

Research Article

## Echoes of the Past, Demands of the Present: A Comparative Reading of *The Immortals of Meluha* and *Dark Horse*

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**Abstract:** India is a country of various diversities. There are differences in India that make India a world in itself. One part of the country is enormously different from the natives of the other part. Since ancient times, there have been migrations and displacements due to various reasons and causes. Besides other reasons and causes, the social and economic needs of the natives were one of the most influential factors for the displacement and migration. But the impact of the native land, language, food, and cultural practices remains alive in some part of their hearts and often is reflected in their behaviour and practices. The present paper aims to read two novels titled *The Immortals of Meluha*, written by Amish Tripathi, and *Dark Horse*, written by Nilotpal Mrinal, from the point of view of the need and emotion of migration and displacement. The settings of both novels are at a vast time gap. Tripathi's *The Interpreters of Meluha* is a mythical rewriting set in 1900 BC ancient India and deals with the migration of the protagonist Shiva and his Guna tribe from Mansarovar Lake in Tibet to Meluha. On the other hand, *Dark Horse* is set in 21st-century Delhi and deals with the migration of students from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to Mukherjee Nagar, New Delhi, to prepare for the civil exams. Both novels have displacement and nostalgia at different times in India. The main focus of the paper is comparing this theme in the two novels and comparing the Indian sentiment towards the motherland at two different time spaces.

**Keywords:** migration; nostalgia; displacement; multiculturalism

जिम्मेदारी मजबूर कर देती है अपना शहर छोड़ने को

वरना कौन अपनी गलियों में जीना नहीं चाहता।“

“हसरतें आज भी खत लिखती हैं मुझे,

मगर अब मैं पुराने पते पर नहीं रहता!

(‘Responsibilities force one to leave one’s city,

Otherwise, who doesn’t want to live in one’s own place?’

‘Desires write me letters even today

But I don’t live at my old addresses’ (Anonymous, my translation).)

These are two couplets from some anonymous Hindi poets describing man’s migration and displacement from his native place for the fulfilment of desires, responsibilities, and needs. Migration and displacement are of different kinds. In a country like India some people leave their country to be settled in some foreign country but most of Indian Youth leave their own place for their needs for example people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar migrate to Gujarat and Maharashtra in search of employment, students from villages and small cities and towns migrate to big cities to study in universities or to prepare for different competitive exams, etc. These are only two causes and reasons of internal migration and displacement in the present time in India, but there are several other causes. Actually, the fact is that people in India have been migrating since ancient times due to different reasons. After leaving their native place, some of them went back, some could not, but all of them are nostalgic or anti-nostalgic about their place. The sense of good or bad memories remains with them throughout their life.

The Marwari Community, a business and trade community in India, has been migrating across India, setting up its business and trade. There are two novels: *Kalikatha: Via Bypass* by Alka Saraogi and *Moom* by Bani Basu, the first one written in Hindi and the other in the Bengali language. Both novels were published in the year of 1998 and deal with the story of the protagonist of the migrated Marwari community. The comparative study of the two novels has been done by Meenakshi Mukherjee in a lecture at the Department of South Asian Studies, University of Pennsylvania. The lecture was later published in her book *Elusive Terrain: Culture and Literary Memory* under the title ‘*Internal Diaspora: From Desert to Delta*’ (46 - 58). The two writers of these novels are not living at a vast physical distance, and there is no time gap in the publication years and the settings of both novels, but Meenakshi Mukherjee is trying to study the cultural and social distance between the two writers and the characters in both novels. Meenakshi Mukherjee comments: ‘Alka Saraogi and Bani Basu live in Kolkata, within a few miles of each other, but such is the distance of the literary worlds of Hindi and Bangla, it is quite possible that the two writers might not be familiar with each other’s work’ (48). The other examples of the narratives of ‘Internal Diaspora’ and migration can be seen in Phanishwar Nath Renu’s Hindi novel *Maila Anchal* (1954), Saratchandra Chatterjee’s Bangla novel *Pather Dabi* (1926), Satinath Bhaduri’s Bangla novel *Dhorai Charit Manas*, P. Schidanandan’s *Govardhan’s Travels*, translated into

English from Malayalam. These novels have also been discussed in the same chapter in brief by Meenakshi Mukherjee. There are other problems of migration, like the migration of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities to and from Eastern and Western Pakistan at the time of the partition of India. The migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir due to terrorism and religious hysteria has been the subject of partition narratives and works of some other writers also. But all these narratives are about the permanent migration of characters and throw light on the mental and nostalgic states of the characters. Neither Meenakshi Mukherjee in her study nor these other novels try to focus on the temporary migration due to the fulfilment of needs or to pursue the aims, ambitions, some destiny or desire of men/women. They do not point out the struggle of a man/ woman who migrated from his/her native place and his/her desire or reluctance to go back to native place among his/her own people. This paper tries to find out the different and current problems of Indian Society. Actually, this is not only the problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but it has been the problem of Indian society more or less at all times. This is why I am selecting two novels set in two different time spaces of Indian society and trying to study the problem.

So, this paper focuses on this particular psychological state of the human mind at different time spaces through the characters in two novels titled *Dark Horse* (2015) by Nilotpal Mrinal in the Hindi language and *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010) written by Amish Tripathi in English. Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* is set in the time space of ancient India in 1900 BC, while Mrinal's *Dark Horse* is set in the time space of 21<sup>st</sup>-century India. Though there is a gap of only 5 years in the first publications of the two novels but there is a gap of about 4000 years in the settings of both novels.

In *The Immortals of Meluha*, the protagonist Shiva and his Guna tribe migrate from their village near Mansarovar Lake at the foot of Mount Kailash, Tibet, and the *Dark Horse* narrates the displacement and struggle of the students preparing for the civil exams from different parts of India to Mukherjee Nagar, New Delhi. Both migrations took place at a vast time gap in different social and political situations, but the fundamental cause behind them is very similar, that is, the fulfilment of some need and desire, and to pursue some ambition or destiny. In their village, Shiva and his Guna tribe are struggling in "pointless battles with no end in sight" (Tripathi, *The Immortals* 14). He started thinking that the land was fit only for 'barbarians'. He wants peace for his people and for himself. It's his need for a peaceful life that forces him to accept the proposal of migrating to Meluha. His uncle, who was his Guru, also had once told him his destiny. His uncle had told Shiva, "Your destiny is much larger than these massive mountains. But to make it come true, you will have to cross these very same massive mountains" (Tripathi, *The Immortals* 13). Remembering these words of his uncle, he started questioning himself if he deserved such a great destiny. He questions himself, "Is this the man who will lead me to my destiny? Do I really have the destiny my uncle spoke of?" (Tripathi, *The Immortals* 13). This is Shiva's ambition and hope for 'good destiny', told by his uncle, which is also compelling him to leave his land for a new place where they will have an entirely new life. Apart from all these, Shiva is an ideal leader. Being the chief of his Guna tribe, he bears the whole responsibility of the welfare of his people, but instead of forcing them, he left the decision of migrating to Meluha fully on

their own will. He had already told the truth about Nandi and Meluha to all his people. The people of the Guna tribe are the true followers of Shiva, and they agreed to his decision to leave their homeland near Mansarovar Lake. So, finally, Shiva and his Guna tribe decided to move to Meluha for their needs, desires, destiny, and welfare.

On the other hand, in the novel *Dark Horse*, the protagonist Santosh and other characters like Kripa Shankar Rai (Rai Sahab), Rustam Singh, Manohar, Gururaj Singh, Bharat, Bimlendu Yadav, Vidisha, Payal, Javed Khan, Mayurakshi, Gorelal Yadav, and many other students have migrated to Mukherjee Nagar, New Delhi, from different parts of India like Chapara, Motihari, Bhagalpur, Ranchi, Bhopal, Asansol, Gazipur, Ajamgarh, Baliya, Allahabad, etc. Actually, these characters are not only individuals, but they are types. They represent students of different backgrounds, needs, social conditions, and individual circumstances who leave their places with only the hope, aim, and ambition of being an IAS or PCS officer. They have intense pressure from their family condition, financial status, responsibility, and desire to qualify for the exam. They all have some common as well as individual struggles and nostalgic and anti-nostalgic situations.

Vinnayak Sinha, father of the protagonist Santosh, is a school teacher in Bhagalpur, Bihar. He has a keen desire and excitement to see his son be successful as an administrative officer. Santosh has completed his graduation now, and he is being sent to New Delhi with all possible effort of his father. Santosh is also ready to put all his effort into his success and to fulfil his parents' dream. Santosh reached Mukherjee Nagar and came in contact with other characters and their individual struggle, nostalgic and anti-nostalgic feelings.

Displacement and Migration cause several changes that one has to adjust to or be accustomed to. One who migrates has to follow the social systems and rules of the new place, and he/she have to face changes and challenges in language, customs, social behaviour, appearance, and dress sense. One has to sacrifice several of their own learning and ideology to fit into the new society. Shiva has this fear in his mind even before his displacement along with his tribe. When Nandi proposes to him:

Come to our land. It lies beyond the great mountains. Others call it Meluha. I call it Heaven. It is the richest and most powerful empire in India. Indeed, the richest and most powerful in the whole world. Our government has an offer for immigrants. You will be given fertile land and resources for farming. Today, your tribe, the Gunas, fight for survival in this rough, arid land. Meluha offers you a lifestyle beyond your wildest dreams. We ask for nothing in return. Just live in peace, pay your taxes, and follow the laws of the land (Tripathi, *The Immortals* 12).

Shiva thought:

... He would certainly not be a chief in this new land.

Would I really miss that so much?

His tribe would have to live by the laws of the foreigners. They would have to work every day for a living (Tripathi, *The Immortals* 12)

But at once he found the solution. Thought came to his mind, "That's better than fighting every day just to stay alive!" (Tripathi, *The Immortals* 12). They met with a unique experience after reaching Devgiri. The camp for their abode was full of luxuries. They were given several cotton cloths. All these are very new experiences for Shiva and his Gunas.

Santosh's experiences are not very different in their fundamentals. Mukherjee Nagar is actually a very new and unique experience for him. His very first astonishing experience was the old man's behaviour at the Metro Station while he was at the Metro ticket counter. There after he met with a series of such experiences as Manohar's removing hair from his chest, the filthy condition of rooms and washroom, the property broker's behaviour, wine, beer, and non-veg party by fellow students, Vidisha's behaviour, Payal's relations with several boys, and so on. Santosh was fooled by the coaching receptionist, Man Mohini, in choosing subjects.

In both novels, the protagonists have to sacrifice their old identity and ideology. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva gets a new identity of 'Neelkanth', the saviour of the natives of Meluha and Sapt Sindhu, as a result of the Meluhan faith in the Neelkanth myth. Now, Shiva has a new responsibility for the welfare of the Meluhans and the Sapt Sindhu. But he himself is unable to accept his new destiny. He has to search for the truth and destroy the evil. On the other hand, in the *Dark Horse*, Santosh reformed himself, sacrificing his old ideologies regarding moustache and hair on his chest. According to the ideology and teachings of Santosh's village and his father, a moustache must not be shaved before the death of one's father, and the hair on the chest is the symbol of manliness. But Santosh shaved his moustache and removed hair on his chest to adjust to the new society. Shiva's Guna tribe is now ready to accept new culture, new rules, and to pay taxes to the government of the new land.

Shiva is happy on reaching Meluha, but he is very sensitive to the welfare of his people. On the first night in Meluha, he met with a different fortune that, after drinking Somras, his throat became blue, and his people suffered a severe fever. Now he is recognised as Lord Neelkanth, but he himself is not sure of his fate as Lord Neelkanth and proceeds on a long pathway in quest of the Truth. But on the other hand, Santosh found a great struggle and competition in achieving his fortune. He failed in his first attempt, and he missed his second attempt too. His father had taken a loan to pay the fee and expenses for his second attempt. Being unable to bear the expenses anymore, his father requested Santosh to go back to his home, but Santosh had decided on something else. His father got his horoscope read by an astrologer, and the astrologer predicted that Santosh could not become a civil servant. But Santos is no coward to accept his fate predicted by the astrologer, so he decided to rewrite his fate and destiny with his hard work. He left his old abode in New Delhi and cut all his connections in the city. He studied harder and smarter and finally achieved his goal, proving his horoscope wrong.

Javed Khan was from Chhapara, Bihar. His father died with a deep desire for him to be an administrative officer. Now Javed is living in Delhi with the memories of his dead father to fulfil his father's last desire. His mother had sold out the 13 bigha of



his 15 bigha land to pay the expenses of his education for the preparation of the civil exams. His mother is seriously ill, but he is still living with the worry of his ill mother and that of saving his only 2 bigha remaining land. At last, his mother died of illness before his success. But his struggle and sacrifice got their reward at the end. Finally, he qualified for the exam of Bihar PCS and returned happily.

Vidisha had come to New Delhi from Bhopal in search of her destiny as an IAS officer. She had spent six years in Delhi for the preparation but couldn't achieve any success. Now she has intense pressure from her family to return home and get married. She is in love with Santosh and hopes to be the wife of a civil officer, but at last she had to return home hopelessly because Santosh was also unsuccessful in his second attempt at the IAS exam. Mayurakshi got her destiny living in New Delhi.

Gorelal Yadav had come from the Ajamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh to prepare for civil exams. He had appointed a lady cook, like several other students living in Mukherjee Nagar, so that he could feel like an officer. He is very conscious of his look and the physical appearance of an officer. But he couldn't qualify as an officer and finally eloped with his cook.

These characters are only types, but this is the truth of several students in Mukherjee Nagar coming from different parts of India. The biggest crowd is from Allahabad University this why Allahabad is the city that is most remembered in Mukherjee Nagar among the students. One day, when Rai Sahab was preaching down the tea of Shukla's shop, he remembered Allahabad's tea. He said, "The tea is very insipid. The quality of Shulula ji's tea is also falling now. You can't get Allahabad's tea here" (Mrinal 20). The narrator of the *Dark Horse* narrates Allahabad in Mukherjee agar as:

An Allahabad used to move around in Mukherjee Nagar. ... Every evening when students gather at the tea shop, Pan Shop, Litti-Chokha shop, Jalebee shop, and chat-pakaudi shop, they miss Allahabad a lot, even several times more than that of Amitabh Bachchan. Words like Chhedan's pan, Mantoo's *Jalebee*, Netram's Kachauri, Lallan's Pakauda, Lallan's tea, PMC (lover point), etc., float like fragrance in the air of Mukherjee Nagar (Mrinal 20).

Shiva's destiny is a little bit different from that of the protagonist of *Dark Horse*. Santosh is very clear regarding his aim, and he certainly has to go back home, but Shiva is not sure of his destiny, even though he is unable to accept his destiny as reality. He has to check and find out the truth. Shiva is not sure whether to go back to his home, but he cannot forget the holy Mansarovar Lake. Shiva is used to praying 'in the name of the Holy Lake'. The dream of a lady in danger, whom Shiva couldn't save from a beast, is still chasing him. Shiva is achieving his destiny in due course of his journey of whole India. At the end of the trilogy, Shiva got the destiny of being Mahadev. He destroyed the city of Devagiri and the Somras, which had grown as an evil for society. He fulfilled the responsibility of Mahadev. He took the right decision for the welfare of society. He used the Pashupatiatra to destroy the evil and returned to his land, Kailash

Mansarovar, to fulfil the punishment of banishment from Saptasindhu for using the Pashupatiatra.

Concluding as a whole based on the above arguments, it can be said that both novels present migration and displacement of people due to needs, responsibilities, and hopes. People left their own place in search of new hope and destiny for their loved ones and for themselves. People leave places, but the places never leave them. The remembrance, good and bad memories of their places, keep on chasing them like their shadows. It can be said that problems, circumstances, and conditions remain almost the same, but there is only a change of time because the two novels are set at a time gap of about 4000 years; the fundamental circumstances are almost the same, and characters are migrating from their native place with memories of their place and their people left over there. People leave their homes in search of fortune to get happiness and satisfaction, but one can get satisfaction and happiness only in their own place. If one migrates from one's own native land, he/she may earn money and good fortune, but can't get real happiness and satisfaction till the end of their life. One's native land or one's own home is the real heaven.

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