha
		Leader	Reformist	Conscientiousness (e.g.) Abolishing Vikrama law by marrying Sati
		Leader	Emphatic	Agreeableness (e.g.) Empathy for Mothers affected by the Maika system
		Leader	Conscientious	Conscientiousness (e.g.) Honesty about views-war
		Leader	An Effective Orator	Extraversion (e.g.) Motiving Suryavanshi soldiers
	Personal	Lover	Ardent	Agreeableness (e.g.) Love for Sati
		Dancer	Artistic Nataraj	Openness (e.g.) A graceful dancer
		Friend	Dependable	Neuroticism (e.g.) Friendship with Brahaspati

Table 1. Roles, Characteristics, and Big Five Personality Traits of Shiva – 'The Neelkanth'

Table 1. Roles, characteristics, and Big Five Personality Traits of Shiva – 'The Neelkanth' explains the features and the Big Five Personality Traits evident in Shiva- 'The Neelkanth' in the chosen book. Thus, book one in the *Shiva Trilogy* demarcates the big five personality traits of conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, openness, and neuroticism evident in Shiva as he is initiated as 'The Neelkanth.'

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