

# Amalgamation of History and Mythology with Fantasy in Caste System in Shiva Trilogy

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## Abstract

Tripathi believes that myths are nothing but jumbled memories of true past, a past buried under mounds of earth and ignores. *Immortals of Meluha* is a gripping mythological story written in modern style. Reading this beautifully written creation is like plunging into the icy and venerable waters of Manasarovar. We can actually sense the beats of Shiva's Damru and fumes of intoxicating Chillum. Shiva Trilogy has known characters from Hindu mythology as well as those born from Tripathi's imagination. However the characters from Hinduism do not inherit their entire classical trait. In Meluha no one was born in a caste. In ancient time your station in life was based on Karma, not birth. Valmiki, who wrote the original Ramayana was of low caste by birth but is looked upon as a great sage. Similarly, Ved Vyas who composed the Mahabharat, was born to a fisher woman. Today's caste system, which is based on birth is appalling and against our traditional culture.

Meluhan women are free and have all rights. The prime minister of Meluha is a woman. Ayurvati is the doctor who tends to Shiva and his people as they arrive in Shrinagar from Tibet. Sati seems to embody the ideal Meluhan woman, bold, fearless and beautiful. Some women are made Kshatriyas through Maika system.

**Keywords:** Varna, Manusmriti, Vikarma Maika, Mahar Shudra, Rigveda

## Introduction

Amish Tripathi left his job as a banker for becoming a writer. He is an IIM graduate, worked 14 years in financial industry. Born on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1974, is known for his three novels, *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*.

## Literary Reviews

"*Immortals of Meluha*" is a gripping mythological story written in modern style. Reading, this beautifully written creation is like plunging into the icy and venerable waters of Mansarovar.

*The Secret of the Nagas* takes you into that era and paints a beautiful picture in your mind. Portrayal about the various temples and cities can become vary at times. In the course of the *Secret of the Nagas*, Shiva learns that appearance can be misleading. *The secret of the Nagas* narrates how the inhabitants of that land are saved from their wars by Shiva.

The third book *Oath of the Vayuputras* begins with the summary of the first two, Amish in the third book discusses the perception of good and evil, Concepts of Paramatma and Dharma.

## Amalgamation of, History and Mythology with Fantasy in Caste system in Shiva Trilogy

Amish Tripathi, has amalgamated Mythology with fantasy in Caste system in Shiva Trilogy.

## Caste system and position of women in Shiva trilogy

The origin of caste system cannot be found in one single authoritative text, nor can it attributed to one single founder. In the beginning Varna, meaning color, guided the division of society, starting with arrival of Aryans in waves and mixing up of their culture with native culture of the land evolved a social structure based on the principle of Varna, Dharma and Karma. Caste had its ethnic roots as denoted by Jati, ritualistic and symbolic significance in

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its Varna aspects. The four Varnas remained the same. These were never more or less than four, for over 2000 years. But numerous castes and sub castes emerged, within each Varna.

‘Most scholars believe that there was no Aryan invasion from the North, in fact, some even believe that the Aryans if they did exist, actually originated in South Africa and spread from there in Europe. Regardless of whom the Aryans were or where they lived, it is generally agreed that they did not single handed created South Asia’s caste system. The traditional Caste system of India developed more than 3000 years ago, when Aryan speaking nomadic groups migrated from the north to India about 1500 BC, sometimes between 200 BC and 100 AD, the Manusmriti or law of Manu was written.’

But the origin of the castes in India remains an enigma. Many castes are known to have tribal origin, as evidenced from various totemic features that manifest themselves in these caste groups. The caste system in northern India may have developed as a class structure from within tribes. ‘Something very like castes was in India’. Even before Aryan speakers entered India. <sup>[1]</sup>

According to Justice Markendey Katju, judge Supreme Court of India, ‘Some persons deny that the Aryans came from outside India and asserts that India was the original home (Aryavarta) from where a section of them migrated to Europe. It is difficult to accept this view because from uncomfortable area to comfortable area. Why should anyone migrate from a comfortable country like India which has leveled an idea for agriculture to a place like Afghanistan or Russia which is cold, mountainous and therefore uncomfortable? Indian history bears and therefore uncomfortable. Indian history bears out the view that almost all invasions, Immigrations were from outside India into India’.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Amalgamation of History and Mythology with Fantasy in Varna and Caste System**

In Meluha no one was born in a caste. In ancient time your station in life was based on Karma, not birth. Valmiki, who wrote the original Ramayana was of low caste by birth but is looked upon as a great sage. Similarly, Ved Vyas who composed the Mahabharat, was born to a fisher woman. Today’s caste system, which is based on birth is appalling and against our traditional culture.

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There are references of Varna and Caste system in Shiva trilogy. Amish Tripathi, using fantasy, amalgamated the origin of Varna and caste system with history and mythology.

The period which Amish has portrayed, was free from Varna and Caste system. The following are few examples how he has through the mouth of various characters in Shiva Trilogy, presented the origin of caste and Varna system.

From the following conversation one finds about the presence of four Varnas.

“Yes it has! Their doctors are seriously gifted: Shiva”.

‘You know, their doctors are called as Brahmin’: Bhadra.

‘Like Ayurvati?’ asked Shiva, passing the chillum back to Bhadra.

‘Yes, but the Brahmins don’t just care the people. They are also teachers, lawyers, priests basically any intellectual profession’.

‘Talented people; sniffed Shiva’.

‘That is not all’; said Bhadra, in between a long inhalation. ‘They have a concept of specialization. So in addition to the Brahmins they have group called Kshatriyas, who are the warriors and rulers. Even the women can be Kshatriyas.’

‘Really! They allow women into their army?’

‘Well, apparently there are not too many female Kshatriyas, but they are allowed into the army.’

‘No wonder they are in trouble!’

‘And they have Vaishyas, who are the craftsmen, traders, business people and finally the Shudras, who are the farmers and workers and one caste cannot do another caste’s job. <sup>[3]</sup>

There is the reference of Shudra in following way, “A Shudra came in, reset the Prahar lamp precisely and left as quietly as he came.” <sup>[4]</sup>

As well as reference of Kshatriya.

“That would be wonderful! Smiled Nandi, who hated the simple Brahmin, influenced vegetarian food served at the royal guest house. He missed the spicy meats that were served in rough Kshatriya restaurants. <sup>[5]</sup>

Amish has presented wonderful theory about the beginning of Varna system with the help of fantasy, which is as follows.

In the words of Shiva “We were about to discuss the changes that Lord Ram brought about, your Highness, and how he defeated the rebellion of the renegade Brahmin. But

in his view, the core problem ran deeper; it wasn't just a matter of some Brahmins, not following the code. There was a conflict between a person's natural Karma and what society forced him to do."

"I don't understand your Highness" said Shiva "Let me explain, do you know what the essential problem with the renegade Brahmins was? Some of them wanted to be Kshatriyas and rule. Some of them wanted to be Vaishyas, make money and live a life of luxury. However their birth confined them to being Brahmins".

"But I thought that Lord Brahma had decreed that people became Brahmins through a competitive examination process" said Shiva.

"That is true my Lord. But overtime this process of selection lost its fairness. Children of Brahmins became Brahmins. Children of Kshatriyas became Kshatriyas and so on. The formal system of selection soon ceased to exist. A father would ensure that his children got all resources and support needed to grow up and became a member of his own caste. So the caste system became rigid." Dhaksha.

"Did that also mean that there could have been a person talented enough to be a Brahmin but if he was born to Shudra parents, he would not get the opportunity to become a Brahmin?" asked Shiva.

'Yes, Shiva, said Parvateshwar, 'In Lord Ram's view, any society that conducted itself on any principle beside merits could not be stable. He believed that a person's caste should be determined only by that person's Karma, not his birth, not his sex, no other consideration should interfere."

"That is nice in theory, Pravateshwar," argued Shiva, "But how do you ensure it in practice? If a child is born in Brahmin family he would get the upbringing and resources which would be different from that of a child from Shudra family. So this child would grow up to be a Brahmin even if he was less talented than a Shudra boy. Isn't this unfair to the child born in the Shudra family? Where is the merit in this system?"

"That was the genius of Lord Ram, Shiva, smiled Parvateshwar, "He was of course a brave general, a brilliant administrator and a fair judge. But his greatest legacy is the system he created to ensure that a person's karma is determinate only by his abilities, nothing else. That system is what has made Meluha. What it is – the greatest nation in the history?"

"But what was the system that Lord Ram set up? Asked Shiva.

'The system is simple; said Parvateshwar, "As we agreed, the best society is the one where a person's caste is decided purely by his abilities and Karma. Lord Ram created a

practical system that ensured this. All children that are born in Meluha are compulsorily adopted by the empire. In order to ensure that this is done methodically, a great hospital city called Maika was built deep in the south. All pregnant women have to travel there for their delivery. Only pregnant women are allowed into the city, nobody else."

"Then who takes care of the pregnant woman in Maika?"

"The hospital staff, they are extremely well trained." Continued Parvateshwar. Once the child is born after few weeks mother travels back to her own city and the child is then put into Meluha Gurukul, a massive school created by the empire close to Maika. Every single child receives the benefit of the same education system. They grow up with all the resources of the empire available to them. The record of the parents and the children is kept in utmost secrecy and neither in the Gurukul nor in the rest of empire would anybody know who the child's birth parents are."

"So every child, regardless of whether he is born to a Brahmin or a Shudra, would get exactly the same treatment at the Gurukul" Reasoned Shiva.

"Yes, smiled Parvateshwar, 'As the Children enter the age of adolescence they are all given the Somras. Thus every child has exactly the same opportunity to succeed. At the age of fifteen, when they have reached adulthood, all the children take a comprehensive examination. The results of this examination decide which Varna or Caste the child will be allocated to Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra." "So that is way your Caste system is called the Varna system" said Shiva, "Varna means color right?"

"Yes, my Lord," Smiled Kanakhala.

Ignoring the barb, Shiva asked, "So what happens after that?"

"When the children turn sixteen, they are allocated to applicant parents from their caste, for example, if some Brahmin parents have applied to adopt a child, one randomly chosen student from Maika, who has won the Brahmin Caste in the examination, is allotted to them, Then the child grows up with these adopted parents as their own child. "And society is perfect", marveled Shiva, "Each person is given a position in society based only on his own abilities. The efficiency and

Amish Tripathi has amalgamated his concept of origin of Varna system with the help of fantasy. According to history and mythology the origin of Varna is as follows.

There are different theories about the establishment of Caste system. There are religious mystical theories, there are biological theories and there are socio-historical theories.

The religious theories explain, how the four Varnas were founded, but they do not explain how the castes in each Varna or untouchables were founded. According to Rigveda different Varnas were created from different parts of the body of the primal Man-Purush. The Varna hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the Varna were created. Other religious theory claims that the Varnas were created from the body organs of Brahma, who is the creator of the world.

The Socio-historical theory explains the creation of the Varnas, Jats and of untouchable. According to this theory, the caste system began with the arrival of the Aryans in India. The Aryans arrived in India around 1500BC. The fair skinned Aryans arrived in India from south Europe and North Asia, Before the Aryans there were the Dravidians, who were the largest community in India. When the Aryans arrived in India their main contact was with Dravidians. The Aryans disregarded the local culture.

In order to secure their status the Aryans resolved some social and religious rules, which allowed them to be the priests, warriors and the businessman of the society. For example Maharashtra is known by this name for hundreds of years. Many think that the meaning of the name Maharashtra is in its name Great Land, but there are some, who claim that the name Maharashtra is derived from the name Jat (Caste) called Mahar, who are considered to be the original people of this region. In the caste hierarchy the dark skinned Mahars were the outcastes. The skin was important factor in the caste system. The meaning of the word Varna is not class or status but skin colour. Between the outcasts and the three Aryan Varnas, there is Shudra Varna, who are the simple workers of the society. Later they were made slaves; in fact they were original residents of India whom the Aryans coined as monster, devil, demons and slaves.

Later on the Aryans who created the caste system, added to their system, Non-Aryans. Different castes who professed different professions were integrated in different Varnas according to their profession. Most of the communities that in India before the arrival of the Aryans, who professed polluting professions were made out-castes. The Brahmins are very strict about cleanliness. In the past people believed that diseases can also spread thorough air and not only through, physical touch, perhaps because of this reason the untouchables were not only disallowed to touch the high caste communities but they also had to stand at a certain distance from the high castes.

The origin of the caste system in India and Nepal are shrouded but it seems to have originated some two thousand years ago. Under this system, which is associated with Hinduism, people were categorized by their occupations. Although originally caste depended upon a person's work, it soon

became hereditary. Each person was born in unalterable social status. People who violated social norms could be punished by being made untouchables this was not the lowest cost. They and their descendants were completely outside of the caste system.

Early written evidence about the caste system appears in the Vedas, Sanskrit language texts as early as 1500 BC, which form the basis of Hindu scripture. The Rigveda, from 1700-1100 BC rarely mentions caste distinctions and indicates that social mobility was common.

The caste system was not absolute during much of Indian history. For example the renowned Gupta Dynasty, which ruled from 320 to 550 CE were from Vaishya caste, rather than the Kshtriya.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Origin of Varna in Vedas

The first indication of the caste system outlined in the hymn to Purusha (Rig Veda). The embodied human spirit, who is on fourth creature and three fourth eternal, lives.

The Brahmin caste was to be the priests and teachers. Rajanya represented the king, head of the warrior or Kshtriya caste, Vaishyas are the merchants, craftsmen and framers and the Shudras are the workers. (Rig Veda x:85)

By the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC and after the conquest, Aryans has proceeded from the North West and Punjab to cover northern India. The caste system was in place and as the warriors settled down to ruling over an agricultural society the role of the priests and their ceremonies gained influence and justified the Aryan ways to the native workers, who labored for farmers. Merchants, craftsmen, who in turn governed by their kings and priests. Land and wealth accumulated in the hands of few ruling families, and with food scarce, the indigenous people were enslaved or had to sell their labor cheap to ruling classes.

The priests placed themselves at the top of the caste system, as they supervised the religion. Most of the people could not understand without them. After the Atharva Veda was accepted, each sacrifice required at least four priests, one on each side of the fire using the Rig, Sam, Yajur and Atharva Vedas, plus their assistants. After the wars of conquest completed and the warrior's castes settled down to rule, the priests were needed to sustain social stability. Yet in these times the caste system was much more flexible, as it is indicated that one should not ask about the caste of a learned man. The Brahmins as the priest caste were called had three obligations or debts to pay back in life. They paid back to seers by studying the Vedas, the gods by offering sacrifices and their fathers by raising a family.

During the period of Atharva Veda 'The Brahmin caste became even stronger their wealth can be seen by the



belief that the cow by right belonged exclusively to them. Taxes were collected probably by the warrior kshatriya caste from Vaishya artisans, farmers and merchants. The Shudra workers were too poor to be taxed, and the Brahmins were exempt. (Atharvaved 3:29:3)

Between about 900 and 700 BC the 'Brahmins' were written in prose sacerdotal commentaries on the four Vedas to guide the practices of sacrifices and give explanations often mythical and fanciful of these customs.

The caste system based on color (Varna) was now established, though not as rigidly as it became later. The essential difference was between the light skinned Aryans who made up the top three castes of the priestly Brahmins, warrior Kshatriyas and artisan Vaishyas and the dark skinned Dadas who were the servant Shudras. Shudras like women could not own property and only rarely they rise above service position. The Vaishyas as were considered inferior by the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, they were the basic of economic system of trade, crafts and farming.

Out of God (Brahman) came the Brahmin caste of priests and teachers and the Kshatriyas as to rule, development through Vaishyas and Shudras, however the principle was created as justice (Dharma) than which nothing is higher so that, a weak person may control by strong as if by a king. They say that those who speak truth speak justice and Vice-Versa, because they are the same. By meditating on the soul (Atma) alone, one does not perish and can create whatever one wants. Whatever suffering occur remains with the creature, only the good goes to soul because evil does not go to good. <sup>[8]</sup>

### Concept of Vikarma in Shiva Trilogy

Amish have presented the concept of Vikarma which is very equal to untouchables in India. We can find description and references regarding Vikarmas in Shiva Trilogy.

'As they turned and walked into the lane.' Shiva asked, "Who are Vikarma women?" "Vikarma People, my Lord" Said Nandi sighing deeply, "are people who have been punished in this birth for the sins of their previous birth. Hence they have to live this life without dignity and tolerate their present sufferings with grace. This is the only way they can wipe their Karma, clean the sins of their previous birth. Vikarma men have their own order of penance and women have their own order."

"There was a procession of Vikarma women on the road we just left. Is their Puja a part of order?" asked Shiva.

"Yes, My Lord. There are many rules that the Vikarma women have to follow. They have to pray for forgiveness every month to Lord Agni. They are not allowed to marry since they may contaminate others with their bad fate. They

are not allowed to touch any person, who is not related to them," if you are interested, we could meet up with a Pandit at the Agni temple later and he could tell you all about Vikarma people.

"No, I am not interested in meeting the Pandit right now." Said Shiva with a smile, "But tell one thing who decides that the Vikarma people had committed sins in their previous birth?"

"Their own Karma, my Lord," Said Nandi, his eyes suggesting the obvious, "for example if a woman gives birth to a still born child, why would she be punished, thus unless she had committed some terrible sin in her previous birth? Or if a man suddenly contracts an incurable disease and gets paralyzed, why would it happen to him unless the universe was penalizing him for sins of his previous life?"

"That sounds pretty ridiculous to me, A woman could have given birth to a still born child simply because she did not take proper care while she was pregnant, or it could just be a disease. How can anyone say that she is being punished for the sins of her previous birth?" <sup>[9]</sup>

### Amalgamation of Historical elements in the concept of Vikarma as untouchables

In India we find social stratification in the form of caste, based on the birth of the individual in a particular caste family, the word caste is originated from the Spanish word 'Casta', means breed, race, strain or a complex of hereditary qualities. The English word caste is an adjustment of original word casta. Caste started as natural division of occupational classes Caste system became an integral part of religious dogma which divided the people into superior and inferior groups. It is an aggregate of persons whose privileges are fixed by birth and sanctioned by religion, based on the idea of high and low, superior and inferior, pure impure, touchable and untouchable. There are two main characteristics on which the caste system is based.

- Hereditary: Cast based distinctions are unchangeable.
- Birth: It is not an achieved status, no amount of wealth and no prayer or penance can change his caste or status.

The Shudras are socially as well as religiously neglected and are not treated as human beings but are treated even worse than dogs and cats.

According to Kautilya, 'a Shudra, if he violates a Brahmin female, shall be burnt to death. If he intentionally reviles or criminally assaults a Brahmin the offending limbs shall be cut. The various restrictions were put on Shudra and Atishudra, in the matter of residence, marriage. The theory of pollution also played important role, even simple touch of Shudra used to pollute, defile the upper caste Hindus, thus

rendering the existence of Shudras worse than animals. In Kerala a Nair may approach a Nambodiri Brahmin but must not touch him. While a Tiyan must keep a distance of 36 steps from the Brahmin and a Pulayan may not approach him within as 96 paces.' <sup>[13]</sup>

Several Social thinkers' philosophers and scholars have tried to find out the origin of caste system in India. No definite and concrete proof is available, on the basis of which the date of caste system may be pointed out. According to traditional theory, members of the different castes were born out of different parts of the body of original man Brahma, the creator of the universe. This theory receives a classical interpretation in the account of Manu.

'Occupation is the main base of caste system, some occupations are considered as superior and some are inferior. The followers of these occupations were considered as superior and inferior. The caste system like other social instructions has originated as a result of the process of the evolution. According to Denzil Ibtson has further pointed out that originally man laid a nomadic life later on agricultural and then after Industry came in to being. This group about the development of economic life and the rural. In order to purpose his economic policy had to divide the society in to the various groups based on occupations. These groups on order to maintain their prestige and status, clashed with one another. As a result of these, structural, the class of the Purohits became vitreous and they not only established their supremacy but also established the practice of endogamy. Other groups also followed same and so different castes came in to being.' <sup>[14]</sup>

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