

## Karmic Journey Of A Tibetan Tribesman To A Hindu God- A Mythical Fictional Analysis Of Shivain Amish Tripathi's Immortals Of Meluha

Dr. U Madhavaiah<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Pawel Veliventi<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Mantri Venkata Raghuram<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

*Myth, fantasy, beliefs, superstitions, chronicles, and history are some common sources for writers of mythic fiction. The characters, themes and symbols in Indian Mythic Fiction has represented some qualities that are very popular in the experience of human beings across different cultures in India. The last two decades have seen considerable increase in the production of fictional writing drawing from mythological resources and archaeological discoveries. This literature often provided alternatives to the mainstream narratives and continental perception of the orient. "Shiva Trilogy" by Amish Tripathi is an epic fantasy genre fiction reimagining life and adventures of Indian almighty Mahadev. It is presented very clearly in this trilogy how Gods were humans till they have attained immortality because of their adventurous activities. This paper analyses the evolution of a Tibetan immigrant Shiva into God Mahadev in Immortals of Meluha<sup>1</sup> using elements of Mythic fiction. The various stages of the process of gradual Hinduization of a Tibetan and his transformation to a powerful Hindu God is presented by analysing the physical journey of Shiva as a Karmic journey of deification.*

**Key words:** Epic Fantasy, Indian Mythic Fiction, Shiva Trilogy, Amish Tripathi, Karma, Deification.

### Introduction

The process of deification, or the elevation of a human being to the status of a deity or god, varies significantly depending on the cultural, religious, and historical context. Different religions and belief systems have their own unique practices and concepts related to deification. In ancient Rome, the deification of emperors was a common practice. After an emperor's death, the Senate would often vote to declare him a god. This deification was part of the imperial cult, and it involved rituals and the construction of temples in the emperor's honor. In ancient China, the emperor was often seen as the Son of Heaven and was considered semi-divine. Rituals and ceremonies were performed to legitimize their rule and connect them to the divine. While not considered gods, some individuals are revered as saints in certain Christian traditions. The process of canonization involves the recognition of an individual's holiness, often based on miracles attributed to them. Once canonized, a saint is venerated and believed to have a special connection with God.

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<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Vasireddy Venkatadri Institute of Technology, Namburu

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Vasireddy Venkatadri Institute of Technology, Namburu

<sup>3</sup>Dean-Placements, Vasireddy Venkatadri Institute of Technology, Nambur

In various indigenous and folk religions, there can be beliefs in local deities or spirits that may be believed to be humans who attained divine status after death or through specific rituals. It's a complex and culturally specific phenomenon that depends on the beliefs and traditions of a particular group of people. In Hinduism, the concept of deification is closely related to the belief in avatars. An avatar is a deity or god who takes on a human form. For example, Lord Vishnu is believed to have ten avatars, including Rama and Krishna, who were divine incarnations on Earth.

Theories of deification, also known as theosis or divinization, have been explored in various religious and philosophical traditions. These theories attempt to explain the process or concept of humans becoming divine or achieving a state of oneness with the divine. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the concept of theosis is central. Theosis refers to the process by which human beings can become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). This process involves a transformative journey of purification and divinization, where individuals progressively become more like God through the grace of God. It is considered a lifelong journey of spiritual growth and transformation, with the ultimate goal of union with God. On the other hand, Neoplatonism, a philosophical system developed by thinkers like Plotinus, emphasizes the ascent of the soul toward the One, a transcendent and ineffable source of all reality. The process of deification in Neoplatonism involves a series of emanations from the One, with the ultimate aim of returning to the source. The soul's journey is one of purification and intellectual realization, ultimately leading to unity with the divine. This may appear to be close to Buddhist thought, but on a closer examination it is evident that Buddhism doesn't involve the deification of individuals. It is the concept of Nirvana that is central to the goal of liberation from suffering. Nirvana represents the extinguishing of suffering, ignorance, and the illusion of the self. It is a state of transcendent peace, wisdom, and liberation, but it does not involve becoming divine in the way other traditions may describe.

In some ancient mystery religions, initiates were believed to undergo transformative experiences that would lead to their deification. For example, in the Mysteries of Eleusis in ancient Greece, participants were believed to gain insight into the divine and achieve a form of immortality. Some Gnostic sects within early Christianity and other religious systems believed in the potential for individuals to achieve divine knowledge and liberation from the material world, often through a process of enlightenment and revelation.

These theories of deification vary widely in their beliefs, practices, and interpretations, but they share the common thread of humanity's potential to transcend the ordinary and achieve a higher, more divine state of being or understanding. The specific beliefs and practices associated with deification can differ significantly among these traditions, and the concept may not always imply literal divinity but rather a profound spiritual transformation and union with the divine.

Several literary theories and approaches have explored the theme of deification in literature, examining how characters, symbols, and narratives convey the idea of humans becoming divine or achieving god-like attributes. Mythological and Archetypal Criticism associated with thinkers like Joseph Campbell, focuses on the universal symbols, archetypes, and mythic narratives that recur in literature across cultures. Analyzing literature through this lens can reveal how characters and stories embody archetypal journeys toward enlightenment or deification, drawing on motifs like the hero's journey, the quest for wisdom, or the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary. Literary theories offer various lenses through which scholars and critics can analyze how the theme of deification is portrayed and explored in literary works. Some such approaches that were used for analysis of literary texts in this regard are as follows:

- i. Jungian Analysis: Carl Jung's theories of the collective unconscious and individuation can be applied to the study of deification in literature. Jungian analysis looks at how characters and narratives symbolize the journey toward self-realization and integration of the unconscious aspects of the self. This theory helps to explore the transformation of ego-bound individuals into more whole and spiritually attuned beings.
- ii. Comparative Literature: Comparative literature scholars often examine how the theme of deification is represented in different cultural contexts. They explore how various literary traditions and narratives approach the idea of humans becoming divine, emphasizing both the commonalities and the unique cultural expressions of this theme.
- iii. Religious and Theological Literary Criticism: Scholars from religious studies and theology backgrounds may apply their expertise to the analysis of deification in literature. They examine how literary works reflect or challenge religious beliefs and narratives related to the divine. This approach often looks at how literary texts engage with and reinterpret religious or mythological traditions.
- iv. Postcolonial Theory: Postcolonial literary theory can be used to analyze how the theme of deification is portrayed in the context of power dynamics, colonialism, and cultural clashes. It may explore how colonial literature appropriates or subverts indigenous deification narratives and how this reflects larger issues of identity and resistance.
- v. Feminist Literary Theory: A feminist analysis of deification in literature may focus on the gendered aspects of divinity and transcendence. It can examine how women or female characters are represented in relation to processes of spiritual or personal transformation and how these representations challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles.
- vi. Psychoanalytic Criticism: Psychoanalytic literary theory, as developed by Sigmund Freud and later theorists like Jacques Lacan, can be used to explore the psychological aspects of deification in literature. It may delve into the unconscious motivations and desires of characters and examine how their journeys toward divinity or transcendence relate to their inner conflicts and desires.
- vii. Postmodern Literary Theory: Postmodern literary theory often questions and deconstructs traditional narratives and symbols, including those related to deification. Scholars in this field may examine how literature challenges or subverts conventional ideas of the divine and instead emphasizes relativism, multiple perspectives, or the limitations of human knowledge.

This paper uses Mythological and Archetypal critical approach as a primary tool of analysis with sufficient inputs from other approaches as well where it becomes a necessity.

Many Indian stories and personalities have their tropes and themes from the famous Vedas, Puranas and epic literature like *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*. Shiva trilogy by Amish Tripathi is one of the pioneering novels in this category of writing tales and comes under the genre Mythic fiction where he draws from the Vedas and Upanishads, the classical Indo-Aryan texts for his narrative. Book 1 of Shiva trilogy namely *The Immortals of Meluha*, (IoM) is considered in this paper. Mythological (here coterminous with Mythic<sup>ii</sup>) fiction and mythology are different says Devdutt Pattanaik in an interview with Indo-Asian News Service (IANS). He says,

“Mythological fiction is very popular as it is fantasy rooted in familiar traditional tales. Mythology itself is about figuring out worldviews of cultures — how did people think in a culture. Most writers I know focus on mythological fiction. Study of mythology still remains rather academic<sup>iii</sup>.”

Among Indian Mythic fiction writers, Amish Tripathi is different because of his ability to give his writings a distinctness. He is distinct for his art of combining facts from Indus Valley Civilization with the beliefs of Hindu Vedic times with frequent reference to the modern socio political and cultural practices. The narrative of the first book of the trilogy, *The Immortals of Meluha*, begins with the journey of a simple tribal and ends with his transformation into a powerful God from Indian Mythology through his “karma” - conduct, deeds, actions, choices, and fate. “karma, Sanskrit karman (“act”), Pali kamma, in Indian religion and philosophy, the universal causal law by which good or bad actions determine the future modes of an individual’s existence. Karma represents the ethical dimension of the process of rebirth (samsara), belief in which is generally shared among the religious traditions of India.”<sup>iv</sup> This rendering of the *Shivapurāṇa*<sup>v</sup> as an allegory of philosophy in a different style of writing the stories of Shiva, Sati, Ganesh, and Kali has reconstructed the Vedic Indian life and literature.

The process of transformation from tribesman to a powerful God is traced through the following six phases in the selected novel. They are

1. Call of Duty
2. Maiden Journey
3. Self-fulfilling Prophecy
4. Exploration and Pilgrimage
5. Conflict and Self-proclamation
6. Social Reform and Marriage

### 1. Call of Duty

Opening of *The Immortals of Meluha* takes the readers back to 1900 B.C. where Lord Shiva<sup>vi</sup> is introduced as a cheerful, carefree, strong, and powerful (both physically and psychologically) Tibetan leader of the Guna tribe living on the banks of the holy lake Manasarovar; an opening that is a characteristic feature of Mythical fiction where epic narration and literary construction is intertwined with the pseudo past sources. Shiva was introduced as a commoner who never woke up early in the morning.

“Shiva had seen just few sunrises in his twenty-one years. But the sunset! He tried never to miss the sunset!” (IoM, p. 1).

However, this young man has a nightmarish teenage experience which he shares with only one person, his best friend Bhadra. Accidentally, Shiva witnesses a rape and escapes without protecting the hapless woman. This little secret haunts Shiva throughout his life. He spends many sleepless nights and every time when someone asks him for help, he remembers this incident feels guilty. Apart from this unique incident, Shiva always defended his tribe against the attacks of Pakrati<sup>vii</sup> in their fight for the control of Mansarover lake. His boldness makes him most revered among the tribesmen. Little did he expect that he would be soon drawn into the legendary battle between the Suryavanshis and the Chandravanshis<sup>viii</sup> helped by Nagas. Suryavanshi’s are shown at the outset of the novel as a civilized and rule abiding society while Chandravanshis are shown as “a crooked, untrustworthy and lazy people with no rules, morals or honour” (IoM, p. 43). Nandi, an Indian tells Shiva that Nagas are

“cursed people, my Lord... 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 Naganame alone strikes terror in any citizen's heart. (IoM, p 44)

He gets a call from the famous Suryavanshi king, Daksha to immigrate to Meluha with his tribe. The Meluhan envoy, Nandi invites Shiva, ensuring that they would be given fertile lands and peaceful life and expect nothing in return but to abide by the rules of the empire.

“Come to our land. It lies beyond the great mountains. Others call in Meluha. I call it heaven. It is the richest and most powerful empire in India. Indeed, the richest and the most powerful in the whole world (IoM, p. 13)

Then he remembers what his uncle said a few years ago,

"Your destiny lies beyond the mountains. Whether you fulfil it or run away once again, is up to you". (IoM, p. 13)

He chooses to move and the process of deification of Shiva begins with this call.

Here the readers understand that Shiva is the Chosen One.

## **2. Maiden Journey**

In response to the call, the Gunatribe's maiden journey to relocate from Mansarovar, Mount Kailash to Devagiri in Kashmir, the capital city of Meluha<sup>ix</sup> via Srinagar under Shiva's leadership begins. This epic narration continues with introducing various mythical characters into pure flesh and blood human beings both deformed and well-built. This maiden journey takes them to the land of civilized people. The first leg of deification journey from Mt. Kailash ends at Srinagar, a city ruled by Daksha. In Srinagar, he and his tribe receive a warm welcome. In this city they come across well-established society with proper guidelines for public health in place.

Meluha is introduced as the land of pure life. Shiva is surprised at its sight.

“This was a land of abundance, of most ethereal perfection. It was an empire ruled by clearly codified and just laws, to which every Meluhan was subordinated. Inclining the emperor. The country supported a population of nearly eight million, which without exception seemed well fed, healthy and wealthy” (IoM, p. 28).

However, Gunas develop high fever. Their first advisory by the chief doctor of Meluha is as follows. The Rule one has “to follow in order to control disease is to maintain strict hygiene standards” (IoM, p. 16). They were offered Somras as a medicine. Somras, is considered as the drink of gods that gives supernatural powers when consumed.

“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” (IoM, p. 81).

## **3. Self-fulfilling Prophecy**

Nandi hints that Shiva is the chosen one in the opening pages of the novel when he pardons Yakya, the Pakrati chief. Nandi muses,

“Shiva has the heart. He has the potential. Please, let it be him. I pray to you Lord Ram, let it be him” (IoM, p. 5).

This Somras incident leads us to the concept Self-fulfilling prophecy, another important stage in the process of deification that is characteristic of Mythic fiction. Self-fulfilling prophecy is a common device used by mythic fictional writers as it helps them to create a very compelling narrative. A popular Saviour or Emancipator prophecy that is universal in nature in vogue those days in Meluha is the emergence of a hero to root out the evil when it becomes nearly impossible human task.

“The legend says that the Neelkantha will be a foreigner. He cannot be from sapt-Sindhu. And that his throat will turn blue when he drinks the Somras” (IoM, p. 119).

Shiva too drinks Somras. As soon as he drank,

“the neck shone an eerie iridescent blue.... he turned around to the polished copper plate and stared in stunned astonishment at the reflection of his Neel Kanth; his blue throat” (IoM, p. 12).

It was then Ayurvati, the chief of medicine women and the most revered of the land observes that the throat of Shiva has turned into blue after consuming Somras. She immediately declares that Shiva is the reincarnation of Mahadev who came to save them from the evil.

“My lord you have come! The Neelkanth has come!” (IoM, p. 25).

This is the first recognition of Shiva as a God. This story is the alternative narrative of the popular Amritha, the Elixir of Immortality episode in the Hindu religious literature. The myth goes on to depict how Suras and Asuras took up the mammoth task of churning the Ocean of Milk with Mt Mandara as a churning paddle and a famous Naga Vasuki as a rope. As they were churning, the snake was about to spew venom into the ocean which was gulped by God Shiva to prevent contamination. This consequently turned Shiva’s throat blue<sup>x</sup> giving him the name Neelkanth (Blue throat). Meluhan Kingdom accepts Shiva as God but he doesn’t like it, a denial phase in the development of a hero as suggested by Campbell<sup>xi</sup>.

“What the hell are you doing, Ayurvati?” asked a horrified Shiva. You are a doctor, a giver of life. Don’t embarrass me by touching my feet” (IoM, p. 32).

But his denial is not accepted by the people of Meluha. They once again assert that Shiva is the God Neelakanth who will protect them from the onslaught of Chandravanshis.

“...what the legends also tell us is that when the problems become insurmountable for ordinary men, the Neelkanth will appear. And that he will destroy the evil Chandravanshis and restore the forces of good. My Lord, you are the Neelkanth. You can save us. You can complete the unfinished task of Lord Ram.” (IoM, p. 115)

Daksha also strongly believes that Shiva is their God.

“I believe in the legend. My people believe in the legend.... All the agonies they now inflict upon us will be over - from the terrorist attacks to the shortage of Somras to the killing of the Saraswati” (IoM, pp.70, 71).

In the final pages of the novel, this prophecy is once again reinforced through the Chandravanshi King, Dilipa. After winning the battle, Shiva gets intrigued when he sees tears in the eyes of Dilipa whenever their eyes met. He could see a visible feeling of hurt and deception. Anandamayi, daughter of Dilipa, an intelligent and passionate woman wonders as to why Shiva covered his neck always. She informs that Chandravanshis also believe in Neelkanth to save them from the evil Suryavanshis, to the utter disbelief of Shiva. This puzzles Shiva and he ponders whether he was on the wrong side of the conflict.

#### **4. Exploration and Pilgrimage**

Exploration and Pilgrimage are used as instruments of deification process. Impressed by Shiva’s character and courage, Daksha requests him to travels far and wide in the kingdom of Meluha accompanied by Sati. Every town and village receive Shiva with great reverence. He meets several people and places across the length and breadth of the Meluhan kingdom. Also, keeping to the objective of the prophecy fulfilment, several evil characters are introduced who are either killed or transformed to Gods by the protagonist through his actions and deeds. Mythical characters such as Sita, Daksha, Parashuram, Brahspati, Ganesh, and Kartik who are introduced as inherently evil, with some of them inhuman and demonic in forms. For example, the Naga kidnapper of Sati is shown as a woman of two physical bodies fused together. Pilgrimage to important Temples and visits to famous Gods is presented vividly. Shiva gets his spiritual, religious and political education through these visits to the temples. The pilgrimage is not a specific and continuous process but is built into the narrative at various legs of Shiva’s journey. Almost every journey has a temple visit and something to learn from. Every temple is unique in the novel, but the pandits (priests) who perform religious rituals in these temples are all shown to have striking similarities. In the novel, one group of people are called Vasudevas and are considered as representatives of the God Vishnu and other group of people associated

with the temples belong to the tribe of Brahma and are called Brahmins. Shiva visits three important temples in this novel and meets three Vasudevas. They enlighten and instruct Shiva in Karma philosophy.

The first visit of Shiva is the Temple of Brahma where he learns about creation and invention from a Vasudev. Super God Brahma is introduced in the novel as a legendary Indian scientist with a passion for inventing objects. Shiva learns that his inventions are unending and with his controlling power over his creations, he cures the people of their illnesses. He understands that to be a God, one must have the knowledge and power of healing. Brahma gets this power from Saptarishis<sup>xii</sup>—intellects who hail from seven prime regions of India. Here, Amish employs the tool of personification where, seven stars of popular Great Bear or Ursa major constellation are described as seven intellects. In the novel they are presented as men who are forbidden from any kind of active trade for personal credit. They are popular as monks, gurus and mendicants who do not charge for their services and lived on public charity. This visit gives great insights into the socio-political system of those days.

It is interesting to observe that in the Vedic period, there is a system of Varnashram in which the society is segregated based on their profession. Any change in profession changed their Varnas as well. But the present-day caste system is very different and rigid. Amish introduced the modern Indian caste system through Bhadra.

“They have a concept of specialisation. So, in addition to the Brahmins, they have a group called Kshatriyas, who are the warriors and rulers. Even the women can be Kshatriyas! ... And then they have Vaishyas, who are craftsmen, traders, and businesspeople and finally the Shudras who are the farmers and workers. And one caste cannot do another caste's job” (IoM, p. 28).

The four-fold caste system predominant in the Himalayan region is introduced as post-Vedic in the novel. The Saptarishis are described as Brahma or Brahmins owing to their way of living. The warrior class, Kshatriyas who lived on the borders of Himalayas are introduced as Chandravanshis as they worshipped Moon in contrast to the Himalayan tribes who are Suryavanshis, the worshippers of Sun. Meluhans belong to the Suryavanshi tribes. In contrast to the vegetarian, rule-bound Brahmins who help the people without seeking reciprocation, Shiva is presented as a non-vegetarian taking substances like marijuana, and who spends time dancing with a widow Parvathi. As to who framed the rules and what rules bound the people of those times, Amish, brings in the rules laid down by Lord Rama<sup>xiii</sup> who is introduced as a God though not physically present in the novel. Nandi, a native of the mainland in the novel informs Shiva that Lord Rama has built the Chandravans Empire and framed many rules that shall be followed ardently by the public. Another instance of the presence of rules comes out from the discussion between Daksha and Shiva regarding Somras<sup>xiv</sup>. Shiva is told that Lord Brahma has invented Somras and has offered to everyone particularly to the well-known group Saptarishis or the Brahmins. But as per rules laid by Lord Rama, Somras is to be offered to all the four castes.

“Yes, my lord. And the revolution was known as Lord Ram. The greatest emperor that ever lived. Jai Shri Ram. His ideas and leadership transformed the society of the Meluhans dramatically” (IoM, p.85).

The concept of rule bound societies is brought out through asynchronous treatment of information from Hindu Vedas, epics and puranas. This vacillation in time and interlinking of different epics and historical events is another characteristic of Mythic fiction. Amish Tripathi believes that ‘myths are nothing but jumbled memories of a true past. A past buried under mounds of earth and ignorance’<sup>xv</sup>. The wealthy mythological heritage of ancient Asian nation is mixed with historical reality as the novel progresses. Alternative narratives of demigods,

gods, and goddesses like Vasudevs, Sati, Nandi, Gunas, Rudra, Devas and Asuras are woven as subplots around the main narrative of Shiva's transformation into a Super God.

Exploration of sapta-sindhu region facilitates the process of visiting many temples. Shiva and his tribe are not familiar with temples and altars of Meluha. However, Amish incorporates the theme of Temples, especially of living Gods and elaborate religious rituals to Shiva as a process of familiarizing how Gods behave, dress, and perform in real life. He juxtaposes Shiva's beliefs with the established customs of Meluha. This phase introduces the culture of Gods to the Chosen One while highlighting Shiva's disagreement and nonconformity with some important spiritual issues. In his interactions with the priest of the temples, Shiva explores his inner spirituality and philosophical outlook. He learns about the most important dualities of the world – existence and absence; male and female; and good and evil.

Shiva is taken to Mt. Meru the abode of Lord Brahma, their Chief Scientist. As a passionate dancer, Shiva performs there and soon he is likened to the dancing God Nataraj<sup>xvi</sup>. There he finds among several scientific inventions, an attractive woman who likes his performance. He gathers information that the woman is Sati and lives in Devagiri, the capital city of Meluha. He reaches Devagiri to court Sati. However, to his shock, she is introduced as a Vikarma and the cursed daughter of Daksha. She is an expert in warfare and the use of advanced weapons of war. She rejects Shiva's proposal.

Later, the chief inventor of Meluha, Brahaspati takes the King's family and Shiva to Mount Mandar where the preparation of the magical potion Somras with the waters from the river Saraswathi is shown and explained. This is another important step in the process of Shiva's deification. Preparation of Somras is the top secret of Suryavanshis and is known only to Brahaspati. Shiva understands that it must be properly diluted with waters from the mighty river Saraswathi to be fit for consumption. He also observes that the waste waters of the process are poisonous and are left into the lesser rivers to flow into the territories of Nagas, resulting in their genetic deformities and disorders. He realised that he was offered a highly concentrated drink of Somras which turned his neck blue. It is believed that undiluted Somras is lethal drink and even in its diluted form has some side-effects. Brihaspati runs experimental trials with imported material to make this potion more effective.

During his visit to Mohan Jo Daro, he learns that people have an advanced lifestyle. He also understands that non-kshatriyas can also be rulers and some cities there developed trade relations with Egyptians and Mesopotamians. There he learns from a pandit, the second Vasudeva about Ramayana and how Kaikeyi, the second queen of King Dusseradha, Ram's father, was influenced by her handmaid Manthara and brought sorrow to the kingdom.<sup>xvii</sup> Shiva gains knowledge about flexibility and stability in governance and the importance of cultural transactions. He also gets few lessons on Karma freedom. He is informed that the origin of civilization eight thousand five hundred year ago and their forefather Lord Manu who laid down some rules for better living and wellbeing. Shiva learns that the Sangam Tamil civilizations beyond Narmada were engulfed by the seas and the family of Lord Manu moved to the Sapt-Sindhu region, the land of seven rivers – the six newly formed rivers namely Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswathi, Brahmaputra, Sindhu (Indus), Sarayu and the pre-existing river Narmada. This description was very important to the discussion as the God who would save the people from evil will not be from Sapta-sindhu region, here he is Shiva, a Tibetan immigrant.

## **5. Conflict and Self Proclamation**

The Immortals of Meluha begins with Tibetan tribal conflicts in the Himalayan regions around the holy lake Manasarovar and ends with the conflict of the mighty Indian empires Ayodhya, the birth place of Ram. On his way to Immortality, Shiva fights several battles, and the book is well constructed with the depiction of loads of battles and well-structured violence.



Water is shown as the primary cause for conflict in this novel. In the initial days of his settling near lake Manasarovar, Shiva is shown as protecting the Guna tribe from the cowardly attacks of Pakratris. And he does this without seeking anything in return. Gradually, he becomes popular as a trouble shooter and protector of the Guna tribe. Shiva's first conflict is with the Pakratris over protecting Guna tribe's water rights of Lake Manasarovar. Very early in the narrative, the reader is informed that Pakratris use the magic of twilight and the dark of the nights to attack and kill women and children of Guna tribe. "Their mutilated bodies were found next to the lake" (IoM, p. 5). Shiva understands that controlling natural resources is a sign of Power and the Prakriti tribal chief, Yakhya is a megalomaniac. These cowardly attacks on Guna women and children are detested by Shiva. Here, he is shown as a lover of peace. He suggests the idea of relocating his tribe to a peaceful place. He says,

"This land is fit for barbarians! We have fought pointless battles with no end in sight" (IoM, p. 6). "In an atmosphere like this, there was never any hope for peace" (IoM, p. 7).

A timely invitation from Daksha, makes it possible for Shiva and his tribe to migrate.

In the Kingdom of Meluha Shiva witnesses how some Chandravanshis with the help of Nagas, launched many surprise attacks on public places such as temples, public baths with an aim to kill and loot non-combatants like the Brahmins, Vaishyas or Shudras. Nagas are portrayed as excellent warriors with astonishing martial skills despite being an ostracised race of deformed humans. They behaved like outlaws with little or no regard for rules of the mainland.

The next major conflict is shown as a curtain raiser over the fight against social discrimination. While exploring the Kingdom of Meluha, Shiva visits Karachappa city, where he is invited to the Yagna<sup>xviii</sup> performed by its Governor. Unfortunately, Tarak, moral police, protests Sati's participate as a Vikarma. Sati offers to leave the place but is challenged by him for a duel. Sati chooses a sword to fight and injures him. To the surprise of many, she spares his life, and he is rushed to the hospital for treatment where he recovers. At that time, the news of a Naga led Chandravanshi attack on a Suryavanshi village Koonj, reaches Shiva and he rushes to help them. By then the Brahmins get killed and the temple demolished. With no options left, Shiva reveals his scarf covered blue neck for the first time and makes a self-proclamation to the scared and fleeing villagers that he is Neelkanth, the God who has come to fight the evil alongside the good. Self-proclamation is used as tools to reinforce the deification process of Shiva.

Inspired by Shiva, the villagers gather their courage and take-up arms against the invaders. In the fight, a Naga fires a poisonous agniban (a lethal poisoned fire arrow) at Shiva. Sati covers him and gets grievously injured. Unlike the earlier instances, all the Nagas are killed along with several Chandravanshi soldiers while the remaining flee from the battle. From these conflicts, Shiva understands that Chandravanshis with the help of Nagas are attacking Suryavanshis repeatedly to kidnap Sati. There is an underlying suggestion that Shiva does something drastic which he is not supposed to do for the sake of Sati. Sati recovers by drinking Somras offered by Ayurvati. This news brings Daksha and his two thousand strong army to Koonj.

Here, the conflict between King Dilipa and King Daksha is linked to control over the water resources of River Yamuna and River Saraswathi as their courses meet. Dilipa believes that Daksha is wasting river waters in the guise of preparing Somras and blocks Yamuna waters from flowing into Saraswathi. "Instead of flowing south, it started flowing east to meet their main river, Ganga" (IoM, p. 108) creating water scarcity in Meluha. Daksha feels that they want to "kill the Saraswati to harm us" (IoM, p. 108). This is regarded as a root cause of animosity between followers of Moon and Sun. Daksha wants to declare an all-out war against Dilipa. Again, we see here Shiva's quest for peace. He says,

“I wonder if we could have avoided bloodshed if we shared our good fortunemore willingly” (IoM, p.107). If I have learnt one thing from the pointless battles of my land, it is that wars should be the last resort. If there is an alternative available what is the harm in saving some young soldier’s life? Surely, a mother would bless us for it (IoM, p.110).

While Daksha and his army are away, another army of Chandravanshis led by Nagas kill all the brahmins on Mount Mandar, the research centre of Meluha. Shiva reaches the place to search for the scientist Brihaspati’s body. There he finds a Naga bracelet forcing him to conclude that Nagas are behind the attack. Kanakhala, the Prime Minister of Meluha wants Shiva to request Daksha to interact with Dilipa to see if war could be avoided. Shiva says, “Striving for a peaceful resolution will help in avoiding the deaths of innocents”, said Shiva (IoM, p. 312). Accordingly, Daksha orders Dilipa, the Chandravanshi king to capture and surrender the Mount Mandar attackers to him. However, Dilipa replies with a friendly letter highlighting the need to fight unitedly against the evil while promising to act against the assassins. Enraged with this reply, Daksha orders an attack led by Shiva.

This conflict at Mount Mandar makes it inevitable for Shiva to attack the Chandravanshis and Nagas as he vows to avenge the attack on Meluhans. Shiva trains a strong army of five thousand archers and plans a strategic defence formation in the form of a tortoise shell that fortifies the army against the invaders.

He proclaims that He is Mahadev. Shiva addresses the army before the war. He says,

“A man becomes a Mahadev when he fights for good. A Mahadev is not born as one from his mother’s womb. He is forged in the heat of battle when he wages a war to destroy evil.

I am a Mahadev.

I am not the only one.

I see a hundred thousand Mahadevs in front of me. I see a hundred thousand men willing to fight on the side of good! I see a hundred thousand men willing to battle evil!

I see a hundred thousand men capable of destroying evil.” (IoM, p. 345)

Saying this, he raids Swadweep, the kingdom of Chandravanshis with Parvateswar, Chief of Suryavansh Army. Shiva uses Trishul, a trident shaped weapon and unleashes terror on the enemies. This weapon is new to both the warring armies and as an inventor of this weapon he is immediately recognised by the soldiers as a reincarnation of God Mahadev. Meluhans win the battle. But, to his dismay, none of the Nagas are killed in the battle while it leaves a trail of devastation and death of many innocent Chandravanshis forcing King Dilipa and his son to surrender.

After the conflict, Shiva interacts with Anandamayi and once again wonders as to what he gained from this conflict. He sees death of several innocent soldiers around him. A true warrior seeks to fulfil the true objective of a war and his objective was to fight the Nagas who attacked Mount Mandar and critically injured Sati. Here, Shiva fails in his objective. He worries, ‘Whathave I done?’...an agonized whisper suffused the tent with its resonant grief” (IoM, p. 371). Shiva realized with pain and self-humiliation that Chandravanshis are not evil.

## 6. Social Reform

The Karachappa moral police incident highlights the discriminatory practices of the time. Through this sub-plot, Amish informs the reader that during 1900BC people believed in Karma as a genetic designer of one’s rebirth. According to Karma, it is one’s actions and deeds in the previous life that decide how one is born again in this world. Vikarmas are those born again who have performed unacceptable actions in the past and therefore should be excluded from normal social life. As a Vikarma, Sati should not get married. Shiva asks,

“Who are Vikarma women?”

Nandi replies,

“Vikarma are people who have been punished in this birth for the sins of their previous birth. Hence, they have to live this life with dignity and tolerate their present sufferings with grace. It is the only way; they can wipe their Karmas clean of the sins of their previous births. Vikarma men have their own order of penance and women have their own order... They are not allowed to marry since they may contaminate 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 daily life” (IoM, pp. 92 - 95).

This plot is used to project Shiva's next stage in deification as a social reformer and a legislator. Shiva says, “Well to be honest, it sounds like a rather unfair law to me” (p. 96). Promptly Shiva abolishes the practice of such discriminatory law much to the relief of Daksha and the people of Meluha. Shiva orders Daksha to scrap this law. He says,

“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.”

Daksha, accepting Shiva as a God says,

“Of course, my lord. The proclamation will state that the entire Vikarma law has been scrapped. Once you sign it, it will become law” (IoM, p. 282).

Here, Gods and their activities are used in bringing awareness to solve social problems of discrimination. Shiva has abolished the obsolete laws of the land after being accepted as God, Neelakanth. He marries Sati as promised. Later in the story, Shiva builds an army of Vikarmas and trains in the art of metallurgy and archery to fight against the Chandravanshis. In one of his travels, even before the vikarma law is repealed, he touches the feet of a blindvikarma father to show the Godly quality of acceptance.

Here, Amish shows the conflict between the two kingdoms as more ideological and social in nature. The motto of Suryavanshi Kingdom is “Satya (Truth), Dharma (Duty), Maan (Honor)” (IoM, p. 63). This is reflected in their way of life. Suryavanshi's follow rules rigidly and literally. Even the King is no exception. They do not judge rules, hence the practice of social discrimination like Vikarma and restrictions on the availability of Somras. They believe that they blindly follow the rules laid down by Lord Rama. In contrast, the motto of Chandravanshi kingdom is “Shringar (Passion), Saundarya (Beauty), Swatantrata (Freedom)” (IoM, p. 352) reflecting their free spirit. They believe so much in freedom that some groups join hands with Nagas, the cursed and deformed beings of society with a strong hatred towards Brahmins. Cities of both the kingdoms are well planned except for the presence of slums and slum colonies in Chandravanshi cities. Though both Suryavanshis and Chandravanshi's hail Ram as their Supreme God, his temple is in Ayodhya, his place of birth and capital city of Chandravanshi kingdom.

During Shiva's absence, Nagas attack the Suryavanshis on Mount Mandara and abduct their inventor desecrating the temples and destroying the Somras processing facility. This makes Shiva angrier towards Nagas. Later Nagas totally devastated the mount Mandar killing many inventors, even the chief scientist goes missing. When Shiva and his troop reach there they were shocked, in ruins Shiva finds a Naga's bracelet, a symbol of aum, making sure that the Nagas are involved in this attack. Shiva takes vow to destroy the Naga.

Shiva was so enraged by this attack that he declares war on the Chandravanshis. On the declaration of war Suryavanshi's army starts their war preparation. They planned to attack in abow shape with tortoise formation in the middle and a hidden archery at the back. Shiva will lead the army along with general Parvateshwar, Vakra, Nandi and Veerbhadra. Chandravanshi's on the other hand plan to attack in parallel lines of fifty squads each having five thousand soldiers to

move from back to side under the leadership of Dilipa. In this Dharmayudh, the holy war,

Suryavanshis win and Dilipa surrenders with his son Bhagirath and comes to Daksha. Here Daksha declares Parvateshwar as viceroy of Swadeep, the Chandravanshis kingdom. In concluding last two chapters Shiva and his troop reaches Ayodhya. On the main gate a motto was written 'shringar, sundarya ,swatantra'.

There is a hot discussion between Anandmayi and Parvataeshwaron Chandravanshis, Suryavanshis and on lord Ram. Shiva here visited Ramjanmabhomi temple, he meets a priest who preaches him about the karma, bhagya and his choices in life which will guide him in future. He challenges Shiva to find, 'what is evil?'. The book ends with an attack by a Naga on Sati and Shiva saving her.

Here it is clearly examined that all the relations are disconnected successfully by Shiva from the threshold of the known and visible world to endure a form of metamorphosis. Shiva submits himself to transform his attire when he visits the temple of Lord Ram at Ayodhya, the capital of Swadeep and it is informed by an old priest that it is of his choices, karma and fate in life by which he will be guided in future. There Shiva has landed into the world of the Nagas where he is taken charge for supporting the Nagas who are being stood on the side of Sati. Here it is the end of the first book, *The Immortals of Meluha*, the initial one of the series of Shiva Trilogy by Amish Tripathi.

The persons like Kali, Ganesh, Kartik and Sati become gods and goddess in future. Though Shiva's meeting with Kali is observed as the meeting with the goddess, the protagonist does not win the love of the goddess in this second book because he has already won the love of Sati who is intended to become goddess in the end of the first book itself.

## References

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Amish Tripathi. *The Immortals of Meluha*. Westland, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> The credit of familiarizing the term goes to Charles de Lint and Terri Windling when they were working on Oxford Series of *Fantasy Stories*.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/books/mythological-fiction-and-mythology-are-different-devdutt-pattanaik-4791044/>

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(Pattanaik)

<sup>iv</sup> Olivelle, Patrick. "karma". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 21 Feb. 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/karma>. Accessed 21 October 2021.

<sup>v</sup> Shiva Purāṇa is described in Wikipedia as one of the eighteen great Purāṇas, a genre of Sanskrit texts in Hinduism, and part of the Shaivism literature corpus. It primarily centers around the Hindu god Shiva and goddess Parvati but references and reveres all gods.

<sup>vi</sup> one of the three Super Gods of Hinduism – Shiva, the Destroyer; Brahma, the Creator; and Vishnu, the Protector.

<sup>vii</sup> Guna and Pakrati are two Tibetan tribes that live on the fringes of Lake Manasarover in the Himalayas.

<sup>viii</sup> Two legendary dynasties of India – Suryavanshis, the worshippers of Sun and the Chandravanshis' the worshippers of Moon. While the formers follow the Solar Calendar, the latter follow the lunar. The novel informs us that these bipolar affiliationssimilar to male and female or good and evilare necessary to strike a balance of life and humanity on the planet Earth.

<sup>ix</sup>Meluha is regarded as a Bronze Age Indus Valley settlement with a Sumerian leaning. However, in this novel it is a near perfect empire created many centuries earlier by Lord Ram, one of the greatest monarchs that ever lived.

<sup>x</sup><https://www.britannica.com/topic/churning-of-the-ocean-of-milk>

<sup>xi</sup>Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1949.

<sup>xii</sup>In Sanskrit, saptha means seven and rishi is a person of great knowledge, an intellect, saint, etc. They are Vashistha, Marichi, Pulastya, Pulaha, Atri, Angiras and Kratu.

<sup>xiii</sup>A Hindu Super God who is famous for monogamy and a principled way of living. His governance and reign were recorded as best and unparalleled to any other king in the annals of world mythology or history.

<sup>xiv</sup>Somras is a Himalayan plant potion and is regarded as the king of all ayurvedic medicines in *Rigveda*.

<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.authoramish.com/mahadev-myth/>

<sup>xvi</sup>"The whole thing is there, you see. The world of space and time, and matter and energy, the world of creation and destruction, the world of psychology...We (the West) don't have anything remotely approaching such a comprehensive symbol, which is both cosmic and psychological, and spiritual," said Aldous Huxley about Natraj, the dancing form of God Shiva in an Interview *Speaking Personally* in 1961. [https://www.rarebooksocietyofindia.org/postDetail.php?id=196174216674\\_10153443073251675](https://www.rarebooksocietyofindia.org/postDetail.php?id=196174216674_10153443073251675)

—Aldous Huxley, 1961

<sup>xvii</sup>The sub-plot involving Mandhara holds her as responsible for Ram's banishment from Kingdom of Ayodhya, as it was she who manipulated Queen Kaikeyi to make that wish to King Dasaradha, Ram's father. Ram leaves for the forest on his father's order causing great sorrow to his countryfolks.

<sup>xviii</sup>A Sacred Ritual performed to appease gods and Goddesses.