Body Modifications and Posthumanity: A Critique of Social Constructions in *The Immortals of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt by the researchers to analyze Amish Tripathi's book, *The Immortals of Meluha*, utilizing a Foucauldian framework of sociological critique. In the article, we debate the notion of distinguishing normal and abnormal, the social construction of ideology, and the victimization of persons with deformities and handicaps. We consider the novels as the author's attempt to satirize society for its victimization of Dalits, individuals with physical deformities, and widows. As a result, we talk about the ideological construct and how the exercise of power might alter it. Here, the "truth" becomes the puppet of the authorities. The truth also alters as the balance of power shifts because with the new power, ugliness is celebrated, but in the previous power, the deformity was a curse. In the end, we contend that xenophobia is the only reason why the people of Meluha despise the deformed and that deformed bodies are nothing more than posthuman alterity. Overall, the present paper is a critical study of disability with a critical Foucauldian framework.

Keywords: Posthuman, Deformity, Foucault, Alterity, and Social Construction

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason!

How infinite in faculty, in form, in moving, how express and admirable in action!

- William Shakespeare

The phrases above emphasize the dignity of man and claim that he is one of God's most priceless and essential creations. However, society began to doubt the absoluteness of man, particularly when he is born aberrant, such as deformed or crippled. These individuals are slowly driven into the shadows, where they are unable to see the innumerable marvels of life. Such anomalies are referred to as disabilities or impairments in medical science. It is

necessary to examine how the word "disability" builds meaning for disability studies and study the discipline's evolution in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries before examining it as a defect.

Regardless of socioeconomic rank, caste, ethnicity, or gender, people with disabilities have been relegated to situation of being marginalized in practically every region of the world They began to struggle against the dangers and fears that existed in society against them to survive. Social campaigns and disability activism gradually developed in many nations, but mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom. The problems of war veterans who were wholly or partially disabled owing to the awful injuries they sustained during combat is another element that contributed to the formation of such campaigns' impacts on war. These motions also aided those who had been rendered crippled at some time in their lives due to an accident or a harsh acid assault in realizing their power and gaining attention. These efforts inspired people to examine disability rights, and as a result, several legal amendments for taking into account the many problems encountered by handicapped persons were made. Numerous talks and research about the detrimental effects of disability brought on by society, as a result, have been done.

The 1960 release of Paul Hunt's book *Stigma: The Experience of Disability* marked the beginning of the field's early disability studies. In this essay, some important problems raised by 1960s activism are presented. Hunt contends that rather than an individual's handicap, the biggest issue is the social context. Hunt looked at the necessity of bringing such issues out in public. Following this, many individuals pooled their own experiences and took part in initiatives intended to combat the physical, emotional, and environmental hurdles that handicapped persons must overcome. Such social and political rights-based movements raised awareness of disability in academic circles by the late 1980s and early 1990s. An alternative was provided by experts in sociology, education, cultural studies, and the humanities offering a different disability paradigm. The medical paradigm views disability as an innate pathological deficiency. The medical paradigm portrayed persons with disabilities as inferior and damaged, which gave them a bad connotation. The "social constructivist model," an alternative approach, placed focus on the structural and societal dimensions of disability and claimed that historically, individuals with disabilities had been classified as an oppressed minority. The social model could shift focus away from the body and onto society, and it painted a clear image of how society saw persons with disabilities.

The words impairment and disability were categorized using the social model. Impairment is the term used to describe a human body that is missing a limb or that has a damaged organ or limb. People with disabilities are limited in what they can accomplish in society at large, and they are increasingly cut off from social interaction. Disability refers to such a negative characteristic. We can see that disability is a socially created reality thanks to this classification. In a way, society itself "disables" people via discrimination or the construction of physical obstacles. Wheelchair users, for instance, may have any kind of disabilities, but they are rendered incapacitated by the absence of ramps and are unable to enjoy all the amenities that are available to normal people. Therefore, it is clear that environmental and cultural variables play a significant part in the development of impairment. In this

context, feminist critic Simon de Beauvoir's famous quote, that is, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (247) gives added significance.

Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity, a sociological study by Erving Goffman, is one of the primary works on the subject of disability studies (1963). He asserts that "stigma" links a person's behavior to their social environment. There has always been a propensity to undervalue those with disabilities. By restricting their civil rights, society continues to categorize them as separate in modern culture. The social model was expanded upon, and it served as an example of how disability is not a set condition but rather the result of societal norms and behaviors. The social model largely draws from Foucault's view of the state's function in regulating and normalizing bodies through the "subjection" process and biopower tools such as statistics, demographics, sterilization, and eugenics (Siebers, 55). The philosopher and critic Michel Foucault claim that "the social constructionist paradigm places passive bodies" in The History of Sexuality (1976).

Disability studies became a distinct field of study in literature in the twenty-first century, opening up new avenues for research, knowledge expansion, and the development of human rights. Digital technology platforms like blogs, websites, YouTube videos, Twitter, etc. offer far-reaching, affordable channels for persons with disabilities to share the traumatic experiences they keep to themselves. Such words increase their influence and provide new avenues for social interaction. memoirs by handicapped people outcomes of conflict. These motions also aided those who had been rendered crippled at some time in their lives due to an accident or a harsh acid assault in realizing their power and gaining attention. These efforts inspired people to examine disability rights, and as a result, several legal amendments for taking into account the many problems encountered by handicapped persons were made. As a result, several conversations and research were undertaken to address the harmful impact of disability caused by society. The medical paradigm views disability as an innate pathological deficiency. The medical paradigm portrayed persons with disabilities as inferior and damaged, which gave them a bad connotation.

The social model was expanded upon, and it served as an example of how disability is not a set condition but rather the result of societal norms and behaviors. The social model largely draws from Foucault's view of the state's function in regulating and normalizing bodies through the "subjection" process and biopower tools such as *The History of Sexuality (*1976), the philosopher and critic Michel Foucault says that " the social constructionist view positions "docile bodies" (135). Intersectional approaches such as feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory, critical race, etc. also molded the growth of disability studies as they served as a link for gender, race, class, and sexuality. It is important to examine how disabilities are portrayed in different literary works and visual media because of the breadth and effect of disabilities in many facets of life. In general, every story depicts disability in one form or another. Some people can see it, while others can't. For instance, there are certain impaired major characters in commercial entertainment (submissive, ill, crippled, unattractive, low class, destitute, etc.), however, they are sometimes buried under the hero. Additionally, we may observe the many ways that disability is portrayed in literary tales. Whether these depictions are favorable to the handicapped person or not, it is common to see disabled

people being used by others for their gain, despite the emotional pain, forced estrangement, and—most importantly—identity crises they endure. Without a question, the discourses in the literary and visual media are crucial in bringing to light the issues and abilities of those with disabilities. With the use of an analysis of Amish Tripathi's well-known Shiva Trilogy, this study will be effectively refuted. We may also see the many ways that literary stories convey disability. Despite the emotional suffering, forced alienation, and—most importantly—identity crises they experience, it is common to perceive disabled persons being exploited by others for their advantage, whether or not these images are favorable to the handicapped person. Without a question, the discourses in the literary and visual media are vital in bringing to light the difficulties and capacities of persons with disabilities. This paper will be successfully debunked using an analysis of Amish Tripathi's well-known Shiva Trilogy. The Nagas are a cursed race that is born with severe abnormalities that are said to be the result of their previous birth's wrongdoing. Some people are born with extra hands, hideous features, and occasionally many heads. They are the exact reverse of conventional ideas of beauty and are quite offensive to other people's eyes. Despite being kind, just, and hardworking, they face prejudice in society since character flaws are also imposed upon them. Nagas are misunderstood by everyone around them. Shiva/Neelkanth is the destroyer or savior against evil, according to the Meluhan worldview. Shiva initially has the opinion that eliminating evil entails eliminating Nagas, the origin of all ills. Nagas are not permitted to reside in the Sapt Sindhu area because they are viewed by Meluhans as the embodiment of evil and hostility. They reside south of the Narmada River, past the Meluhan border. Despite being the byproducts of Meluhan's mystical elixir Somras, Nagas are abandoned as soon as they are born. After the devastating blast of Mount Mandar, which Meluhans and Shiva think was caused by Nagas, Shiva decided to help Suryavanshis. Additionally, Nagas are blamed for any illegal and criminal activity in Meluha. Despite all of this, Nagas are exceptionally brilliant people who used every tool at their disposal to make their realm exceedingly safe. Their great battle strategies, defenses, military hardware, town planning, foresight, etc. made the so-called well-maintained perfect Meluhans remarkable. Shiva draws strength from Nagas' fervent support as he resolves to battle Somras and eradicates evil. The majority of them, particularly Ganesh, the Naga Lord of the people, conceal their faces and physical flaws when they stand in front of the public by donning veils. After receiving approval from Sathi and Shiva, Ganesh removes the veil. which ultimately changes his image and boosts his confidence. It can be rightly considered that, if society accepts the deformed people without hesitation, they can live according to themselves and confidently utilize their abilities, and create their own unique identities.

Ganesh, the Nagas' Lord of the People, is the Naga who suffers the greatest abuse. From Sati's first marriage, we had Ganesh. He was born with two buck teeth, an unusually long snout, and big, floppy ears that give him the appearance of an elephant. The disfigured infant is abandoned by his grandpa Daksha by the Meluhan system. Ganesh has been depicted to people for a long time wearing a veil over his face. Despite several opportunities, he never meets Sathi because of his inferiority mentality and fear of being rejected. He is kind-hearted, attentive in his work, and of excellent moral character. He is also a clever, courageous, and skillful strategist. He once saves two ladies from a crocodile assault, but the reptile turns against him since it thinks he's a Naga who attempted to devour

the victims. To save a foreign woman, he also murders Urgasen, the prince of Magadhan. after saving his brother Karthik from the Ligers' onslaught. Ganesh is a person with immense ability, but he is extremely irritated by his estrangement and rejection. His remarks to Sathi, "Ugly, aren't I? " reveal his need for affection. Is that the reason you left me? Because you were too afraid to even look at me. (Nagas Secret 221). This blatantly displays his misery at being alone, cut off from his parents, and of course, from society at large. He endures all of these problems just because he is a Naga, a person with physical deformities, and is thus denied life and identity. Most of the time in the novel, he is hidden behind a veil and is only referred to as the Lord of People; it was only when Sathi and Shiva won society's acceptance that he rose to prominence. But he perseveres through all of his difficulties and forges his personality. He is an honorable soldier, a sweet brother, and a loving son. The idea of "Vikarma" in the Shiva trilogy serves as an illustration of how society oppresses, abuses, and governs people through certain preconceived conceptions. Untouchables known as karmas are punished for their past-life sins in this incarnation. They have a deferential and accepting existence. They ask Lord Agni, the deity of cleansing fire, for pardon. A Vikarma woman is only permitted to touch her immediate family members and is not permitted to marry. Giving birth to a stillborn, malformed, or accidentally dismembered kid is seen as the outcome of prior transgressions, and those individuals are referred to as Vikarmas. Any citizen who comes into contact with a Vikarma person must go through a Sudhikaran or purifying ritual. Since Meluha is a nation that values law and order, its residents have no problem abiding by it. They are subservient and firmly feel that their destiny is what they deserve. Sathi, for instance, is a Vikarma even though she and her father have the authority to alter the law. Shiva finally overturned this restriction by union with Sathi and contact with Vikarma people. Drapaku is a Vikarma since his father is also a Vikarma, a blind person. He joins the Meluhan army under Shiva. However, some believe Vikarma is helpless and incapable of combat. Later on, though, Drapaku battles valiantly for Meluhan and receives praise from everyone. Vikarmas are the perfect example of how societal standards restrict identity or give someone a bad identity. Power and rigidly upheld ideology rendered individuals mentally inferior and identity less. This might be seen as an illustration of hegemony, or the domination of one group over another that is frequently justified by rules and beliefs, as defined by Antonio Gramsci.

The main female characters in the Shiva Trilogy—Sathi, Kali, Ayurvathi, Anandamayi, and Kanakhala—are all strong, independent women who own their own identities and are in no way subordinate to males. The fearless princess of Meluhan, Sathi, is a proficient swordswoman. The Naga queen Kali is also incredibly strong. The leader of medicine among the Meluhans, Ayurvathi, can heal any illness. The princess of Ayodhya, Anandamayi, with a strong sense of self. The prime minister of Meluha is the clever, well-educated Kanakhala.

Kali is the most estranged and ostracized of all these strong and brilliant women. Sathi, a child of Meluhan King Daksha, is her identical twin sister. However, as a kid of Naga descent, she is left behind by her parents. According to the description of her anatomy, she had "little bones that went from her shoulders down to her stomach, almost like a garland of skulls." Two little additional protrusions that may have been a third and fourth arm were perched

atop her shoulders. One with a knife in hand had a visage like Sati's and was jet black (Secret of Nagas, 223). The Naga Queen, however, is Kali because of her fierce tenacity and drive. She is a ferocious warrior, a wise queen, and a valiant lady. She became an orphan and was socially isolated for a significant portion of her childhood due to her disability identification as a Naga child. Her tenacity, bad temper, arrogance, and uncompromising temperament reveal her frustrations. Despite her strength and bravery, she feels weak. She hides much of the time and feels inferior. She only comes to the fore when Neelkanth departs for Panchavati. She speaks out bravely, takes risks, and confronts Neelkanth and other masculine characters. She is a powerful and important queen who defends her subjects and effectively controls her realm while being disfigured, estranged, abandoned, and dissatisfied. She takes care of Ganesh, Sati's abandoned Naga child, in every way a mother would. Tripathi has reimagined Kali from Indian myth and imagination, and Kali's persona celebrates feminine strength by highlighting the talent concealed in her infirmity.

The main character, Sathi, is a Meluhan princess and Emperor Daksha's child. She gives birth to a Naga kid, but because her father kept it a secret, she thinks she had a stillborn baby. She is humiliated and insulted by her people and rules because she is a Vikarma. For instance, Tarak, a Meluhan resident, once questioned her eligibility to be present at a Yaga ceremony. But in the Agnipariksha, she triumphs over him. Even though she is a skilled fighter, strong-willed, and valiant, she nevertheless experiences Vikarma. She has been forbidden a social life and a marital life, estranged from her sister and her son. However, she has a highly open mind because she unquestionably embraces her Naga son Ganesh with all of his physical flaws without consulting anybody else. Her agility and flexibility in battles and duels are unmatched due to her prowess as a dancer and her intelligence in thinking and action.

Many questions, including Sati's response to gender discrimination, social injustice, caste prejudice, and inequity in society, are answered by Tripathi's portrayal of Sati. Shiva regards her as one of her own. She is someone he respects and sees as equal to himself. She learns about herself and her abilities through his love. She has a scar on her face from the battle, but she wants to keep it even though Ayurveda can simply remove it through surgery. When she is made to have surgery by others, she rejects it and sees it as a sign of her wounded self and her drive to exact revenge on her adversaries. Shiva encourages her as well, telling her that the scar makes her even more attractive. Tripathi supports those who lead substandard lives a because of acquired or inflicted infirmities. It is a declaration of war against the fictitious idea of beauty. Sati is the ideal wife, mother, citizen, warrior, and most importantly, a person of great honor. She triumphs over her suppressed individuality and makes a name for herself as an extraordinary woman character.

The Siva trilogy also illustrates how challenging it is to have a close family who is malformed or crippled. Naga lady Maya is King Athithigva's sister. She has two heads, two limbs, and four shoulders but is two ladies in one body. King Athithigva adores and longs to be with his sister. He meets his sister every day and keeps her hidden in a palace. It depicts his powerlessness and emotional anguish. According to Lord Shri Ram Meluhan's philosophy,

social equality is upheld through the Maika system. Lord Ram established the Maika system, which requires that kids grow up in public nurseries. All Meluhan pregnant women are required under the Maika system to travel to camp when they are ready to give birth, and the newborns are raised there until the age of fifteen without ever knowing their parents. Parents may adopt any child from there after 15 years. Even though it is intended to end caste prejudice, parents and kids suffer significant emotional pain as a result of this. This is an illustration of how laws and systems cripple individuals mentally and exert identity control over them.

The Branga community shares a disability with the Naga and Vikarmas. When Somras' industrial waste is dumped into the Tsangpo River, it contaminates the Brahmaputra and travels to Branga land, where it causes their terrible sickness. Brangas live short lives, and their children in particular struggle to survive. When the most affluent kingdom, Meluha, treated the entire population badly, Nagas provided Brangas with all necessary supplies, including medicine. This is how the powerful use everything, including the environment, resources, technology, etc., for their benefit without taking into account other people or the weaker members of society. A mystical beverage known as "samaras" among the Meluhans has the power to provide immortality and heal all illnesses.

After consuming Somras, Shiva has a blue neck, which turns him into Neelkanth. Once, it prevents Sathi from dying after being struck by an Agnibaan. Brihaspati reveals to Shiva the negative repercussions of Somras in the Oath of the Vayuputras. Brihaspati draws attention to the fact that making Somras uses a lot of water. Only Saraswathi River water is used and can be applied to the production of Somras. That big river was finally eliminated as a result of the large-scale industry. The Brahmaputra river passes through the Branga area, and the hazardous waste from Somras production there has caused terrible diseases there. The birth of Naga offspring is the most dreadful effect of Somras. The ability of Somras to multiply cells results in deformation and outgrowths. Therefore, the Somras, which are prized and feared by Meluhans, have the power to destroy nature, its resources, and people by inflicting illnesses and physical deformities, denying their identity and existence in the process.

 Shiva left behind certain traces that have in some cases been disabled. The Guna tribe's leader, Shiva, journeys to Meluha to rescue the lives of his people. Pakartis and Gunas frequently engage in conflict. Shiva eventually concludes that fighting is pointless and departs with his people. Shiva is a courageous and capable fighter, yet he feels helpless when it comes to protecting his people's lives. He again becomes confused after being identified as Neelkanth since he cannot distinguish between good and evil. He initially sees Nagas as bad until realizing that Somras is the height of evil. He occasionally needs Vasudeva's counsel because he is unable to make judgments on his own. In terms of the truth

Through his Shiva trilogy, Amish Tripathi masterfully speaks out against societal injustice. His Neelkanth, also known as Shiva, is a social reformer who speaks out against the idea of Vikarmas and integrates the Nagas into civilization. Similar to this, Shiva might be seen as a supporter of gender equality. Sathi and Kali in particular are portrayed by Tripathi as being on par with males in terms of courage, knowledge, ability, education, etc. He depicts

Drapaku and Sathi as having oppressive Vikarma identities, and Nagas as having exceptional abilities despite having malformed bodies. According to the explanation above, a handicap is often an identity that society constructs, rather than a physical or mental defect. The marginalized handicapped may transcend all forms of oppression, much as Ganesh, Kali, Sathi, etc. in the Shiva Trilogy by Tripathi, and integrate themselves into society. They may design their own identities by transforming their impairments into new strengths. We can deduce that because we live in a biased culture, disability is frequently psychological rather than physiological. Based on medical and societal beliefs, the lack of a limb or sense, or a change in either, is classified as a handicap. The goal of society is for everyone to share the same physical abilities. Without taking into account individual variations, it imposes societal and cultural standards. No one examines whether the so-called impaired can do the tasks that the non-disabled should complete. They are seen as having diverse abilities when they perform their tasks in their unique style. However, if a handicapped person can execute tasks that a non-disabled person is not, they are more exceptional and not just differently abled. In our ableist culture, being "able-bodied minded" is the standard; if you don't follow it, you're expected to change so that you can be as able-bodied as possible. Robert Mc Ruer presents the notion of obligatory able-bodiedness in his book Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability. Disability or deformity, in the eyes of society, cannot be "fixed," hence such bodies and minds should be kept out of sight. According to Mc Ruer, the forced able-bodiedness system is one in which there is no freedom of choice. It reinforces the idea that normality is important and makes the assumption that everyone should be physically well and able-bodied since nobody wants to be crippled. The idea of required able-bodiedness may be appropriately applied to the state of Nagas and Vikarmas. They suffered as a result of society's inability to tolerate and accept their appearance. No matter how capable they are, society is more concerned with their appearance and atypical organs. The concept of required physical ability is comparable to Adrienne Rich's idea of required heterosexuality. The system that always requires what has been done in the past assigns gender and sexuality. These ideas marginalize those who identify as transgender or homosexual as handicapped because they are unable to accept these realities. People who desired to change their sexual orientation are so suppressed by it. They were so denied their sense of self and social reality. Authors with personal experiences of transitioning into different genders, like Jack Halberstam, have emerged and have helped society understand what it means to be oneself rather than a certain gender. The narratives about the handicapped in today's society emphasize the need to change their living situations by raising society's awareness of what it means to be disabled. Instead of special education, which is a kind of marginalization and conveys the sense that they are less abled and not normal, we need inclusive education to achieve this. To meet the unique demands of their various abilities, inclusive schools must instead offer customized sessions. Maintaining human rights, sustainable development, and peace and security depend on disability inclusion. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places a strong emphasis on leaving no one behind. The dedication to achieving the rights of people with disabilities is an investment in our shared future as well as an issue of justice.

In addition to accidents and inherited physical defects, environmental factors also significantly contribute to people being disabled. For instance, according to research, suicide behavior increased by 67% in India during the lockdown. Unexpected health crises, lockdowns, etc. harm the populace. According to studies, economic problems, alienation, and mental stress account for the majority of suicides. This serves as the ideal example of how circumstances may render someone disabled and how this kind of impairment is more psychological than physical. Herein lies the value of emotional intelligence, regardless of physical ability or lack thereof. One will succeed if one can adjust to new circumstances and possess a strong sense of drive and tenacity. Several persons have remarkable abilities in various professions, like Helen Keller, Stephen Hawking, Nick Vujicic, Octavia E. Butler, and others.

In this posthumanist and technological age, it is important to integrate handicapped persons into society. The slogan of The International Day of the Disabled, observed on December 3, 2020, is "Building Back Better: Toward an Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Post-COVID-19 World by, For and With Persons with Disabilities." This idea is made abundantly obvious by this motto. A global awareness campaign called "Tell our tales, enable our rights" is also being organized by UNESCO. They may act and live their lives in their way when we protect the rights and identities of people with disabilities and stand by them. They are more effective at using their various skills and fulfilling their social obligations. Let's hope for a day in the future when the rigid disability conventions are gone and we might wonder as Miranda does in Shakespeare's Tempest.

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world

That has such people in it!

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