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A Deconstructive Reading of Amish Tripathi's 'The Immortals of Meluha'

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Abstract:
Amish Tripathi, an erstwhile IIM graduate, is a prolific writer who has written ten books so far. His first book is The Immortals of Meluha (2010) which is the first volume the famous Shiva Trilogy. He writes fictions in popular mode. The book is followed by The secret of the Nagas and The Oath of the Vayuputras. Jacques Derrida, a French, postmodern philosopher, proposed a theory of 'Deconstruction'. It subverts or undermines the language of the text. It is neither the construction nor the destruction of meaning. He puts radical questions to the fundamental philosophical concepts such as knowledge, truth, identity, language and other approaches as well. The paper explores the deconstructive elements from the first book of Shiva Trilogy, which is inhibited with some postmodern elements and techniques.

Keywords: deconstruction, logocentrism, aporia, differance, trace, decentre.

Introduction:

In the binaries such as the God and the human, the deconstructionist gives importance to the second one. In The Immortals of Meluha, Amish Tripathi does not portray the orthodox hindu God, Shivshankar or Bholenath or Mahadev who sits in isolation on the top of the mountain in the permanent state of meditation but an under-privileged migrant with ample masculinity, a man with blood and flesh, a chillum smoker, a poverty-stricken and who utters the modern slangs of the present hooligans or the picaroons. Additionally, he is intellectually wise who has a mind with logic. Shiva solves the problems of the subject by directly living among them. He is more concrete rather than the divine. This signifies that this is the representation or reinterpretation of the conventional myth or mythology, legends and folklores. Besides him, several other characters like Ganesh, Nandi, Parvateshwar, Sati and Parshuram are quite unorthodox in terms of their temperament and their presentation. Binary oppositions such as man/woman, oppressor/oppressed, rich/poor, white/black, occidental/oriental, industrialists/workers work the in the society. Out of these two, the first is the dominator or the powerful and the second one is the victim. Society cannot work without these oppositions as their existence and identity depend upon each other. Both of them form the society. Exclusion of any one harms the very structure of it. The first fights to maintain his status of prominence so that he cannot lose his position and the second one struggles to gain the status of the first. The former tries to maintain his position through economics, politics and such other institutions on which the society is based. The latter endeavours to raise his position; he tries to achieve the level of the former. Consequently, conflict arises there.

Myths are already in our unconscious. Hence, both of the Shiva's are distinguishable. Ultimately, he suggests that to become god one has to be human being first. Being human is the prerequisite of being the god. Generally, the Indian Gods are shown from the front, as we see them in the portraits. They have feminine appearances. Whether it is a painting or a serial on the television, very often, 'Devas' (Indian Gods) are presented as fair, good, mild, patient, cool, merciful, beautiful. On the other hand, 'Danavas' are rather black, bad, wild, short-tempered, cruel and ugly. Unlike the traditional Gods, Shiva is a macho-man, masculine figure, terribly mystical and wild. Most importantly, he is a tribal who lives in Himalaya who leads a nomadic life. Very often, he is shown either from the back or sideways in order to heighten the sense of mysticism in this novel. The book provides a graphics through the subtle narration. Especially, the depiction of the fights are quite subtle.

This book does not have a specific theme or the centre. It has multiple themes. It can be a criticism on politics, philosophy, religion, science, social evils, terrorism, myths, pollution and the standardisation of the language as well. It means that there is no centre in the book. It is a fine blend of action, emotion, drama, fantasy, and melodrama. The meaning is rather decentralized. Besides this, there is discontinuity in the narration. The meaning of the text does change as you read more. The characters are abundant. The time is 1900 BC

ancient India, land of Meluha, a near perfect empire of India, a land of opportunity, hired Shiva to fight for them and have a king-size life as a reward. But it is not merely a luxurious life, it brought responsibility and accountability as well. He evolves himself through hard work and becomes god ultimately.

The narration is exotic and strange. Having the fragmented story in chapters and divided into uneven, invariable sections, the story does not have a proper beginning, middle and end. Each chapter is divided in several tiny unequal fragments. The fragments are disproportionately distributed in the chapters. There are several substories. The subsequent parts of the substory continue oddly in the succeeding chapters. The episodes are narrated into smaller fragments. There is a parallel narration of the other substories. If one tends to figure out a complete substory, one has to pick and garner all the fragments which are spread in smaller sequences into various chapters. A chapter, for instance, begins with a particular substory, the writer miserly provides the scant sequence with minimal development in the action of the substory. The subsequent sequences are unevenly distributed in the next chapters. The major feature of such technique is that it maintains the suspense, and heightens curiosity. It provides the sense of mysticism. The structure is terribly complex. The apocalyptic sequences keep the reader exciting and surprising. At the end of each section of the chapters, there is the use of religious symbols. Thus, the plot is quixotic and cumbersome.

Usually, the deconstructionists give prominence to the subjugated or subservient rather than the primary in binary oppositions. The traditional positions are exchanged or replaced. What Bakhtin calls as 'carnivalesque'. In this book Sati is unlike Parvati (who is the ardent follower and servant of the husband), portrayed as very brave as she fights with the Nagas. She defies the society by condemning the law of Vikarma, (the law wherein the deformed persons and the widows cannot lead the normal lives). Despite being a widow, she rebels and joins the yagnya. She is rather a New Woman to the ancient obedient wives who were put to trial by their husbands. Sati's portrayal in the trilogy is equivalent to Shiva. She is as ferocious as Shiva in the warfare. Despite being a woman, Sati knows the martial arts. Shiva is a tribal, Ganesh and Kali are Vikarmas. They are the terrorists. She is par excellence as far as mind and body are concerned. Ganesh is the elder son of Sati and Chandandhwaj (her demised husband). Having the abnormal features, Sati's parents threw her child in the river and told Sati that it was a stillborn. She receives the news that her husband is dead when the child was born. However, when Shiva leaves for in search of the Nagas, (the terrorists as declared by King Dakhsa, father of Sati). It is explored that the Nagas are the victims of polluted water, caused by the production of Samras. Ganesh, and Kali, Sati's elder sister are also among them.

Conventionally, language is the crucial source or medium of knowledge. Derrida strongly opposes the same because all the western languages are logocentric or phonocentric. He resists the concept of the centre or theme which cannot be stable. He justifies his ideas through various concepts such as "trace", "differance" and "aporia". He signifies that language is unable to provide you the complete meaning since it is made from logos and phones. It makes the reader to reach close to the meaning but not the meaning. It is a kind of endless play of meanings. The deconstructionists challenge the concept of final meaning or interpretation. Language is the only medium through which we draw meanings but it is not a perfect medium. It is made up of logos and phones. The words in it are rather self referential. In The Immortals of Meluha, according to the Suryavanshis, the Chandravanshis are terrorists and the conflict is on among them. One has to go beyond these axial limitations because language itself has its own limitations. It can arise to misapprehension through words. Yet, Derida advocates that there is nothing outside the text.

In The Immortals of Meluha many conventional patterns are reversed. The legends of Shiva, Sati, Ganesh, Kali, Nandi and such other characters could be changed or challenged. Their stories are modified, rectified or transformed partially or fully. The book is fraught with binary oppositions such as Chandrawanshi-Suryawanshi, masculine-feminine, good-evil, rational–orthodox, Vikarma- non-vikrama, secular-religious, Meluhans-Nagas. Hence, he tends to show that the position of the subordinate is reversed. They are the modified agents.

In Chapter 15, Shiva has a brooding nightmare (time and again, he has dream visions) regarding some bitter experience of his childhood, something which gives him pain, remorse and distress. It makes him guilty that he could not help a woman who was being raped by a man. These sequences create mysticism. In fact, the entire trilogy is fraught with mysticism which enhances the gothic ambience of the novel. Ganesh and Kali are deformed, they are Vikarmas (untouchables). Ganesh has the elephant head and therefore he puts on a hood to hide his face. Maya has two heads, two shoulders and four hands. She is the lost sister of Sati. Kali has extra appendages to her body. This book is neither a pure fantasy nor a realistic. It is an amalgamation of the both. It is the combination of myth and imagination. Apparently, the myth is historicised. Amish hardly makes distinction between myth and history. They both are closely connected to each other. It is the "time" which

determines whether some historical account is myth or history.

"Buddha is a man from history but he has been mythologized", Amish says, "The description of the Indus valley cities, the flow of the rivers, the name Meluha are all broadly accurate. The theory of the Vedic civilisation being a descendant of an antediluvian civilisation that existed in South India before the end of the last great ice age, is based on the works of a British historian called Graham Hancock."

The book is fraught with deconstructive elements. It is very difficult to find centre in this book. In fact the meaning is decentralised in this hodgepodge of themes and significations. If one tries to find out the centre the meaning is implicitly deconstructed. There are various themes in the novel such as the distinction between good and evil, mythological significance with the changing scenario and philosophical and religious mysticism. It is constantly indicated in the novels that everything must go in the process of revival and recreation as it is the essence of life. Being a post modern novel, it exploits all postmodern elements in the fiction. Reinterpretation of the myth, religion, science, is one of the salient features of the book. The magical realism, discontinuous narration, mythical renaissance, labyrinthine or the inorganic plot, allegorical elements are the other salient features of the book. The meaning is continuously postponed through bizarre narration. They gratify the quench of the modern reader of popular literature and culture. Through some customs and rituals, he has discussed some of the burning Indian problems covertly.

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