

REINTERPRETING CULTURE AND MYTH IN AMISH TRIPATHI'S THE IMMORTALS OF MELUHA

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Abstract

Culture and mythology is the center of the focus in Indian literature. Mythology has its roots from the people's beliefs on Gods, spirituality and divinity and this in India is quite common. There are different avatars of various Gods in Indian mythology. One among them is Lord Shiva. Amish Tripathi takes extreme pride in bringing Lord Shiva as a man full of morals and right thoughts through his narration in his *The Immortals of Meluha*. It sheds light on multiculturalism of India. As mythology is often viewed on the lens of cultural values, Amish Tripathi too connects Lord Shiva's destiny with culture and mythology. Furthermore, *The Immortals of Meluha* precisely distinguishes the differences between different and evil through Lord Shiva's journey.

Keywords: Mythology, Lord Shiva as God and cultural values and multiculturalism

Reinterpreting Culture and Myth in Amish Tripathi's The Immortals of Meluha

Culture is the base of discussion on any kind of social interpretation. In a country like India where multiculturalism is being followed mythology is seen in cultural lens. Hindus connect their culture with several Gods like Lord Ganesh, Lord Karthikeya, Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu and few others. There are female Goddess celebrated in India like Goddess Sati who is known for purity and innocence; Goddess Kali who is a notable ferocious Goddess; Goddess Saraswati is believed to be the holiest God for invoking the children's education. Christians associate their culture with the mythological stories that talks about Jesus Christ and Mother Mary. Muslims associate their culture with their God Allah. With these interpretations this paper aims to see culture and mythology as two sides of the life. A cultural component is defined in *Hindu Culture: An Introduction* by Swami Tejomayananda "that a group of people must exist, they must live together in a particular area, that they must live there for a long period of time, and they respect certain common values of life" (8)

The eastern literature is characterized by the living ethics from the ancestral heritage values compared to the western literature where materialism is the center of focus in literature. *The Immortals of Meluha* speaks the mythological insight of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is the man who emerges in Mount Kailash but is destined to reach the greater heights by his inbuilt morality, goodness of virtues and skills. He finds his way to Devagiri, the Meluhan capital. He gets acquainted with the love of his life Lady Sati. Lord Shiva was told how the Meluhan society was formed by Daksha the Emperor of Meluha. Daksha stresses imperialistic attitude towards Chandravanshis and Nagas by framing that the Suryavanshis are superior to them.

Amish Tripathi is the sailor of Indian literature where his subject focused on reviving Indian mythology and history. His first publication *The Immortals of Meluha* belongs to *Shiva Trilogy* and it became as a debut for the author. The sequel to *The Immortals of Meluha* is *The Secret of The Nagas* and it is followed by *The Oath of the Vayuputras*

The Immortals of Meluha speaks the ways in which Lord Shiva turns out to be a lord. Amish Tripathi brings the reference of the characters of mythology from the epic stories of Ramayana, the Mahabharata and Shivapurana as stated by Priya the researcher in her research titled 'Use of Mythical Characters in Shiva Trilogy'. It is the reflection of culture of ancient India where Gods have taken human form to imply some messages to the society. Tripathi also used Vedas and Upanishads in his work and this has been pointed out by the researcher Priya in her article 'Use of Mythical Characters in Shiva Trilogy'. It delineates Shiva's life which begins in Mount Kailash but destined to reach heights for the larger good of the society.

Lord Shiva finds a big responsibility as a leader for his tribe called Gunas and his skill of being a warrior is born with him. His skills as a warrior is revealed when he fights calm and tactically with Pakratris in their own land

in Mount Kailash; when he blows the sword to save ati from hooded figure and in against Chandravanshis his skills are refined and composed as a warrior. This represents the ancient India where the people are well acquainted with war. The Gunas are attacked by the Pakratris who are foes each other. The Pakratris wanted to abduct the land of Gunas and they launch several attacks frequently. The Gunas finally in the name of the mercy left the Pakratris their land. As mythology deals with banishing the evilness and sowing goodness where In Ramayana Ravana is portrayed as an antagonist and his effigy would be burnt in auspicious festival of Diwali in India. Lord Shiva also destroys the law that seems injustice in society that is the law of Vikarna.

The cultural context lies in the social norms followed by the people, their rituals, morals and ideologies of the mythical heroes. The Gunas reach Meluha and they begin to adapt themselves to the new environment. The Meluhans call themselves as Suryavanshis and their binary opposites as Chandravanshis. The Suryavanshis are the followers of Lord Ram. The transition from Mount Kailash to Devagiri defines journey of Shiva and it shifts his status from Shiva to Lord Shiva, Mahadev or the Neelkanth the destroyer of evil. Tripathi succeeded in bringing the mythical characters that are divine in humanly figures who is made of flesh, blood, reasons and emotions. Lord Shiva is not the man of modernity where he is seen wearing western suits, but instead wraps tiger skin around his thighs, possess the holy river Ganga and has beads worn in his neck. This has been stated by Prabavathi Vijaya in her article 'Recreation of Myth in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy'. Through Tripathi one can see the divinity which is said to be felt only through divine meditation effortlessly through reading his work.

The journey of Shiva even makes the destroyer of evil to formulate new concepts in the society and eradicate the practices that diminish the individual's liberty and self-respect. Every mythological story that preaches the morality for the audience has a legend and the legend has a dear friend. For instance, Lord Ram is a legend and he has a dear friend called by the name Hanuman who makes all odds of his Lord invisible. In the same way here in The Immortals of Meluha, there is a legend called by any of the following names Shiva, Lord Shiva or Neelkanth. He has loyal friends called Nandi and Bhadra who stands beside him at all odds. Vijaya Prabavathi in her studies titled 'Recreation of Myth in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy' declares the original myth behind Bhadra is said to be emerged from the jatta being thrown by Lord Shiva after the death of Lady Sati. In the myth, Bhadra is described as a demon. Amish Tripathi in contradictory describes Bhadra as dearest friend of Lord Shiva.

The Gunas are administered with Somras, the drink of the Gods by Lady Ayurvati and her assistants. It is the time when Shiva's throat began to radiate blue. There is a myth described by the author that after the Legend Lord Ram it will be Legend Neelkanth whose throat glows blue after consuming the Somras. The actual story behind the blue throat is where Lord Shiva consumed the devastating poison to save the world and Devas. Goddess Shakti placed her hand in his throat and it stopped there as stated by the researcher in her article Vijaya Prabavathi titled 'Recreation of Myth in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy'. Lord Shiva thought his uncle words himself, "Your destiny is much larger than these massive mountains". (27)

Every society has different culture, beliefs and heritage. Like the same Meluha is an organized and systematized society based on different class of people like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. These four castes are also emphasized in Swami Tejomayananda which is represented as ancient caste systems of India. The Meluhan society gives all kinds of privileges where the skills of the people decide what they can be. Amish Tripathi in *The Immortals of Meluha* justifies the segregation of the Meluhan society, their particular profession and caste. Brahmins take the intellectual professions and they are the creators of the society like: Doctors, Teachers, Lawyers and Priests. Kshatriyas fight as warriors and women were warriors too. Sati, the Princess of the Daksha is a warrior too. Women are given equal importance to men. Vaishyas performed interesting jobs like: craftsmen, traders and businesses. Shudras do the menial jobs such as farming and they work under the people who are superior in caste. It is the culture of Meluha through which mythological aspect is portrayed. The people are segregated through their skills and not by their biological parents.

The myth exists in all the cultures but in different matters. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, by Amish Tripathi he describes the symbols as the representation of the myth. The Meluhans wore the amulet that represents their positions. The first amulet has the lines that symbolize shoulders of Parmatma the almighty, and that represent him as a Kshatriyan. Under that Kshatriyan, he belongs to bull. The chain he wears has a golden pendant which looked like a circular sun streaming outwards. This represents the culture of India where the people wore jewelery all the time. Jewelery in times of ancient India represents the social status of people. The gold represents the high status, silver the middle class and bronze the low class people. There are also symbols for Brahmins, Vaishyas and Shudras.

In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Amish Tripathi additionally brings the symbols of other caste people where Brahmins are represented by the Head of the Parmatma, Vaishyas are described by the thighs of Parmatma and Shudra takes the feet of Parmatma. This division has the cultural differences where it belongs to the mythical reality

of ancient India. The second amulet implies the chosen tribe. Brahmins take theirs from birds, Kshatriyas take theirs from animals, Vaishyas chose from flowers and Shudras take it from fishes. The tribes should be chosen at their limits. The brown seed is the representation of Lord Rudra. The brown seed gives security and protection for the wearer and no divine weapon cannot destroy it. The sun represents that he is a Suryavanshi, they follow solar calendar. They are honest, follow promises, brave, truthful.

Like *The Immortals of Meluha* there is another Indian fiction by Shashi Tharoor titled *The Great Indian Novel* which takes the classical epic of *Mahabharata* that draws mythological characters of the *Mahabharata* and describes about the political movement with satires and puns. The *Mahabharata* is a fight for the dynasty called Hastinapur between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. This fight is satire between the rivalry of India and British in the Indian lands. When this in contrast to *The Immortals of Meluha* it is the long existing duel between Suryavanshis, Chandravanshis and the Nagas where the Suryavanshis impose their imperial rule in the name of mythological figure called Lord Ram. In *The Great Indian Novel* of Shashi Tharoor, he states "How shall I tell it, Ganapathi? It is such a long story, an epic in itself, and we have so much else to describe". (46)

Lord Shiva admired the 'Temple of Lord Brahma'. Shiva did not see the idol of the God; instead he is wonderstruck by the architectural marvel. Lord Shiva is the man who has no belief in God but on his gradual process of finding the right he begins to accept the presence of God. A Pandit blessed him Jai Guru Vishwamitra, Jai Guru Vashista. Indian culture is so stern to give respect to elders, the blessings of elders is considered as the blessings of the God. Lord Shiva meets his meaning of life Lady Sati. Sati was saved from the hooded figure by Lord Shiva. Indian mythology is based on different colors. Red represents the traditional color, black is considered as inauspicious color. In the same way, Devagiri is based on the holiness of pure blue color.

Shiva is fond on dance in the myth and his dances are named as Shivatandav, Anandatandav. Lord Shiva noticed Sati performing dance steps but using the stage limitedly: Shiva said: "As they say in the land I come from, the mudras and the kriyas were all technically correct but the bhav or emotion was missing. And a dance without bhav is like a body without soul" (76).

Indian mythology is closely acquainted with the classical form of dance. There are plenty of dances like Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak and Kathakali. Through these dance forms the stories are also narrated. Shiva said about the Natraj pose which originates from Lord of Dance, the Natraj.

The Somras is invented by Lord Brahma and used it for the good of the society. He chose seven men as his disciples known as Saptrishis. The Saptrishis are believed to be the wisest men of the ancient society of India. Shiva comes to know about the Vikarma people, who are the carriers of the bad fate. Vikarma people are punished for their sins of previous birth at this birth. Vikarma women need to worship Lord Agni, the purifying fire god to get rid of their sins. In Indian culture and mythology, sins, karmas and morality is given high importance. One among that woman is Lady Sati. But Lord Shiva realizes that considering the people as Vikarma is the flaw of the society and he is against it. The concept of Vikarma is like Dalits being neglected in the society. The Vikarma people are not meant to be par taking in yagna or any auspicious occasion. The same thing applies for Dalits. The Dalits are allowed only to clean the temple and not enter the pooja ceremony. Even though the society of Meluha is a near perfect society, the concept of Vikarma is a flaw of the society. This system seemed the best one of Meluha. The depletion of Saraswati River is the major cause for the war between Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis. The deformed Nagas are ostracized by the society. The ownership of Somras destroys the peace of the society.

Lord Shiva has to take a Shudikaran for touching Lady Sati. Shudikaran is a purification ceremony in Meluha for touching Vikarma woman. He is not bothered to do it. In Indian mythology some are not meant to be touched since they carry the bad fate with them. Sati in the original myth is said to be the incarnation of Kali, who does deep tapasya to marry Shiva. Lord Shiva does not want wars at initial level itself. The Chandravanshis joined hands with Nagas and they attacked the people who are not the masters at warriors like the Brahmins, Vaishyas and Shudras. Honesty is considered as a base for the relationships both in Indian culture and mythology. Lord Shiva gets to know Brahaspati the chief scientist of Meluha.

Mythology is interconnected with Science when living is claimed to be possible only when the person has 'Shakti'. The chief scientist Brahaspati explains the science beyond living process. The oxygen helps the food to convert itself as energy; at the same time it also causes oxidant that kills us. The Somras helps in lessening the oxidants. He said Shiva with references, The Messiah from bible merges the Christian mythology with Indian Mythology. People wait for the Messiah to come and solve their problems, like how Meluha expects Neelkanth says Brahaspati. The Emperor, Queen Veerini and their daughter Sati reached Mount Mandar. Lord Shiva met Sati at the dining hour. Hooded figure and Vishwadyumna tried their best to capture Sati alive.

Lord Shiva, Sati, Nandi, Bhadravya and other Arishtanemi soldiers heard Nagadhavi conch. Lord Shiva clearly knew what had to be done and executed it accordingly. He is a skilled warrior. Bhadravya is impressed by the smart plans of war by Lord Shiva. Lady Sati is impressed. Lord Shiva is in dilemma whether he could fulfill the expectations of the people. Nandi addressed Lord Shiva to be better than Lord Ram, who considers the latter as an idol of his life. Lord Shiva, Sati, Veerbhadra, Brahaspati sets on tour across the empire. The protection was laid by Parvateshwar, Kanakhala and group of soldiers. Nandi and Lady Ayurvati too joined the entourage for any need of favor.

Lord Shiva comes to know about Lord Manu as the person one who created the civilization. In India the term Pandit refers to the person who offers his entire life serving the god. That term was derived from the Pandya which is the family name of Lord Manu. The first city they visit is Kotdwaar. He got the blessings of a blind man who is considered as a Vikarma. Sati feels that she deserves the punishment when she gave birth to a still born child and lost her husband on the same day. Their next port is to Mohan Jo Daro is dedicated to Lord Mohan. Shiva visited the Lord Mohan temple. The Pandit approached him. Lord Shiva went through the fact of cultural life that gives the person flexibility and stability over their life by the wisdom of Pandit.

Lord Shiva understands from Pandit that Sati yearns for the respect. Lord Shiva found his path to gain Sati. They reached Karachapa. Jhooleshwar, the governor of Karachapa welcomes them. Jhooleshwar arranges the yagna to seek the blessings of Lord Varun and Ashwini Kumar twins. Indian mythology is infinite with mythical stories of moral for cultural wellbeing. The yagna began and it is objected by Tarak the Kshatriyan. His accusation is on Sati being in the platform where yagna is going to be held. When Sati is spoken ill by Tarak she accepted it with dignity. But the time Tarak took out the dignity of her Shiva she wished to take the Agnipariksha, which is known as trial by fire. This time Shiva is with Sati to give her respect.

The duel took place and Sati won in the one on one duel. The Nagas began their new attack. Lord Shiva screamed “THIS NONSENSE HAS TO STOP” (249). Shiva made his mind to attack and he said “I am the Neelkanth” (250). As every god in the world stands in the side of justice, the Neelkanth also took the side of justice. He inspired every soul:

I am the Neelkanth... I am going to fight these terrorists, roared Shiva. ‘I am going to show them that we are not scared anymore. I am going to make them feel the pain we feel. I am going to let them know that Meluha is not going to roll over and let them do what they want. (250)

The platoon of soldiers marched to Koonj. The Suryavanshis aimed at killing the Nagas. A Naga released agnibaan also called as the fire arrow towards the Neelkanth. It is the most devastating weapon. To save Shiva Sati took the Shot. She confessed that she loves him and it leaves Shiva broken. Shiva got a brilliant idea to give Somras to treat Sati and get her cured. The cure worked on Sati and it bought back her to life. Royalty arrived to see injured princess. Lord Shiva ordered that the Vikarma law should be scrapped. Mount Mandar is under attack and Brahaspati lost his life. The destruction happened by daivi astras which is not used by anyone.

Shiva threw everything on himself; he accuses himself for the state of Brahaspati. The preparations of the war began and the tools for the battle have been decided. Parvateshwar is wonderstruck by Shiva’s brilliance over the war. Shiva heard from Sati that he is going to be father, very soon. Drapaku, the son of the blind man joined the battle with the Suryavanshis. The Neelkanth inspired the Suryavanshis with energetic words: “A man becomes a Mahadev when he fights for good. A Mahadev is not born as one from mother’s womb. He is already forged in the heart of the battle, when he wages a war to destroy evil” (346). The Suryavanshis win in the battle.

In Indian mythology, if the king loses the war, he will be taken as a prisoner of war. Like the same, Emperor Dilipa, his son Prince Bhagirath and Princess Anandamayi were taken as the prisoners of war. The Suryavanshis motto is ‘Truth. Duty. Honor.’ And the Chandravanshis had their own ‘Passion. Beauty. Freedom’. Lord Ram belongs to both the Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis. Shiva then takes an individual trip to Lord Ram’s temple to seek the answers for his questions in his mind. The temple is called as Ramjanmabhoomi temple. The previous time when he visited different temples he looked at the magnificence of the architecture but this time he sees just the idol of Lord Ram. The simple truth unveiled Lord Shiva’s eyes; the Chandravanshis are different and not evil. The Pandits are called as Vasudevs. The Vasudevs role is to help the next Mahadev in all their possible ways.

To bring the argument to the final note, The Immortals of Meluha teaches the readers how Lord Shiva put an end to the Vikarma law through his goodness. It also reveals the perspective and differences being different and evil. The Suryavanshis cannot accuse Chandravanshis as evil just because they’re different. The concept of being inferior and superior should also be abolished. If it is so, all the people living in the world can get equal importance. Lord Shiva’s destiny was destined to be in Mount Kailash, but not for long time where he has to do some changes in

the society and reach beyond imagination. He does so and he becomes a Mahadev, the Neelkanth the destroyer of evil. He realized his mistakes but not failed in accepting those and rectifying it.

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