

The Immortals of Meluha

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‘Amish has a fine eye for detail and a compelling narrative style.’

– **Dr. Shashi Tharoor**

(Member of Parliament & Author)

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– **Sandipan Deb**

(Senior Journalist & Editorial Director, Swarajya)

‘Amish’s influence goes beyond his books, his books go beyond literature, his literature is steeped in philosophy, which is anchored in bhakti, which powers his love for India.’

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‘Amish is a literary phenomenon.’

– **Anil Dharker**

(Senior Journalist & Author)

‘{Amish’s writing is} a fine blend of history and myth... gripping and unputdownable.’

– **BBC**

The Immortals of Meluha

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of the
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Amish



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This book is produced from independently certified FSC® paper to ensure
responsible forest management.

To Preeti & Neel...
You both are everything to me,
My words & their meaning,
My prayer & my blessing,
My moon & my sun,
My love & my life,
My soul mate & a part of my soul.

Om Namah Shivāya

The universe bows to Lord Shiva. I bow to Lord Shiva.



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And lastly, I believe that this story is a blessing to me from Lord Shiva. Humbled by this experience, I find myself a different man today, less cynical and more accepting of different world views. Hence, most importantly, I would like to bow to Lord Shiva, for blessing me so abundantly, far beyond what I deserve.



The Shiva Trilogy

Shiva! The Mahadev. The God of Gods. Destroyer of Evil. Passionate lover. Fierce warrior. Consummate dancer. Charismatic leader. All-powerful, yet incorruptible. A quick wit, accompanied by an equally quick and fearsome temper.

Over the centuries, no foreigner who came to our land – conqueror, merchant, scholar, ruler, traveller – believed that such a great man could possibly have existed in reality. They assumed that he must have been a mythical God, whose existence was possible only in the realms of human imagination. Unfortunately, this belief became our received wisdom.

But what if we are wrong? What if Lord Shiva was not a figment of a rich imagination, but a person of flesh and blood? Like you and me. A man who rose to become Godlike because of his karma. That is the premise of the Shiva Trilogy, which interprets the rich mythological heritage of ancient India, blending fiction with historical fact.

This work is therefore a tribute to Lord Shiva and the lesson that his life is to us. A lesson lost in the depths of time and ignorance. A lesson, that all of us can rise to be better people. A lesson, that there exists a potential God

in every single human being. All we have to do is listen to ourselves.

The Immortals of Meluba is the first book in the trilogy that chronicles the journey of this extraordinary hero. Two more books are to follow: *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*.



List of Characters

Anandmayi: Ayodhyan princess, daughter of Emperor Dilipa.

Arishtanemi: Meluhan militia, protectors of Mount Mandar and the road to it.

Ayurvati: The chief of medicine at Meluha.

Bhadra, a.k.a Veerbhadra: A childhood friend and a confidant of Shiva. He is named Veerbhadra as he singlehandedly fought a tiger.

Bhagirath: Prince of Ayodhya, son of Emperor Dilipa.

Bharat: An ancient emperor of the Chandravanshi dynasty married to a Suryavanshi princess.

Brahaspati: Chief Meluhan scientist; belonged to the swan-tribe of Brahmins.

Brahma: A great scientist from the very ancient past.

Brahmanayak: Father of Daksha, previous emperor of Meluha.

Chenardhwaj: Governor of Kashmir, based at Srinagar.

Chitraangadh: Orientation executive of the immigrants' camp in Srinagar.

Daksha: Emperor of the Suryavanshi Empire of Meluha, married to Veerini and father of Sati.

Dilipa: Emperor of Swadweep, king of Ayodhya and chief of the Chandravanshis.

Drapaku: A resident of Kotdwaar in Meluha.

Jattaa: An official in Hariyupa.

Jhooleshwar: Governor of Karachapa in Meluha.

Kanakhala: The prime minister of Meluha, she is in charge of administrative, revenue and protocol matters.

Krittika: Close friend of, and attendant to Sati.

Manu: Founder of the Vedic way of life; born many millennia ago in Sangamtamil region.

Nandi: A captain in the Meluhan army.

Panini: Associate scientist of Brahaspati at Mount Mandar.

Parvateshwar: Head of Meluhan armed forces; in charge of army, navy, special forces and police.

Ram: The seventh Vishnu, who lived many centuries ago. He established the empire of Meluha.

Rudra: The earlier Mahadev, the Destroyer of Evil, who lived some millennia ago.

Sati: Daughter of King Daksha and Queen Veerini, the royal princess of Meluha.

Satyadhwaj: Grandfather of Parvateshwar.

Shiva: The chief of the Guna tribe. Hails from Tibet. Later called Neelkanth, the saviour of the land.

Tarak: A Karachapa resident.

The hooded Naga: A mysterious leader of the Nagas.

Veerini: Queen of Meluha, wife of Daksha and mother of Sati.

Vishwadyumna: A close associate of the hooded Naga figure.

Yakhya: Chief of the Pakrati tribe, opponent of the Gunas from Tibet.



CHAPTER 1

He Has Come!

1900 BC, Mansarovar Lake (At the foot of Mount Kailash, Tibet)

Shiva gazed at the orange sky. The clouds hovering above Mansarovar had just parted to reveal the setting sun. The brilliant giver of life was calling it a day once again. Shiva had seen just a few sunrises in his twenty-one years. But the sunset! He tried never to miss the sunset! On any other day, Shiva would have taken in the vista — the sun and the immense lake against the magnificent backdrop of the Himalayas stretching as far back as the eye could see. But not today.

He squatted and perched his lithe, muscular body on the narrow ledge extending over the lake. The numerous battle-scars on his skin gleamed in the shimmering reflected light of the waters. Shiva remembered well his carefree childhood days. He had perfected the art of throwing pebbles that bounced off the surface of the lake. He still held the record in his tribe for the highest number of bounces: seventeen.

On a normal day, Shiva would have smiled at the memory from a cheerful past that had been overwhelmed

by the angst of the present. But today, he turned back towards his village without any hint of joy.

Bhadra was alert, guarding the main entrance. Shiva gestured with his eyes. Bhadra turned back to find his two back-up soldiers dozing against the fence. He cursed and kicked them hard.

Shiva turned back towards the lake.

God bless Bhadra! At least he takes some responsibility.

Shiva brought the chillum made of yak-bone to his lips and took in a deep drag. Any other day, the marijuana would have spread its munificence, dulling his troubled mind and letting him find some moments of solace. But not today.

He looked to his left, towards the edge of the lake where the soldiers of the strange foreign visitor were kept under guard. With the lake behind them and twenty of Shiva's own soldiers guarding them, it was impossible for them to mount any surprise attack.

They let themselves be disarmed so easily. They aren't like the blood-thirsty idiots in our land who are looking for any excuse to fight.

The foreigner's words came flooding back to Shiva. '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.'

Shiva mused that 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.

That's better than fighting every day just to stay alive!

Shiva took another puff from his chillum. As the smoke cleared, he turned to stare at the hut in the centre of his village, right next to his own, where the foreigner had been stationed. He had been told that he could sleep there in comfort. In fact, Shiva wanted to keep him hostage. Just in case.

We fight almost every month with the Pakratīs just so that our village can exist next to the holy lake. They are getting stronger every year, forming new alliances with new tribes. We can beat the Pakratīs, but not all the mountain tribes together! By moving to Meluha, we can escape this pointless violence and may be live a life of comfort. What could possibly be wrong with that? Why shouldn't we take this deal? It sounds so damn good!

Shiva took one last drag from the chillum before banging it on the rock, letting the ash slip out and rising quickly from his perch. Brushing a few specks of ash from his bare chest, he wiped his hands on his tiger skin skirt, rapidly striding towards his village. Bhadra and his back-up stood to attention as Shiva passed the gate. Shiva frowned and gestured for Bhadra to ease up.

Why does he keep forgetting that he has been my closest friend since childhood? My becoming the chief hasn't really changed anything. He doesn't need to be unnecessarily servile in front of others.

The huts in Shiva's village were luxurious compared to others in their land. A grown man could actually stand upright in them. The shelter could withstand the harsh

mountain winds for nearly three years before surrendering to the elements. He flung the empty chillum into his hut as he strode to the hut where the visitor lay sleeping soundly.

Either he doesn't realise he is a hostage. Or he genuinely believes that good behaviour begets good behaviour.

Shiva remembered what his uncle, also his Guru, used to say. 'People do what their society rewards them for doing. If the society rewards trust, people will be trusting.'

Meluha must be a trusting society if it teaches even its soldiers to expect the best in strangers.

Shiva scratched his shaggy beard as he stared hard at the visitor.

He had said his name was Nandi.

The Meluhan's massive proportions appeared even more enormous as he sprawled on the floor in his stupor, his immense belly jiggling with every breath. Despite being obese, his skin was taut and toned. His child-like face looked even more innocent as he slept with his mouth half open.

Is this the man who will lead me to my destiny? Do I really have the destiny my uncle spoke of?

'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.'

Do I deserve a good destiny? My people come first. Will they be happy in Meluha?

Shiva continued to stare at the sleeping Nandi. Then he heard the sound of a conch shell.

Pakratis!

'POSITIONS!' screamed Shiva, as he drew his sword.

Nandi was up in an instant, drawing a hidden sword from his fur coat that was kept to the side. They sprinted

to the village gates. Following standard protocol, the women started rushing to the village centre, carrying their children along. The men ran the other way, swords drawn.

‘Bhadra! Our soldiers at the lake!’ shouted Shiva as he reached the entrance.

Bhadra relayed the orders and the Guna soldiers obeyed instantly. They were surprised to see the Meluhans draw weapons hidden in their coats and rush to the village. The Pakratis were upon them within moments.

It was a well-planned ambush by the Pakratis. Dusk was usually a time when the Guna soldiers took time to thank their Gods for a day without battle. The women did their chores by the lakeside. If there was a time of weakness for the formidable Gunas, a time when they weren’t a fearsome martial clan, but just another mountain tribe trying to survive in a tough, hostile land, this was it.

But fate was against the Pakratis yet again. Thanks to the foreign presence, Shiva had ordered the Gunas to remain alert. Thus they were forewarned and the Pakratis lost the element of surprise. The presence of the Meluhans was also decisive, turning the tide of the short, brutal battle in favour of the Gunas. The Pakratis had to retreat.

Bloodied and scarred, Shiva surveyed the damage at the end of the battle. Two Guna soldiers had succumbed to their injuries. They would be honoured as clan heroes. But even worse, the warning had come too late for at least ten Guna women and children. Their mutilated bodies were found next to the lake. The losses were high.

Bastards! They kill women and children when they can’t beat us!

A livid Shiva called the entire tribe to the centre of the village. His mind was made.

‘This land is fit for barbarians! We have fought pointless battles with no end in sight. You know that my uncle tried to make peace, even offering access to the lake shore to the mountain tribes. But these scum mistook our desire for peace as weakness. We all know what followed!’

The Gunas, despite being used to the brutality of regular battle, were shell-shocked by the viciousness of the attack on the women and children.

‘I keep no secrets from you. All of you are aware of the invitation of the foreigners,’ continued Shiva, pointing to Nandi and the Meluhans. ‘They fought shoulder-to-shoulder with us today. They have earned my trust. I want to go with them to Meluha. But this cannot be my decision alone.’

‘You are our chief, Shiva,’ said Bhadra. ‘Your decision is our decision. That is the tradition.’

‘Not this time,’ said Shiva holding out his hand. ‘This will change our lives completely. I believe the change will be for the better. Anything will be better than the pointlessness of the violence we face daily. I have told you what I want to do. But the choice to go or not is yours. Let the Gunas speak. This time, I follow you.’

The Gunas were clear about their tradition. This respect for the chief was not just based on convention, but also on Shiva’s character. He had led the Gunas to their greatest military victories through his genius and sheer personal bravery.

They spoke in one voice. ‘Your decision is our decision.’



It had been five days since Shiva had uprooted his tribe.

The caravan had camped in a nook at the base of one of the great valleys dotting the route to Meluha. Shiva had organized the camp in three concentric circles. The yaks had been tied around the outermost circle, to act as an alarm in case of any intrusion. The men formed an intermediate ring of defenders to repulse any attack. And the women and children were in the innermost circle, just around the fire. The expendables first, defenders second and the most vulnerable in the inside.

Shiva was prepared for the worst. He believed that there would be an ambush. It was only a matter of time.

The Pakratis should have been delighted to have access to the prime lands, as well as free occupation of the lake front. But Shiva knew that Yakhya, the Pakrati chief, would not allow them to leave peacefully. Yakhya would like nothing better than to become a legend by claiming that he had defeated Shiva's Gunas and won the land for the Pakratis. It was precisely this weird tribal logic that Shiva detested. In an atmosphere like this, there was never any hope for peace.

Shiva relished the call of battle, revelled in its art. But he also knew that ultimately, the battles in his land were an exercise in futility.

He turned to an alert Nandi sitting some distance away. The twenty-five Meluhan soldiers were seated in an arc around a second camp circle.

Why did he pick the Gunas for his invitation to immigrate? Why not the Pakratis?

Shiva's thoughts were broken as he saw a shadow move in the distance. He stared hard, but everything was still. Sometimes the light played tricks in this part of the world. Shiva relaxed his stance.

And then he saw the shadow again.

‘TO ARMS!’ screamed Shiva.

The Gunas and Meluhans drew their weapons and took up battle positions as fifty Pakratis charged in. The stupidity of rushing in without any thought struck them hard as they encountered a wall of panicky animals. The yaks bucked and kicked uncontrollably, injuring many Pakratis before they could even begin their skirmish. A few slipped through. And weapons clashed.

A young Pakrati, obviously a novice, charged at Shiva, swinging wildly. Shiva stepped back, avoiding the strike. He brought his sword back up in a smooth arc, inflicting a superficial cut on the Pakrati’s chest. The young warrior cursed and swung back, opening his flank. That was all that Shiva needed. He pushed his sword in brutally, cutting through the gut of his enemy. Almost instantly, he pulled the blade out, twisting it as he did, and left the Pakrati to a slow, painful death. Shiva turned around to find a Pakrati ready to strike a Guna. He jumped high and swung from the elevation slicing neatly through the Pakrati’s sword arm, severing it.

Meanwhile Bhadra, as adept at the art of battle as Shiva, was fighting two Pakratis simultaneously, with a sword in each hand. His hump did not seem to impede his movements as he transferred his weight easily, striking the Pakrati on his left side at his throat. Leaving him to die slowly, he swung with his right hand, cutting across the face of the other soldier, gouging his eye out. As the soldier fell, Bhadra brought his left sword down brutally, ending the suffering quickly for this hapless enemy.

The battle at the Meluhan end of the camp was very different. They were exceptionally well-trained soldiers.

But they were not vicious. They were following rules, avoiding killing, as far as possible.

Outnumbered and led poorly, it was but a short while before the Pakratis were beaten. Almost half of them lay dead and the rest were on their knees, begging for mercy. One of them was Yakhya, his shoulder cut deep by Nandi, debilitating the movement of his sword arm.

Bhadra stood behind the Pakrati chief, his sword raised high, ready to strike. 'Shiva, quick and easy or slow and painful?'

'Sir!' intervened Nandi, before Shiva could speak.

Shiva turned towards the Meluhan.

'This is wrong! They are begging for mercy! Killing them is against the rules of war.'

'You don't know the Pakratis!' said Shiva. 'They are brutal. They will keep attacking us even if there is nothing to gain. This has to end. Once and for all.'

'It is already ending. You are not going to live here anymore. You will soon be in Meluha.'

Shiva stood silent.

Nandi continued, 'How you want to end this is up to you. More of the same or different?'

Bhadra looked at Shiva. Waiting.

'You can show the Pakratis that you are better,' said Nandi.

Shiva turned towards the horizon, seeing the massive mountains.

Destiny? Chance of a better life?

He turned back to Bhadra. 'Disarm them. Take all their provisions. Release them.'

Even if the Pakratis are mad enough to go back to their village, rearm and come back, we would be long gone.

A shocked Bhadra stared at Shiva. But immediately started implementing the order.

Nandi gazed at Shiva with hope. There was but one thought that reverberated through his mind. '*Shiva has the heart. He has the potential. Please, let it be him. I pray to you Lord Ram, let it be him.*'

Shiva walked back to the young soldier he had stabbed. He lay writhing on the ground, face contorted in pain, even as blood oozed slowly out of his guts. For the first time in his life, Shiva felt pity for a Pakrati. He drew out his sword and ended the young soldier's suffering.



After marching continuously for four weeks, the caravan of invited immigrants crested the final mountain to reach the outskirts of Srinagar, the capital of the valley of Kashmir. Nandi had talked excitedly about the glories of his perfect land. Shiva had prepared himself to see some incredible sights, which he could not have imagined in his simple homeland. But nothing could have primed him for the sheer spectacle of what certainly was paradise. *Meluha. The land of pure life!*

The mighty Jhelum river, a roaring tigress in the mountains, slowed down to the rhythm of a languorous cow as she entered the valley. She caressed the heavenly land of Kashmir, meandering her way into the immense Dal Lake. Further down, she broke away from the lake, continuing her journey towards the sea.

The vast valley was covered by a lush green canvas of grass. On it was painted the masterpiece that was Kashmir. Rows upon rows of flowers arrayed all of God's colours,

their brilliance broken only by the soaring Chinar trees, offering a majestic, yet warm Kashmiri welcome. The melodious singing of the birds calmed the exhausted ears of Shiva's tribe, accustomed only to the rude howling of icy mountain winds.

'If this is the border province, how perfect must the rest of the country be?' whispered Shiva in awe.

The Dal Lake was the site of an ancient army camp of the Meluhans. Upon the western banks of the lake, by the side of the Jhelum lay the frontier town that had grown beyond its simple encampments into the grand *Srinagar*. Literally, the '*respected city*'.

Srinagar had been raised upon a massive platform of almost a hundred hectares in size. The platform built of earth, towered almost five metres high. On top of the platform were the city walls, which were another twenty metres high and four metres thick. The simplicity and brilliance of building an entire city on a platform astounded the Gunas. It was a strong protection against enemies who would have to fight their way up a fort wall which was essentially solid ground. The platform served another vital purpose: it raised the ground level of the city, an extremely effective strategy against the recurrent floods in this land. Inside the fort walls, the city was divided into blocks by roads laid out in a neat grid pattern. It had specially constructed market areas, temples, gardens, meeting halls and everything else that would be required for sophisticated urban living. 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.

In contrast to the extravagant natural landscape of