

Revived Reverence: A Reading of Reminiscence in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*

Ms. M. Velvizhi, Ph.D. Scholar and Dr. J. Amalaveenus

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Abstract

Women are educated, they work, speak for themselves, planning their life, hanging out with men but to every action they fight, most of them fail to do what they want; they rely on their family. Especially in India, women accept and adapt to this situation since birth. If the literature turns its back to the history for these predicaments of women, most importantly in India, the people's ambiguous attitude towards the mythological stories, folk tales, and legends is to be blamed. The social structure and life style of Indians are based on the religion scriptures they believe in. People in India generally refer *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* to construct their lives. And, it is common to everyone's knowledge that some women in those texts are depicted largely as cruel, envious, dim-witted, subservient and beautiful which are the causes of destruction. Unlike the other interpreters, Amish Tripathi, as the grandson of a Sanskrit scholar and Pandit in Benaras, revered women mythological characters in his *Shiva Trilogy*. He materializes power and fire from his women characters comparing to male counterparts. The elements of 'phantabula' (portmanteau of fantasy and myth) were well-employed; Amish has retold myth in his imaginative ways, but the essence of spirituality has not lost throughout the series.

Keywords: Amish Tripathi, *Shiva Trilogy*, Indian society, depiction of women characters and 'phantabula'

Women in Science

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud is an Austrian Neurologist; in his view the woman should soften a man surely not weaken him. According to Freud in scientific way, the right side of human brain goes for emotional decisions and the left side for rational thinking. Both brains are connected by corpus callosum which balances right and left side brain to have conclusive decision. Women have heavy corpus callosum compared to men, so they tend to

think both rationally and emotionally whereas men have either emotional thoughts or rational thoughts. So, it is expected of women to take neutral decisions in certain issues, intervene in the decisions made by men.

To certain extent, Freud's concept is acceptable but in action, mostly the intervention of women is disregarded. Or else, men would go for misinterpretations of Freud's words like Coventry Patmore.

Phantom of the Society

The poet Patmore published his poem "The Angel in the House" in 1854; revised it in 1862 which was not that famous until Virginia Woolf dissected it in feminist view. In "Professions for Women", Virginia Woolf described the Angel presented by Patmore as,

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but, preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it---she was pure. (Woolf 2)

These are not the expectations of women in nineteenth or twentieth century society alone; even today, there are views that how good those days women were?; having such 'pure' woman are gifted, what is wrong with these feminist type women; seeing and talking critically.

Women are educated, they work, they speak for themselves, planning their life, hanging out with men but to every action they fight, most of them fail to do what they want; they rely on their family. Especially in India, women accept and adapt to this situation since birth.

Shiva Trilogy

Amish Tripathi's first series *Shiva Trilogy* is well-liked even by non-literature readers. His debut book *The Immortals of Meluha* was published in 2010 and acclaimed positive reviews all over India. People waited for the sequel *The Secret of Nagas* till 2011 and the last book of the series, *The Oath of Vayuputhras* was published in 2013. The series focused Shiva, a common man who stole the hearts of all India to consider him as worthy of being Mahadev, the God of Gods.

In his series, Amish mentioned the *Laws of Manu* often, another most important Hindu scripture. People tend to accept and recall Manu's patriarchal words, for example:

Men must make their women dependent day and night and keep under their own control those who are attached to sensory objects. Her father guards her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth, and her sons guard her in old age. A woman is not fit for independence. A father who does not give her away at the proper time should be blamed, and a husband who does not have sex with her at the proper time should be blamed; and the son who does not guard his mother when her husband is dead should be blamed. (42)

But the same scripture which verbalizes the importance of revering women is accustomed to be ignored by the law makers. It is said in the *Laws of Manu*,

Fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law who wish for great good fortune should revere these women and adorn them. The deities delight in places where women are revered, but where women are not revered all rites are fruitless. Where the women of the family are miserable, the family is soon destroyed, but it always thrives where the women are not miserable. Homes that are cursed by women of the family who have not been treated with due reverence are completely destroyed, as if struck down by witchcraft. Therefore, men who wish to prosper should always revere these women with ornaments, clothes, and food at celebrations and festivals. (43)

Unlike the other interpreters, Amish, as the grandson of Sanskrit scholar and Pandit in Benaras, revered women mythological characters in his *Shiva Trilogy*. He materializes power and fire from his women characters comparing to male counterparts of those women. He retold myth in his imaginative ways, but the essence of spirituality has not lost throughout the series. In settings as well as characterization, Amish brought in the natural aspects of Hindu mythology.

Phantabula

The elements of 'phantabula' (portmanteau of fantasy and myth) are well-employed by Amish in his *Shiva Trilogy*. The characters were taken from Hindu sacred texts; unlike the

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Ms. T. Vembu, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., (Ph.D.), Editor: *English Language, Literature & Culture*

Ms. M. Velvizhi, Ph.D. Scholar and Dr. J. Amalaveenus

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twisted mythologies of women being submissive, weak, and meek, Amish revered the women characters for what they are in their roles. Not only had the major character Sati, every woman in the series was noted for their physical, psychological, behavioral, and intelligent skills. They were respected for their skills and actions, and their sex was not highlighted anywhere. And the jibes in some places of the series were used to mock at the people who qualify men when they generously consider women as equal; people forget that women are not willingly in desperate need of approval from men for how they are. Our social structure drove them to the state of fighting for basic rights in the beginning and now equal status as well as respect.

Mythology of Lord Shiva

Not everyone in India knows the details of Hindu sacred texts; very few people of the 21st century read *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. About Lord Shiva, people have imprecise idea about his family details and esoteric sports (*Thiruvilayadal*). As in Myth, Shiva is known as destroyer of evil. His wife Parvati or Uma is the Goddess of fertility, love, and devotion. Parvati is the mother of Ganesh and Karthick; Ganesh is not the biological son of Shiva. Hindus worship Ardhanarishvara which implies the half man-woman, the androgynous form; the right side of the body is Lord Shiva and left is meant for Goddess Parvati. In *Puranas*, there are too many versions of stories to this unique form. People call Parvati as Shakti because of her divine strength and power; the name Kali is also attributed to her which represents her righteous anger and its results. The stories about Goddess Kali as well have importance in *Puranas*; on the whole when the Goddess is in Parvati's form, she calms the angered God Shiva whereas when she is in Kali's form, and it is the role of God Shiva calm Goddess Kali.

Shiva abodes in Kailash and he wears Snake as necklace; there are many stories about that but the most likable and logical, scientific one is that the energy body has 7 chakras. Among 7, the vishuddhi chakra is positioned in the throat and the chakra has strong association with snakes because the snakes are sensitive to certain energies. The vishuddhi chakra is noted for stopping poison and the snake carries poison. And the symbol of Ganga in his matted hair iconography also has stories.

The skillful scholar Amish had intertwined all the mythological details, history, and geography of India to frame *Shiva Trilogy*. The first book *The Immortals of Meluha* set with

the historical fact of India that Meluha is the pure, near perfect society which indicates Indus valley civilization.

Vigorous Women Characters

Ayurvati

The first notable woman character introduced by Amish in the novel is Ayurvati, the best doctor in the land. The name of the doctor character is derived from an ancient Indian form of medicine, Ayurved. Dhanvantri is believed to be the God of Ayurved. It is natural for Amish to create a Brahmin male doctor, Dhanvanth but the author chooses to introduce Ayurvati, a Brahmin woman doctor who is best. Throughout the series Ayurvati accompanies Shiva and his entourage even in war field. She is a great doctor but humble with the people who treat her worthy. She is the one who first identifies Shiva as Neelkanth. She is intelligent in her profession; she is no warrior, but she respects Kshatriyas and treats even the enemy clan without grudges.

When Ayurvati treats Ganesh, she is not bothered of his deformity and she is brought up to consider Nagas as evil but as a doctor, she serves as a giver of life. She points out her unhappiness with him because he is the killer of Brahaspathi, the scientist. She says, “It’s sad you don’t have his untainted heart ... I admired Brahaspathi. He was not just a good man, but a fount of knowledge. The world suffered when he died before his time” (SN 305). The scene ends with the words, “She yanked his bandage open. Hard enough to make it sting, but soft enough to not cause any serious damage” (SN 306). She never hesitates to express her opinion and she does what she believes in; the moment she argues with Parvateshwar is the best example,

Ayurvati shook her head in irritation, but her voice was unfailingly polite. ‘Parvateshwar, you are making a mistake. You are pitting yourself against your living God. You are defending the Somras, which even you believe has turned evil. And you are doing all this to serve some “purpose”. Does the purpose defending Meluha justify all the mistakes that you know you are making?’ (OV 126)

Sati

Sati, one of the major characters is the daughter of Daksha and Veerini, the wife of Shiva, the sister of Kali and the mother of Ganesh and Karthick. These are all her societal

identities. For her, she is more than these; she is a dignified, loyal, loving, law-abiding warrior. She stands for justice, speaks for her righteousness, she sees herself as a kshatriya not as a princess. Every other character admires her actions not mere beauty. Brahaspati says to Shiva, “She is not just a good woman. She is one of the finest I have ever met. She is beautiful, honest, straight-forward, brave and intelligent ...” (IM 204). At first Shiva is clueless to get her love, she is not a simple woman but something more, and a Vasudev pandit explains this to Shiva, “She gets many things from the people who love her. What she doesn’t get is what she craves for the most-respect” (IM 217).

To save a woman in distress, Sati fights a pack of wild dogs when she is just sixteen. After giving birth to her second child, she goes into the village Icchawar to fight a liger and its pack of lions. She strongly believes that the strong should protect weak. And, when a situation forces her to choose either her husband or her son; she attempts to reason it out with Shiva. She loves Shiva dearly but not giving in for his anger; she decides what she must do and ready to face the consequences. She gives importance for justice than love and so she stands against her father.

Though Sati as commander has saved most of her cavalry from Meluhans’ trick attack; with her scarred face she thinks of her betterment. The novelist Amish strongly suggests through her temperament, that the characteristics of masculine are not meant only for men. The epitome of all these structure of her personality is her last battle with the Egyptians. Even in her last breath she volunteers for the duel of Aten and though her limbs are mutilated and with the heavy loss of blood, she fights as a skillful warrior to save as many men as possible. The leader of the assassins, Swuth finds her as a most challenging opponent and to his disbelief, he considers her as his final kill which is the point the author reveres a woman for what she is capable of. Sati is not an individual representation of goddess but her character proves that the women are not ‘some stupid baby-producing machines’ as Swuth commented of her.

Kali

Her sister Kali’s anger is legendary, and it is cited in a few situations and also her affection for her step-son Ganesh is expounded. Her righteous actions to protect her land as queen and Brangas as human are praiseworthy traits. Along with Kali, there is Suparna, the

representative of the people of Garuda and another fearsome warrior who leads Nagas into the war.

Anandmayi

The character sketch of Anandmayi is admirable and she is the best representation of Chandravanshi way of life. In the beginning she seems to be arrogant and break all the conventions reserved for women in the society. She is an eye-opener who upholds one of the core concepts of the series, “Contradictions are a part of nature” (IM 381). Her abundant love for Parvateshwar and her constant attempts to get his love are all charming. She shows that the women are capable of doing extraordinary things for the life they decided to have.

Veerini

Veerini, the queen of Meluha behaves too much like a submissive wife of Daksha from the beginning and in the end as queen’s dignity she fulfills her role and face death spiritually. She expresses her remorse to Kali as “It is not a wife’s duty to support her husband in his misdeeds. In fact, a good wife corrects her husband when he is wrong, even if she has to ram it down its throat” (OV 514). Outwardly her role looks cowardly, but the inaction takes too much courage and she fights hard and long to be a queen, wife, and mother.

Minor Women Characters

Sati’s friend Krittika, Parashuram’s mother Renuka, and Brahaspati’s ladylove Tara have little but significant roles in the novel. Krittika’s compassion, Renuka’s doggedness and Tara’s devotion and resolution are adding color to the series. Another minor woman character Kanakhala is the Prime Minister of Meluha. She is an active, devoted, and trustworthy woman. In her last minutes of life, she chooses dharma over her loyalty. She does what is right and commits suicide which is also an act of courage in her part because she rightly believes, “Dharma protects those who protect it” (OV 436).

A Man of Letters

The survey of the series validates that the author Amish draws on more of his creativity on characters. In his interview in ‘The Hindu’, Amish answers the question related to the issues he directs in his book as, “Our society is at war with women... I make my women characters very strong”. The reconstruction on the image of Lord Shiva and his family in the minds of

Hindus is quite challenging; Amish's determination to fulfill his learning in appropriate way is radiating in every aspect of the series.

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Ms. M. Velvizhi (Author)
Research Scholar of English
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Tiruchirappalli – 02
Tamilnadu
India
velvizhi21@gmail.com

Dr. J. Amalaveenus (Coauthor)
Assistant Professor of English

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St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Tiruchirappalli – 02
Tamilnadu
India
amalaveenus@rediffmail.com