

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 5. Issue.1., 2018 (Jan-Mar)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

ISSUES OF WAR IN *THE IMMORTALS OF MELUHA*

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ABSTRACT

The issue of war had been relevant in all ages which also figures prominently in the *Immortals of Meluha*. It seems to question war on the one hand and draws attention towards the present on the other. Wars are an organized and prolonged conflict that is carried out by states. It is generally characterized by extreme violence, social disruption and economic destruction. It is an intentional widespread conflict between political communities. War leads to destruction of human and natural resources. War leads to pervasive violence in the name of justice and revenge. In the novel various battles are fought between Guna and Prakritis, Suryavanshi and Chandravanshi, Naga and Suryavanshi.

**Keywords:** Meluha, Shiva, war.

Introduction

Amish Tripathi is a finance professional educated from Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. He is passionate about history, mythology and philosophy. He is an avid reader of history and his inspirations for the story ranged from writers like Graham Hancock and Gregory Possehl to the Amar Chitra Katha series of Indian comics. *The Immortals of Meluha*, the first novel in *Shiva Trilogy* by Amish Tripathi, is also heavily embedded in Indian mythology. The *Shiva Trilogy* comprises three parts: *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secrets of the Nagas* and *The Oath of Vayuputras*. *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku* and *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* are of the Ram Chandra Series comprises of five books.

Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* pictures battles between Gunas and Pakratris and between Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis and Nagas. It brings to fore the matter of senseless killing of human beings. There is nothing heroic about wars. War leads to massive destruction of resources. Pakritis and Guna are tribal communities living near Mansarovar Lake. Both the communities have access to the lake's water but the Pakritis keep attacking Gunas so that they can become powerful acquiring all the resources. Pakritis attacked Guna women and children in the evening. "Their mutilated bodies were found next to the lake" (5). Yakhya, head of Pakratris, wants to become a legend by claiming that he had defeated Shiva and his tribe. People like Yakhya have a streak of violence in them. They hold strange opinions to satisfy this streak in them. Their malicious desire to satisfy their hedonistic ways leads to devastation. "It was precisely this weird tribal logic that Shiva detested. In an atmosphere like this, there was never any hope for peace" (7). Therefore, Shiva decides to go to Meluha. It was the senseless violence of war which made him leave Tibet. He accepts the invitation to migrate. He addresses his tribe saying, "This land is fit for barbarians! We have fought pointless battles with no end in sight" (5).

Shiva is a believer in harmony. He understands Daksha's state of mind. Daksha tells Shiva that his empire is the best in the world with new technology in science and commerce. Other empires hate the

progress of Meluha and don't live in harmony. Shiva feels that he and his tribe too face terrorist attacks because of jealous. He says, "I wonder if we could have avoided bloodshed if we shared our good fortune more willingly" (107). Daksha further explains that Chandravanshis think that Meluhans' success lies in Somras. Chandravanshis have the knowledge of Somras but they cannot make mass production. So in order to become powerful they tried to destroy the Somras. They tried to "kill the Saraswati to harm us" (108) as no other water works for making Somras. Shiva was surprised to hear as to how one can kill a river. Daksha tells that Saraswati is formed by the confluence of two rivers—Sutlej and Yamuna. Earlier both the Chandravanshis and the Suryavanshis drew water for the Somras. But Chandravanshis diverted the course of Yamuna, "instead of flowing south, it started flowing east to meet their main river, Ganga" (108). Daksha tells that the matter was discussed with the Chandravanshis but they denied any knowledge of that and said that the river changed its course due to minor earthquake and they all should accept God's will in it.

Then, Parvateshwar, Head of Meluhan Army, says that they refused to do that and "under the Leadership of King Brahmanayak, his Highness' father [Daksha's father], we attacked Swadweep" (109). Meluhans won the battle and restored Yamuna's original course to meet Saraswati. But Saraswati is still depleting that is the major concern in present. Meluhans believe that Chandravanshis are setting up plans again to repeat the history. But in fact it is the Meluhan Empire that is responsible for the dying of Saraswati. This revelation will be made in the other two novels of the *Shiva Trilogy*.

When Daksha tells Shiva that Chandravanshis are doing terrorists attacks and have allied with the cursed group Nagas then Shiva inquires whether the matter has been discussed with the Chandravanshis or not. He says,

If I have learnt one thing from the pointless battles of my land, it is that wars should be the last resort. If there is an alternative available what is the harm in saving some young soldier's life? Surely, a mother would bless us for it. (110)

Shiva is the voice of reason, of sanity, of peace, of preserving humanity. Shiva is Tripathi's spokesperson. Tripathi through Shiva in the novel gives a rational outlook for war. He highlights that people kill each other for petty reasons. The Meluhans and the Swadweepans have converted the area near Yamuna into a no man's land and live peacefully abiding by the agreement made in the past after the battle. But it is insecurity in human beings which blinds their psyche. People do not trust each other and see each other as enemies. The Meluhans instead of finding the true reason of dying Saraswati are blaming Swadweepans; who in fact do not have any knowledge of that.

Suryavanshis are keen to wage war against Chandravanshis to teach them a lesson for terrorist attacks they are doing, but they avoid it because Chandravanshis do not follow "rules of war". For instance, a Suryavanshis soldier will never attack an unarmed man. A swordsman will not attack a person below his waist. On the other hand, Chandravanshis believe in victory not in rules. Meluhans believe in Lord Ram's ethics as rightly said by Parvateshwar "a person's character is not tested in good times. It is only in bad times that a person shows how steadfast he is to his dharma."(113)

During the Battle of Koonj, a Naga aimed an arrow at Shiva but Sati came forward. She rescues Shiva and is injured by the arrow. The Naga has released the '*agnibaan* or the fire arrow'—the legendary poisoned arrow. "The venom of its tip burned its victim's body from inside, causing a slow, painful death that would scar the soul for many births" (251). It is a reflection on the chemical weapons or other harmful weapons like atom bombs that the human beings have developed and which can give people very painful deaths.

Further, Mount Mandar was devastated in the blast where Brahaspati, Chief Scientist of Meluha and others worked. Brahaspati is killed in the blast. Panini, another scientist of Meluha, tells Shiva that Somras is unstable during its manufacturing. Brahaspati wanted to conduct some new experiments with Somras and he knew that the experiments can result in destruction. Therefore, he did not wait for anyone so that no one is harmed in the process. Shiva visits the place to search for Brahaspati's body and finds a Naga Bracelet. He is at once sure that the Lord of Nagas killed his friend. Shiva gets furious and said, "We declare war" (309). The Meluhan war council declares a war and orders for preparations of war. However, Kanakhala, Prime Minister of Meluha, suggests an alternative. She says that the Meluhans are enraged at what happened at Mount Mandar but we should not hurt the innocent people.

We want vengeance against the perpetrators of the crime, not all of Swadweep. Could we try and see whether a scalpel might work before we bring out the mighty war sword? (310)

At this Parvateshwar replies that they are not cowards. Kanakhala tries to persuade the members of the council by saying, “my aim is to seek our vengeance at minimum cost to Meluhan lives” (310).

Tripathi through Kanakhala tries to suggest a mid-way to avoid war and bloodshed. She comes up with a proposal of sending an emissary to Emperor Dilipa, King of Swadweep to request him to surrender the terrorists. But Parvateshwar is resolute and says that if they do not fight back “they [Chandravanshis] will be convinced that they can mount any attack at will and we will not respond” (311). Kanakhala further tries to dissuade them from waging war by saying that they should talk before battling. “This may be an opportunity to get them to admit that there are sections in their society who are terrorists. If they hand them over, we may even find ways of coexisting” (311). She turns towards grief-stricken Shiva to persuade him. Shiva though in pain understands Kanakhala’s concern for innocent people. He agrees to send an emissary to Swadweep. “Striving for a peaceful resolution will help in avoiding the deaths of innocents”, said Shiva (312).

Later in the narrative, during the preparation of war it is revealed that archery was a crucial war strategy for mass destruction. There were *daivi astras*—celestial weapons or the nuclear weapons in the past and are still present. However, Lord Rudra, the previous Mahadev, banned the use of *daivi astras*. During the preparation for war in Meluha, Drapaku, the blind old man’s son and a Vikrama, comes to Shiva for fighting. He says, “And he [his father] will disown me if I don’t support you in this *dharmayudh*” (320). Shiva too starts believing that this is a *dharmayudh*, a holy war. But in reality they all are going astray. People form strange opinions and claim that they are fighting for the right cause.

Meluhans think that the Chandravanshis and the Nagas are evil but in fact few people in power are responsible for such a massive destruction. All these revelations will be made in the other parts of *Shiva Trilogy*. It is not surprising that in the present era too such incidences happen as in the novel, *The Immortals of Meluha*. Soldiers unaware of what they are doing still fight. The mad logic of fighting is portrayed in the novel:

Five thousand archers rained death on the Chandravanshis as the sky turned black with a curtain of arrows....The Suryavanshis archers, unmindful of their tiring limbs or bleeding hands, bravely continued their unremitting assault....horses, with missing riders, attacked as if their own lives depended on it....when their shields were not strong enough to block the arrows, they used the bodies of their dead comrades. (346-48)

This war like the other wars that took place was futile and senseless, as Shiva learns the truth that it is not the Chandravanshis who attacked the Mount Mandar. They are not evil but different. He repents for not having learnt the truth before fighting. The blood of thousands of innocents was on his hands.

### Conclusion

The novel is a political allegory because the contemporary scenario in the world is vividly drawn. People fight war claiming they are fighting for a right cause and in the process so many innocent people are killed. There is an atmosphere of violence, bloodshed and destruction on both the sides irrespective of who is right or wrong. The lethal atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by United States during the Second World War is the most disastrous event that took place in the history of the world. It is one of the deadliest war in which nuclear weapons were used. It killed nearly 129,000 people. Everything was destroyed in the attack. The explosion affected human lives as there was a higher tendency of malformation of brains in the newborns. There was an increase in the rate of stillbirths and diseases such as cancer for decades. The attack destroyed many species of flora and fauna. Still, there is no change in the situation. There is still a threat of terrorist attacks in the world. One of the worst terrorist attacks in the present time has been 9/11 in 2001 at American Trade Center and 26/07 in Mumbai. Recently, there were terrorists’ incidences in India in 2014 in Chennai, a bomb blast at Church Street, Bangalore. There were terrorists’ activities in Pakistan and France and a major school massacre on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2014 in Peshawar. Many innocent people are killed in such activities. Terrorism has been a subject for literary writers, journalists as well as for film-makers. It is depicted in several Indian movies like *Roja* (1992), *Black Friday* (2004), *Aamir* (2008), etc.

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