

Caste system in Amish Tripathi's "The Immortals of Meluha"

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Abstract

This paper elucidates the caste systems and the caste discriminations in Amish Tripathi's "The Immortals of Meluha." The caste systems were severely practiced even in those ancient times. In the novel "The Immortals of Meluha" Amish Tripathi clearly explores the caste systems and caste divisions happened in ancient period through this novel. But finally Lord Shiva banished some of the discriminations and caste divisions practiced in those times mainly the Vikarma system. Vikarma system is nothing but a Karma based unfair traditional system practiced by the Meluhan people. If anyone did any evil things in their past life they will be treated as Vikarmas. The Meluhan people treated Vikarma people especially women as bad souls. There are many restrictions to Vikarma people, such as they should not marry anyone, they should not touch anyone, they have to beg to Lord Agni for every month to forgive their past life sins. There are four caste divisions in Meluha. They are Brahmins, Shudras, Vaishyas and Kshatriyas. Every caste people have certain jobs. Kings and Warriors were Kshatriyas, Business was for Vaishyas, household works were for Shudras and Studying was for Brahmins. These are the four caste divisions in "The Immortals of Meluha." Amish Tripathi is a well known mythology writer in Indian literature. All of his works are based on Fantasy and Hindu mythology. The Shiva Trilogy makes him popular among all the people. It contains "The Immortals of Meluha," "The Secret of the Nagas," and "The Oath of the Vayuputras." The aim of this paper is to analyse how the caste

systems were followed in ancient times and how one caste dominate another caste, and how the people lived peacefully in Meluha even in the caste discriminations.

Keywords: Caste system, discrimination, Vikarma system, Lord Shiva, Meluha

Introduction

In the novel “The Immortals of Meluha” Amish has clearly delineated the caste systems and caste discriminations that happened in the ancient times. Caste systems were designed to separate and divide people such as high class, middle class and the low class. These class separations maybe easy to identify people but sometimes it gives oppressions for some people. Even now a days we are happened to see caste discriminations in some of the places, think about that those olden days how the caste discriminations were happened and how people were suffered. Some of the people treated the other caste people as untouchables. In “The Immortals of Meluha” the Meluhan people treated the Vikarma people as untouchables. Even in the oppression, the Vikarma people blame themselves for being untouchables they believe that the sins committed in their past life made them as untouchables. In the Meluhan city, the people believed that all the Vikarma people were untouchables and they were committed sins in their past life.

Description of caste systems in “The Immortals of Meluha”

“The caste System in the country today is a disgusting corruption of what it once was. In ancient times, most of the evidence points to the fact that the caste system was actually not rigid. It was not based on birth,” Tripathi said.

In “The Immortals of Meluha” Meluha city is the symbol of perfection. Meluha civilization is the best civilization in the world. Rule of law is supreme in Meluha because law is the foundation of the Meluha civilization which gives it an edge over others. This was the land of

abundance of almost ethereal perfection. It is an empire ruled by clearly codified and just laws to which every Meluhan was subordinated, including the emperor. The average intellect was exceptionally high. It seemed to be a flawless society where everyone was aware of his roles and played it perfectly. This is the one side of the Meluha, but when we look another side we find the caste systems and old traditional rules which exploit the lower caste peoples. The problem is that some grossly unfair practices in the nearly perfect society for example the way Vikarma are treated. When we analyse the Meluha city we find Meluha a land of truth, duty and honor. The society of Meluha is wonderful, things do seem very well and in order. The rules and law of the caste systems makes Meluha imperfect and the “perfect society” becomes full of violence and bloodshed cruelty. The strong point of the Mehula become the weakness and good thing change into the evil.

There are four caste divisions in Meluha. They are Brahmins, Shudras, Vaishyas and Kshatriyas. The partition of the caste is based on the Parmatma’s body lines. If the lines are drawn to represent the head it means Brahmins, if drawn on the shoulders it means Kshatriyas, thighs for Vaishya and in the last feet of the Parmatma for Shudras. There are also tribe symbols: birds for Brahmin, animals for Kshatriyas, flowers for Vaishyas, and Fish for Shudras. Every caste is created on the basis of peoples quality. Every caste people have certain jobs. Kings and Warriors were Kshatriyas. Business was for Vaishyas, household works were for Shudras and Studying and teaching were for Brahmins.

Principles to decide Vikarmas

There are many principles to decide a person as Vikarmas. 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.

Rules for Vikarma people

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 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 and on the same day her husband was also dead. So she becomes a widow and Vikarma on that day. She genuinely believes that she deserves to be a Vikarma and consequent punishment. She strictly adheres to all other rules laid down for Vikarmas. Shiva learns from Brahaspati that Sati is declared a vikrama because she delivered a stillborn child. Giving birth to a stillborn child is probably one of the worst ways in which a woman can become a vikrama. (203) Shiva replies that this system needs to be changed. ‘This has to be changed. The concept of vikrama is unfair.’ (203). Shiva falls in love with Sati when he sees her at Brahma Temple. Brahaspati asks him if he wants to change the law for Sati, Is it because you genuinely think that the law itself is unfair? Or is it because you are attracted to Sati and you want to remove an

inconvenient law which stands in your path? (204) Shiva agrees that he is in love with Sati but he does not want to change the law for her. He genuinely believes that the law is unfair. Brahaspati tells Shiva that Sati is a righteous woman and any man would be happy to be her husband but he is not any man--- he is the Neelkanth. Whatever he decides has its repercussions. Brahaspati says, because of that unfortunate blue throat, every decision you take has many ramifications. You have to think many times before you act. (205)

Amish Tripathi reveals Shiva's intentions of abolishing the Vikrama Law during the conversation between Shiva and Pandit of Mohan Jo Daro. When Shiva learns about Lord Ram's concept of Vikrama Law for larger good, he thinks that this system is unfair. He says 'This system needs to change' (212). People think that Shiva wants to change the law for marrying Sati, who is a Vikrama. But he does not want to change the law for her but for everyone. He genuinely empathizes with the pain and injustice meted out to Vikrama people. Finally Shiva banished the Vikarma system which was practiced by the Meluhan people.

Conclusion

Throughout the novel, "The Immortals of Meluha" the Vikarma people were treated as the bad fate and untouchables. But Lord Shiva is the only one who raises voice against this Vikarma system and Caste systems. He wants to banish this system only for the better future of Vikarma people and Meluha not for Sati. 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. By this incident we can clearly understand that Shiva banished this system for all the Vikarma people not for Sati. In many novels we are happened to see about the caste discriminations and treating some people as untouchables. But in this novel the Vikarma people accepts all the rules and restrictions that were

designed to them. Even though they were in oppression they blame themselves for being Vikarma.

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