

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

5th Year of Open Access

Vol. 5, Issue-6 December 2014

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Cultural Crisis, Dislocation, Displacement and Dispossession of the Gunas in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy 1: The Immortals of Meluha*

Suganthi Medasani

Ph.D Research Scholar,
Department of English and Foreign Languages,
SRM University, Kattankulathur,
Kancheepuram District- 603203

&

Dr. B. Cauveri

Assistant Professor,
Department of English and Foreign Languages,
SRM University, Kattankulathur,
Kancheepuram District- 603203

This ancient land which many of us claim our home land today once was a home land to various cultures and superior civilizations. Our ancestors believed and accepted that they were mere fragments of nature. Their interpretations, perspectives, dreams, and imaginations had resulted in developing great societies which were ruled by Great Kings. To our amazement, we still hear stories of Gods, Kings and Heroes who were not lost or diminished due to the advancement of Science rather they grew stronger in our subconscious mind.

Hence, in recent times Mythology and History have become a very strong and powerful genre in India as well as in many countries. There is a paradigm shift in many Indian writers who have written novels based on Mythology and History. These writers have shown new perspectives, broken old conventions, avoided stereotyping, created characters and conveyed messages through brilliant narratives.

From time immemorial, human race had wandered the length and breadth of the earth in search of food, shelter and suitable climatic condition. Some of our ancestors had left strong imprints on the face of the Earth to be exhumed, discovered, and deciphered by us. Thus, History had begun recording most of the events and continues recording even in our present day. Upon carefully analysing the History of our past and present we realise that man has experienced cultural crisis, dislocation, displacement and dispossession.

When we turn a few pages of Indian legendary epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, we are astonished to observe that most of the great heroes were forced to live in exile; however, they successfully created or formed their new capitals and new societies.

In *The Ramayana*, the nearly perfect hero, Lord Vishnu's incarnation, the great Prince of Ayodhya Sri Ram, obeyed his father's order and went on exile for fourteen years. Ram was concerned about his wife, beloved Sita, who having been born and raised in luxury, had to face the perils of the jungle. She had to sleep on plain earth, eat only fruits and vegetables, whichever was available. She had to be vigilant all the time because forest was an unknown territory for her, Ram and Lakshman. So, we learn of a different kind of dislocation, dispossession and displacement here.

In modern times, we see many, especially, the younger generation who puts humongous efforts to prove and establish themselves to settle down in foreign countries. In the foreign soil they have to abide by the laws of foreign countries. So, this is another kind of calculated dislocation and displacement where the move is made for better economic prospects.

Every now and then we hear or read heart-breaking true stories about people who try to cross the borders of other countries. For example, Mexican nationals jump into the mighty waters of Pacific Ocean and swim stealthily to escape the eyes of the vigilant United States' patrol. To our amazement, some of them even succeed in their life-risking venture, though many are caught red-handed in the process.

Now, let us travel back in time approximately to 1900 B.C and land on the paradise which the author Amish Tripathi calls Meluha, and today we recognize as Jammu and Kashmir. In this paper, we shall analyse Amish's novel, *Shiva Trilogy 1: The Immortals of Meluha*.

The first novel introduced Shiva, as a simple tribal leader of the Gunas, who lived on the banks of Manasarovar Lake and Mt. Kailash in Tibet. Shiva was barely twenty-one years old but he was the leader of the tribes called the Gunas. In the beginning of the first novel, Shiva was shown in a worried and confused state of mind. The reason was that he wanted to protect his people, the Gunas, from the constant attacks of another tribe named the Pakratris at any cost. Pakratris were greedy, blood-thirsty and barbaric whose only aim was to destroy every single man, woman and a child who belonged to the Gunas. Pakratris' main objective was to capture the lush, fertile lands of the Gunas that spread right next to the Manasarovar Lake which was also the prime land in all of Tibet. Hence, the Gunas and the Pakratris stand as arch enemies. However, the Gunas were led by a leader Shiva who was noble in heart; on the otherhand, Pakratris were led by Yakhya who was thoroughly evil in heart.

Shiva was given an offer by the neighbouring Emperor of Meluha, Daksha, to immigrate along with his entire clan to Meluha. The Meluhan Captain Nandi came to Mount Kailash with a clear instruction from his emperor to persuade the immigrants to go with him to Meluha and never to reveal their true purpose or their secrets to Shiva or his fellow Gunas. As readers, we now observe how cultural crisis, dislocation, dispossession and displacement had occurred and how these combined forces had changed the course of Shiva's life. Thus an ordinary man's nobility finally leads him through his quest to his destiny.

Nandi says,

“Come to our land. It lies beyond the great mountains. Others call it Meluha. I call it Heaven. Our government has an offer for immigrants. You will be given fertile land and resources for farming. Today, your tribe, the Gunas, fight for survival in this rough, arid land. Meluha offers you a lifestyle beyond your wildest dreams. We ask for nothing in return. Just live in peace, pay your taxes and follow the laws of the land.” (p.2)

The above were the words of Nandi who persuaded Shiva.

In reply,

Shiva mused that he would certainly not be a chief in this new land. *Would I really miss that so much?* His tribe would have to live by the laws of the foreigners. They would have to work everyday for a living.

That is better than fighting everyday just to stay alive! (p.2)

Here, we are able to get a clear picture why in the first place someone would want to immigrate and the probable consequences of living in a foreign land, following the laws of that land. Also, it outweighs every other petty issue because the very survival of Gunas was at stake at that moment.

Shiva speaks to the Gunas. Powerful emotions coursed through every vein of Shiva and finally he revealed his mind to his people.

They kill woman and children when they can't beat us. A livid Shiva called the entire tribe to the centre of the village. His mind was made. This land is for barbarians! We have fought pointless battles with no end in sight. (pg.5)

He continues:

... I want to go with them to Meluha. But this cannot be my decision alone.

(p.6)

Here we listen to the honest and sincere words of a people's man, and a true leader.

They spoke in one voice. 'Your decision is our decision' (p.6)

This conversation won the attention and hearts of Nandi and the Meluhans. As readers, our response is the same, because the author is extra cautious to show Shiva first, as an uncivilized simple man; second, as a capable and worthy leader; finally, as a potential man who will eventually become a God and a Mahadev. Shiva believes in his Karma, his actions, and not merely in customary beliefs or legends, and thus the author succeeds in making the readers empathise with him.

Meluhans were in search of 'the Neelkanth' (God with a blue throat) for centuries. They believed in the legend that their saviour would emerge from a foreign land and destroy evil. This was the reason, captain Nandi was sent by the Emperor Daksha. Meluha was under threat by their enemy Chandravanshis who had changed the course of their sacred river Saraswathi. The Meluhans who were Suryavanshis possessed the knowledge of preparing 'Somras' the immortal drink, which when consumed at constant intervals bestowed a long, healthy and youthful life. Thus, Chandravanshis wanted to stop the production of 'Somras' which cannot be made without the waters of the revered river Saraswathi.

According to the legend, only, Neelkanth who was the reincarnation of Lord Rudra could destroy evil. That is why, Emperor Daksha had given clear instruction to the immigration officers at Meluha to administer "Somras" to all the foreign immigrants. As part of immigration procedure, Shiva and Gunas were quarantined and treated for any possible epidemics.

Shiva observed some changes in his body – his frost bitten toe, his knee and shoulder were healed once he had taken the Somras. Shiva also felt stronger but he was sweating profusely. His throat felt unusually cold. Other Gunas were running a high fever.

Then, the most efficient Meluhan doctor Ayurvati made sure that all of them were treated. When, Ayurvati instructed Shiva to have bath, Shiva was stubborn that he would take care of his people first. Ayurvati was shocked and angry at this, as she could not digest the fact that Shiva, a simple man dared to disobey her words.

Shiva glared at Ayurvati as he made a heroic effort to rein in the curses that wanted to leap out of his mouth. (p.21)

Ayurvati too glared back at Shiva. She was used to being obeyed. She was a doctor,.. But in her long years of experience she had also seen a few patients like Shiva, especially from the nobility...such patients had to be reasoned with not instructed. Yet, this was a simple immigrant. Not some noblemen! (p.21)

The above scene from the novel depicts the ingrained attitude of the Meluhan doctor Ayurvati. She strongly felt that she was above Shiva, who was after all an ordinary immigrant from a foreign land, an uncivilized and an uncouth barbarian.

Here, we could visualize two contrasting characters, Shiva and Ayurvati. Shiva was born and raised in a village on the foot hills of Mt. Kailash. He led a simple rural life, innocent but very brave, spoke in a substandard language which was unacceptable by many elite and educated people like Ayurvati.

On the other hand, we see Ayurvati who belonged to the civilized, highly sophisticated society and accustomed to an urban life style. She was highly educated, talented, well-trained and a respected doctor in all of Meluha. It was natural for someone who possessed a thorough knowledge of medicines and in particular 'Somras', to get infuriated at the defiant and crude behaviour of such an immigrant as Shiva. Yet, Ayurvati remained calm and composed.

Amish, the author is convincing in portraying how different cultures affect or influence people; what happens to people when they are displaced from one society to another, and also when and how the unexpected hits the 'others' in a foreign land.

Later on, in the story it was revealed that Shiva was their Neelkanth, but Daksha had not been honest with him. During one of the meetings with Emperor Daksha, Shiva questioned him thus:

Do you agree that honesty is required to make any friendship work? Even if it means deeply offending your friend with the truth? (p.117)

Then Daksha replied to Shiva:

I am truly sorry my Lord, said Daksha. ...Somras has considerably positive effects on your body. (p.118)

But Shiva spoke firmly,

Do you know that my tribe was also probably given the Somras that night? And they fell seriously ill, perhaps because of the Somras?

... You should have told us the complete truth at Mt. Kailash. Then you should have let *us* make an informed choice rather than *you* making a choice for us. We probably would still have come to Meluha anyway but then it would have been *our* choice.

"Please forgive us the deception, my Lord." said Daksha, with guilty regret. (p.118)

Only now the readers understand clearly the hidden motive of Daksha. Also, through Shiva's words we realise his agony. The unabashed character of Daksha, his ulterior motive, the Meluhans' systematic search for Neelkanth together form the crux of the story.

To conclude, when we first looked at displacement and dislocation in this novel, it appeared as a simple process where people moved from one place to the other. But later we understand that its complexity is multi-layered, and we stumble on the facts when we unravel each layer. These phenomena actually help in building many interesting twists in the story. The author has used them skilfully to captivate the readers. Today, Amish is one of the best-selling authors, whose debut novel is based on Hindu Mythology which is also a top listed fiction and has sold millions of copies across the country.

Works Cited:

1. Tripathi, Amish. *The Immortals of Meluha: Book 1 of the Shiva Trilogy*. Westland Ltd, 2010.