

The Backdrop of Myth and Mysteries in Amish Tripathy's '*The Immortals of Meluha*'

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Abstract

Amish Tripathi's novel *The Immortals of Meluha*, draws heavily from Hindu mythology, particularly the mythology surrounding the deity Shiva. The story takes inspiration from ancient Hindu scriptures and reimagines them in a fictional world set around 1900 BC. By infusing a contemporary viewpoint into classic stories and narratives, authors like Amish Tripathi offer a fresh perspective on familiar myths. They use these narratives as a platform to examine and reflect upon modern society, drawing parallels between the mythological world and our own. In doing so, they shed light on universal themes, such as environmental degradation, social inequality, or moral dilemmas, and invite readers to consider their relevance in the present context. The use of mythology as a mirror for today's social reality allows authors to engage readers in a thought-provoking manner. It enables them to explore timeless themes in a new light and encourages readers to critically analyze their own world through the lens of these mythological tales.

Key words: Myth, Environmental degradation, Social inequality.

Amish Tripathi is an Indian author known for his works in the genre of mythological fiction. Born on October 18, 1974, in Mumbai, India, Tripathi began his career as a banker and later turned to writing. Amish Tripathi received his education from the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta. He has a deep love for mythology, history, and philosophy. Being a passionate lover of history, Amish Tripathi drew inspiration for his plot from various sources, including authors like Graham Hancock and Gregory Possehl, as well as the Indian comic book series Amar Chitra Katha. For the mythological passages in his book, Tripathi tapped into the tales and fables passed down within his own family. He holds the belief that all world religions and cultures possess beauty and significance.

During a family discussion prompted by a history program they were watching, the concept of consciousness and the existence of evil within humanity came up. The program mentioned that in ancient Persia, demons were referred to as 'Daeva' and angels as 'Asuras'. This revelation sparked Tripathi's interest and led him to write about it. He discovered that Shiva, one of the primary deities in Hinduism known as the 'destroyer of evil,' would be the ideal subject for his writing. Amish Tripathi aimed to convey his ideology through Shiva's journey and biography, hoping to persuade his audience. He viewed Hindu gods not as mythical beings or products of imagination, but as individuals who had once lived like us. It was their actions during their human existence that elevated them to the status of deities.

In his portrayal of Shiva, Tripathi deliberately chose a humanized approach, presenting him as a regular person or commoner. This approach challenges conventional perceptions of myth by modernizing it. This article highlighting the author's willingness to question established notions of reality.

The novel presents a remarkable endeavor to weave fiction using factual elements from folklore, religion, and archaeology. It is a captivating work that not only celebrates virtues and principles but also enthralls readers with its action-packed storyline, romance, and adventure. What makes this work truly exceptional is the author's skill in transforming numerous mythical characters into relatable, ordinary individuals.

Amish Tripathi employs mythical techniques in the novel to explore on social issues, and one such topic explored is environmental pollution. The detrimental effects of environmental pollution, such as illnesses and health problems, are highlighted. This concern for environmental preservation is not a new concept and has been addressed in various literary works throughout history. For instance, the ancient Indian classic Yajnavalkya Smriti advocates against deforestation, emphasizing the importance of forest administration as highlighted in Kautalya's Arthashastra during the Mauryan Period. The significance of environmental health and biodiversity is evident in Ashoka Pillar's Edicts as well.

Amish Tripathi expresses concern over the consequences of environmental contamination, a critical issue that he addresses in *The Immortals of Meluha*. In this novel, the Meluhans consume a substance called Somras, which grants them youth, strength, and good health. Somras absorbs and neutralizes harmful oxidants, eliminating them from the body through sweat or urine. However, even after consuming Somras for an extended period, the sweat and urine excreted still pose a risk. Consequently, it is crucial to remove and dispose of them properly to ensure they do not harm others. Due to this concern, cleanliness holds great importance in the Meluhan society. The residents of Meluha partake in two daily baths and wash their clothes regularly. The "Great Public Bath" is available for everyone to use, without any exclusive accommodations for nobles. All cleansing rituals take place in designated areas, and an efficient subsurface drainage system ensures waste is properly carried outside the city.

On the other hand, the Chandravanshis suffer from severe diseases because they dispose of their waste in the river that flows through Swadweep, their homeland. The Ganges and other rivers are currently facing a significant influx of garbage resulting from domestic activities such as bathing and laundry. Chemical industries, textile mills, distilleries, hospitals, and other businesses dispose of their waste into these waterways. The trash dumped into the rivers often contains toxic and non-biodegradable materials. When living organisms consume this contaminated water, they become susceptible to illnesses like cholera, hepatitis, dysentery, and more. Amish Tripathi addresses this issue in the book, highlighting the jeopardy faced by the Saraswati River. The Meluhans, due to their extensive water usage and disposal of hazardous Somras leftovers into the river, contribute to its gradual depletion.

The Somras, although providing the Meluhans with vigor and vitality, acts as a double-edged sword. It infects the Chandravanshis with diseases and contributes to the proliferation of Nagas. While technology progresses, it also brings harm. Both creation and destruction hold equal importance. Despite the sophistication of Meluhan society, it still creates problems for other societies. Consequently, one social class must bear the consequences. The preparation of Somras necessitates the use of Saraswati River water and branches from the Sanjeevani tree as essential ingredients. However, with the increasing production of Somras to cater to a population of eight million people, the demand for water has escalated. The massive manufacturing complex at Mount Mandar gradually depletes the river's waters, eventually leading to its complete obliteration—it's only a matter of time. While "The Immortals of Meluha" touches upon the topic of environmental degradation, subsequent books in the Shiva Trilogy delve deeper into the depletion of the Saraswati River.

Conclusion

Amish Tripathi employs this book as a means to shed light on the socioeconomic realities of modern civilization. He reinterprets the Shiva tale as a metaphor for the malevolent schemes of those in positions of power and how their self-centred desires lead to destruction and calamity. He proposes a logical perspective to address these issues, intertwining modern reality with the fantastical elements of the Shiva story. Environmental degradation is one of the problems tackled through the lens of legendary storytelling. Amish Tripathi does not create an entirely new universe; instead, he unveils a world that is magically realistic, where the supernatural coexists with everyday reality. As an example, in the Shiva myth, Lord Shiva consumed poison during the Sagar Manthan, resulting in his throat turning blue. In the novel, when Shiva consumes Somras, his throat also takes on a blue hue.

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