

The Utopian Fantasy in Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*

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Abstract

Amish Tripathi is one of the contemporary Indian novelists who recreates the Indian myths in Shiva Trilogy. *The Immortals of Meluha* is the first series in Shiva Trilogy which has many aspects of Utopia in it. Here, the writer creates an imaginary Utopian land known as Meluha. Utopian society refers to the society which is ideal in all aspects. Tripathi fantasises Meluha as a Utopia without any negatives. He further portrays the place without any evils such as poverty, hunger and social violations where, every Meluhan citizen follows the rules. The construction of houses, the rulers and the social customs of Meluhan society reflect the ideas of Thomas More's Utopia. This paper is an attempt to express how Meluha resembles Utopia and the Utopian scruples imposed on the citizens of Meluha affects them.

KEYWORDS: Utopia, fantasy, Meluhan society, Somras, Maika system, caste, clan

Literary utopias are generally devoured as either authoritarian schemes or fanciful hallucinations. They are considered as representations of an archetypal ideology. Utopian society epitomizes a flawless society striving against the social, political and cultural chaos prevalent in the real society. Thomas More first coined this term in his Utopia. A Utopian community affords an exemplary civilization of peaceful environment and equality to the citizens. More imagines a land which is seen nowhere and the power of More's imagination seems more suited to social revolutionary activities than to technical, industrial, and entertainment-based applications.

Thomas More's Utopia tries to attain perfection in politics and economics of an imaginary society that never witnesses hunger and greediness. More has given an exhaustive description on the unique government system of Utopia. The homogeneous organization of the cities of Utopia is articulated as:

There be in the island fifty-four large and fair cities, or shire towns, agreeing all together in one tongue, in like manners, institutions, and laws. They be all set and situate alike, and in all points fashioned alike, as far forth as the place or plot suffereth.

Of these cities they that be nighes together be twenty-four miles asunder.

Again there is none of them distant from the next (50).

More's Utopia endeavours the democratic civilization with the division of cities and districts intending better administration, social scenarios of public property and family circumstances exemplifying women equality in selecting the partner as well as in claiming annulment for extra-marital affairs. Thomas More's imaginary island of

perfection is perennial with the competence in the ship construction, warfare techniques and scientific developments. The austerity of Utopian laws enables every citizen to defend himself /herself for justice without the aid of the counsels. The repugnance and the perspicacity on war is expressed as:

War or battle as a thing very beastly, and yet to no kind of beasts in so much use as to man, they do detest and abhor. And, contrary to the custom almost of all other nations, they count nothing so much against glory as glory gotten in war. And therefore, though they do daily practice and exercise themselves in the discipline of war, and not only the men, but also the women upon certain appointed days, lest they should be to seek in the feat of arms if need should require, yet they never go to battle but either in the defense of their country.... (106)

The Utopians suicide but forces the citizens with incurable diseases to be isolated and poisoned. A Utopian society coerces the disabled to sacrifice their lives for the welfare of the society, discriminating them as voiceless to oppose and rebel the bigotries against them. Thomas More has given many solutions to the problems faced by society. He dreams of a society without any problems and names it as "Utopia". The ideas he suggested are far from reality.

The utopian literature bloomed throughout the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. This outpouring of utopian literature declined in the twentieth century due to the influence of literary realism and modernism, the development of science and industries, and the impact of two World Wars. There are many writers even in the present age, following Thomas More, in creating a perfect imaginary society being consistent in its logical structure, providing freedom and fantasizing a society with happiness. Amish Tripathi, a renowned, contemporary Indian myth re-creator is also one among them. He dreams of an ideal society in *The Immortals of Meluha*, the first series in *Shiva Trilogy*. Tripathi names his imaginary, perfect society as Meluha. With Utopian fantasy, Amish has created this country as an "earthly paradise" and also a "land for pure life" (10). This paper examines the utopian elements comprised in the novel and also the elements which differ from Utopia.

Imagination premises beliefs as Frye noted in *Educated Imagination*, "In our imagination our own beliefs are also only possibilities, but we can see the possibilities in the beliefs of others. Bigots and fanatics seldom have any use for the arts, because they're so preoccupied with their beliefs and actions that they can't see them also as possibilities" (*Educated Imagination* 77-78). Tripathi has portrayed Meluha, as the country which follows the rule of Lord Ram, one of the mythical characters in the Indian epic *Ramayana* believing his imagination may lead to reality. Like Utopia, the Meluhan houses are built in the same order. Meluhans excel in architecture, ship construction and also scientific technologies. They produce Somras, the drink of Gods which makes the Meluhans immortal. Tripathi's fantasy on bringing the elixir of Gods to the people in the earth and making them immortal contrives the land far from reality, present nowhere. The warfare of the Meluhans resemble the warfare techniques hinted by Thomas More in Utopia. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, the author imagines the Meluhan society with perfect social conditions which are different from those of our contemporary society. They are entirely different and there is a discontinuity between the actual and the imagined society. His imaginary Meluha is free from poverty and hunger. It is a society of

rules. The citizens of his Utopian society follow the rules of Lord Ram. Amishelaborates the consequences of his chosen set of social conditions in fleshing out the social arrangement of the Meluhan society in *The Immortals of Meluha*.

Tripathi has created Meluha as a highly structural society. His Utopian fantasy is explicit in the way he narrates the houses of Meluha, "All the houses looked like simple multiple-storeyed block structures from the outside. The only way to differentiate a rich man's house from that of a poor man's, was that his block would be bigger... The entire city was a picture of cleanliness, order and sobriety."(11-12). The Meluhans have the tactics in creating giant platforms. Every city is surrounded by giant platforms to be protected from enemies and natural calamities. The platforms named Tamra and Rajat are for the common man and the platform named Svarna is for the royal castle. The city is divided into streets with footpaths for the pedestrians, traffic lanes and covered drains. The administrative technique of the Meluhans is depicted as:

The city was divided into many districts consisting of four to eight blocks. Each district had its own markets, commercial and residential areas, temples and entertainment centers. Manufacturing or any other polluting activity was conducted in separate quarters away from the districts... the census conducted two years back had pegged the population of the city at two hundred thousand. (65)

They have a commendable political system where every city has a Governor and the Governors meet the Prime Minister to get counsel for administration. The Meluhan's excellent architecture skill is displayed in the temple designs, sculptures and the construction of bridges connecting cities. Tripathi imagines a different society in *The Immortals of Meluha* and creates it into a fanciful one with its own characteristics. The Utopian fantasy of Tripathi pictographs the Meluhan society as a different one from the ordinary society. It follows the motto: "Truth. Duty. Honour"(64). The Meluhans have a system for everything- for treating immigrants, for slaughtering animals, for keeping shoes at shoe stall in front of the temple, for serving meals in the restaurant, and also for giving as well as receiving orders. None of the Meluhans break the rule and they treat all the people in a righteous manner. They keep their promises even at the cost of their lives. Everything seems perfect in the Meluhan society. This situation is far from reality which is one of the remarkable features of Utopian literature as Okoro Kingsley expresses in "Utopianism and the New World Order: A Critical Consideration":

Utopian thinking sets goals, provides an image to strive for. By creating an imagery which gives a clear picture of common humanity or new humanity, utopian thinking becomes the fact of life in actuality. Presently, we live in a world plagued with unimaginable horrors of poverty, homelessness in their staggering proportions, violence in all realms of the society, child and women abuses, starvations, wars, holocaust, ethnic cleansing, genocide etc, (332)

In contrast to all the present reality, Tripathi dreams of a utopia, creates a land of perfection and sustenance without poverty and hunger, contributing a safe environment and equality to its citizens. In creating Meluha with his fantasy, Amish Tripathi foresees a society that endows equality and creates Meluha with the same vision deviating from reality. His imaginary Meluhan constitution provides equality to every citizen. Even the King is not given any luxury:

Despite ruling over such a massive and wealthy empire, the nobility lived in a conspicuously simple manner. The structure of the royal citadel was almost exactly like the other platforms. There were no special concessions made for the aristocrats. The same block structures that dominated all of Meluha were to be found in the royal citadel as well. (67).

All the Meluhans follow the same rules and the laws are known to every citizen and they never violate the rules. They also never intervene the law even for the convenience of their God, Neelkanth. Chenardhwaj, the Kashmir Governor accepts Shiva, as their Neelkanth but affirms, "But the laws cannot be broken, my Lord, not even for you. We can only give them what had been promised," when Shiva enquires about the facilities to be provided to Gunas (26).

Somras, the scientific invention of the Meluhan scientists is given equally to all the citizens of Meluha. Somras is a medicine that retains the youth and health of the Meluhans and they get a long-life. This miraculous drink is also shared equally to all the citizens of Meluha. To sustain equality in the Meluha, Tripathi aspires for the caste and clan system and Maika system proscribing the parents to bring up their own children, ensuring equality in determining the caste and clan of every citizen with his ideal vision, "a person's caste should be determined only by the person's karma. Not by his birth. Not his sex. No other discrimination should interfere" (98). Amish has a proclivity in creating strong women characters. In his re-created epics, he attributes women with great abilities than in the original epics. He intends to eradicate the harms of patriarchy in the present scenario and he himself expresses in an interview as in Immortal India :

most late medieval interpretations of our epics tend to be patriarchal. Any society which has faced a lot of violence tends to become patriarchal. It's a natural sociological process. And India did suffer heroic violence in the medieval era. But if you study the versions of our epic, of our myths, from an earlier era, it would not be so out-of-the-ordinary to find very strong women, and interpretations that are not patriarchal. (43)

Tripathi's beliefs on strong women characters have led him to produce a society that treats men and women without any discrimination. In the land of perfection that he has created, women are allowed to select the clan and caste according to their potentiality also they are created as warrior. Princess like Sati is courageous to take part in war. They are also admired for their exemplary capabilities. Ayurvati is celebrated as the best Physician. Women are given proper places in administrative sides too; Kanakhala plays the role of the Meluhan Prime Minister. More's Utopia ensures the equality of women in society whereas Tripathi's novel perpetuates it in all aspects such as the social, political and religious phenomenon. Tripathi has moulded his creation of strong women characters in his ideal, flawless and perfect society as a step against female discriminations prevalent in India. He points out that a technically developed society has not ensured the rights of women, "Increased education and wealth does not seem to make a material difference. Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat, for instance, have the highest rate of female foeticide. An important reason for this attitude is the use of patriarchal prism" (Immortal India 23).

Miéville conveys his opinions on fantasy in "Editorial Introduction." as "the fantastic might be a mode peculiarly suited to and resonant with the forms of modernity. [...] Fantasy is a mode that, in constructing an internally coherent but actually impossible

totality—constructed on the basis that the impossible is, for this work, true—mimics the ‘absurdity’ of capitalist modernity” (42). Tripathi is against the violence, one of the absurdities of the modern era. He employs his fancy to elude wars and emphasizes not to harm children and women in war. Hence, creates the Meluhans with strict rules of war. They neither indulge in war for expanding their territory nor attack the unarmed. Killing those who beg for mercy is against their rules of war. It is given as, “We will not attack an unarmed man. A better-armed person like a cavalry man will not attack a lesser-armed person like a spear-wielding foot-soldier. A swordsman will never attack a person below his waist because that is unethical.” (115) Meluhans never, “demand for any war reparations or a yearly tribute.” (111). Thus they strictly follow war rules in their land Meluha, a land of Utopian fantasy.

Meluha seems like a perfect and ideal society where the peaceful Government exists. Equality prevails there yet there is also some discriminations. Thomas More’s Utopia isolates the people with incurable disease and compels them to die for the benefit of society whereas The Immortals of Meluha discriminates the people with deformities as Vikramas. Meluhans are ignorant about the cause of their sufferings and they term them as, “sins of the previous life” and impose restrictions upon themselves. Hence, “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 or is not part of their daily life.” (95). The citizens of an ideal society follow the rules but they never have a chance to voice out their opinions. They are compelled to hide their emotions and they must be silent when enduring the pains for the betterment of the society. The agony of the women who leave their child at Maika is completely disregarded. The discrimination of the Vikarma people is left without consideration. Like Utopia, Meluha also has some deformities. An ideal society can frame rules and laws but they can never provide freedom for their citizens.

Meluha has been a source of moral energy and inspiration for an ideal society. This fictionalized Utopian fantasy created by Amish Tripathi, opens up a new avenue to look into the ideal society with its philosophies, spirituality, battles, mysteries and political commentaries. These iconic multitudes of possibilities plead the present society for achieving these virtues. Tripathi has created Meluha as a model society with the moral standards and powerful ideals to be pursued in future.

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