

CREATION THROUGH ANNIHILATION: EMERGENCE OF DIGNIFIED IDENTITY AND DECENTERING THE OPPRESSOR IN AMISH TRIPATHY'S '*SHIVA TRILOGY*'

Saurav Bhattacharyya* and Shri Krishan Rai**

Abstract: This paper attempts to show how Amish's portrayal of mythical past is permeated by contemporary allusions. He shows that how the evocation of India's glorious past only adds to the gloom that is a part and parcel of all those who are oppressed. Oppression, according to Tripathy, is universal and is inherently evil which needs to be rooted out. Shiva, the hero is endowed with such a task. However, given such extraordinary prowess the task may simply be carried out by one who attains goodness, but wherein lies the common man's solace? How is he to overcome such Herculean tasks? In an aphoristic tone Amish comes up with an answer: 'Har Har Mahadev' that is 'every one is a Mahadev'. Taking the mythical as a background this paper focuses upon the nature of the centre and argues that emancipation and identity formation can only be possible at the centre. The centre assigns as well as defines identity and constantly interpellates individuals into subjects. Thus emergence of dignified identity and true emancipation is possible through a systematic implosion of the centre itself. In the trilogy Shiva gradually comes to comprehend this and at the end destroys Devgiri- the centre of Melhua to recreate and remodel an egalitarian society.

Keywords: Mythology, Oppression, Shiva, Centre, Margin, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

In his *Shiva Trilogy*, Amish Tripathy concentrates on the nature and origin of evil with special reference to societal injustice. Shiva, the protagonist, starts as an 'uncouth barbarian' to become the Neelkanth, the liberator. In his perilous journey, which is also a rite of passage that every mythical hero must undertake in order to free the society from the clutches of evil, Shiva learns that evil is ultimately a by product of good which is no longer acceptable at a given time. Meluha is built upon the image of Plato's Republic, it is a 'Ram Rajya' according to its king Daksha but it is plagued by terrorist attacks. Shiva soon finds out that the apparent utopia that Daksha boasts of is menaced by internal societal injustice which needs to be remedied first before eradicating external evil out of the social apparatus. The 'Vikarma law', which has close reference to the present day untouchability, (and the vikarmas allude to the oppressed dalits) is one such custom which is not only oppressive but also demeaning. Shiva, himself being an outcast god (according to the Hindu pantheon) as well as an uncouth barbarian (according to the novels) lends a sympathetic ear to the Vikarma cause and empowers them.

* Research Scholar, National Institute of Technology, Durgapur. Email: bhattacharyyasaurav4@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor, NIT, Durgapur

The Immortals of Melhua begins at the backdrop of a harsh and extreme climate where the tribals like 'Gunas' and 'Pakraits' undergo severe existential crises. Living on the fringes of society and almost at the precipice of extinction, does Shiva, the protagonist, realize the importance of dependence- both communal as well as social. With this view in mind he concedes to Nandi's proposal to move to a more centred societal space viz. Devgari. Shiva's dependence on the centre for his clan's benefit soon gets obfuscated in lieu of a greater symbolic discourse that almost acts as an hierophany- that is the revelation of the sacred- Shiva's blue throat, which blurs the fine line between the ruler and the ruled, and culminates in a topsy turvy making Shiva more important and powerful than Daksha, the king of Meluha. Thus the very beginning of the novel exposes the nature of power; the relation between the oppressor and the oppressed is but built upon certain ideological and symbolical discourses rather than being inherently present within the body of the subject like caste, creed or religion. This paper will focus upon the narrative exegesis of power and its articulation with special references to a few underprivileged characters in the Shiva Trilogy and show how these characters get emancipated not due to divine intervention but by employing a more suitable, secular strategy- acknowledging one's propensity to be divine (by bringing them close to the centre) by acknowledging social change as an inevitable and necessary step towards progressive humane evolution.

Amish's *Shiva Trilogy* deeply conveys and captures the psycho-social as well as moral and ideological constructs which have cemented the abstract notion of 'hinduism' in India. By giving a fantastic and mythical account of India's history, Amish rather focuses, albeit obliquely, on the contemporary social situations especially caste based oppression. Dividing humans on the basis of caste, according to Amish, is not a religious or mythical phenomenon but a strategy having political endorsements. Thus *Shiva Trilogy* can allegorically be read as a narrative that seeks to speak for those who have been rendered speechless- viz. the dalits and the tribals of India. The first generation dalit writers were skeptical about a unified India, they felt that their voices were subsumed under the mainframe traditional narratives and thus argued for an exclusive approach, which though necessary at that time seemed self-centred. The new writers on the other hand, are striving for a holistic approach. They write their identities and histories into the Indian narrative, their pursuit is a pan-Indian inclusiveness, which despite being a grand-narrative, evoke verisimilitude because of the present recuperative governmental and legal measures. *Shiva Trilogy* can be read as a veiled allusion to the contemporary India only enacted in a mythico-fantastic world. The various kinds of injustices and oppressions find their due importance in the plot. But Tripathy has taken an all inclusive approach to erase these individual 'narratives of pain' and replenish the society with celebration of equality. In the novels segregated masses as well as individuals confront one another and through a dialectical process emerge with

new identities which seem more inclusive and conducive to national integration. Unfortunately, the society due to its long acquaintance with rigid laws (which once might have been good and moral but now have become obsolete and hypocritical) has internalized them and accepted them as natural, needs to be destroyed before the new can truly emerge. This true, unfettered humanism without its blind adherence to tradition is achieved at the end by deposition of old moral laws symbolized by Daksha, Bhrigu et.al. Tripathy aims to annihilate the petty notions of ‘difference’ and create a unique identity based on equality and participation.

To attain a progressive human evolution, mentioned in the previous section, people must see history (and by extension mythology) as an advancement of absolute mind or consciousness toward self-conscious freedom. For Hegel, Historicism is the belief that people can evaluate and comprehend phenomena (people, events, nations, religion etc.) only within their specific historical context. Amish renders these ‘specific contexts’ into generalized situations by introducing and incorporating myth (in the form of Shiva’s story) into the social unconscious because true movement toward freedom must be complimentary to a movement towards rationality not only in terms of individual minds but also the social and political constructs that express them. But the centre always appropriates phenomena and attaches truth and universality to it. Thus, these generalizations that Amish carefully constructs must be destructed to gain a progressive evolution, hence the centre must be eradicated, which is what Shiva does at the end.

DISCUSSION

The *Shiva Trilogy* is premised upon an imaginative rendition of the *Shivapurana*. Any discussion regarding the contemporary social conditions or its representations in literature would be inadequate without discussing the extant social structure which has conditioned them. Myth conditions thoughts and feelings, it gives rise to beliefs and customs, and it influences the culture as a whole. Myths have always been used as powerful tools to manage (sometimes even manufacture) social orders. Before the emergence of ‘history’, mythological discourses legitimized and regulated social laws and ideologically interpreted them as true and moral, which due to its sacrosanct value was almost always internalized by the masses as natural and inevitable. The upper sections of the society (class, caste, creed etc.) have always used myths to oppress the ‘other’ through these discourses. Myth is increasingly being replaced by history. Contemporary authors, according to Kiran Budkuley:

...Oppose or expose such authoritarian and discriminatory ideology [and] break its spell upon the popular mind and thereby, render it ineffectual. For this, it becomes necessary for the writer to identify the supportive mythic structures and, in re narrating them, to re-construct their irrational, uncritical pedagogic images so as to de-mythify the ideology....This in

turn, exposes/counters the discriminatory power structures vested in the polarity of centre and the margins... (19-20)

By divesting the myths of the 'uncritical pedagogic images', Amish has de-familiarized the known narratives to expose the fallacy of concentration of power at the center and shown how identity and self awareness can be concretized and realized only at the centre. But, because the centre is always controlled by the elite class, identity at the periphery or margin remains forever obscured, segregated and loose because of its very nature. Even the evil that Shiva tries to eradicate and which is considered to be existent only at the margin (first the Chandravanshis and then the Nagas) is found to be present at the very centre. But the centre relocates and negotiates those identity formations by weaving ideological narratives around them. Because the evil is vested with awful power and because it has its own identity, it cannot but be present at the centre. The Nagas at the periphery are not organized neither are their attacks. The Chandravanshis are a chaotic people. Organization is only possible at the centre. The centre exudes power to control and manufacture identities. This paper discusses how through a radical reinterpretation of the margin and a total withering away of centre, an all-inclusive social paradigm can be structured that shall be conducive to identity formation irrespective of class or caste. But this emergence of new identity presupposes an annihilation and implosion (and not explosion) of the existing societal superstructure, and the myth of Shiva (the god of destruction) acts as the only possible metaphor for this radical alteration. The paper further discusses the process of constant accommodation and relocation of masses (or individuals) at and to the centre by creating grand narratives, and this situates the centre paradoxically as both inclusive (selective inclusion) and exclusive at the same time. The paper also focuses on the centre's propensity to transform individuals into subjects by imposing identities on them.

1. The Case of Shiva:

The Vedas hardly mentions Rudra as a major god and the term Shiva is never heard in the Rig vedic hymns as R.N Dandekar mentions:

He was also the god of wild communities living among mountains and forests, who were generally given to uncivil activities. When such a god had to be admitted to the hieratic pantheon, an attempt was made to suppress the original character of Rudra and superimpose upon him the character of some heavenly god. ...Rudra emerges in later Hindu mythology as a god of great importance and popularity, assimilating to himself, certain elements of the character of Pasupati of the Indus religion and of the Dravidian Shiva. (229.)

Historically, the worship of Shiva is rooted in prehistoric religious beliefs and is prior to the introduction of Vedic religion in India. While we cannot entirely rely upon Puranas and Vedas for facts, we can at least deduce that there was a power struggle of sorts between the Shaivas and the vedic people before a compromise emerged and Shiva was integrated within the vedic religion. This conflict of attitude is very much evident in the ‘Satarudriya hymn’ found in the *Vajaseyeni Samhita* of the *Yajur Veda* about which Monier Williams mentions:

In this hymn- a hymn which is of the greatest interest because constantly used in the present day- he is described as possessing many contradictory, incongruous, grotesque and wholly ungodlike attributes; for example he is a killer and destroyer; he is terrible fierce and inauspicious; he is a deliverer and saviour; he causes happiness and prevents disease; he has a healing and auspicious body; ...he is a ruler and controller of thousand Rudras who are described as fierce and ill formed (Virupa) ...he is lord of ghosts spirits and goblins; he is a patron of thieves and robbers, and is himself a thief, robber and deceiver; he presides over carpenters, chariot makers, blacksmiths, architects, huntsmen; he is present in towns and houses, rivers and lakes, in woods and roads,...(77)

Therefore, in so far as the Vedic mythology is concerned, Shiva is an outcast precisely because of his communion with people given to ‘uncivil activities’. These so called activities were obviously not in accordance with Aryan view of life. Therefore it can be seen that how the centre allocates identities by imposing ideological value judgment. Any god worshipped at the periphery cannot be included into the mainframe, central theological paradigm. The narrative centering around the Daksha-Shiva encounter amply suggests the exclusive nature of the centre. Daksha, as the story goes, prohibits Shiva, almost through an injunction, from receiving portions of sacrifice. He compares Shiva to a ‘sudra’. The centre cannot allow aberrations or deviations from the norm. By nature, Shiva represents chaos and thus cannot be accommodated at the centre of the cosmos. He is thus an outsider forever. He symbolizes death and destruction. But, since death and destruction are necessary according to the Hindu theory of Karma, where life and death, chaos and cosmos, creation and destruction are like eternally repeatable cycles one following the other, Shiva could not but be accommodated within the center as one of the divine Trinities. Shiva thus lies both within and outside the centre, and this paradox can only be resolved by an altogether different identity shift: the phallus- a patriarchal elitist symbol. Thus only through annihilation (massacre at Daksha’s Sacrifice) and negotiation (by being changed into a phallogocentric symbol) could Shiva gain power position and dignified identity at the centre.

In the *Shiva Trilogy*, Tripathy attempts to portray Shiva as an ‘uncouth barbarian’ who as a type, ought to be generally reviled by people of Melhua. He

is an outsider living on the fringes of the society. Melhua is a caste free society built upon the egalitarian principles of Lord Ram. Its organization and stoic moral regulations soon exhibits cracks under the pressures of an observant individual like Shiva. It might be caste free but it is menaced by various sorts of oppressions. Oppression is the basic fulcrum upon which the social apparatus is balanced and allows it to create the dialectics between centre and margin. When Shiva enters Melhua, he remains a marginal figure- a petty chieftain seeking refuge against existential crises. The centre would have been oblivious to his existence had he not served a greater symbolic sacerdotal function. Because of his blue throat, he had to be transformed into an hierophanic object (that is an object or a subject where the divine has revealed or manifested itself) and accommodated into the centre but obviously with an identity shift- the saviour, the Neelkanth. The centre can never allow concentration of power at the periphery; it seeks to accommodate and integrate aberrations within itself but always with an identity shift. Shiva being an iconoclast challenges all traditionally accepted notions and questions their validity. He strives to eradicate evil (which for him is oppression, inequality etc.), thought by him to be existent at the periphery (first in the in the form of Chandravanshis and then as Nagas) but ultimately was discovered to be present at the very centre, veiled under the guise of good. If evil is to be taken out of the social apparatus the centre must be destroyed, if equality is to be achieved the hierarchical difference between centre and margin is to be destroyed. If everyone is to be a Mahadev (har har Mahadev) the centre needs to be imploded, because power can emancipate only the powerful and in absence of a centre power can be equally distributed. What Shiva calls for is a withering away of centre and it shall be discussed later.

2. The Case of Vikarmas and Nagas

Vikarmas are the subjugated group in Melhua, they can be alluded to the present day dalits, the untouchables. Though this subjugation is not based upon caste, it is rather more ludicrous and illogical as Nandi explains in Tripathy's *Meluha*:

Vikarma people, my lord are people who have been punished in this birth for the sins of their previous birth. Hence they have to live this life out with dignity and tolerate their present sufferings with grace... They are not allowed to marry since they may poison others with their bad fate. They are not allowed to touch any person who is not related to them or is not part of their normal duties. (93).

The vikarmas, like the contemporary dalits have internalized the upper class discourses as moral and true. This acknowledgement has relegated them to the periphery, rendered them powerless by taking their sense of self worth. Shiva, in order to root evil out of the society first tries to give these hapless people their dignity back by calling into question the validity of such mandates that bind them to their

humiliating lives. Sati, Shiva's beloved, is also a vikarma, but due to her proximity to the centre, she enjoys certain privileges. When Shiva liberates the vikarmas by scrapping the vikarma law, he brings some of the vikarmas like Drapaku into the centre. Endowed with power, which by itself is emancipatory, the vikarma brigade march with dignity to certain doom. Their identities as weaklings, change and they gain respect in Melhua.

Similarly the Nagas, who are introduced as evil force and allude to Maoist tribals living at the extreme periphery of society, are considered as:

They are cursed people my lord...are born with hideous deformities because of the sins of their previous births....the Naga name alone strikes terror in any citizen's heart. They are not even allowed to live in the Sapt Sindhu...(59).

After their encounter with Shiva, the Nagas too are allowed to participate in the societal machinery and their identities too are changed, Ganesh becomes the lord of people. Thus it is seen that the narratives of power are artificially manufactured and it is glued to the centre. All the marginal characters who, either challenge the centre or exude power naturally, are selectively brought to the centre and the centre accommodates their appearances by employing a counter narrative which changes their identities. Thus it is seen that liberation and emancipation is possible only at the centre. But how can all the masses be accommodated at the centre? The question haunts Shiva throughout the span of the novels and only at last he understands that only by annihilating the centre from within, that is, through an organized implosion (whose physical manifestation is the destruction of 'Tripur') can power be equally distributed throughout.

But the implosion of the centre would lead to total chaos as it is the only binding principle that structures society. The image of Shiva, the eternal destroyer acts as the most congruous metaphor to reconcile this irresolvable conundrum. Only a social outcast can implode the centre by virtue of his absence from the centre. But once the centre implodes and a new order begins, it tries to define its centre once again. In order to avoid such philosophical paradox, Tripathy chooses the figure of Shiva as the liberator as the conclusion suggests:

Over the subsequent years, Shiva became increasingly ascetic. He began spending many days, even months in claustrophobic confines of mountains, performing severe penance.. (563).

He chose not to stay amid the new order and took refuge in the mountains, because he knew the oppressive force that the centre intends to exert. This is also in tune with mythology because the absolute Shiva having manifested the world through emitting his cosmic energy does not directly interfere with our regular affairs but willing take upon himself the task of eliminating evil and the delusion

or Maya that exists in the manifest creation and in our own consciousness. So an all inclusive society must do away with the centre to create equal distribution of power that would in turn emancipate individuals by giving them self awareness and dignity.

CONCLUSION

In his *Annihilation of Caste*, Dr. Ambedkar suggests that the very paradigm on which the Hindu religion stands, needs a radical change. He considered religion (specially Hinduism) to be the most oppressive metaphor of the centre as in India religion acts as the guiding force. Shiva in many ways alludes to Ambedkar, whose radical views attract many powerful enemies and Bhriгу resembles Gandhi. The ascetic is an ardent champion of the existing social order and demands social reformation, without totally overturning the existing order, whereas the other supports a radical overthrow of the existing order. Self identity and dignity can only be achieved when the social machinery is completely remodeled. The vision of past that Amish presents is but a projection of modern India, his claim of a pluralist, egalitarian society is best understood by the epigraph of the *The Oath of the Vayuputras*:

Har har Mahadev

All of us are Mahadevs, All of us are gods

For his most magnificent temple, finest mosque and

Greatest church exist within our souls.

But, Amish understands that the inclusion which he aims for will only be possible, that is the dignified self- identity will only be achieved in a totally remodeled society where reason and morality will bypass age old doctrines promulgated by religion. This is what Shiva does, by a terrible implosion he destroys the existing belief system to introduce a new epistemology which strives, at all cost, to do away with the centre.

Thus decentering the oppressor does not only mean the abdication of the ruler but an abolition of the centre as a whole, as the ruler (which may be an individual or an ideology) is replaceable. Thus it is seen that the centre always exerts its oppressive force on the periphery. But in order to gain an equal ground, to really have an egalitarian society, the centre which is the real oppressor must implode to yield space for a centreless society where power would emancipate rather than enslave. *Shiva Trilogy* is an apt example of such a society. Its visionary ideology might sound utopian but should not be underestimated because the mythical background that Amish has chosen acts as a re-interpretation of the universally applicable societal structure. The myth of Shiva tries to condition the current societal inequality and bring a fresh equilibrium.

References

- Budkuley, Kiran (2010). 'Mahabharata Myths in Contemporary Writing: Challenging Ideology', in K. Satchidanandan (ed.), *Myth in Contemporary Indian Literature*, pp. 19-20 New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Dandekar, R.N (2006). 'Indian Mythology', in R.C. Hazra (ed.), *Cultural Heritage of India*. Vol. II, pp. 229. Calcutta: The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture.
- Hegel, G.W. Friedrich (1979). *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. USA: OUP.
- Monier Williams, Sir Monier (1885). *Religious Thought and Life in India*, pp-77. London: OUP.
- Tripathy, Amish (2010). *The Immortals of Melhua*, pp- 59-93. New Delhi: Westland.
- , (2013). *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, pp-563. New Delhi: Westland.

