ILN JOURNAL:
INDIAN LITERARY NARRATIVES

https://doi.org/10.70396/ilnjournal.v2n1.a.09 | Volume 2, Number 1, March 2025 | ISSN: 3048 6920

Nomadology of the Nagas: Deterritorializing the Somras-Industrial Complex in Amish Tripathi's *The Shiva Trilogy*

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Abstract

Amish Tripathi's The Shiva Trilogy reimagines Hindu mythology through a socio-political lens, presenting the Nagas not as mythological monsters but as deterritorialized agents challenging the hegemonic Somras-Industrial Complex. This paper employs Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadology to analyze how the Nagas—ostracized, mobile, and resistant—disrupt the centralized systems of power that control the Somras (the elixir of immortality). By examining their role in exposing exploitation, redistributing knowledge, and ultimately dismantling institutionalized oppression, this study argues that the Nagas embody a postcolonial critique of empire, industrialization, and bio-political control. Through close textual analysis, mythological parallels, and theoretical frameworks, this paper positions the Nagas as revolutionary figures who redefine sovereignty, belonging, and resistance in Tripathi's narrative universe.

Keywords: Nomadology, Deterritorialization, Striated space, Biopolitics, Capitalist exploitation, Postcolonial critique, Ecological degradation, Neocolonialism, Lines of flight.

Amish Tripathi's *The Shiva Trilogy* has become one of the most celebrated reimaginings of Indian mythology in contemporary fiction. The series blends myth,

Submitted: 10.02.2025 Accepted: 29.03.2025 Published 30.03.2025

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history, and philosophy with modern political, economic, andecological concerns. At its core, the trilogy critiques the exploitative and destructive structures of power embedded within the Somras-industrial complex—a system that, much like real-world capitalist enterprises, thrives on exclusion, monopolization, and ecological degradation. The trilogy's depiction of the Somras, an elixir of immortality, as both a miraculous substance and an ecological disaster presents a complex critique of industrial modernity, scientific monopolization, and biopolitical control.

In the sweeping narrative of Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*, a remarkable transformation occurs. The Nagas - those feared, scarred outcasts of society - emerge not as villains but as the vanguard of revolution against one of literature's most sophisticated systems of oppression: the Somras-industrial complex. This paper argues that through their nomadic existence, embodied resistance, and subversive knowledge systems, the Nagas perform what Deleuze and Guattari would term a "deterritorialization" (353) of the established world order. The brilliance of Tripathi's reimagining lies in how he takes traditional mythological figures and recasts them as revolutionary actors in a struggle that feels startlingly contemporary. The Nagas' resistance mirrors modern movements against pharmaceutical monopolies, industrial pollution, and caste discrimination, making their story not just mythological entertainment but a potent political allegory.

The Nagas, a marginalized group in the narrative, embody resistance against the hegemonic structures of the Meluhan state, which controls the production and distribution of the Somras. Through a Deleuzian lens, the Nagas can be understood as a nomadic force operating outside the rigid 'striated space' of state control. In contrast, the Meluhan state represents the forces of territorialization and order, seeking to maintain power by controlling life itself. This essay argues that the trilogy's central conflict—the struggle between the Meluhan empire and the Nagas—mirrors the larger philosophical and political battle between striated and smooth spaces, hierarchical and rhizomatic structures, and state-controlled immortality versus organic cycles of life and decay. By analyzing the trilogy through the framework of nomadology and deterritorialization, this paper will explore how the Nagas function as a destabilizing force against the Somras-industrial complex, ultimately leading to its destruction and the reimagination of societal structures.

The Somras-industrial complex in *The Shiva Trilogy* serves as a metaphor for capitalist enterprises that operate under the guise of progress and development but ultimately result in environmental destruction and social inequality. The production of Somras requires the waters of the Saraswati River, and its excessive use leads to the river's depletion, symbolizing the reckless exploitation of natural resources. Much like real-world pharmaceutical, petrochemical, or technological industries, the Somras-industrial complex prioritizes monopolization and exclusivity, ensuring that only the elite benefit while the marginalized bear the costs. The Meluhan state, led by Emperor Daksha, upholds the Somras-industrial complex as an unquestionable good, paralleling how modern nation-states justify economic and technological advancements despite their harmful consequences. As uttered by Daksha

> There is no sorcery at all, my Lord,'... 'What makes this possible is the brilliance of our scientist who makes a potion called the Somras, the drink of the gods. Taking the Somras at defined times not only postpones our death considerably, but it also allows us to live our entire lives as if we are in the prime of our youth-mentally and physically. (*The Immortals of Meluha* 83)

Daksha's rule represents a form of biopolitical control, where life itself is regulated through state-sanctioned substances and medical advancements. Michel Foucault's concept of biopower—where the state exercises control over the population through medical, scientific, and technological means—is evident in how Meluha administers Somras to its citizens. As Brahaspati says, "That the Somras has been the greatest Good of our age is obvious' 'it has shaped our age. Hence, it is equally obvious that someday, it will become the greatest Evil. The key question is when the transformation would occur." (*The Oath of the Vayuputras* 11) The distribution of Somras is a form of population management, creating a rigidly structured society where only those deemed worthy receive the elixir, while those who suffer its consequences, such as the Nagas, are cast out. As Kali vents out that, "…the Nagas were born with deformities as a result of the Somras. The Somras randomly has this impact on a few babies when in the womb, if the parents have been consuming it for a long period" (*The Oath of the Vayuputras*, 14)

From a Deleuzian perspective, the Somras-industrial complex functions within a "striated space," (474) characterized by order, segmentation, and rigid hierarchies. Striated space, in A Thousand Plateaus, is the structured environment imposed by the state to ensure stability and control. In contrast, nomadic movements exist in "smooth space," which resists the confines of centralized power. The Somras-industrial complex enforces striation by dictating who may access longevity, controlling the means of production, and maintaining a system that excludes those who do not conform to the desired genetic and societal standards. The exclusion of the Nagas from mainstream society exemplifies this mechanism of control, where deformities—ironically caused by Somras consumption—are framed as a justification for societal rejection. The Somras-industrial complex mirrors contemporary debates on biotechnology, pharmaceutical monopolies, and environmental destruction. It raises fundamental questions about the ethics of scientific advancement and the trade-offs between longevity and sustainability. As depicted by Tripathi,

> …This division and growth has to end sometime. Otherwise one's body would keep growing continuously with pretty disastrous consequences. So the Almighty put a limit on the number of times a cell can divide. After that, the cell simply stops dividing further and thus, in effect, becomes old and unhealthy… some cells lose control over their division process and keep growing at an exponential pace… This cancer can sometimes lead to a painful death. But there are times when these cells continue to grow and appear as deformities – like extra arms or a very long nose. (*The Oath of*

the Vayuputras, 15-16)

By portraying the Somras as both a gift and a curse, Tripathi critiques the modern tendency to pursue progress at any cost. This critique aligns with postcolonial and ecological readings, where industrial expansion is often linked to neocolonial exploitation of land and marginalized communities. The destruction of the Somras-industrial complex in the trilogy, therefore, is not merely the downfall of a corrupt system but a radical rethinking of progress, technology, and power.

The Nagas, the outcasts of Meluhan society, represent a deterritorialized force that resists the hegemony of the Somras-industrial complex. While Meluha constructs rigid boundaries around purity, order, and control, the Nagas disrupt these structures through their decentralized existence. By navigating the tensions between conformity and otherness, Tripathi critiques the societal norms that perpetuate stigma and exclusion, ultimately advocating for empathy and understanding in our engagement with the Other. In Simone de Beauvoir's view, the concept of the other is as novel as the idea of awareness. As he contemplates:

> . . . alterity is the fundamental category of human thought. No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself . . . For the native of a country inhabitants of other countries are viewed as ―foreigners ‖ ; Jews are the ―others ‖ for anti-Semites, blacks for racist Americans, indigenous people for colonists, proletarians for the propertied classes. (26)

By situating his narrative within the framework of mythology, Tripathi engages with the cultural significance of these stories, allowing readers to explore the ways in which they inform contemporary identity as written by Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Power of Myth*, which addresses the issue of a hero's path towards self-discovery. As Campbell comments, "There are two types of deed. One is the physical deed, in which the hero performs a courageous act in battle or saves a life. The other kind is the spiritual deed, in which the hero learns to experience the supernormal range of human spiritual life and then comes back with a message" (152).

In Deleuzian terms, the Nagas embody "nomadic war machines," (351) forces that operate outside state control and resist reterritorialization. Unlike the centralized governance of Meluha, the Nagas live in hidden cities, move fluidly between spaces, and create alternative networks of knowledge and survival. The deformities of the Nagas, rather than being biological afflictions, can be read as markers of their deterritorialized status. As expressed by Nandi "…, They are cursed people, my Lord. They are born with hideous deformities because of the sins of their previous births. Deformities like extra hands or horribly misshapen faces. But they have tremendous strength and skills. The Naga name alone strikes terror in any citizen's heart. They are not even allowed to live in the Sapt Sindhu. (*The Immortals of Meluha* 61). The very substance that grants immortality to the Meluhans has created a population of exiles, revealing the paradox at the heart of the Somras-industrial complex. The Nagas' rejection from mainstream society does not make

them passive victims; rather, it propels them into a state of nomadic resistance. They form alliances with other marginalized groups, including the Vasudevs and the Brangas, creating a rhizomatic network that undermines the centralized power of Meluha. By highlighting Anita Ghai's idea of challenging disability as a cultural fabrication, this research will dismantle the assumption that has pathologised impairments, demonstrating that impairment is a normative hegemony. As she explicates:

> It is only by challenging prevailing socio-cultural values and the binaries of normal and abnormal, that disabled people can resist normative constructions of them as dependent, asexual or deformed, and begins to forge new identities. We need to contest the notion that biology is a given destiny and identity is always fixed though the task may appear formidable, the recognition that our knowledge of the world is a matter of constructed meanings, and not irrefutable facts, will provide the catalyst for change. (159)

James C. Scott's theory of "state evasion" (178) in The *Art of Not Being Governed* is useful in understanding how the Nagas resist incorporation into the dominant system. Scott argues that marginalized groups, such as hill tribes and nomadic societies, resist state control through strategic mobility, alternative knowledge systems, and decentralized forms of governance. The Nagas embody these principles, thriving in spaces that the Meluhans cannot control and utilizing guerrilla tactics rather than direct confrontation. This aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that nomadic movements do not seek to replace the state but to render it irrelevant. The mobility of the Nagas is crucial to their resistance. Unlike the Meluhan army, which relies on structured formations and fixed territorial strategies, the Nagas operate through fluid movements, making them unpredictable and difficult to subjugate. This nomadic existence allows them to challenge the state not through brute force but through the disruption of its very foundations. By exposing the dangers of the Somras and allying with Shiva, the Nagas set in motion a process of deterritorialization that ultimately leads to the collapse of the Somras-industrial complex.

The Nagas' resistance is not merely physical but also epistemological. While the Meluhans operate within a fixed paradigm of knowledge—where the Somras is an unquestionable good—the Nagas embody an alternative form of wisdom. They possess knowledge of the Somras' dangers long before Shiva or the Meluhan elite acknowledge them. It is evident when "Shiva's intuition tells him, Fi*nd the Nagas. They are your path to discovering evil. Find the Nagas"* (*The Secret of the Nagas* 11). Their ability to see beyond the dominant ideology positions them as agents of disruption and transformation. This epistemic resistance further reinforces their role as deterritorialized subjects, challenging not only the physical structures of power but also the ideological frameworks that sustain them. Tripathi critiques societal attitudes toward difference and suggests that those who are marginalized often have the potential for greatness, given the opportunity for self-assertion. David T.

Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder make the following observations in their article that is included in the Handbook of Disability Studies and is titled "Cultural Representations of Disability" as they observe:

> The power of transgression always originates at the moment when the derided object uncharacteristically embraces its deviance as a value. In perversely championing the terms of their own stigmatisation, marginal peoples alarm the dominant culture with a seeming canniness over the terms of their own subjugation. (208-9)

Deterritorialization, in Deleuzian terms, refers to the process by which rigid structures of power are disrupted, destabilized, and ultimately dissolved. In *The Shiva Trilogy*, the Somras-industrial complex operates as a deeply territorialized system, reliant on centralized production, monopolistic control, and a rigid hierarchy that privileges the elites while marginalizing the Nagas. However, throughout the narrative, Shiva and the Nagas initiate a process of deterritorialization that undermines this seemingly invincible structure, leading to its eventual collapse. One of the key mechanisms of deterritorialization in the trilogy is the disruption of the ideological legitimacy of the Somras. In the early sections of The Immortals of Meluha, Shiva, like many others, perceives Meluha as an advanced and utopian society.

The state's efficient governance, technological prowess, and its promise of longevity create an illusion of perfection. However, as Shiva encounters the Nagas and the environmental consequences of Somras production, this illusion unravels. The realization that the same substance that grants immortality is also poisoning the Saraswati River and deforming unborn children is a moment of epistemic rupture—a break from the dominant discourse that sustains Meluha's power. This epistemic rupture aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "lines of flight, " (351) which describe moments where individuals or groups break away from oppressive systems and create new possibilities of existence. Shiva, originally a warrior assimilated into the Meluhan system, undergoes a transformation as he learns the truth about the Somras. His growing disillusionment represents a line of flight that moves him away from Meluha's striated space toward the smooth, deterritorialized space occupied by the Nagas. His journey from being a participant in the system to becoming its destroyer is emblematic of how deterritorialization functions—not as an immediate overthrow of power, but as a gradual process of breaking down its ideological and material foundations.

Beyond the ideological dimension, deterritorialization also manifests through direct action against the Somras-industrial complex. The Nagas, through their guerrilla-style resistance, sabotage the distribution and production of Somras, challenging Meluha's technological monopoly. Unlike the Meluhan state, which operates through bureaucratic control and rigid territorial boundaries, the Nagas move fluidly, striking at the weak points of the system. This kind of non-linear, decentralized warfare is characteristic of deterritorialized resistance movements

that challenge dominant power structures by refusing to engage on the system's own terms. As Tripathi writes:

> Brahaspati reveals, 'The Somras is not only difficult to manufacture, but it also generates large amounts of toxic waste. A problem we have never truly tackled. It cannot be disposed of on land, because it can poison entire districts through ground water contamination. It cannot be discharged into the sea. The Somras waste reacts with salt water to disintegrate in a dangerously rapid and explosive manner. (The Oath of the Vayuputras 18-9)

The climax of deterritorialization occurs when Shiva floods Devagiri with the poisoned waters of the Saraswati, effectively ending the production of Somras. This act is not just a tactical victory but a radical erasure of the territorialized system that sustained Meluha's power. The destruction of the Somras-industrial complex marks the dissolution of the structured hierarchies that upheld Meluhan superiority. This moment aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of absolute deterritorialization, where a structure is not merely weakened or reformed but completely undone, forcing the emergence of new possibilities of organization and existence.

Interestingly, the collapse of the Somras-industrial complex does not immediately result in a new territorialization. Instead, the narrative ends in a state of uncertainty, where the structures of power have been dismantled but no rigid new order has been imposed. This open-ended conclusion reinforces the Deleuzian idea that deterritorialization is not about replacing one power structure with another but about opening up new spaces for nomadic movement, adaptation, and reconfiguration. While *The Shiva Trilogy* presents its critique of the Somras-industrial complex through a mythological lens, the implications of this critique extend beyond fiction and resonate with contemporary ecological and postcolonial concerns. The environmental consequences of Somras production—such as the depletion of the Saraswati River and the genetic mutations among the Nagas—serve as allegories for real-world ecological crises caused by industrial overreach. The narrative draws attention to the dangers of unchecked technological advancement, particularly when it is pursued without ethical and ecological considerations.

The parallels between the Somras-industrial complex and contemporary capitalist enterprises are particularly striking. The destruction of the Saraswati River mirrors the environmental devastation caused by extractive industries such as mining, deforestation, and large-scale agribusiness. In many ways, Meluha's pursuit of immortality through the Somras reflects modern society's obsession with technological progress at the cost of environmental sustainability. The poisoning of the river can be likened to the pollution of major water bodies due to industrial waste, a recurring crisis in both postcolonial and global contexts.

From a postcolonial perspective, the narrative also critiques the monopolization of knowledge and resources by elite power structures. The Meluhans, in their claim to superiority, resemble colonial and neocolonial forces that justify their dominance through the rhetoric of progress and civilization. The Somras, much like many scientific advancements in colonial history, is positioned as an unchallenged good, despite its exploitative and destructive consequences. As portrayed by Tripathi in *The Oath of the Vauputras:*

> Shiva asks Gopal Panditji, "So you always knew the Somras was Evil?"
>
> "We always knew it would eventually become Evil. What we didn't know was when. Remember, Good needs to run its course. If we remove a Good too early from society, we are obstructing the march of civilization. However, if we remove it too late, we risk the complete destruction of society. So, in the battle against Evil, the institution of the Vishnu has to wait for the institution of the Mahadev to decide if the time has come. In our case, a Mahadev emerged, and his quest led him to the conclusion that the Somras is Evil. Therefore, we knew that it was time for Evil to be removed. The Somras had to be taken out of the equation". (99)

This mirrors the colonial justification for resource extraction and medical experimentation in colonized regions, where the supposed benefits for a select elite often came at the expense of the marginalized. Moreover, the Nagas' resistance can be seen as an anti-colonial struggle against an imposed system of knowledge and governance. Their rejection of the Somras aligns with postcolonial critiques of Western modernity, which often dismisses indigenous and alternative epistemologies in favor of a universalized scientific rationality. The trilogy, by giving voice to the Nagas and positioning them as the key agents of change, challenges the dominant narrative of technological supremacy and calls for a more inclusive and ethical approach to knowledge and progress.

In addition, the displacement of the Nagas resonates with the historical marginalization of indigenous communities who have been cast out due to state policies, economic expansion, or environmental destruction. Their nomadic existence, forced upon them by the consequences of the Somras-industrial complex, parallels the real-world experiences of indigenous groups displaced by dams, deforestation, and urban expansion. This reading situates *The Shiva Trilogy* within a broader discourse on environmental justice, where those who suffer the consequences of industrial and scientific advancements are often those who have the least power to resist them.

Amish Tripathi's *The Shiva Trilogy* is more than just a mythological retelling—it is a complex philosophical, ecological, and political critique of power structures that sustain themselves through monopolization, exclusion, and environmental exploitation. By analyzing the trilogy through the lens of Deleuzian nomadology and deterritorialization, this essay has demonstrated how the Nagas function as a disruptive force against the Somras-industrial complex, ultimately leading to its

collapse. The destruction of the Somras-industrial complex is not just a narrative resolution but a radical act of deterritorialization that dismantles hierarchical power and opens up new possibilities of existence. The Nagas, as nomadic agents of resistance, embody an alternative model of knowledge, governance, and sustainability that challenges the rigid structures imposed by the Meluhan state. Furthermore, the ecological and postcolonial implications of the trilogy offer valuable insights into real-world issues of industrial expansion, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of indigenous communities. By framing the conflict over the Somras within these broader theoretical discourses, *The Shiva Trilogy* emerges as a powerful commentary on the dangers of unchecked technological progress and the necessity of alternative modes of resistance. Ultimately, the trilogy's resolution is not about imposing a new order but about breaking free from a destructive system. In doing so, it aligns with Deleuzian thought, which sees true revolution not as the replacement of one structure with another but as the creation of new, open-ended possibilities for movement, thought, and life.

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