

## **Alienation And Reconciliation In Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals Of Meluha***

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores Amish Tripathi's debut novel, *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), which addresses diasporic themes of alienation and reconciliation. Tripathi, a contemporary Indian English writer, draws inspiration from the *Shiva Purana*, reimagining the legendary Shiva in a human form as the protagonist of his Shiva Trilogy. Here, Tripathi presents Shiva as a mortal, a leader of the Guna tribe from Lake Mansarovar, at the base of Mount Kailash in Tibet, who migrates to the ancient city of Meluha. Shiva's journey includes transformation into the "Neelkanth" after consuming the mystical drink *Somras*. In Meluha, he experiences a mixture of nostalgia, alienation, and eventual reconciliation with his new environment. While previous studies have analyzed various aspects of this novel, few have explored the diasporic elements it presents through Shiva's perspective as a refugee.

**Key Words:** assimilation, acceleration, association, Meluha.

### **Introduction**

For many purposes, human beings have been wandering around the world since ancient times, searching for food, water, and safety from animal attacks and natural calamities like floods, forest fires, and droughts. They gradually settled along riverbeds to begin cultivation, leading to the growth of civilizations in those areas. All these civilizations are recorded in history, including the Indus Valley Civilization. The renowned Indian novelist Amish Tripathi draws on archaeological sources to blend mythical characters taken from Vedic scriptures into his stories.

Amish Tripathi references this history, weaving characters inspired by Vedic scriptures into his narratives. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, the legendary god Shiva is reimagined as a mortal, supported by mythological characters like Daksha, Nandi, Veerbhadra, and Lord Ram, who established the society of Meluha. Tripathi's novel blends current themes of war and migration with the narrative of a god-turned-human, tackling issues of cultural integration and diaspora. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva is the protagonist, while other mythological characters include Daksha, the antagonist; Nandi, the captain who brings Guna to Meluha; Veerbhadra, Shiva's friend; Brahma, the inventor of Somaras; and Lord Ram, the creator of Meluhan society in the novel. This novel mixes present-day realities of war and diasporic elements with an intertwined narration of mythical characters. Amish's books are considered the fastest-selling in Indian publishing history and have gained popularity in other countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States.

*Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction* states that in the original Greek sense diaspora means 'more voluntary form of population movement' (Kenny, 2013) in *The Immortals of Meluha* addressed that the immigrant's issues in the foreign land through the leading character, addressed Shiva, who belongs to the Guna tribe.

The protagonist, Shiva, is portrayed as a straightforward, brave warrior, a friendly character, and a leader of the Gunas Community. That community was forced to settle in the neighboring country of Meluha, here, 'involuntary migrants classified as refugees' (2013). Shiva quickly adapts to Meluhan laws, and his destiny leads him to become the Neelkanth. As Neelkanth, he challenges the irrevocable rules of Meluha and abolishes them for the sake of marrying Sati who is the princess of Meluha. Sati practices the rule of Vikarma; the previous birth sin made her lose her husband when her child was born as stillborn. Promod K. Nayar contemporary *Literary and Cultural Theory*, quotes Jan Mohammed, who states, "The migrant often possesses a double consciousness... one way of locating the immigrant's intellectual-cultural position is on the specular border of two cultures, looking critically at both, neither assimilating nor combining either of them."

Shiva critically examines the cultural practices of both the Guna and the Meluhans community. It has been argued that Shiva chose Veerbhadra as the leader of the Gunas during his absence, but Bhadra mostly depends on Shiva's orders. The Guna cultural tradition insists on obeying the leader's orders without question making Bhadra always depend on his leader friend Shiva. The protagonist, Shiva, observed that the well-mannered country struggles with irrational practices followed in the name of Lord Ram, which he feels do not suit the present-day scenario as well.

### **Literature Review**

In "Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*: A Reading from Contemporary Literary Perspectives," Dipanjoy Mukherjee (2018) briefly examines the novel's diasporic elements. Falguni P. Desai's (2020) work, "The Immortals of Meluha: Relocating the Distant Land," analyzes migration theory in Tripathi's novel, while Richa Sharma and Shrutinita Mehata (2023) explore distinctions between migration and diaspora studies. However, no existing studies examine the connection between Shiva's alienation and his active pursuit of reconciliation with Meluha. This paper seeks to fill that gap.

### Methodology:

A qualitative, close-reading approach was used to identify diasporic themes in *The Immortals of Meluha*. The characters' ideologies and behaviors were analyzed for evidence of these themes.

### Results and discussion

#### Tension in the Homeland:

Diasporic studies of literature often highlight the tensions within a homeland that compel people to seek settlement in foreign countries. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, a similar instance is described by the writer at the beginning of the novel, where twenty-one-year-old Shiva, leader of the Guna tribe on Mount Kailash, faces a pivotal decision. He feels uncertain about accepting an offer from Meluha, delivered by Captain Nandi, a Meluhan representative. The offer is straightforward: Meluha invites the Guna tribe to live peacefully in its society in exchange for "paying taxes and obeying the laws of the land" (2). This narrative reflects the current reality of immigrants from developing countries who are drawn to developed nations by the promise of education, job opportunities, and an improved lifestyle.

The rival Pakrati clan frequently attacks the Gunas, forming new alliances each year to strengthen their position. Shiva recalls the ancient Mansarovar Lake, where the Gunas have lived on the shores since ancient times. Shiva's uncle had once allowed the Pakraties access to the lake's water for their livelihood, even though both communities regularly clashed over control of the lake. Now, as the Guna leader, Shiva holds power over the lake and fights bravely to protect it. Despite being outnumbered, the Pakraties refuse to accept defeat and continually challenge the Gunas, impacting their daily lives. One day, Shiva notices a surprise attack by the Pakraties as they enter the Guna village. He quickly alerts his people and fights courageously alongside Meluhan soldiers. The Gunas suffer devastating losses, particularly among the women and children of their community. At dusk, while the Gunas offer prayers of gratitude for any day without conflict, the women are busy with chores on the lakeshore, unaware that the Pakraties have planned their attack for this vulnerable time. Confronted with this harsh reality, Shiva ultimately decides to leave his homeland and seek a new life in a foreign land. Nicholas Van Hear's statement about the refugee diaspora reflects this situation:

"In conditions of protracted violent conflict or widespread social dislocation and repression, a common pattern is for most people to seek safety in other parts of their country, while a substantial number look for refuge in neighboring countries" (Encyclopedia of Diaspora, 581).

Shiva announces his decision in an emotional speech: "It is fit for barbarians. We fought endless battles, but we saw no sign of an end." He acknowledges Nandi, saying, "They fought shoulder to shoulder with us today. They have earned my trust. I want to go with them to Meluha. But this cannot be my decision alone" (6). This moment portrays Shiva as a leader who respects his people's freedom to choose their fate in a foreign land.

The entire tribe supports Shiva's decision, declaring, "Your decision is our decision" (6). This statement reflects the Gunas' desire for peace, rather than risking their lives in their homeland. In *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, Kenny explains that "...those experiencing involuntary migration, or those who felt their migration was forced rather than chosen, were among the most likely to experience discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion in their new host countries" (Kenny 2013). The Gunas' refugee diaspora represents a painful and forced migration from their homeland.

On the fifth day of the Gunas' march toward a foreign land, they face a surprise attack from fifty Pakraties, who are quickly defeated. The Gunas' approach to warfare is simple: eliminate the enemy. However, the well-trained Meluhan soldiers avoid killing, adhering instead to rules of engagement. Yaksha, the leader of the Pakraties, ultimately begs Shiva for mercy. At this moment, Nandi intervenes, pleading with Shiva to forgive Yaksha. From now on, the Gunas will not return to their homeland, and so they consider a peaceful compromise with their enemies, aiming for future nonviolence.

Shiva then orders his tribe to disarm the Pakraties and allows them to return home, surprising his friend Badhra. For the first time, Shiva feels pity for the Pakraties. Nicholas Van Hear expands on this idea, noting that "...there are minorities living abroad, fearful of their vulnerability to local nationalism" (qtd. in Kaldor and Duffield 586). Shiva's choice to end the conflict with the Pakraties through a peaceful treaty alleviates the anxiety of future attacks.

#### Mesmerizing Urbanization:

After four weeks of continuous marching, the troop reached the outskirts of Srinagar, the capital of the Kashmir Valley. The first sight of Kashmir is depicted as a masterpiece of nature, and Shiva is mesmerized by its beauty. The journey of the Jhelum River is described as a "roaring tigress" through the mountains, but when it enters the valley, it becomes a "languorous cow," nurturing Dal Lake with its water before continuing its journey to the sea.

The melodies of birds soothe the exhausted ears of Shiva's tribe, who are accustomed only to the harsh howling of icy mountain winds (11).

Srinagar is a well-planned city, built on a raised platform five meters high to protect it from the floods of the Jhelum. The city walls stand twenty meters tall and four meters thick, designed to defend against enemies. Inside these walls, the layout is organized into blocks with neatly arranged roads, marketplaces, temples, gardens, meeting halls, and all the necessities for urban life. The Gunas, accustomed to simple lives in the Himalayas, are astonished by the organized, urban environment of Srinagar. The city already houses twenty thousand residents and is now prepared to welcome another two hundred souls from Mount Kailash (11-12).

The narrator conveys a positive attitude toward the host country; Nandi describes Meluha as a paradise that welcomes immigrants with open arms. For Shiva, the leader of the Gunas, years of anxiety seem to lift as he prepares to embrace a new, peaceful life, leaving behind the violence of the Himalayas. This shift represents an immigrant's hope for relief from past traumas and a readiness to assimilate into the host culture.

At the foreigners' camp, Shiva meets a young officer, Chitraangadh, who greets him with an official smile and a respectful namaste. Chitraangadh guides Shiva through the immigration formalities. Noticing the respect with which Nandi and the officer address him, Shiva asks them to call him by his name rather than the formal sir. This moment marks his first step toward feeling a sense of belonging in Meluha, rather than remaining an outsider. Once the formalities are complete, Nandi leads Shiva to their allocated camp. Along the way, Shiva notices colorful stones running through the center of the road. Nandi explains that these stones cover underground drains that carry waste away from the camp. This detail highlights Shiva's observant nature and Nandi's acceptance of his friendship by allowing him to use his name.

Upon arriving at the camp, Shiva finds a spacious, three-story structure with separate living quarters for each family. The Gunas express their gratitude to Shiva for making the right decision at the right time and for providing them with a sophisticated lifestyle. Each room is furnished with luxurious furniture, polished copper plates serving as mirrors, clean linens, towels, and clothing. Amused by the softness of the fabric, Shiva learns from Chitraangadh that it is cotton, a plant cultivated in Meluha. This experience highlights the cultural and economic superiority of Meluha compared to the Guna tribe.

Edgar Karu's *The Contradictory Immigrant Problem: A Socio psychological* notes that the immigrants' differences from the host population first appear in communication difficulties and in their different habits and customs. It has been pointed out that while all mankind belongs to one species, there are geographical varieties that, though differing genetically only slightly, culturally often differ very markedly (qtd. in Wolstenhome and O'Connor, 148). The group then examines a "bathroom with a sloping floor that enabled the water to flow naturally to a hole, which drained it out" (14). Bhadra's mother exclaims that there is some kind of device (Water Tap) attached to the side walls to control the flow of water in the bathroom. These are some market products that are not the Gunas have never encountered; their existence is closely tied to nature, and they are unfamiliar with controlling or altering it.

### **Feeling of Alienation:**

On the first day at camp, Lady Ayurvati announces quarantine for the Gunas, adhering to Meluha's strict hygiene standards. Nandi explains that this is a safety measure that will last only seven days, and he reassures Shiva that Lady Ayurvati is the best doctor in Meluha. He encourages Shiva to cooperate with her, but Shiva grimaces at Nandi, questioning, "Hygienic standards?" (16). This line reflects how the Gunas' self-image is impacted by the rules of quarantine, though they have no choice but to comply.

That evening, Ayurvati serves a medicinal drink called Somaras after a hearty meal, though its side effects remain undisclosed. Shiva tries to sleep on the most comfortable bed he has ever experienced; he rolls on the mattress, missing his belongings, especially his tiger-skin garment, which were taken away for hygienic reasons.

He takes the bed sheet, wraps himself in it, and lays on the ground, seeking a better sleep. His thoughts drift to his homeland: he misses the rough, cold floor of his hut, the shrill winds of Mount Kailash, and his comforting tiger skin (18). The place feels "excessively comfortable but unfamiliar and alien," and Shiva's instincts reveal the truth: "It's not the room, it's you" (18). In the middle of the night, Bhadra knocks on his door, announcing that the entire Guna tribe, including himself, has suddenly fallen ill. Shiva immediately informs Lady Ayurvati, who takes prompt care of them. Meanwhile, she advises Shiva to take a bath, but he refuses, wanting to stay with his people. Ayurvati, accustomed to being obeyed as a doctor, glares at him. She expects compliance when she 'instructs' a patient, yet she recalls that noble patients, like Shiva, often need explanations rather than commands. However, 'he is not a nobleman, just an immigrant' (21). This reveals Ayurvati's urban mindset; she explains that only nobility are informed of Somaras' side effects, as they understand its medicinal properties. Despite Shiva's earlier jokes, which she tolerated as "uncouth immigrant" behavior, she now feels compelled to tell him the truth: if he doesn't wash the Somaras toxicity from his body, it could be fatal. Reluctantly, Shiva agrees and bathes, experiencing an unusual sensation.

In his homeland, he bathed just twice a month in the icy waters of Lake Manasarovar, but here he follows Ayurvati's instructions, scrubbing with soap. After finishing, he feels "new, rejuvenated, and stronger than ever," though his neck remains uncomfortably cold (22). To ease it, he drapes an angavastiram (a cloth worn over the shoulder) around his neck. Ayurvati soon checks on Shiva's health and informs him that his tribe is recovering rapidly. Observing his neck, which she had overlooked earlier, she gasps and collapses, exclaiming, "My Lord, you are here!" (23). She becomes the first to recognize Shiva as the Neelkanth, noticing his throat has inexplicably turned blue. Witnessing this, Nandi and Chitraangadh cry out with joy, as though longing for freedom.

Chidradhwaj, the Governor of Kashmir, shows deep reverence toward Shiva. Suddenly, the Meluhans around him begin to worship Shiva, attempting to touch his feet in reverence. A few days later, Ayurvati approaches Shiva to apologize for treating him as a commoner, attempting to touch his feet as a sign of respect. Shiva gently refuses, acknowledging her as a healer and life-giver. Her eyes shine with admiration as she thinks, "He is a worthy man, being the Neelkanth" (32).

This reflects Ayurvati's pride; she believes in the prophecy but still views Shiva as an outsider, showing the Meluhan mindset that regards themselves as superior.

In Indian mythology, the Devas and Asuras churned the ocean to create an elixir with the help of the snake Vasuki, releasing a poison called "Aalakaala." Lord Shiva consumed this poison to save the universe, his throat turning blue with the help of Goddess Parvati to hold it in Shiva's throat. In Meluha, Somaras is consumed to promote youth, strength, and health.

On his way to Devagiri, Shiva meets Sati at the Bharama temple, captivated by her beauty. Sati, noticing Shiva's gaze, remarks to her assistant Krittika that he is an "uncouth immigrant." Just then, a hooded figure suddenly attacks her. Shiva attempts to intervene, but Sati is ready, drawing her sword to confront the attacker. Together, Shiva and Sati overpower the hooded figure. After the confrontation, Sati introduces herself to Shiva, promising to help him in the future if he ever needs it.

### **Reconciliation with Meluha:**

Chidradhwaj, the Governor of Kashmir, informs Shiva that he should proceed to Devagiri, where the emperor will explain the significance of the Neelkanth. Accompanied by Nandi, Shiva travels to Devagiri, observing Meluhan society with keen interest, considering it the most advanced city he has encountered. He wonders about the Neelkanth's importance to this society, and his curiosity drives him to seek answers.

Unexpectedly, Shiva meets Sati in the royal garden at Devagiri, where she practices dance under her teacher's guidance. Shiva attempts to impress Sati by offering to teach her the dance, but Krittika is angered by his behavior, believing the uncouth immigrant unsuitable to compete with Meluhan teachers. Shiva apologizes and receives permission to perform the dance for Sati.

In Daksha's private chamber, Shiva meets the emperor regularly, learning about Meluhan customs. One day, Daksha mentions Lord Ram's unfinished task, claiming only the Neelkanth can complete it. Daksha confirms the Neelkanth originates from another land, not the Sapt-Sindhiyan region. This revelation makes Shiva realize Meluha's true intention in inviting immigrants: searching for the Neelkanth among them. Feeling betrayed, Shiva maintains his composure, stating, "Meluha wasn't honest with me" (119). He reflects on his initial eagerness to join Meluha's workforce, now disillusioned by their ulterior motive.

In the medical camp, the unannounced side effects of Somras caused suffering for the Guna tribe. Nandi acknowledges the mistake and feels guilty. Emperor Daksha and Prime Minister Kanakhala urge Shiva to forgive the oversight. Chief General Parvateswarar sincerely apologizes, admitting the mistake. However, Parvateswarar doubts the prophecy of the Neelkanth's arrival from outside Sapt-Sindhu, adhering to Lord Ram's karma of honesty and self-reliance. Shiva respects Parvateswarar's conviction, recognizing a true Lord Ram follower. He reconciles with Meluha, demanding his Guna tribe be settled in Devagiri to ensure their security and connect with his people before accepting the Neelkanth role. Shiva warns the Meluhan royalists: he expects transparency regarding his Neelkanth role, unhappy about being misled. Emperor Daksha acquiesces, arranging the tribe's settlement through Prime Minister Kanakhala.

Shiva confessed his love to Sati, but she rejected him due to her status as a Vikarma, a person burdened by past sins. In Meluhan society, Vikarmas are excluded from auspicious events, as their touch can transfer their bad fate to others, necessitating Sudhikaran, a purification process.

Sati's past tragedies losing her husband and stillborn child led to her Vikarma declaration. As a devoted Lord Ram follower, she cannot accept Shiva's love. However, Shiva, as the Neelkanth, challenges this law and ultimately abolishes it to marry Sati.

Their union symbolizes Shiva's assimilation into Meluhan society. Furthermore, his friend Bhadra marries Sati's friend Krittika, strengthening social bonds. As an immigrant, Shiva adapts to Meluhan culture and leads effectively, demonstrating that an outsider can bring fresh perspectives.

### **Conclusion:**

This study builds upon existing research, shedding light on the hardships faced by refugees in Meluha. Despite biased rules favoring natives over immigrants, Shiva challenges these rigid regulations. His adaptability enables him to thrive in the foreign lifestyle, ultimately fulfilling the Neelkanth role. Shiva critiques the foundational principles of Vikarma tradition and Sudhikaran, deeming them ineffective in the current context. He works to abolish these laws in Meluhan society, promoting social change. This research focuses on diasporic experiences of immigrants but highlights the plight of Vikarma individuals, alienated from their own country, as a valuable area for future study.

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