

New Bard of MacDonald Generation: A Critical Study of the Marginalised Voices in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* (2013)

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Abstract: *In his effort to portray Lord Shiva in Shiva Trilogy Amish Tripathi tried to subvert the meta-narratives of gender, caste, nationality, religion and a few more. Amish concentrates on the life of marginalized people in the ancient world of Lord Shiva and tries to give rationale to make their voices heard in the postmodern discourse. He establishes the fact that the marginalisation of socially deprived communities has happened because the wrong interpretation of the scriptures. Amish through his novels wishes to hear the marginalised voices.*

Amish Tripathi's novels Shvia Trilogy (2013) comprises of The Immortals of Meluha(2010) The Secret of the Nagas(2011) and The Oath of the Vayuputras(2013). It deals with the life of Lord Shiva with certain creative changes to the mythological story. It juxtaposes the ancient milieu of Shiva Puran and scientific outlook of post modern world. It focuses on the protest of Vikarma women like Sati, Kali, and Maya. It also studies the subaltern voices of Nagas, Brangas and Vikarma people who are victims of dominant power structures of the society of those times.

In his novels Amish Tripathi tried to subvert the meta-narratives of gender, caste, nationality, religion and race. Amish focuses on the life of marginalized people in the myths related to Lord Shiva and tries to give rationale to make their voices heard in the postmodern discourse. He establishes the fact that the marginalisation of socially deprived communities is still rampant because of the wrong interpretation of the scriptures. This paper tries to attempt the scrutiny of these marginalised voices.

Key Words: mythology, protest, power structures, Shiva, gender, race,

The present literary scenario is replete with the titles of mythological fiction in English. Writers like Ashwin Sanghi, Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Anand Neelkantan and few more are the bestseller authors of our times. Amish Tripathi possesses a much coveted place in the fiction written by taking inspiration from Indian mythology. Amish published his first novel *The Immortals of Meluha* in 2010. Readers loved the book. The book saw phenomenal rise of buyers and 2.5 million copies of the book were sold. Amish was declared 'India's first literary pop-star' by Shekhar Kapoor. Some found Amish as the 'Paulo Coelho of the east'.

One of the important changes witnessed by Indian publishing industry was that *The Immortals of Meluha(2010)* changed the definition of 'bestseller'. BBC Delhi's Geeta Pandey declared him as 'Tolkien of Hindu mythology'. Amish proved that the young adult fiction can revolve around mythological thrillers and it is not necessary to discuss the love affairs of IITians as Chetan Bhagat did. Amish Tripathi was offered an advance of Rs.5 crores by Westland Publisher for his next novel, even if the idea for the same was not finalised. This incident was a historic moment in Indian publishing industry when an author gets sumptuous amount of money as advance.

In an interview with Emma Dawson Varughese, Amish observes,

"Mythology has always been the most popular genre in Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, etc. However, it may not have been so in the Indian English language publishing industry till the recent past. Till 10 to 15 years ago, the Indian readers who read in English were the old elite and they were westernised. Is it that they did not want to read mythology form ancient India or is it that the Indian English language publishing industry did not supply such books? One can debate that. Today, however, due to increased education, there are many non-westernised Indian readers who have also started reading in English and their tastes reflect the tastes of the real India. So the 'revival', if at all, is more in the area of English language publishing in India rather than anything else." (Dawson.2017:80-81)

In an effort to portray Lord Shiva in Shiva *Trilogy* Amish tried to reject the age old superstitions and stereotypes attached to the deity. He tried to subvert the meta-narratives of gender, caste, nationality, religion and a few more. Amish concentrates on the life of marginalized people in the ancient world of Lord Shiva and tries to give rationale to make their voices heard in the postmodern discourse. He establishes the fact that the marginalisation of socially deprived communities has happened because the wrong interpretation of the scriptures. Amish through his novels wishes to hear the marginalised voices.

Amish Tripathi's first novel *The Immortals of Meluha*(2010) deals with the life of Lord Shiva with certain creative changes to the original story of Lord Shiva. It juxtaposes the ancient milieu of Shiva *Puran* and scientific outlook of post modern world. It tries to give scientific justification to the mythical legends by exploiting modern theories of atomic, biological, chemical science. It also gives a philosophical message for the current generation as Lata Mishra says, 'The Shiva *Trilogy* becomes living inspirational scripture capable of providing spiritual direction in the modern world' (Mishra: 2013:20)

Amish speculates in the beginning of the novel that the Gods we celebrate today are not the figments of our imaginations but the men lived legendary lives in their times. Amish observes,

'What if Lord Shiva was not a figment of a rich imagination, but a person of flesh and blood? Like you and me. A man who rose to become godlike because of his karma. That is the premise of the Shiva Trilogy, which interprets the rich mythological heritage of ancient India, blending fiction with historical fact. This book is therefore a tribute to Lord Shiva and the lesson that his life teaches us. A lesson lost in the depths of time and ignorance. A lesson, that there exists a potential god in every single human being. All we have to do is listen to ourselves'. (Tripathi, 2010:xv)

Anchored in 1900 BC Indus Valley Civilization at the foothills of Mount Kailash and in the vicinity of Manasarovar Lake, *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010) revolves around a Tibetal tribal named 'Shiva' who is heading his community entitled '*Gunas*'. Shiva and his community are always at wars with another community called '*Pakratis*' which are waging a proxy war against *Gunas*. Shiva tries to get in good terms with Pakratis but they are constantly attacking *Gunas*. These warring tribes can be compared to, as Dawson says,

'To readers unfamiliar with Hinduism, Shiva may present as a warrior, fighting to save his people. The topographical context of the story for such readers may simply translate as a mountainous region where different tribes live, the mountain ranges dividing up the land, each tribe benefitting from that particular areas natural environment. This sort of description of the landscape and the various inhabitants of the regions makes easy connections to non-Indian Fantasy series such as Tolkien's 'The Lord of The Rings' or Brandon Sanderson's 'The Stormlight Archieve' where regions, peoples and different races clash, and where battles ensue as both parties pursue a coveted prize.

(Dawson, 2017:55-56)

Researcher wishes to foreground the idea that Lord Shiva is considered to be a wild and least domesticated God. It is often debated that after Aryan invasion Aryans have domesticated Lord Shiva, a Dravidian deity by giving title of 'Rudra' to him. This claim is voiced by M. Kishwar in his essay 'Yes to Sita, no to Ram: the continuing hold of Sita on popular imagination in India' as, 'Puranic description of Shiva show him as the least domesticated and most rebellious of all the gods, one whose appearance and adventures border on the weird' (Kishwar 2001:206)

The story furthers with Shiva's entry in to Devgiri, the Capital of Meluha. Ayurvati, the chief doctor of Meluha gives *Somaras* to Shiva and finds herself wonderstruck to see Shiva's neck turned blue. She bows down to him as *Neelkanth*. Thereafter starts a new journey of Shiva as everyone's perception changed to look at him. They consider him as their fabled saviour. Shiva witnessed a terrorist attack by *Nagas* and gets to know from Nandi that Nagas are a cursed community with hideous deformities. Shiva asks about *Nagas* to Nandi to find the answer, 'They are the cursed

people; they are born with hideous deformities because of the sins of their previous births. (Tripathi, 2010:59)

The major problem he fathoms is the belief system of Meluhans who always curse the sins of previous births to any problem. They consider deformities of Nagas are the result of sins of their previous births. Shiva witnesses a procession of *Vikarma* women in the street and asks Nandi about the same. Nandi answers,

There are many rules that the *Vikarma* women have to follow they have to pray for forgiveness every month to Lord Agni, the purifying Fire God, through specifically mandated *puja*. They are not allowed to marry since they may poison others with their bad fate. They are not allowed to touch any person who is not related to them or is not part of their normal duties. There are many other conditions as well. (Tripathi, 2010:92-93)

Shiva questions this illogical custom. He asks who decides that the *Vikarma* people had committed sins in their previous birth. Nandi answers that their sufferings in this birth decides that they are *Vikarma*. Nandi tries to justify the *Vikarma* law but finds strong reply in Shiva's argument, 'that sound pretty ridiculous to me. A woman could have given birth to a still born child simply because she did not take proper care while she was pregnant. Or it could just be a disease. How can anyone say that she is being punished for the sins of her previous birth?' (93)

Shiva discusses the *Varna* system of Meluha. Nandi gives satisfactory answers to his questions. Shiva was astonished to know that all the children in Meluha are born in a hospital city called *Maika*. There all the mothers donate their children to the state and receives the children after his training. The identity of the children was kept secret and after passing a competitive examination of *Varna* the willing parents could choose any random child who qualified the respective exam. Amish here tries to build an utopian state of discrimination free caste system which is fully based on the abilities of the person as 'each person is given a position in society based only on his own abilities.'(99)

After a series of incidents Shiva is declared as Neelkanth officially by the royal authorities of Meluha and Shiva tries to break the ridiculous law of *Vikarma*. Amish tries to hear the marginalised voices of *Vikarma* people. When common people tried to touch Shiva as they hailed him their saviour, he happens to meet a blind *Vikarma* man. Shiva finds this occasion to break the *Vikarma* law and touches him. Shiva says to the blind *Vikarma* man, 'Bless me, sir, so that I find the strength to fight for a man as patriot as you' (198). When Shiva seeks the blessings of the impure *Vikarma* blind man the entire crowd was flabbergasted to see what their Neelkath has done. Amish describes it as, 'forget the gravity of touching a *Vikarma*, the Neelkath had just asked to be blessed by one. Shiva turned to see Parvateshwar's enraged face. Shiva had broken the law. Broken it brazenly and in public. Next to him stood Sati. Her face, her eyes, her entire demeanour expressionless.' (198-199)

Shiva didn't like the logic put forth by Pandit but could sense the necessity of *Vikarma* law in certain 'law and order' issues. The Ideas of Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci are relevant in the present study. In his Prison Notebooks he posits the concept of 'hegemony' which is the crux of his theory. Hegemony is as M.H. Abrams describes, 'that a social class achieves a predominant influence and power, not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological views so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression (Abrams 2008:159). To wield that order certain ideological apparatus like *Vikarma* law was created. Once the person is convinced that his suffering is due to the sins he committed in his past birth he will not vent his anger but on the other hand will help to subjugate himself in his own oppression.

In the portrayal of Sati Amish achieved an epitome of womanhood. Even if Sati is a *Vikarma* woman Shiva gives her fair chance of *Agnipariksha* with Tarak, a great warrior who challenged the presence of Sati, a *Vikarma* woman, in the auspicious occasion of a *Yagna*, a fire sacrifice. Sati

proves herself as a fierce warrior and defeats Tarak. The marginalisation on the basis of gender was wiped out when Sati triumphed the fire sacrifice by accepting and defeating Tarak in a dual. Shiva scraps the *Vikarma* law by saying, 'I want the entire *Vikarma* law scrapped. Nobody will be a *Vikarma* from now on. Bad fate can strike anyone. It is ridiculous to blame their past lives for it.' (279)

There is another episode which underlines the place of marginalised Naga women. Atithigva, King of Kashi gets the *rakhi* tied from his Naga sister Maya. Sati happens to see the spectacle of tying of *rakhi* by a Naga woman to the King of Kashi. Sati learns that Maya is the sister of King Atithigva and ties *rakhi* to the king every year. Maya was actually two women in one body. The body was one from the chest down. But there were two sets of shoulders, fused to each other at the chest, each with a single arm dandling in either direction. The Naga had two heads.

The King gifts her brother *Veena* and *Sword*. These gifts are allegorical. Nagas are equally comfortable with musical instrument like *Veena* and with *Sword*. Sati shouts at Maya in utter shock. Sati was questioned by Maya about the arbitrary laws of ostracizing Nagas from main stream. Maya asks, 'And who is more misunderstood today than a person with a deformity? Call us Naga. Call us a monster. Throw us to the south of the Narmada, where our presence will not trouble your lily white lives.' (Tripathi, 2011:178)

Amish portrays a beautiful galaxy of women like, *Sati*, *Kali*, *Kanakhala*, *Ayurvati*, *Anandmayi*, *Veerini*. All women are marginalised by the patriarchy and power structures, but Amish successfully subverts the power equations and freed them from the shackles of subjugation. Amish portrays *Veerini* as a very influential women in *Trilogy*. She always works as 'foil' to King Daksha. She makes him aware the unjust path he is treading. She also rejects the notion of abandoning the *Vikarma* daughter *Kali*. She seems to be double colonised.

Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford have used the phrase 'double colonisation' to refer to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. In the Foreword to their edited collection 'A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post - Colonial Women's Writing' (Dangaroo, 1986), Peterson and Rutherford argue that colonialism celebrates male achievement in a series of male oriented myths. The phrase 'double colonisation' refers to the fact that women are twice colonised - by colonialist realities and representations and by patriarchal ones too.

(John McLeod, 2015:175)

The Immortals of Meluha (2010) lays bare the latent framework of binaries in *Chandravanshi* and *Suryavanshi* way of life. *Chandravanshi* way of life is very skilfully juxtaposed with *Suryavanshis*. The former believes in the strict following of the rules set down by Lord Ram. Meluhan motto is 'Satya-Dharma-Maan' Truth-duty-honour' where as *Chandravanshi* motto is 'Shringar-Saundrya-Swatantrata' Passion-beauty-freedom'. (371) It highlights the very background on which the edifice of binaries is constructed. These binary dichotomies are considered as the forces which determine the other as evil. Former's way of life is considered as evil by the later and vice-versa. This dichotomy is very well described by the description of the empires of *Chandravanshi* and *Suryavanshi*. The former is considered as the perfect empire while the later is considered to be a corrupt and lawless. one is obviously reminded of Plato's ideal 'Republic' in Meluha. It is very well described by Amish When Shiva enters in to the territory of Meluha.

"There were no special concessions for the aristocrats. The same block structures that dominated all of Meluha were to be found in the royal citadel as well. The only magnificent structure was to the far right and sported the sign 'Great Public Bath'. The Bath also had glorious temple to Lord *Indra* to the left. The temple, built of wood, stood on a raised foundation of baked bricks, its cupola plated with solid gold! It seemed that special architecture was reserved only for structures built for the Gods or Ones that were for the common good." (Amish, 2010:65)

John McLeod summarises Said as,

“The western discourse invests a lot of resources in creating knowledge of the Orient. According to Said Orientalism constructs binary divisions. Orient is conceived as being everything that the West is not. The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms that serve to buttress a sense of the West's superiority and strength. If the West is assumed as the seat of knowledge and learning, then it will follow that the orient is the place of ignorance. Thus in Orientalism, East and West are positioned through the construction of an unequal dichotomy. The West occupies a superior rank while the Orient is its 'other' in a subservient position. This makes the relations between them asymmetrical.

(John McLeod, 2015:40-41)

Above observation can be studied in the light of King Daksha's remarks about *Chandravanshi's* as,

" The *Chandravanshis* are corrupt and disgusting people. No morals. No ethics. They are the source of all our problems. Some of us believe that Lord Ram was too kind . He should have completely destroyed them. But he forgave them and let them live. In fact, we have to face the mortification of seeing the *Chandravanshis* rule over Lord Ram's birthplace- Ayodhya." (Tripathi, 2010: 100)

The Secret of the Nagas(2011) is remarkable in venting the voices of marginalized communities like *Brangas*, *Nagas* and women. *Brangas* are marginalised community. Shiva raises the morale of *Brangas* and promises them to help them in their war against Somaras as it is causing serious plague in their territory. Shiva appreciated *Branga's* skill of ship building and requests Divodas, a *Branga*, to prepare a special kind of ships to embark the journey of Panchavati, the Naga capital.

Parashuram tells Shiva about Nagas that they are angels. Shiva was surprised to know that Nagas are not 'evil' but 'angels'. Parashuram Says that in this war against *Branga* kings, Nagas helped him. They gave him medicine so that he could survive despite the unclean waters and food here.

“[...]They are the best people of us all. Angels who fight for the oppressed'

Shiva frowned. "Who?"

"The *Nagas*,' replied Parashuram.

"What?' 'Yes, My Lord. That is why you are looking for them, right?

If you want to find Evil, you must make the Good your ally, right? what are you talking about?

"They never kill innocents. They fight for justice, despite the injustices they face. They help the oppressed whenever and wherever they can. They truly are the best of us all."

(Tripathi 2011:268)

The advocacy of Nagas by Parashuram strikes Shiva to rethink his idea of 'Evil'. He took that Nagas are 'evil' but he found them 'angels'. Amish tries to give representation to the marginalised Nagas. This marginalization was ideologically manipulated by Meluhans and Swadeepans to declare Nagas as 'outcaste' by declaring them 'evil'.

In essay 'The Order of Discourse', Foucault talks about how the discourse is regulated by power structures. He opines, ' in every society the production of discourses at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, or evade its ponderous, formidable materiality' (Foucault 1978:52)

Nagas are different than *Chandravanshis* and *Suryavanshis*. Being different is not being evil is the important thread which is woven by Amish throughout the Shiva Trilogy. Foucault underlines that the dominant discourse in the society produces knowledge about the subjugated classes. They claim them as 'different' and were victimized as insane. Shiva rejects this notion by saying that being different is not evil. The crux of the argument denotes the discourse that are controlled, selected and redistributed by the dominant class. Here *Chandravanshis* and *Nagas* were victimised by calling them as 'evil' as they are different from *Suryavanshis*.

Thus, Amish focuses on the protest of *Vikarma* women like *Sati*, *Kali*, *Vireeni* and *Maya*. It also studies the subaltern voices of Nagas, *Brangas* and *Vikarma* people who are victims of dominant power structures of the society of those times.

In his novels Amish Tripathi tried to subvert the meta-narratives of gender, caste, nationality, religion and race. Amish focuses on the life of marginalized people in the myths related to Lord Shiva and tries to give rationale to make their voices heard in the postmodern discourse. He establishes the fact that the marginalisation of socially deprived communities is still rampant because of the wrong interpretation of the scriptures. By reinterpreting mythology Amish revisits the roots of Indian mythology to churn out some plausible solutions and he succeeds in his venture triumphantly.

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