

## Redigging the Caste System through the Immortals of Meluha

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### Abstract

This paper is an attempt to elucidate the probable origin of caste system in the ancient Indian society. The author gives the firm idea to the readers about this through the characters in the novel and so the readers can get a new dimension to the origin of the divisions in the society. Also this paper would give the readers that may this Varna system would have been created for the betterment of the society. Even though the protagonist of the novel Lord Shiva could understand that these discriminations are unfair, he has not made many efforts to change all these things. He knows that he is in love with Sati, a Vikrama woman who is considered as one of the carriers of bad fate; he does not want to change the rules for her though he knows the law is unfair.

**Key Words:** Varna system, Discrimination, Meluha, Ranking, Vikrama system.

“All the world’s a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;”

says the Bard of Avon, William Shakespeare through Jacques in *As You Like It*. True to his words, every human being in this world has his/her own role to play. While some play it wise, some others play it vice. The wise sometimes become vice and take control over the fellow human beings which Charles Darwin in his *Origin of Species* says the survival of the fittest. Those who are strong enough to control the activities of others become the King and those who are strong enough to control the ideologies of others become king makers. These kings and king makers wanted to transfer their power directly to their heirs and so their heirs can also enjoy the

power and the supremacy that they enjoyed for years and do not want to share this supremacy with others and so there were many laws created to make divisions among the people so that it would be convenient for the rulers to make advantages out of such divisions. One such division is the Varna system in the Indian mythology that created a division of people in the ancient Indian society. Almost most of the people believed the mythology of the Varna, the radical thinkers understood the politics behind this class division.

Amish Tripathi, in his series of Shiva trilogy *The Immortals of Meluha* has given a new dimension for this Varna system of division of people. Though it is a work of fiction, it gives the readers a new dimension to look into this particular political strategy that is being followed for many years. In fact, understanding the reason behind the caste system that becomes the major dice for the politics to play with is the key concept of most of the literature. Many mythologies are there to define the culture of the people and Amish through this fiction have explored the concept of the Varna in the Indian society.

In this novel, the Hindu Gods and Goddesses are projected as ordinary human beings who were given the duty of living the life protecting the people under their rule and defeating the evil forces that come across their way. To do this duty they had to maintain some of the rules that can help imparting the disciplined life in the society. Once, the land of Meluha was ruled by Ram who is being worshiped as one of the Hindu gods for many years till now. It is during this time, the practice of the system of Varna was introduced. Amish Tripathi has given the view that such division was created for the purpose of the betterment of the administration. He has also given the reason for the creation of the Varna system through this novel. In the society of Meluha, people were supposed to wear amulet to show the caste they belong to. There are four different kinds of amulet to represent the four different castes in the Meluhan society such as to represent Brahmin, the lines in the amulet are drawn on the head of Parmatma (the almighty), for Kshatriya, the lines are drawn on the shoulders of Parmatma, the lines forming the thighs of the Parmatma are the symbol for Vaishya and at last the feet of the Parmatma would make the wearer a Shudra. Tripathi explains this system through the character of Nandi talking to Shiva.

This division of caste is for assigning the jobs to everyone in the society. Every chosen tribe would take on the jobs that fit its profile. Meluhans when they turn twenty-five apply for a chosen tribe after consulting with their parents. Birds, animals, flowers and fish are allocated to Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras respectively. Based on a scrupulous examination process, the Allocation Board allocates the chosen-tribe. The candidate must qualify for a chosen-tribe which represents both ambitions and skills of the particular candidate. When the candidate chooses the tribe that is too mighty for him, then he will have to embarrass himself if his achievement does not measure up to the standards of the particular tribe. If a candidate chooses a tribe that is low, it is like doing injustice to the candidate's own talent. This is how the system of Varna may have been started according to the view given by the author in this novel.

In Hinduism, the system of Varna is considered to be the Brahminic ideology of making hierarchy in the society into classes. *Manusmriti*, the first ancient legal text, epitomizes such ideologies and divides the society into four Varnas such as Brahmins as Vedic scholars, teachers

and priests, Kshatriyas as administrators, rulers and warriors, Vaishyas as merchants and agriculturists and Shudras as laborers and service providers. Once this classification would have been emerged on the basis of the mighty and talents of the particular persons, but when the time goes by everything changes and this division become the major reason for discrimination in the society. Later the people started to believe that this system is based on the birth of every person. Even now, this division plays a significant role in the politics of the country and many people, who are considered to have belonged to the low caste in the category, are treated with inhuman behaviour. There was another point that Parvateshwar gives to Shiva that the caste of a person is determined by the ability and karma of that person and there is nothing to do with the person's birth and sex. The pregnant women are sent to the hospital Maika, a city of Meluha, where no one other than the pregnant woman is allowed. When she delivers the child, she should go back leaving the child in Maika. When grown up, every child will be given the same education despite their caste. At the age of fifteen, every child is given Somaras, a health drink which would help the children succeed and take an examination that would decide their caste. There are many literary works that projects the issues based on this Varna system. Every work has a different point of view. Some of the literary works promote the caste system while the others would delineate the dark side of the same.

Another discrimination given by Amish in the novel is Vikrama, a division of people who are considered as untouchables because of the sins that they have done in their previous birth. They are believed to have been punished in this birth for the sins of their previous birth. As it is so, they ought to live this life with at most dignity and ought to tolerate all the sufferings that they experience at their present life with grace. They ought to live their life like this as it is the only way to wipe their karma clean of the sins of their previous birth. If we ask the question who decides that the Vikrama people had committed sins in their previous birth, then the answer for this question would be their own karma. If a woman gives birth to a still born child, it is believed to be the result of her previous sins: in case of a man, if he suddenly contracts some incurable disease or paralysis, he is considered to be a Vikrama. The people of Meluha have a justification for this also that if the vikrama people have not done anything sins in their previous birth they should not have had such fate in their present birth.

The Vikrama people are treated as bad souls by the Meluhan people especially the women are treated badly. The Meluhan people laid many restrictions to the Vikrama people such as the Vikramas should not marry, they should not touch anyone and they have to beg to Lord Agni to forgive their past sins. Meluhan people deeply believed that their karma is carried over many births. Even the women in the Meluhan society accepted their fate to be a Vikrama and followed such rules laid down by the society for the Vikramas. For instance Sati gives birth to a still born child and on the same day her husband dies and so she is considered to a Vikrama woman. Sati also accepts her fate and adheres strictly to the rules laid to them. The author described the appearance of Sati in a way that would say that Sati is an exceptional beauty in the clan. The author expresses it through the eyes of Lord Shiva. Her body is covered with a long angavastram, her face exhibited the confidence in her, but not arrogance. Even though she is like an exceptional beauty, she sticks to the law and has no intention to break the law at any cost and

considers the inconvenience of the bodyguards as not a matter. This might have probably led to the subalternity of women.

Though mythology has a lot to tell, it is not sure whether all the things said through mythologies are true. Instead it gives the readers an entirely new perspective to look into a matter. These many years most of the people are thinking that caste of a person is decided based on the birth of a person. But when someone reads *The Immortals of Meluha* they get an opportunity to explore another dimension of the caste system. This might have been created on the basis of some assumption but the view that we get out of this assumption would help us to find another meaning for our ancestral way of living. All these things from *The Immortals of Meluha* give us a clear idea about the origin of the caste system and the probable reason behind the system of Varna. Though Amish's writings are based on Hindu mythology, imagination and fantasy, the view he gave on the caste system makes the reader to understand a new dimension, for the emergence of such divisions. Though the caste system was discussed in many perspectives in the literature, the view that the author Amish gave in this novel would make the readers think that the Varna system would have been created only for the administration of the society in a way that serves equally to all the people in the society. In case, if the Varna system would have remained as it is mentioned by Amish, it would have definitely created an ideal society where everyone would have got the right opportunity to express themselves according to their talent. Since the caste system turned out to a discriminating factor determined based on the birth, it has become a threat to the humankind. Though many literary works have portrayed the darker side of the particular dividing system in the society, there are many incidents that are happening based on this discrimination still providing more and more opportunity for the emergence of many more literary works as literature is the mirror of the life after all.

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