



SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN AMISH TRIPATHI'S SHIVA TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

Pre-Aryan history of India provides insight of the highly civilized race in India. An overlook of Indian civilization can viewed through the Hindu scriptures such as Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Epics, Puranas and other works. The scriptures represent Aryans as superior while Non Aryans as Dada, Dasyu, fifth Vasna or Shudras, Ati- Shudras and untouchables. One section of Hindu society -Shudra has been treated persecuted. Among Shudras, 'Nirvasita' were treated even inhumanly. This chapter was pushed at the margins of Hindu society and they have been identified differentl in different ages with the offensive terms. They were mainly classified as untouchables. It is believed that touching to them was polluting, even their shadows was polluting to the orthodox Hindus. In the modern times, marginal literature refers to the writings belonging to communities and classes living on the margins of the socio - political structures. The Immortals of Meluha, the debut work of the trilogy, provides a way to justify those who have been marginalized since ages. The fiction inculcated social conciseness and promotes a new sense of self esteem. The new dimension was given by Amish in his novels to representing the pain and worries of the oppressed people. In Shiva Trilogy, Amish creates sympathy and emphathy through different people impacted by in the novel such as Sati, Vikrama, Nagas and people with disabilities. This present research aims to explore the the social injustice in Meluhan society through the protagonist Shiva.

INTRODUCTION

The novel begins with a battle between Gunas and Pakratis, two tribes in Tibet. Shiva, a young man from Gunas begins his journey to search for better future for his tribe under the guidance of Nandi from Mt.Kailash to Meluha and Swadeep. Meluha takes us to ancient

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Indian culture especially with its social structure. society has been cleft into four categories - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. In the Bhagavad Gita, chapter 4, verse 13 The Lord says: "The fourfold caste has been created by me according to the differentiation of Guna and Karma". Brahmins represent teachers, lawyers, priests, and other intellectual professionals. Kshatriyas are the warriors and rulers while craftsmen, traders and business people are considered as Vaishyas and the Shudras who are the farmers and workers. In this social order, one race cannot do another's job. Every caste has been allotted a particular amulet. The amulet symbolizing the shoulders of the Parmatma means that the wearer is a Kshatriya. Nandi gives a clear picture of this social structure as:

Well, if the lines are drawn to represent the head of the Parmatma, it would mean the wearer is a Brahmin. The symbol for a Vaishya would be the lines forming a symbol of the thighs of the Parmatma. And the feet of the Parmatma on the amulet would make the wearer a Shudra.(IM 38)

Thus, Amulets and ordained symbols were distributed among each Meluhan. The amulets that categorically embody their castes are supposed to wear round the clock. The Meluhans claim themselves to be the followers of the Suryavanshi kings a descendants of the Sun. They are the devotees of Lord Ram who was a Suryavanshi king. They strongly believes have in the teaching of Lord Ram. Their rival Swadeepans are the descendants of the moon. The Meluhans believe that these people are crooked, unreliable and lazy without rules, morality and honour. They blamed Chandrvanshis as a blot on humanity. The Chandravanshis and Nagas represents a marginal part of the Meluhan society in the novel. In the Vedantic tradition there is the concept of a natural 'Law of Karma.' The law of karma is similar to Newton's Law that is every action has its equal and opposite reaction. The results of the law of karma are individual and unmistakable. The answer to the question, 'why bad things happen to good people?' is 'karma'. The law of karma continues even if the people do not remember the action that triggers the current reaction. The wheels of karma are driven by the free will and desire of the embodied spirits. This concept is explained in more detailed in the following line. 'Now who the bloody hell are the nagas?' asked Shiva. "They are cursed people, my Lord," gasped Nandi. "They are born with hideous deformities because of the sins of their previous births. Deformities like extra hands or horribly misshapen faces."(IM, 59) ...Deformities like extra hands or misshapen faces...They are not allowed to live in the Sapt Sindhu"(Indus, Saraswati, Yamuna, Ganga Sarayu, Brahmputra and Narmada).The city of the Nagas exists to the south of Narmada,beyond the border of Meluha land. In a song Naga describes the plight of their life and ask a question to God

*"You were my world, my God, my creator
And yet, You abandoned me
I did not seek you. You called me,
And yet, You abandoned me.
I honored You, lived by your rules,*

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*coloured myself in Your colour
And yet. You abandoned me.
You hurt me, you deserted me,
You failed in your duties,
And yet, I am the monster.
Tell me lord, what can I” (SN 144)*

Besides Chandravanshis and Nagas, there are another group of marginalized people in the novel. This group includes women, the elderly and people with disabilities. Such people called as Vikarma in the fiction. Vikrama's in Meluha society are made to believe themselves as slaves . They are considered as untouchables and never allow others to be touched. They are associated with their abnormalities and the mother of still- born child who suffer from their misery in their lives. If Someone has touches a Vikrama they must undergo the ritual of Shudhikaran. Shiva enquires about these people and Nandi reports:

Vikarma people, my Lord, are people who have been punished in this birth for the sins of their previous birth. Hence they have to live this life out with dignity and tolerate their present suffering with grace. This is the only way they can wipe their karma clean of the sins of their previous births. Vikarma men have their own order of penance and women have their own order (IM 92-93). ...They have to pray for forgiveness every month to Lord Agni, the purifying Fire God, though a specifically mandated puja. 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”.(IM 93)

The Vikarma people were ostracized from the main stream of the society. They have to live a lonely life even they are not allowed to marry since they can contaminate others with their ill fate. Equally they should not touch someone who has no relationship or is not part of their daily life. Meluhan ideology has the strategic insight to keep it distinct. If they start to oppose the dominant discourse, it might lead to instability:

“Many such discontented people can become a threat to society as a whole..... if you make a person believe that his misfortune in this birth is due to his sins in his previous birth, he will resign himself to his fate and not vent his fury on society at large” (IM 211).

If a woman gives birth to a still born child, she becomes a Vikarma because she might have committed terrible sin in her previous birth. If a man suddenly fall ill and is paralyzed by incurable disease it means that the universe is punishing him for the sins of his previous birth. All these sins of people are decided by the Pandits in the temples. This ridiculous practice of

branding a person as Vikarma continues for other reasons such as inheritance, disabilities or malnutrition.

Shiva is fascinated by Sati's beautiful dance. After touching her elbow to move it to the correct angle. Sati immediately recoils in horror and says, "Please go for a Shudhikaran, Shiva before nightfall" (IM 103). But Shiva says,

"I am sorry, but I think this system is completely unfair. I have heard that almost one twentieth of the people in Meluha are Vikrama. Are you going to keep so many people as outcast forever? This system needs to change." (IM 212)

Shiva touches Sati but did not undergo the purification rituals. While his journey to the Meluhan Empire Shiva visits Kotdwaar and happens to see a blind man. That blind person has been considered as a Vikarma by the Meluhans because of his deformity twenty years ago. He is not supposed to touch the Neelkanth. Hence Vikarma people are considered as a bearers of bad luck in the novel.

The Vikarma people are highly submissive and meek while observing Vikarma rules. They have completely surrendered themselves to the Meluhan social ethics. They have no personal grudge or complain against this social recognition. They believe and are made to believe that their low status is given by the Almighty himself due to their terrible sins of the previous birth. Hence the sanction behind this meanness is supreme or godly. The person who complaints about against this recognition is considered to be a double sinner. The spectacle of these people in the society is awesome. When the procession of Vikarma women walked silently on, the normally quiet market street becomes almost deathly silent. Though Sati is one of the most beautiful, honest, straight forward, brave and intelligent women in Meluha still she is declared a Vikarma her only fault is that she has given birth to a still born child. She genuinely believes that she deserves to be a Vikarma and consequent punishment. She strictly adheres to all other rules laid down for Vikarmas. When Sati's aid and confidant Krittika raises question over this system, Sati glares:

"Rules are all that I live by. What have I got to do with happiness? Don't ever dare to speak to me about this again." (IM 214).

Vikarma are usually not allowed to attend a yagna in Meluha. There is no Vikarma that can be on the same platform when a yagna is takes place. By being on the same platform the princess Sati defiles the yagna according to Tarak, a common Kshatriya. A public objection were raised on Sati's existence there. she was asked to move another platform of the city or outside the city wall. Thus, she was humiliated in the public and accused for polluting the yagna ceremony from far distance. Consequently, she was compelled to invoke the right of



Agnipariksha- a trial by fire. Agnipariksha, is a duel unto death that enables a contestant to challenge an unjust tormentor. The duel must keep fighting until someone surrenders or dies. So in this way an innocent woman's life is endangered in the name of Meluhan social values without her mistakes. Sati continued as usual without complaining about this custom but her father Daksha feels the pain of this humiliation and injustice. He says,

"It breaks my heart that I cannot give my daughter the happy life that she deserves...that I cannot save her from humiliation that a good soul like her suffers daily. What can I do..." (IM 277).

In the chapter 'Journey through Meluha', when the Nagas rescue two women from the severe attack of the crocodile without considering their own lives instead of thanking them the two women were blamed that they were trying to eat them. The Nagas, representatives of the bad fate in the novel have vehemently criticized by Meluhans even if they perform a work of goodness.

Shiva faces an embarrassing situation during his visit to Kotdwaar when a blind man happens to touch him. The man's son feels extremely sorry that because his father was Vikarma. The blind man is treated cruelly by his own son at this and the latter apologizes for the same. The blind man continues to cry while folding his hands in a penitent Namaste. Shiva was shocked at the dignity of the blind man as he still loves a country that has treated him so badly. Thus the blind man represents all disabled persons of Meluha and a voice of injustice against such people. Despite being a great warrior, Drapaku was declared as Vikrama along with his father. Serious objections were raised by the people against his inclusion in the Meluhan army. They believed that wrestling is only meant to Kshatriyas. Vikarmas are weak that cannot fight. Later on Drapaku fights very bravely from the Meluhan's side and is recognised by all.

The Meluhans believe that this Vikarma concept provides social stability; this prevents people from fighting for survival. They believe that if someone believes that his misfortune in this world is due to his sins in his previous birth, he will resign himself to his fate and not vent his anger on society at large. If this does not happen, many disaffected people can become a threat to the society as a whole. Thus freedom for citizens is strictly protected by ideological means and force. The parent-child relationship is deliberately eroded with the child separated from mother and their identity is promoted shortly after birth. Healthy children are given to Maika, while the deformed and disabled ones are expelled from the kingdom and thus an ideal society is maintained and prided upon. Only in the royal family is allowed to keep track of their child brought up in Meluha. The country is facing low birth rates which follow strict rules that prevent mothers from reaching out to their children, soon after birth. Except the royal class, children are distributed according to their knowledge and talent to the people in certain classes. This increased discrimination and oppression of caste.

The plot construction of Shiva Trilogy help us to relate the Meluhan society with current scenario. Meluhan society is mixed with people from certain groups who are exposed to exploitation and discrimination by the upper class people. Shiva, the central character in the novel raises voice against the discrimination and injustice. He questions Meluha's ideals of the prevailing social order. Shiva sharply criticizes the Meluhan caste system. He was surprised to learn that a man who is a warrior will not allowed to trade at the market. When Sati forced him to shudhikaran immediately for touching her, he was not interested to do because he does not believe in impurity of the Vikarmas. Shiva is amazed to learn that how Shati was declared Vikarma only due to giving birth to a still born child. He comments:

That sounds 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? (IM 93).

Shiva doesn't mind touching of the Vikarmas. Shiva is the voice of this group. He always criticized the law of Vikarma. He says,

How illogical this entire concept is ? How can one believe that an innocent child is born with sin ? It is clear as daylight: a new born child has done no wrong. He has done no right either. He has been. He could not have done everything. (The Oath of Vayuputras,55)

In the trilogy Shiva is the only person who always tried to create the social equality. The laws are cannot be changed and must be strictly adhered to . There is no room for ambiguity. The ways of life are unique and inseparable from each other. Amish focus on the dual nature of cosmos and holds: these are many hundred ways of life in this world. But if you actually distil the ways of people live, there are only two ways: the masculine and the feminine (SN 48). The masculine way of life was "life by laws" and the feminine way of life was "life by probability".

During his visit to Kotdwaar, he steps forward and touches the feet of the blind man, a Vikarma and seeks blessing from him. The whole crowd is spellbound as he openly breaks the Meluhan law.

"The entire crowd was stunned into silence by what the Neelkanth had done. Forget the gravity of touching a vikarma, the Neelkanth had just asked to be blessed by one.....Shiva had broken the law. Broken it brazenly and in public". (IM198)

He resolves to destroy this social structure and act as spokesman for the Vikarmas. Shiva tried to brought social reform to the totalitarian society of Meluha. His fulfilling harmonious and progressive life is lived according to the Dharma. He marries Sati the widow and promotes evolution which leads the nation to a higher level of consciousness. This makes him an enlightened being, Neelkanth. He works as a link between the privileged and non – privileged, between king and the people. People of Meluha, Swadeep, Branga and Naga become his followers. These people sacrifice their duty (swadharma) for the greater purpose that is Universal Dharma and at the end Shiva brought dignity to the forbidden group.

In the Shiva trilogy, Amish mainly focus on eliminating social inequality or crime and emphasizing the merciless treatment of untouchable. Amish is very ironic about arrogance and hypocrisy, demonstrating and fabrication of the aristocratic people. Amish made Shiva as a true voice of the Vikrama's and Nagas who have considered as untouchables and victims of tyranny and injustice. In Shiva trilogy, Amish express his great commitment to the marginalized and powerless against the humiliation, persecution and oppression. Amish has often claims that he has tried to explore good and evil in his trilogy while portraying a man who became god. It is clear that Amish seemed to have taken a torch to emphasise and eliminate the dead customs and misleading traditions in society and gives a clear picture that we all have the potential of a 'Mahadev' to destroy the caste system and create a new hope and perfect society for the oppressed and victims.

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