



Interpreting the Impact of Cultural Milieu on Amish Tripathi's *Meluhans* in *Shiva Trilogy*

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Abstract

Tripathi Amish broke into the Indian literary scene with an innovative, mythology-based *Shiva Trilogy* with a bang in 2010. His neo myths bring forth the higher tradition of our matchless Indian culture found in our traditional mythology in a different perspective. His fictions have vividly exposed that the images, archetypes and symbols aren't mere decorative or literary devices but they are the special indicators of a culture as they are lived values. At regular intervals, emphasizing the depth of meaning and understanding, myths continue to shape our lives and perceptions. Undoubtedly, Amish has redrafted the Indian Mythology in his own style. His novels have the connection with the theory of Taine, a French critic and historian, '*race, milieu, and moment*' which have roots in earlier attempts to understand the aesthetic object as a social product rather than a spontaneous creation of genius. Within the theory of race, moment, and milieu, cultural milieu is an important concept to analyze a mythical novel because it contributes to the depth, complexity, and thematic richness of the story. Cultural milieu refers to the location and the cultural environment of a group in a society. This paper, *Interpreting the Impact of the Cultural Milieu on Amish Tripathi's Meluhans in Shiva Trilogy*, is an attempt to excavate what influence of the cultural milieu of the author has on the people of Meluha in his *Shiva Trilogy*.

Key words: archetype, complexity, indicator, milieu, perception, tradition.

1. Introduction

Pre-literary categories such as the rituals, oral traditions, cave and rock carvings and paintings and cultural dances and music

etc. have been an essential part of the human civilization as they are strong, free, and globalizing kind of a story that states the essence of the existence and its values. In as much as

myths are related to religion and spirituality, they are also an entity of their own, which enables them to operate as sub-categories in culture. This independence allows myths to go beyond specific religious contexts, which allows them to embody the values, customs and beliefs of various societies. Myths can be flexible as individual stories that can be retold according to the context of the culture. They are the carriers of the cultural memory and identity that travel through time and space¹.

Among the features that can be singled out in relation to myths as independent narratives, there is one that is most valuable – the fact that myths do not belong to religious systems. Contrary to what one might expect, myths do not necessarily belong to religious systems, though many of them are rooted in religions. This freedom enables myths to be received and narrated as cultural tales, which are relevant in the lives of people regardless of the faith they hold. For instance, the myth of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun with wings made of feathers and wax is a mythological tale of ancient Greek religion but this has gone beyond a religious myth. The Icarian myth can now be viewed as a fable of pride goes before a fall or the price paid for aspiring to the unreachable; it remains an important myth in other cultures and other arts.

The independence of myths is also seen in their function as the cultural memories that pass on the lessons, practices, and principles of a community. Legends are the carriers of the people's experience, which contain the information on the codes of ethics and the standards of behaviour in the society. *The story of Mulan* is a Chinese legend about a young woman who disguises herself as a man to take her elderly, ailing father's place in the army during a time of war. She demonstrates great courage and skill in battle, eventually saving the Emperor and achieving victory. After years of

service, she declines offers of high office and returns to her family, who welcomes her home with pride and surprise at her true identity. The tale celebrates female strength and advocates for gender equality, emphasizing that bravery, honor, and wisdom are not limited by gender. In many cases, myths give an account of the genesis of the cultural practices and institutions in a society, thus giving a society a historical perspective of its practices. In an interview conducted by Das, Antara, 2016, an Indian inseparable, legendary campaigner Amish Tripathi speaks to LUX about his life philosophy and the future of Indian culture on the global stage,

Ancient Indian culture can provide a model for that balance, of being both traditional and liberal at the same time. This gives you the roots and solidity that traditions give you, but also the freedom and ability to soar that liberalism provides. Isn't that worth propagating? This is what I get to do through this diplomatic role, and it's why I enjoy this job – because it is in consonance with the values I try to imbibe into my writing.²

Besides being an ambassador of Indian cultural legacy, Amish Tripathi's works also engage with the historical moment of India's economic liberalization and its impact on society. Tripathi's narratives reflect the rapid economic changes and the rise of a new middle class who have brought about shifts in cultural attitudes and values. His focus on themes of self-empowerment and societal change aligns with the aspirations and challenges faced by modern Indian readers. The historical moment of India's economic and social transformation influences the way Tripathi portrays characters and themes, highlighting the intersection of ancient wisdom and contemporary realities.

¹King, G. (1999). Spectacular narratives: Twister, independence day, and frontier mythology.

² An interview conducted by Das, Antara with Amish Tripathi for LUX (2016).

2. Literature Review

The research work of Kathiresan Balasubramanian, "Cultural Analysis of Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy" Dogo Rangsang Research Journal UGC Care Group I Journal ISSN : 2347-7180 Vol-10 Issue-09 No. 04 September 2020 is a cultural analysis of the three novels from the Shiva Trilogy by Amish Tripathi. In this paper, the researcher has taken into account of two cultural groups, Chandravanshis and Suryavanshis, having their own ideologies of life that made people of one cultural group to impose their ideologies on the other which turns out as hegemony among them. Also the presence of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism were discussed yet this paper has missed what impact the cultural milieu had on the people of Meluha. This paper would discover that in detail.

3. Discussion

3.1. Hippolyte Adolphe Taine's Approach

Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, a French historian, and literary critic of the nineteenth century is credited with the historical-biographical school of criticism that evolved literature. Taine's method, introduced in the mid-19th century, sought to understand literary works through the interplay of three primary factors: Race, milieu and moment. This approach is meant to understand the function of these elements in forming and interpreting literary works and in expressing the historical and cultural context of the works' creation. It is based on the assumption that literature cannot be studied in isolation from the external circumstances that surround the process of its creation. For instance, the love and nationalism themes identified by Taine in the French literature of the nineteenth century are considered as the manifestation of the French culture and politics of the period³. Milieu can be defined as the socio-cultural setting in which an

author exists. According to Taine, the environment, that is the political, economic and social climate of the society in which an author lives significantly influences the literature produced.

3.2. The impact of cultural milieu

The concept 'cultural milieu' is one of the fundamental pillars that can help break down the ways in which literature represents and is formed by the social and cultural realities of the time and space of its creation. This concept could be a method of analyzing literary works based on how the cultural locale of the individual, society, and history affect literature. It can be defined as the social setting and culture of the author within which he/she writes. Taine stressed that the socio-political climate, the socio-economic environment at the time of writing has a significant influence on the literature.

The people of Meluha had a positive impact due to the social status of the author, political system, and the economic climate that characterizes the literary environment. By studying the milieu, critics can reveal how the social norms, classes, and economic setting influence the issues, protagonists, and other aspects of the literature. Thus, applying the concept, the critics and the scholars will be able to get a better understanding of the connection between the literary works and their historical and cultural context and their impact on the development of themes, characters and the style of the novel which will help to better understand the role of literature and its significance at a certain period of time.

3.3. Amish Tripathi through Taine's Lens

In the Indian literary history of India so far, in term of sale, the unbeatable *Shiva Trilogy* is highly acknowledged for its fusion of mythology, history, and contemporary

³Morton, M. G. (1998). *Naturalism and nostalgia: Hippolyte Taine's lectures on art history at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 1865-1869*. Brown University.

storytelling. Portraying Lord Shiva and other personae from Hindu mythology, as mortals struggling with personal and cosmic challenges, Amish Tripathi has outstandingly replicated the elements of Indian mythology, philosophy, and spirituality, exploring themes of morality, sacrifice, love, and the nature of divinity in a fresh and unconventional manner. Shiva at first was living among the Guna tribes came to Meluha the land of Suryavanshis where he and his tribes get adapted to the life style of Meluhans and later Shiva found the age old beliefs followed by them and tried to change the illogical law of the Meluhans. Shiva's world was actually the circumstances of the author's longing.

In contemporary literary analysis, Taine's framework continues to be relevant for understanding how global and cross-cultural contexts influence literary production. Analyzing the impact of the cultural milieu in Amish Tripathi's classical piece of *Shiva Trilogy* through the lens of Hippolyte Adolphe Taine's historical-biographical approach offers a valuable insight into how the concept cultural milieu influences his narratives. Tripathi's cultural background, shaped by his Indian heritage, informs his reinterpretation of mythological figures and themes. The social and cultural environment of contemporary India, marked by rapid changes and a renewed interest in cultural heritage, influences his storytelling and thematic focus. The historical moment of the early 21st century, characterized by economic growth and cultural revival, shapes the way Tripathi addresses issues of leadership, morality, and societal transformation. By examining these concepts, we can uncover how Tripathi's cultural background, social environment, and historical context shape his literary output and thematic

concerns. Amish has brought out his flawless and wealthiest dreamland as follows,

Meluha - The land of pure life. This was a land of abundance, of almost ethereal perfection! It was an empire ruled by clearly codified and just laws, to which every Meluhan was subordinated, including the emperor. The country supported a population of nearly eight million, which without exception seemed well fed, healthy and wealthy. The average intellect was exceptionally high. They were a slightly serious people, but unfailingly polite and civil. It seemed to be a flawless society where everyone knew his role and played it perfectly. They were conscious, nay obsessive, about their duties. (Tripathi, IM, 35)⁴

The beautiful description of the city of magnanimous Meluha exposes the craving of the author hoping for a perfect society to live in. As Amish has come from both the orthodox and a strong background, his novels reflect the same ideals. The themes of Tripathi's works are closely connected with the context of the contemporary Indian society that is in the process of transformation due to the economic liberalization, changing values, and the revival of interests in the Indian cultural identity⁵. The socio-economic and cultural environment of the contemporary Indian society as well as its richness and variety shapes Tripathi's narratives. His novels have the impression on the leadership, moral and social issues of the contemporary Indian society and depict the dream of the society. For instance, in the *Shiva Trilogy*, the author has woven issues like justice, dharma, and identity, which are important for the current generation's question regarding leadership and accountability. The representation of these themes is informed by

⁴ Tripathi, Amish (2010). '*Shiva Trilogy 1 - The Immortals of Meluha*'. Westland Publication Private Limited.

⁵ Logan, P. M. (2018). Primitive Criticism and the Novel: GH Lewes and Hippolyte Taine on Dickens. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46(1), 125-142.

the context of modern India that raises issues of authority, equality, and freedom.

4. Findings

The independent nature of myths within culture is also expressed in their ability to impact other cultures and be impacted by them. Myths tend to be passed from one culture to another through trading, moving to other places or being invaded by other cultures and thus, they form part of the other cultures' mythology. This cross-cultural transfer can lead to either retelling of myths or the creation of new myths which are hybrids of two different cultures. The independence of myths in this case is the freedom that the myths have to appeal to people of different culture and at the same time be taken and fitted into another cultural set.

First of all, it must be pointed out that Amish Tripathi's Shiva trilogy reflects the culture of the peoples in question as the stories and values embedded in these myths are derived from the cultural context of their creation. For instance, Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis were shaped distinctively by such environmental aspects as liberty, implementation of rules and the Gods' interaction with people. Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* have the positive impact that includes improved empathy, enhanced cognitive abilities like focus and vocabulary, and reduced stress by providing an escape from daily pressures. It also fosters personal growth, a broader worldview, increased creativity, and a greater ability to understand and accept different perspectives. The Meluhans are becoming a better version of themselves.

5. Conclusion

Understanding one's cultural milieu is essential for comprehending the forces that influence identity, behavior, and decision-making. It's within this milieu that individuals navigate their relationships, form their worldviews, and interact with others. Milieu can be a powerful lens for examining the impact of culture and society on various aspects of life,

including race and identity. In *Shiva Trilogy*, the cultural milieu encompasses the vividly depicted ancient Indian settings, the political and religious structures, the cultures and beliefs of various tribes and civilizations, and the interactions between these elements. The milieu in the trilogy plays a crucial role in shaping the characters' experiences and choices. This universality gives myths an independence of the religious or cultural framework, which indicates their relevance to the general human experience.

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