

**Giving Voice to the Marginalized: A Study of Amish Tripathi's  
*The Immortals of Meluha***

**Suresh Kumar**

Assitt. Prof. of English

K.T.Govt. College

Ratia, Fatehabad, Haryana, India

**Abstract:** *One of the most significant achievements of modern Indian social milieu has been the recognition of the rights of those who had for centuries been cornered, and to which the rights of equality and dignified existence had been denied. The Time had almost stopped for such people for a long period as they haven't any history of their own. With the passage of time, things changed; the plight of the oppressed and underprivileged came under the scanner of the alert writer.*

*The paper aims at exhibiting the social consciousness and representation of the marginalized. The Immortals of Meluha, the debut work of Tripathi, asserts the ways of justification to the people who have been sidelined since ages. The fiction inculcates social conciseness and encourages a novel sense of self esteem. It challenges prevalent system and promotes liberation, knowledge, emancipation, equal rights, justice and womanhood. It gives top priority to human values and self development. Through various sufferers in the novel like Sati, Vikarma people, Nagas and physically challenged people, Tripathi generates sympathy and compassion. Shiva, the protagonist, highlights the loopholes even in 'the perfect' culture of the Meluhans. He raises immortal war against discrimination, injustice and inequality which can show way to the wayward world.*

**Key Words:** *marginalized, Vikarma people, culture, injustice*

Pre-Aryan history of India presents a glimpse 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 present Aryans superior while Non Aryans as Dasa, Dasyu, fifth Varna, or Shudras, Ati-shudras and Untouchables. One section of Hindu society –Shudra- was badly treated. Among Shudras, 'Nirvasita' were treated even inhumanly. This section was pushed at the periphery of Hindu society and they were differently identified by insulting terms in different ages. They were mainly categorized as Untouchables. Touching to them was polluting, even their shadow was polluting to the orthodox Hindus. In the modern times, marginal literature relates to the writings belonging to communities and classes living on the margins of the socio-political structures. Cultural minorities, Dalits, Afro-Americans, and women all over the world include marginal section in literature.

Amish Tripathi an alumnus of IIM Calcutta has produced Shiva Trilogy. It is the fastest selling book series in history of Indian publishing. *The Immortals of Meluha*, the debut work of the trilogy, asserts the ways of the justification to the people who have been marginalized since ages. The fiction inculcates social conciseness and encourages a novel sense of self esteem. It challenges prevalent system and promotes liberation, knowledge, emancipation, equal rights, justice and womanhood. It gives top priority to human values and self development. Through various sufferers in the novel like Sati, *Vikarma* people, Nagas and physically challenged people, Tripathi generates sympathy and compassion. Shiva, the protagonist, highlights the loopholes even in 'the perfect' culture of the Meluhans. The novel opens with a clash between *Gunas* and *Pakratris*, two tribes in Tibet. Shiva, a youth from *Gunas* begins his journey from Mt. Kailash to Meluha and Swadeep in search of better future for his tribe under the supervision of Nandi.

*The Immortals of Meluha* acquaints the readers to ancient Indian culture especially with its social structure. As usual the Meluhan society has been divided into four categories- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Brahmins represent teachers, lawyers, priests, and other intellectual professionals. The second group Kshatriyas are the warriors and rulers while Vaishyas are craftsmen, traders and business people and finally the Shudras who are the farmers and workers. In this social hierarchy, one caste cannot do another caste'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*.(38)

In this way every Meluhan is allotted amulets and ordained symbols. The amulets that categorically represent their castes are supposed to wear round the clock. The Meluhans claim themselves to be the followers of the *Suryavanshi* kings -the kings who are the descendants of the Sun. They are the devotees of Lord Ram who was a *Suryavanshi* king. They have firm belief in the teaching of Lord Ram. The rival *Swadeepans* come from *Chandravanshi*—the descendants of the moon. The Meluhans believe that these people are crooked, untrustworthy and lazy with no rules, morals and honour. They accuse *Chandravanshis* as a blot on humanity. The *Chandravanshis* along with the Nagas represent the marginalized section of the Meluhan society in the novel. Though the Nagas possess tremendous strength and skills, they are neither treated as human and nor even allowed to live in their country by the Meluhans as Nandi comments, "They are born with hideous deformities because of the sins of the sins of their previous births.

Deformities like extra hands or misshapen faces...They are not allowed to live in the Sapt Sindhu”(59).

Besides Chandravanshis and Nagas, there is another category of marginalized people in the novel. This category includes women, old persons and all people having physical deformities. Such people have been termed as *Vikarma* in the fiction. 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 (92-93).

The *Vikarma* people have been ostracized from the main stream of the society. They are supposed to live a secluded life even they are not allowed to marry since they can contaminate others with their ill fate. Equally they are not allowed to touch any person who is not in their relation or is not part of their daily life. If a woman gives birth to a still born child, she will be *Vikarma* because she might have committed some terrible sin in her previous birth. If a man suddenly contracts an incurable disease and gets paralyzed, it means he is punished by the universe 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 *Vikarma* goes on irrespective of any other reason- hereditary, physical disorder or malnutrition whatsoever.

There are many rules the *Vikarma* people have to follow. They have to pray for forgiveness every month to Lord Agni, through a special ceremony. The women have to wear long *angvastrams* dyed in the holy blue colour covering from head to toe. Their heads should be bowed down low in penitence. Sati the heroine of the novel, gives birth to a still born child and it is probably one of the worst ways in which a woman can become a *Vikarma* as per Meluhan social belief. They say she might have committed some unpardonable sin in her previous birth. Shiva is captivated by Sati's wonderful dance. Once he touches her elbow to move it to the correct angle. She immediately recoils in horror and says, "Please go for a *Shudhikaran*, Shiva before nightfall" (103). During his journey to the Meluhan Empire Shiva visits Kotdwaar and happens to see a blind man. That blind person has been marked 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 to be the carriers of bad fate in the novel.

Contrary to Dalit or traditional marginal writings, the protest or anger against this system is hardly observed. 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 granted by the Almighty himself. This lowness is granted due to their terrible sins of the previous birth. Hence the sanction behind this meanness is supreme or godly. The person who even grumbles 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 finest women in Meluha, she is beautiful, honest, straight forward, brave and intelligent; 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 Kritika 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." (214).

A *Vikarma* is normally not allowed to attend a *yagna* in Meluha. No *Vikarma* can be on the same platform while a *yagna* is being conducted. By being on the same platform the princess Sati defiles the *yagna* according to Tarak, a common *Kshatriya*. Open objection were raised on Sati's presence there. It was suggested that she should either move to the other platform of the city or outside the city wall. In this way she was insulted in the public and blamed 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 duelists have to keep fighting till one person either surrenders or dies. So in this way an innocent woman's life is endangered without her any real mistake for the sake of Meluhan social values. Sati makes no complain against this practice and goes on as usual but her father Daksha feels the pangs 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..." (277).

The Nagas, representatives of the bad fate in the novel have vehemently criticized by Meluhans even if they perform a work of goodness. In the chapter 'Journey through Meluha', the Nagas save two women from the severe attack of the crocodile. While rowing through the sea they hear feminine screams of terror in the air. They instantly involve in the rescue operation without caring their own life. One of the Nagas was coming ashore carrying the other woman's limp body. His clothes were glued to his massive body. The disoriented woman took the crocodile's blood all over his clothes as that of her friend and shrieked, 'what have you done, you beast?' Suddenly she leaps to her feet and fled screaming for help as the Naga was eating her friend.

During his visit to Kotdwaar, Shiva faces an embarrassing situation 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 very harshly 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 shaken by the dignity of the blind man as he still loves a country that has treated him so badly. Thus the blind man represents all physically challenged person of Meluha and a voice of injustice against such people. Drapaku, the son of the blind man was also declared Vikarma along with his father though he was a great warrior. Serious objections were raised by the people against his inclusion in the Meluhan army. They say that fighting is a business that involves none but Kshatriyas. *Vikarmas* are weak that cannot fight. Later on Drapaku fights very bravely from the Meluhan's side and gets acclaim from all corners.

The Meluhans think that this concept of *Vikarma* provides stability to the society; it stops people to fight for survival. They believe that if you make a person think 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 fury on society at large. If that does not happen, many such discontented people can become a threat to the society as whole. Thus freedom for citizens is severely limited with social norms strictly maintained by ideological means and force. Parent-child bonds are deliberately eroded with the child segregated from mother and its identity diluted soon after its birth. Healthy children are transferred to Maika, while the deformed and disabled ones deported from the kingdom and thus ideal society maintained and prided upon. Only royal class is allowed to keep track of their biological child brought up in Meluha. The country is facing low fertility rates following strict rules prohibiting mothers from reaching out to their children, almost immediately after birth. Except the royal class, children are allotted according to their knowledge and talent to the people of particular class. This intensifies caste discrimination and oppression.

Shiva, the central figure of the novel raises voice against the discrimination and injustice. He challenges 'the perfect' prevalent social order of Meluha.

Shiva severely criticizes Meluhan caste system. He wonders that if a person is a warrior, he will not be allowed to trade at the market place. When Sati compels him for instant *shudhikaran*, he doesn't care much about it because he does not believe in impurity of the *Vikarmas*. Shiva is stunned to know how Shati was declared Vikarma only due to her 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? (93).

Shiva doesn't mind touching of the *Vikarmas*. 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. He resolves to demolish this social structure and comes out as spokesman for the *Vikarmas*. He brings social reformation in totalitarian society of Meluha. His fulfilling harmonious and progressive life is lived in accordance with

Dharma. He marries widowed Sati and promotes evolution that leads nation towards higher state of consciousness. This makes him an enlightened being, *Neelkanth*. He works as a link between privileged and non –privileged, between king and the subjects. People of Meluha, Swadeep, Branga and Naga become his followers. These people sacrifice their duty (*swadharna*) for the greater cause- Universal Dharma.

Realizing the futility of recurrent war against Pakratis, Shiva decides to migrate to Meluha and provide his clan Gunas with better and more securing living. Brahma being creator of this universe does not interfere in its activities. He provides every individual an opportunity to explore his inner potentials. The role of man is never derided upon. Initiatives on the part of man are, in fact, encouraged by the creator. Shiva, a mortal man realizes his duties and acts upon them with full devotion. He proves how human societies as they grow pass through numerous errors and mistakes. The destruction of the prevalent system opens path for the new creation. In the novel, before meeting Shiva, Sati has no identity of her own. Her identity nature and actions are defined and determined by her father King Daksha. Shiva succeeds in luring her for remarriage and thus into the wider circle of worldly life. Consequently demolishing the concept of Vikarma first for Sati and then for everyone.

Hence Tripathi has created space for the marginalized classes and communities in *The Immortals of Meluha*. This space and voice is directly linked to globalization and the rise of democratic attitude in human mind throughout the whole world. Of course, the space occupied by these marginalized people is marginal, they cannot boast of an effective presence yet this space is sure to increase day by day. With the passage of time, things are sure to change and these unheard or oppressed and depressed voices are to get louder.

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