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Contextualising Myth and Language in the Age of Globalisation:

Contemporary Language in *The Immortals of Meluha*

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"Myths are about the human struggle to deal with the great passages of time and life - birth, death, marriage, the transitions from childhood to adulthood to old age. They meet a need in the psychological or spiritual nature of humans that has absolutely nothing to do with science." Shermer *Why People Believe Weird Things*

It is needless to say that our culture is sustained by the idea of continuity. In the forward of *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao mentions about the sthalpurana or legendary history of every place or village in India. That relates every ritual, tradition, custom and even life to Indian mythology. Myths have provided a wide range of subjects to create new writings for the creative writers from time immemorial. Irrespective of belonging to the contemporary age or being placed in erstwhile era, Indian mythology and its umpteen sections have rested their permanent influence on Indian literature. Men have tried to place long lost mythical stories in their exceedingly sublime and ecstatic literature. Indian fiction in English, in one or the other way tries to textualise living myths by creating different literary traditions. In the present era of globalization, there is an emergence of a new tradition of re-writing, re-creating, re-telling, remembering, re-introducing, re-imagining the myths with contemporary perspective. Such new tradition deploys the ancient myths and archetypes in a very contemporary context to provide the matrix of history, philosophy and psychology. 'The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Epics', the Puranas and classical literatures have provided sources for the plot, themes and characterization irrespective of time and validity. True or Make Believe, myth has a prominent role to play.

Simultaneously, new techniques and styles are generated by writers of every period to reinvent its semiotics. To search for the new venues of creative expressions, Authors like Amish Tripathi, Ashok K Banker, Devadatt Pattnaik and many more turn their vision towards myths. By using myths in a very prominent way, they try to present the idea of globalization in the contemporary context. Their major interests are The Shiva Purana, The Ramayana and

The Mahabharata. To fulfill the objective, the use of language is determined in a strikingly contemporary way. The present paper explores and comprehends the implication of ancient myth in contemporary language and context. *The Immortals of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi, in one or the other way, tries to textualise living language by re-creating ancient myth of Lord Shiva. It allows to explore interiors of the language and its deep-rooted evolution to comprehend the linkages among myths and the development of new sensibilities in the era of globalization. The myth of Shiva – the Lord of the Lord – is intertwined with the use of modern language in such a way that accommodates the very novel into global literature. The novel retells the emergence of the central character Shiva as Mahadev. In doing so, Amish Tripathi attempts a diverse perspective in global context. How Shiva – recognized and transformed as Mahadev by the people of Meluha – faces inner conflict of Sutryavanshis and Chandravanshis is expressed with elaboration. The revival of great Indian mythology with such novel in the era of globalisation paves the way for India to connect to the matrix of world literature.

The action of the novel sets in 1900 BC at Mansarovar Lake, at the foot of Mount Kailash, Tibet almost 4000 years ago. Shiva, the leader of the Gunas' tribe tired of fights and quarrels among the neighboring tribes, thought of the new way of life of peace and harmony. The seeds of globalisation can be found in the thoughts of the hero in the exposition of the novel. He remembered the offer by Nandi, who at a time was his prisoner,

"Come to our land. It lies beyond the great mountains. Others call it Meluha. I call it Heaven. It is the richest and most powerful empire in India. Indeed the richest and most powerful in the whole world. 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." (02)

Meluha is a city inhabited by the people belonged to Suryavanshis. The government offers an ideal and conflict-free life to the immigrants. Apart from that they are accepted in Merluha completely. They will be given Somras – the divine drink – that would postpone them to age and die. The words of a foreigner were echoing continuously in the mind of Shiva and were

enforcing him to accept the offer. The idea of migration enters in the very initial part of the novel. The city and the people consider everyone equal. There is no discrimination or imbalance according to the caste or gender. Meluha is a kind of Utopia. The description of Meluha gives a complete idea of a superb system in which the country is governed. The words by Nandi, Meluha as Heaven are proved correct when Shiva himself observes the structure of the city.

Brihaspati who is the Guru of Devas in mythology is a great scientist here. He conducts many experiments regarding science. He is the one who controls the activities on Mount Mandar to manufacture Somras. The novel also depicts some scientific researches conducted by Brihaspati in detailed way. He is continuously occupied with new experiments regarding Somras.

In Meluha, everything is ordered in a very scientific way. The land has its own army made of the people called Kshatriya. The pattern of the rank of soldiers is the similar to our modern one. It includes captain, brigadier and general. It is highly disciplined and brave. Even the soldiers are classified by their skills. Meluha is an example of an ideal society. Meluhans have the system of festivals and other occasions regarding the entertainment of life. They have their own rituals, pujas, ceremonies, festivities, art etc. to approve a complete culture. There seems no fault at the initial level. The city seems really built on such ideology that provides a perfect world for the Gunas.

The action of the novel takes a turn when the Somras transferred throat of Shiva into blue – Neelkanth. All the Meluhans have strong faith in the legend of Neelkanth as he is believed their savior and the destroyer of the evil. Very few like Parvateshvar and Brihaspati are there who acclaims different opinion that the others. But gradually they develop their faith, trust and respect for Shiva when they come closer to the personality of Shiva. They come to know the real characteristic of Shiva as Mahadev in true sense.

There are certain instances when we find reform in the social structure. The first instance in the novel is that when Shiva denies to go for shuddhikaran – purification process. It is the law that if anyone touches the vikarma – ill-fated – he or she needs to go for purification process. After he gets the recognition and wins the faith of Meluhans, Shiva succeeds to oppose the

law of vikarma by marrying Sati. He abolishes the law and declared the vikarma law as scrap. Shiva expressed his own ideology about the vikarma law and described it as the very evil of the ideal society. Here he becomes the destroyer of the evil in a true sense. Initially, Parvateshwar does not accept his verdict, but when he comes to know that Shiva did not abolish the law for personal reason, on the contrary for the welfare of the society, he starts to develop respect for Shiva from the depth of his heart.

The Meluha society has a very impressive Varna-system (caste-system). The caste or the tribe is not decided by their birth but by their abilities and interests in various fields. All the people from Meluha have to wear a bracelet with an amulet that contains impression of the particular animals. The animals symbolically reflect the ability and the tribe-caste of the person who wears it. High tribe Brahmins like Brihaspati wears Swans-amulet and the people like Nandi wear Bull or Ox at their wrist**.** People when recognize their abilities and strength are free to choose their tribe-caste symbol. None inherits the caste by birth. Even the king is elected and it is not necessary that the son of the king inherits the throne. The work of the person determines his caste and creed. The amulet becomes then their chosen tribe so that nobody can blame the Nature for the low or high birth. Parvateshvar who is a staunch believer and follower of the Lord Rama respect the law also believes that the title Mahadev or Neelkanth can be achieved by the work of the man and not only by the Blue-throat.

To contextualize globalization, language has been used distinctly throughout the novel. Contemporary words and idioms have been incorporated to give it contemporariness. The language that seems very simple at the surface contains deep philosophical meaning when given a deep thought. It succeeds to create a jargon that suits the subject matter of the novel. The language is very down to earth and can be grasped completely by a common reader with minimum effort. Sometimes it becomes abusive and low, but it supplements technique and style to give the novel individual effect. No attempt has been made to use pure form of the language whereas it goes beyond the limitations of the sophistication of the language. The language helps to create the contemporariness in the novel.

Particular jargon has been invented and employed to give global effect. Languages of philosophy, psychology, history and science are simplified to the language of common. The narration of the Meluha infrastructure gives architectural and scientific terminology. While

describing the Mount Mandar and the experiments, the author uses many terms from chemistry. When Brihaspati explains the process of how our body becomes fragile and weak by the effect of time, he explains in a very scientific language to Shiva. He says,

> "The thing (oxygen) that keeps us alive is also what causes us to age and eventually die. When oxygen reacts with our food in order to release energy, it also releases free radicals, called oxidants. These oxidants are toxic. When you leave any fruit out and it becomes rancid, this is because it has been 'oxidised' or the oxidants have reacted with it to make it rot. A similar 'oxidising process' causes metals to corrode. It happens especially with the new metal when we have discovered – iron. The same thing happens to our body when we breathe in oxygen. The oxygen helps convert the food we eat into energy. But it also causes the release of oxidants into our body which start reacting inside us. We rust from the inside and hence age and eventually die." (134)

Along with the use of such scientific language, the author maintains the language of the characters. Each character is given his or her language and characteristic. This can be noticeable when we hear the thoughts of Shiva. The thoughts are typed in italics thus can be easily recognized. The language of the thoughts is sometimes abusive e.g. 'dammit', 'what the hell…' It becomes much more negative when used in certain context.

The most striking part in the novel is Shiva's encounter with Anandmayi and the Pandit towards the end of the novel. The language deployed in such a way that confuses the mind of Shiva in the case of the Dharmayudh – Holy War and its genuineness. It is Shiva who permitted the Holy War and wants his vengeance on the Chandravanshis for their killing of Brihaspati whom Shiva recognized as his brother. The bond between the two was such strong that Shiva could not bear the death of the person who is very close to his heart. After much slaughter of Chandravanshis, Shiva got victory over them. The war is declared over and Chandravanshi king Dilipa is imprisoned. When Shiva realizes the truth that the Chandravanshis are not evil but rather they are different from Suryavanshis and being different does not make them evil. Shiva felt great remorse within. He doubts his action of killing the innocent Chandravanshi people. Evil then is discussed very philoshically while

Shiva is being consoled by the Pandit in the Ayodhya temple. When Shiva asks what the reason for everything that just happened, the Pandit replies,

"'The distruction of evil? Wouldn't you consider that a very important reason?'

'But I did not destroy evil,' yelled Shiva. 'These people aren't evil. *They're just different.* Being different isn't evil.

'Exactly. They are not evil. They are just different." (391)

The Pandit reveals the fact about Lord Rudra the earlier Mahadev. Shiva is compared and proved better than previous Mahadev that was Lord Rudra who destroyed Asura in the same manner as Shiva did to Chandravanshis. Shiva thought himself being misled. But the Pandit once again interrupts with his wise arguments. He asks Shiva how he came to know about Asura and decided that they were evil. Shiva's answer to that was by 'reading…!' (391). But before he completes his statement from where he read, he understood the whole game of language and words. Shiva has read somewhere about evil in Asura and those books must be written by the Devas. The same way, Suryavanshis described Chandravanshis as Asuras and evil. The Pandit says,

"The Devas and the Asuras, just like the Chandravanshis and the Suryavanshis, represent two balancing the life forces – a duality… yes, a duality that is one of the many perspectives of the universe – the masculine and the feminine. The Asuras and the Suryavanshis represent the masculine. The Devas and the Chandravanshis speak for the feminine. The names change, but the life forces they embody remain the same. They will always exist. Neither can ever be destroyed. Otherwise the universe will implode." (392)

And thus they see their fight with the other as the eternal struggle between good and evil. Only Mahadev can help them to decide the difference between two such universal forces. It is only He who can recognize the good and evil. That is the reason that the Neelkanth belongs to none but an outsider – devoid of any bias and prejudice who can judge the action with his own wisdom and intellect. The term evil has been proved relative and its meaning is altered. There seems no difference between Asura and Devas, Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis.

Even Chandravanshis have long waited for their Neelkanth. The hero is disillusioned by the arguments of Anandmayi. Finally the Pandit who introduced himself as Vasudev ends the inner conflict of Shiva. With their discussion, it is made clear that nobody is evil and it is Shiva who will meet evil and will have to recognize the same.

Dharma is not defined as the religion in a narrow sense. Rather it is given a broader plain. The word encompasses holy, right knowledge, right living, tradition, natural order of the universe and duty. Finally it suggests the 'Kartavya'. Essentially, dharma refers to everything that can be classified as 'good' in universe.

There are many symbols used to specify their importance in the Meluhan culture. The symbol of 'Aum' which is explained in detail in the novel is significant. The upper curve of the Aum represents the Chandravanshis and the bottom half the Suryavanshis. The amalgam of the two is the emergent common path. The crescent moon to the right of the symbol was pre-existing Chandravanshis symbol and the sun above is symbol for the pre-existing Suryavanshis. The Aum symbol signifies the unity and harmony between both the tribes. There is another symbol Swastika that can be translated into 'that which is associated with well-being or very simply a lucky charm' (282). Not only Aum and Swastika but there are also symbols like Trishul, Animals, Rivers, Nagas, Vikarmas etc. having their own symbolic significance and language. Many Indian terms have been introduced along with their true meaning. 'Namaste', 'Ayushyaman bhav', 'Akhand saubhagyavati bhav', 'Jai Shree Ram' etc. help to colour the novel with new perspective.

There are certain shifts which are necessary in the process of globalisation and change. The central god in the novel is Lord Rama who is displaced by to Shiva when he is considered as prophesized savior. His words reflect the same spirit and enthusiasm for the welfare of humanity as Lord Rama's. Even he defines the word Mahadev and told that everyone is Mahadev. He says,

"'A man becomes 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 Mahadev, but I am not the only one! ... I am not the only one! For I see a hundred thousand Mahadevs in front of me! I see a hundred thousand men

willing to fight on the side of the good! I see a hundred thousand men willing to battle evil! I see a hundred thousand men capable of destroying evil! … *Hare k hai Mahadev! Har Har Mahadev'* bellowed Shiva.

The Meluhans roared. *All of us are Mahadevs*!" (344-345)

Amish Tripathi recurrently regained stronghold with mythology in his novel. He re-created very significant ancient myth in the novel with familiar characters and different themes. The myth of Suryavanshi and the Chandravanshi intermingled with each other in newly invented style. The novel also merges science, religion, culture, history and many other human sciences as a whole. There is an honest attempt to familiarize myth with the contemporary language.

Symbolism and implicit references to mythology is one guiding factor that presently counts in contemporary context, known to be quite a hit amongst all ages of readers. He organized myth as one of the major elements to convey the very truth of globalisation. The purpose is achieved with the tool of contemporary language. It shares common exclamations, words, idioms and so on. The writer who returned to the past, to its myth, story, history and philosophies is trying to find the new edifice on the sound basis.

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