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MARGINALISATION IN THE IMMORTALS OF MELUHA: A STUDY OF THE VIKARMA CLASS

Ms. K. Kaviya

UG Student of English Literature, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore

Abstract

One of the most significant achievements of the contemporary literature is its portrayal of the society as close as possible. Direct or indirect, the messages are conveyed through the fictional or the non-fictional background of the novel. Time has come where the voices of the suppressed and the Marginalised are rose aloud in literature as well. The Immortals of Meluha by Amish Tripathi, is a novel set in the very ancient India telling the mythical tale of how Shiva transforms into Lord Shiva, and which also relates few of the contemporary issues with that of the ancient ones. Amish give a class of people called as "the Vikarmas" who are untouchable, sinned and secluded. They are not Vikarmas by birth, but by their circumstances. They are supposed to have committed sins in their previous births and are categorised to be sinned based on various unexpected and unjust circumstances. The nonplussing fact is that, the Vikarmas accept their fate and undergo all the humility in silence and obedience. It's the coming of Shiva that gives them identity, liberation, equal justice and emancipation. This paper will be a study of the Marginalisation of these Vikarmas and their liberation.

Amish Tripathi is the renowned author of the Shiva Trilogy that consists of The Immortals of Meluha, The Secret of the Nagas and The Oath of the Vayuputras. Tripathi was born on 18 October 1974, in Mumbai, India. He is an IIM, Calcutta alumni and has worked for fourteen years in the financial services industry before turning to full-time writing. As of December 2016, The Shiva Trilogy is the fastest selling book series in Indian publishing history. He is also the recipient of Communicator of the Year Award 2014, Man of the Year 2013 by Radio One and Pride of India 2014 and 2015, to mention a few.

The novel, The Immortals of Meluha, is the first book of The Shiva Trilogy. It is a re-imagined story of the becoming of Lord Shiva. According to the novel, Gods were once humans, who were later worshipped as Gods because of their great deeds during their lifetime. The novel is set in Meluha. The land is divided between the Chandravanshis (the descendants of the Moons) and the Suryavanshi (the descendants of the Sun) and the Nagas. Suryavanshis are the followers of Lord Ram, a Suryavanshi King. They regard themselves to be the pure race while the Chandravanshis are those who deviated from the Suryavanshi principles and also the enemies of the Suryavanshis. The war is between the Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis, who are supposed to have allied with the Nagas: the cursed people born with deformities.

Daksha, the Suryavanshi King has sent his men to North India in the Tibetan region to bring the tribes from there to his Kingdom. It is the belief of the Suryavanshis that a man from these mountains will be their saviour, the Neelkanth and their Lord. This is how Shiva enters Meluha and is identified to be their saviour, as per their prophecy and beliefs. He soon learns the happenings of the state and accepts to aid the Suryavanshis in war against the Chandravanshis. He falls in love with Sati, daughter of King Daksha, who happens to be a Vikarma. Events turn and the novel portrays how Shiva decides to help the Meluhans while in parallel he identifies himself and his destiny.

The novel portrays multiple scenarios that can be related to the present times: the planning of the state of Meluha, its medical facilities, warfare strategies and most importantly marginalisation. Meluhans follow very strict rules with obedience. Their rules are based on the live and teachings of Lord Ram, who had laid the foundation to their nearly perfect kingdom. From birth till death, there is caste segregation in Meluha. As per the Hindu norms, the Meluhan city is divided in four castes: the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Brahmins are those at the highest professions such as the priests, advocates and scientists; Kshatriyas are the warriors and rulers; Vaishyas are the merchants and traders; while the Shudras are the farmers or the workers. Apart from this segregation, the Meluhans are

supposed to wear two identities that would represent their tribe by birth and their chosen tribe. Such as, a Kshatriya (caste by birth) would have to wear an identity of the caste along with his chosen tribe i.e., a tiger or a bull etc. In this way, the novel shows how deeply society of Meluha and its people are rooted into the caste system.

"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 the thighs of the Parmatma. And the feet of the Parmatma on the amulet would make the wearer a Shudra."

Even before getting into the life of Suryavanshis who strictly follow these rules, one could identify the division in the Meluhan Empire itself: between the Suryavanshis and the Chandravanshis and the Nagas. Science and medicine of today's time would say that a deformity in birth would be the lack of nutrition. But, the Meluhans believed that those born of deformities to be sinned in their previous births. They secluded these people. Those who deviated from the ways of Lord Ram, became the Chandravanshis. Those born of deformities are the Nagas and any kind of contact or alliance with them were strictly forbidden. They are also portrayed as the villains in a way ahead than they actually seem to be.

When the secluded section of Meluha already comprises of the Chandravanshis and the Nagas, happens to be yet another division among all the Meluhans irrespective of their birth or by their deeds. They are the Vikarmas. It is fate or the Karma which decides who would fall into this section. There are many instances and situations that would categorise a person as a Vikarma. For example, turning into a physically challenged person, a woman giving birth to a stillborn child, the father of a stillborn child, would all be secluded as Vikarmas. The priests and the scriptures that they abide by had already laid out the instances that would classify people as Vikarmas. Vikarmas are also those who are considered to have sinned in their previous births.

Nandi says to Shiva,

"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."

The Vikarmas are supposed to live secluded from the mainstream. They cannot remarry as they might contaminate others with their ill fate. They are also not allowed to touch anyone. The worst way, the novel says, for a woman to become a Vikarma is to give birth to a stillborn child. If a man gets paralyzed or physically disabled, it means that the universe is punishing him for his sins. There is no base for these segregations into the Vikarma class, even if it is hierarchical or a medical cause or because of any unexpected turn of events, that they are actually categorised as Vikarmas. Even a soldier, who has lost his sight or limb in war for the state, is categorised as a Vikarma.

Worse than the classification to be a Vikarma is the life that one needs to lead as a Vikarma. They are subject to humiliation and embarrassment regularly. They are supposed to pray regularly for forgiveness. In a special ceremony, women are also made to walk around in long angavastrams praying to Lord Agni. They are not allowed to attend any Yagnas or even stay in the platform where the Yagna is performed. However, the most surprising fact is that the Vikarmas are least agitated or protesting against this system. They accept it to be their fate and are submissive and meek to it. They believe or are made to believe that their low status as a Vikarma is bestowed to them by Almighty himself. One who raises voice against the system is considered to be doubly sinned.

Sati, a noble woman and the Suryavanshi princess, is secluded as a Vikarma since she gave birth to a stillborn child. She also lost her husband the very night when she was to give birth to the child. Though she is a princess, a brave warrior, beautiful or intelligent, there is no consideration for her to be exempted from the Vikarma class. Sati accepts her fate calmly and believes that she deserves it. When Shiva touches her while trying

teaching her dance, she pleads him to perform a Sudikaran as soon as possible.

To take the instance when the old blind man touched Shiva, his son Drapaku (a great warrior) came to apologise, since they were Vikarmas. Clearly Shiva didn't believe in the categorisation of the Vikarmas. He never objected to the old man touching him nor did he ever perform a Sudikaran for touching Sati. He says,

"A woman could have given birth to a stillborn 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?"

As a Lord, Shiva was given all the rights to modify or invalidate any of the laws of Meluha. He decided to invalidate this segregation, for the whole of Meluhan society, when he wanted to marry Sati. He is the one who bought the liberation and emancipation for the Vikarmas. Drapaku, the son of the old blind man, comes of great

help with his men during the war with the Chandravanshis. Sati, the able warrior stands by Shiva and marries him. Their liberation from their seclusion also helped in increasing the consciousness of the people regarding truth and justice.

Before Shiva came into Sati's life, she had no identity or decision for herself. It was Shiva who respected her for her individuality and gave her identity by invalidating the Vikarma class. With this step, he first freed Sati and then all the people of Meluha from the unjust seclusion. Through the novel, Tripathi not only portrays a marginal section of a nearly perfect society but also gives them their voice, freedom, emancipation and light from the darkness.

Reference

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