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The Hero and the Hero-Worship: *The Immortals of Meluha*

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“Worship of a hero is transcendent admiration of a great man”¹(14).

Amish’s fictional faculty makes our legendary divinity alive in the pages of *The Immortals of Meluha*. Shiva, the hero, the protagonist of the novel is “A man who rose to become godlike because of his karma”²(xv). He is a blend of wit and bravery; an unmatched swordsman with cutting edges of intelligence and honest behavior. Godliness including childlike innocence, unraveled sacrificing spirit to save children, women and downtrodden is natural to him. For Shiva, his tribe comes first if he deserves a good destiny beyond the high mountains.

Shiva’s heroic deeds expand three volumes of the *Shiva Trilogy*. The present paper takes into account only the first one, *The Immortal of Meluha*. Shiva, an untiring robust young man in the personal appearance of an ascetic has a stature of an epic hero. “An epic hero is larger than life, a figure from a history or legend, usually favored by or even partially descended from deities, but aligned more closely with mortal figures in popular portrayals”⁴. The hero embarks on a cyclical journey or quest, faces adversaries, who try to defeat him in his journey, gathers allies along his journey, and returns home significantly transformed by his journey. The epic hero illustrates traits, performs deeds, and exemplifies certain morals that are valued by the society from which the epic originates. They usually embody cultural and religious beliefs of the people. Many epic heroes are recurring characters in the legends of their native culture. Epic heroes are superhuman in that they are smarter, stronger, and braver than average humans. An epic hero can also be a warrior of some sort who performs extraordinary tasks that most people find difficult.

Shiva is worshipped throughout India. His journey from ordinary Shiva to *Mahadev*, the God of gods is the result of his sublime thoughts and heroic deeds. Hero-worship is “heartfelt prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike form of a man”¹ (5). Hero-worship is “the basis of religion, Loyalty and Religion. Hero not the ‘creature of time’: Hero-worship indestructible”¹(191). Shiva’s heroic deeds reward him immortality in the world of mortals. Immortality is attributed to those who practice the human values and high ideals in life due to their super egoistic psychological constitution. It is neither easy nor “our natural birth right, a thing to which we are entitled but a prize to be won”³(1951).

Meluha is in deep trouble. Repeated attacks of *Chandravanshis* and *Nagas* have disturbed the peace of nearly perfect society of *Meluha*. Only and only the *Neelkanth*, the savior according to the myth can save them. And “He has come”. The uncouth savior, ignorant of the vile designs of depraved Daksha declares:

If they need my help, I can't turn away from them. All the same time, how can I leave our tribe all by themselves out here?²(29).

How can Heroism be attained in the absence of miseries, setbacks and struggles in the life of a man? Yes, Shiva too bears a scarred conscience in a nightmare. His soul was wounded twice. The first, he suffers the guilt of leaving his motherland along with his tribe to save them from everyday bloodshed and senseless evasions of *Pakritis*. And the second he experiences the guilt when as a child he runs away leaving behind a helpless woman crying and undergoing brutal intercourse in the clutch of a monster. He is not ready to burden his soul with the third one and so he will fight against or purge all that is evil, unfair or unnatural. Justice for women and safety for his tribe are the prime concern in his life.

Sati is a *vikarma* widow cursed twice by the cruel destiny which kills her husband first and then her unborn baby in the womb. Her presence is regarded ominous and her touch is polluting. Sati advises Shiva to go for *shuddhikaran* when he touches her ankle during his first dance performance in the holy presence of Gurugi. He gets disturbed utterly and becomes defiant. When this happens again Shiva's disgruntlement surfaces against her indifferent behavior and he says, “Don't you want me to fight for you. Stop this unfairness that society has subjected to you”²(200). Sati outrageously shouts, “I don't need your protection! I can't be saved”²(200). Brihaspati too views that Sati genuine believes that she deserves to be a *vikarma*. Shiva gains respect in the eyes of Sati by upholding her to a respectable position from an abominable *vikarma* woman. He inculcates self respect and confidence to fight against Tarak, an evil soul. Parvateshwar testifies this by expressing his gratitude to Shiva:

I would like to thank you for helping Sati in her Agnipariksha. It was your clear thinking which led to victory...If there is any person in the world that I look at with a feeling, beyond a sense of duty, it is Sati, I thank you for helping her² (242)

And this causes germination of love in the heart of Sati who can't stop herself revealing that:

Apparently the earth sometimes thinks of the possibility of coming closer to Sun. But she can't do that she is so base and his brilliance so searing, that she will cause destruction if she draws him closer² (236).

Shiva, as a romantic hero, impresses Sati. He knows that Sati will be a perfect life partner and his pursuit of the self ends with his union with her as his whole being, his body mind and soul are pursuing her. And he is sure that without her, his life would be meaningless and his soul's existence incomplete. A chain of surprising events brings Sati closer to Shiva. The lord, Shiva with Aristnemi defeats the *Chandravanshi* and foils his ill intention of kidnapping Sati and Veerini who were returning from Mandar. Sati is highly impressed and extols Shiva's valor in the presence of emperor Daksha:

It was Shiva who saved the day, father. He figured out the real plan of *Chandravanshis* and rallied everyone at the crucial moment. It was because of him that we beat them back²(164).

General Parvateshwar is the only Meluhan whose respect Shiva would certainly like to earn as he is one of the most honest Suryavanshis and a true follower of Lord Ram. Shiva has enough moral strength and strategic acumen to earn respect in the eyes of the General. He qualifies the eligibility criteria set by Parvateshwar in his personal and professional domains. Parvateshwar is very clear about the role of training and preparation in the life of soldiers as he himself rose from the position of a soldier to the General of the Meluhan army. He thinks that every Meluhan male or female has to earn his station in life with proper training and preparation, not just get it on a silver platter just because of a blue throat (ironically in terms of Shiva). So Parvateshwar critically comments on Shiva in the court of King Daksha:

Here we are putting an untrained man on a pedestal and acting as though he is our savior. For all we know, he might lead us to complete disaster. We are acting on faith, not logic or laws or even experience² (196).

The same Parvateshwar bends before Shiva for his selfless attitude to sacrifice on the altar of Patriotism. It is proved when Vraka who is true devotee of Neelkanth, and wants him to fight with them against *Chandravanshis*. But Parvateshwar is of opinion that this responsibility cannot be imposed on Shiva just because he has a blue throat. He is obviously in love and not going to risk Sati being bereaved again. And therefore the General believes that none equals to Lord Ram, he is the only one. But Shiva is straight forward, every soldier's life is precious for him; vengeance of Meluha is important in the war between good and evil without the bystanders in a *dharmayudh*(holy war). Daksha does not want to stake Shiva's life so he pleads him not to fight as many are willing to shed their blood for him. But Shiva retorts, "If they are willing to shed their blood for me, then I must be willing to shed my blood for them"²(338). And Parvateshwar's heart was swamped by the greatest joy a *Suryavanshi* could feel –the joy of finally finding a man worth following. At this crucial moment, Shiva pays his reverence to Sati, a Patriotic lady when he says:

Nothing will happen... And Sati would die a thousand deaths if she saw her husband stay away from a *dharmayudh*. She would lose respect for me. If she weren't pregnant, she would have been fighting alongside me, shoulder to shoulder² (338).

To Shiva, an iconoclast, the concept of *Shuddhikaran* against the polluting touch of *Vikarma* people seems awkward in the systematic and just society of Meluha. He wants to uproot prevailing superstition practiced in the name of the law of karma. For him, all men are equal as a part of Nature. He believes that fate is unkind and people cruel, no one wants to share indignity and pain inflicted upon them. Neelkanth is sensitive enough to declare that, "I will stop this nonsense"²(198). While visiting Kotdwaar, Shiva is surprised at the patriotism of a blind *Vikarma* who still loves a country that treats him so unfairly. Neelkanth touched the feet of the *Vikarma* and says, "Bless me sir, so that I find strength to fight for a man as patriotic as you"²(198). While doing so, he cares not even if Sati, Brihaspati, or Emperor himself is annoyed with him. Shiva needs no purgation or *Shuddhikaran* in any form against the grubby touch of a *Vikarma* because he wants to save them from leading the life of an outcast and therefore, he

advocates his point, “Well if law says that my touching that poor blind man is illegal , then law is wrong”²(199). And this wrong law is finally detached from the constitution on the request of Shiva to king Daksha.

As we know that the story of the novel takes sustenance from the myth of *Neelkanth*, a savior. The different issues in the novel like shifting of Gunas to Meluha, Shiva’s request to Daksh for elimination of *Vikarma* law, love making and remarrying to Sati, a *Vikarma* widow, the episode of Tarak, an evil soul, formation of *Vikarma* troop, his decisions before and after Dharmayuda against Nagas or *Chandravanshis* prove that Amish keeps his hero away from all sorts of controversies and his decisions are unanimously accepted. And if there is any, it is resolved at the same time. If any attack is inflicted on Shiva, it is immediately countered and nullified; and thus the story follows a natural course and the hero remains invincible in all the ways.

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