

Humanising Lord Shiva: Understanding *The Immortals of meluha*

Deepak

Former Research Scholar from, Central University of Haryana, India

Abstract

In India, religion has always been an important part of lives of most of the people of the country and for their belief in religion; mythology has played a major role. It is mythology only that plays a key role in making people believe in religion and on gods, whom they worship like anything. But, today writers like Amish Tripathi and Devdutt Pattanaik are redefining religion in an altogether new way by remapping mythology. Devdutt Pattanaik has written a lot on Indian mythology, and he tries to make it interesting and fact based as well. Amish Tripathi, on the other hand has not written that much about religion, but he too redefines mythology and the myths formulated in order to create the great image of the glorious gods of our religion, especially about Lord Shiva. The Shiva Trilogy by him which includes *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* unfolds many new facts by portraying Lord Shiva as a man; a man with extraordinary courage and blind hatred for evil which transformed him into a god, as the world think of him. This research paper will try to explore how brilliantly Amish as an author, makes people agree with his point by giving concrete examples which establish the fact that Shiva whom they worship as a god, was actually a man, a Tibetan tribal who fought for the cause of humanity and defeated evil forces with his courage and marvelous efforts. The paper will also emphasise on finding how it has become possible for Amish to write in such a way about a sacred god and was it possible for any author to write this kind of novels four or five decades back and if not what made it happen in the case of Amish Tripathi.

Keywords: Hinduism; mahadev; demytholize; legend; religion; myth; mythology

Introduction

The Immortals of Meluha by Amish Tripathi is a novel of its kind, not because of certain treatment of the novel but for its unique representation of a sacred god and his story as he describes in his trilogy. The novel basically does two things; first it gives the new authors a new way to work on mythology and second it provides a great help to its readers to understand the great myths and reverend lords or sacred gods of Hindu religion. He, very beautifully portrays in his book how a courageous bold man was transformed into a god and why now he is worshipped by millions of people throughout the world. The setup of the novel is in Meluha, which according to him is a near perfect empire created by Lord Ram many centuries earlier than the setting of the novel, 1900 BC. He defines Lord Ram as the 'greatest monarch' who ever lived on the earth. Shiva in his book is no god but a human, a 'rough-hewn Tibetan immigrant' as he says in his description of lord Shiva. He calls his novel as a story of the man, whom legend turned into a god; he is now worshipped as a sacred god by so many people around the globe but he was only a man, a man with extraordinary courage and blind hatred for evil in his heart. He is being called as Mahadev, the God of gods, for his karma.

Now, the question arises if it is so easy for a writer to write such a text which in a sense demythologizes the pertinent beliefs and practices which people are observing for a very long time. Here, Amish does a wonderful job by putting the things in a way that it looks very much believable and he does it with the help of reason. He very beautifully explains everything in the light of logic. In addition to that he narrates the novel in such a way that ensures nowhere the reader should feel that he/she is listening to a religious tale; and it is the story of a simple man with all human instincts.

There is no doubt that the events he describes in the book are inspired by either *Shiva Purana* or some other religious texts which have something written within them about Lord Shiva but the treatment of those events and legends by Amish is not religious in any way. His hero of the novel, Shiva is a man who leads to an extraordinary life with his super courageous mind and limitless strength of the body.

Why novel as a medium?

Now, come to the point why did he opt for a novel in English and not some other medium such as Hindi movie or TV serial to tell this story of Shiva, a Tibetan immigrant. The answer comes forth as the motive of creating something new, and here it is to earn commercial success and a novel in English language is a dream medium for doing this. It appears to be the perfect logic behind it, as this kind of treatment of a sacred figure can never be digestible for the viewers of the other mediums like TV serials and Hindi movies. For TV, serials like "Devon ke Dev Mahadev" are perfect ventures, where the legends are retold with a drastic change but with no fundamental change as Shiva remains there on the screen as a god, and not as a man. As I have said earlier it would not be easy for the TV viewers to reckon Shiva as a man; moreover the liberties which Amish Tripathi takes in his novels is not possible for Television. For example, some of the love scenes or moments between Shiva and Sati which Tripathi easily portrays in his novels are no way possible for the viewers of TV to accept with so much comfort and ease. For instance take one of the most simple love moment described in the novel, "She stood up on her toes and kissed Shiva lightly. Shiva kissed her back and turned quickly, before his heart could fill his head with second thoughts." (*The Immortals of Meluha* 338) Any

director would think twice before shooting even this light and beautiful romantic moment, then how is it possible for him to ever go beyond that. These kinds of limitations are not there in English novels as we can see in the language Shiva speaks at many instances in the novel. Many a times in the course of the novel we can read Shiva using slang words like, 'bloody hell!', 'dammit!' and 'shit!' etc. This kind of language or words is very much acceptable to the youth who are the prime readers of these novels, in fact they feel attracted towards this sort of language; it creates a kind of charm in the scene. So, this seems to be the most common reason behind the concept, as nobody wants to create controversies without no commercial gain specially in the field of entertainment as it appears on the first hand.

Humanising Lord Shiva

Amish Tripathi writes at the very beginning of the novel, "The universe bows to Lord Shiva, I bow to Lord Shiva." But it appears as if he writes so to avoid any sort of controversy; moreover he shows his devotion towards Lord Shiva by writing in the acknowledgement, "I would like to bow to Lord Shiva, for blessing me so abundantly, far beyond what I deserve." (*The Immortals of Meluha* xii) But after that what he writes, suggest something else which is clearly visible on the very next page after the acknowledgement where he describes his motive behind writing *The Shiva Trilogy*. He writes,

"Shiva! The Mahadev, the God of Gods. Destroyer of evil. Passionate lover. Fierce warrior. Consummate dancer. Charismatic leader. All-powerful, yet incorruptible. A quick wit, accompanied by an equally quick and fearsome temper.

Over the centuries, no foreigner who came to our land – conqueror, merchant, scholar, ruler, traveller – believed that such a great man could possibly have existed in reality. They assumed that he must have been a mythical God, whose existence was possible only in the realms of human imagination. Unfortunately, this belief became our received wisdom." (*The Immortals of Meluha* xiii)

With this description of the character Shiva of his novel, Tripathi tries to prove that Lord Shiva was actually a man, and not mythological figure; he was a real man who lived in the ancient India around 1900 BC. Shiva had so amazing qualities which a human is not supposed of having all at one time and that makes him a legend. These all qualities turned him into a superhuman who was capable of doing anything and nothing seems impossible for him. There come many instances in the novel where the other characters in the novel reckon him as God but we can see Shiva disapproves of their comments every time by saying that he is no god, he is only a human. Remember the instance when Guruji, the dance master, praises Shiva by referring him as the Nataraj, the Lord of dance. To which Shiva immediately replies, "Oh no! I am just a medium for the boundless Nataraj energy. Anyone can be the medium." (*The Immortals of Meluha* 81) Tripathi further explains this by writing that many a times Shiva used to think about his blue throat which drew the attention of other people to Shiva; as he thinks on one occasion, "Why in the holy lake's name is my blessed blue throat so important?" (*The Immortals of Meluha* 83) In this way, Tripathi makes it very clear at every step of the novel that Shiva was only a man and not a god. Slogans like

'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Jai Shri Brahma' can be heard constantly in the novel but whenever someone even tries to praise Shiva or to compare him with some god, he feels irritated or annoyed as we can see in the argument between Shiva and Nandi,

"More than a thousand years back, we faced a similar situation and Lord Ram came and taught us a better way. I am sure that, similarly, you will lead us to a superior path."

'I am no Lord Ram, Nandi!'

How can this fool even compare me to Lord Ram, the Maryada Purushottam, The Ideal Follower of Laws?

'You are better than Lord Ram, my Lord,' said Nandi.

'Stop this nonsense, Nandi! What have I done to even be compared with Lord Ram? Let alone be considered better?'

'But you will do deeds that will place you above him, my Lord.' 'Just shut up!' (*The Immortals of Meluha* 179-180)

This tells the readers that how annoyed Shiva used to feel whenever he is compared with some reverend and sacred figure. He denies himself the right of being called as Mahadev, as once Daksha said so of him, he shows his disagreement by saying that Daksha spoke too high of him and he is no Mahadev. In the chapter, 'Dharmayudh the Holy War' Shiva defines who is a Mahadev; he says,

"Does he sit on a pitiable height and look on idly while ordinary men do what should be his job? No!'"...

'A man becomes a Mahadev when he fights for good. A Mahadev is not born as one from his mother's womb. He is forged in the heat of battle, when he wages a war to destroy evil!'"...

'I am a Mahadev!'"...

'But I am not the only one!'"... 'Har Ek Hai Mahadev!'"...

'Har Har Mahadev!'" (*The Immortals of Meluha* 346-347)

This is how Amish Tripathi conveys his Message to the readers that whosoever stands against evil and fights with full instinct, is a Mahadev; Shiva did it and was thus called as Mahadev. He was born as a man but was transformed into a god through his will to fight against evil and destroy it. God is everywhere, in each and every being but the world sees the God in one who bestows his whole life for the sake of humanity and its wellbeing.

Conclusion

The Immortals of Meluha is a novel that changed the scenario of Indian English Novels as well as our perception of religion in general and Hinduism in particular. It helps us to understand how legends are created and humans like Shiva become so sacred that people start worshipping them. It also highlights the life of an extraordinary man, Shiva who lived his life to guide and help others and it is done in a very convincing manner by the author. The *Shiva Trilogy* is one of its kind as it successfully establishes the fact of Shiva being a human and it demystifies the myths of Hindu religion which are very popular among people. It also justifies the certain beliefs of Hinduism which are rather

termed as blind faiths and that too with conviction. It has all become possible, because today there are readers who have keen interest in knowing the reality behind certain myths and who want to understand religion in a much comprehensive way. The biggest factor responsible for its success is the treatment of the topic in an interesting way which describes it in a modernistic style and in a language that suits the set of readers it aims.

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