
Spiritual Pilgrimage Towards Salvation: A Critical Study of Basavaraj Naikar's Religious Play *The Pilgrim of Life*

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to analyze in detail the thematic concerns of Basavaraj Naikar's religious play, *The Pilgrim of Life*. It traces the growth of Sarif Saheb of Sisunala village (in North Karnataka) from the humble position of a poor householder and primary school teacher to that of a great saint and a popular philosopher as evidenced by his innumerable philosophical songs sung by all the devotees in all fairs and festivals of Karnataka. It shows how Sarif Saheb, though a Muslim by birth, was deeply influenced by Virasaiva and Hindu scriptures in addition to the Islamic one and became an embodiment of unity of all life and a harbinger of harmony between Hindus and Muslims abundantly expressed in his philosophical songs.

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India is basically and predominantly a spiritual country that has given birth to numerous spiritualists and religious preceptors who have dedicated themselves to spiritualizing Indians and Indian way of life. They have built the socio-cultural life of this nation on the foundation of spiritual and religious doctrines. They practiced penance, meditation and yoga by virtue of which they attained spiritual elevation. These seers have served Indian society as torch bearers and struggled to dispel the gloom of materialism that predominated mundane life. The dedicated saints have been born in this country from time to time in different ages since the Vedic age.

The spiritual personalities who divinized themselves by way of penance and spiritualized Indian Social life in the Vedic age by dedication are Valmiki, Vishwamitra, Vasistha, Vyasadev, Sukadeva and Bharadhwaj. In the later periods the saints who were born are Maharshi Patanjali, Adi Shankaracharya, Gyaneswar, Ramana Maharshi, Tulsidas, Surdas, Kabir, Paramahansa Yogadananda, Dayananda, Ramakrishana, Vivekananda and Shirdi Sai Baba. In the modern age Satya Sai Baba, Sri Aurobindo, Sivananda, Chinmayananda, Chindananda and Krupalu Maharaj have appeared on the spiritual field of India as seers and embarked on spiritual voyage in order to attain enlightenment. These sages have transcended the barriers of earthly life by way of penance and yoga and augmented their spiritual power by virtue of which they are enshrined as blessed souls. Their glorious life and activities ever inspire Indian to emulate their self-sacrifice, spiritual sanctity and magnanimity.

There are accounts of worldly personalities who never renounced earthly life and never practised penance or yoga but attained spiritual sublimity by virtue of their pious deeds of previous life. The belief in the effects of previous birth in the present life grips Indian mind. As Indians postulate, a pious soul of previous birth is reborn in the present life as a blessed soul who irradiates his spiritual light during this life. Such personalities even without embracing an ascetic life stand paralleled to the enlightened seers in respect of possession of miraculous power. Of course, such awakened souls are rarely recognized as they do not exhibit their inner power publicly and ostentatiously with megalomaniac objective.

In this context we can relevantly illustrate the depiction of such awakened souls by Basavaraj Naikar in his play *The Pilgrim of Life* that throws light on the magnanimity of two saintly characters who invariably contemplate to ennoble and idealize their lives on the basis of religious ideology with a view to attaining salvation. These two characters are exceptionally unassuming and unsophisticated in their attitude and epitomize the virtues of naivete, generosity and complacency. They are devoid of the vices of ego, hypocrisy, dishonesty and knavery for which they are worthy of reverence. They are on the whole embodiment of strikingly noblest virtues on account of which they are regarded as saintly personalities, but they restrain themselves from asserting their superiority in order to claim respect and dignity. The play accentuates epitomization of their sublime spiritual faculty in their personalities. They perform and accomplish stupendous and miraculous tasks by virtue of divine power.

One of the two characters portrayed in the play is Govindabhatta a Brahmin youth of the village Kalasa. The other one is Sarif Mahammad a Muslim boy of the village Sisunala. Both these persons came in close contact with each other by virtue of their intuitive perception.

These two characters were the devotees of Lord Shiva and mother goddess. Govinda became the guru of Sarif and the latter the disciple of the former. Govinda could intuitively recognize Sarif as a blessed soul and the latter also acknowledged the former as his guru by studying his inner spiritual uprightness. He called Govinda Holy Father out of profound reverence for him for he could notice holiness in his personality. Both guru and disciple had mystically gained spiritual power without practice of penance, yoga and meditation by reason of which attainment of power in mundane life is ascribed to their pious deeds of previous birth. These two personalities cherish from their early age aspiration to sublimate their souls and attain salvation by conquering worldly attachment and human lapses. They have consistently grappled with adversities to purify their souls by virtue of selfless dedication to the service of humanity. They consider service to humanity as service to God.

Govinda and Sarif undertake their spiritual pilgrimage and advance steadily towards Salvation. They often contemplate to abide in their post-mortal life and not to return to earthly life. They are reckoned as pilgrims of a spiritual journey that leads to salvation. Thus, the play *The Pilgrim of Life* concentrates on spiritual pilgrimage

undertaken by two religious minded personalities who are not at all aware of their acquired inner spiritual faculty.

Govinda is profoundly spiritual in his conception and outlook. He, therefore, looks for a worthy boy to adopt him as his disciple who will be morally and spiritually compatible to him in respect of his sentiment and deportment. Before the birth of Sarif to a Muslim lady Hajjuma, Govinda could intuitively visualize beforehand that the child would be a blessed soul and morally befitting to be his disciple. He contemplated from the very moment of this cognizance to adopt the child after his growth as a young man. He believed that the child is born to a Muslim lady Hajjuma by the blessings of goddess Sakambari and Shiva Putra of Sisunala. As the child known as Sarif grew young, he could judge by virtue of spiritual insight that Govinda was preordained to be his guru, his Holy Father. With this conviction, Sarif came to the village Kalasa to meet Govinda at his door in order to offer his discipleship to the latter. Govinda too accepted his discipleship as preconceived by him. This coincidental meeting between these two characters brought them close together and impelled them to undertake any task jointly with mutual co-operation. Sarif, the Muslim boy, regarded Govinda as a saintly personality and called him Holy father and the latter also adopted him as a disciple and treated him with love and affection of a father.

Both guru and the disciple had been divinely gifted with spiritual insight and prophetic vision by virtue of which their predictions about the future of the villagers came true in real life. As regards Sarif's inward vision, Basayya, one of the villagers comments in the following words "Though our Sarif looks like a very young boy, he is inwardly ripe" (*The Pilgrim of Life* 24). Likewise Govinda too remarks on Sarif "My dear Sarif you are a ripe soul ready to be liberated from worldliness" (*The Pilgrim of Life* 25). He suggests to Sarif that they should spiritually architect a house and fortify it in such a technique that it does not collapse at all. This suggestion presupposes that, they have to build up their personalities on the basis of moral and spiritual sanctity and uprightness so as to keep themselves free from desecration and go ahead for salvation. Sarif as an obedient and faithful disciple collaborates with Govinda in matters of worldly issues and problems. It is also discernible that Sarif from his very childhood develops a spiritual bent of mind by virtue of which he gives Govinda a philosophical interpretation of his relationship with his father. With this regard he states that individual soul is born hundred times and dies also hundred times. In each of his births he has a father, who biologically and physically gives birth to a son. Such is the definition of a worldly father of biological implication.

Another is an adopted father who fills the mind of his son with spiritual knowledge and qualifies him to attain salvation. Sarif is a divinized personality who could visualize the events of material life with intuitive foresight and interpret them in terms of his enlightened perception. Both Govinda and Sarif are insusceptible to caste, creed and religion. They are not at all influenced by social and religious discrimination. The former being a Brahmin youth defies orthodoxy and conservatism. When Bandibhatta, his elder brother forbids him to associate with Sarif, on the ground of religious hostility, Govinda

ignores his forbiddance defiantly and adopts Sarif as his son. He welcomes him to his house and treats him endearingly. As a reaction to Bandibhatta's contempt for the Muslim and his revelation of his sense of superiority of his own belonging to Brahmin Caste, Govinda states that a person does not become a Brahmin by being born in a Brahmin family, a Sudra may on the other hand become a Brahmin by virtue of his possession of Brahmanic qualities. This statement is intended to dispel his brother's repugnance for Muslim. This caste consciousness is a mental phenomenon that can dissolve in to nothingness. Such an interpretation of caste distinction could be given by Govinda because of his innate enlightenment.

In the subsequent scene - IV of Act II the playwright alludes to a strange phenomenon that occurs in the residence of Govinda who smokes a pipe and hands it over to Sarif to take out the used tobacco and empty it. The latter while jerking down the pipe, discovers a gem stone that falls from inside the pipe to their great amazement. As regards the gem, Govinda assumes it to be a manifestation of goddess herself who intends to abide in their village and transform it into a land of penance. He observes that God incarnates as man and uses the land as an abode of Salvation. He further exhorts the villagers and advocates cultivation of the virtue of righteousness which is prerequisite and precondition for realization of God.

Govinda infuses in Sarif the spirit of detachment from worldliness in order to sublimate his soul and enable him to attain salvation. The latter imbibes the advice of the farmer and aspires from the inception of youth to get himself liberated from the trap of worldliness. Sarif in his prayer recites his ambition "Ocean of compassion kindly liberate me from the labyrinth of worldly life" (*The Pilgrim of Life* 32). With this recitation he genuflects the feet of his guru. His prayer authenticates his intensity of desire to attain salvation by overcoming his passion for worldliness. With this objective in mind, he yearns for spiritual elevation.

In the scene V of Act - III when Hajjuma the mother of Sarif asks her son to repair their house so as to stop leakage of rain water; the latter responds to her insistence but does not attach any importance to it. In response to her urge for repairing the house, Sarif gives a philosophical interpretation on this matter in the light of his spiritual knowledge. As he interprets, their house of bricks and clay may collapse someday despite its repair but on the other hand human body of flesh and blood that has been created by a mother in her womb leaks incessantly without cessation. He contrasts this materially built house to human body that is prone to decay due to ignorance and lack of spiritual awareness. In this connection Sarif further asserts "I shall grow ripe in that spiritual gymnasium, burn the traces of mortality and follow the path of no return. I shall never return to this body house" (*The Pilgrim of Life* 39) This pronouncement made by Sarif suggests his strong will and determination to attain salvation and not to be reborn. In his every interpretation of earthly phenomena, there is invariably an undercurrent of his aspiration for salvation.

Both Govinda and Sarif are morally and spiritually immaculate personalities who embark on a spiritual journey to the land of salvation from where the soul does not return to

the worldly life. They are metaphorically two pilgrims advancing in their spiritual pilgrimage towards salvation. They pessimistically profess their retuctance and disinclination for worldly life.

In the scene IV of Act - II Sarif while entering his Govinda's village Kalasa, considers it a shrine for the residence of his guru, a blessed soul, a holy man who is morally and ethically an upright person. He looks upon his guru as Parameshwara as he himself is an enlightened person who visualizes sanctity in every earthly phenomenon and interprets it in terms of philosophical knowledge. Thus, it is inferred that Sarif is worthy of attaining salvation as a blessed soul.

In the Scene - VIII Act - II Mulla 2 the spiritual head of the mosque admonishes Sarif for his deliberate avoidance of attending prayer at mosque. In reply to his query, the latter justifies his action on spiritual ground and interprets mosque and namaz in the philosophical terms. He explains that human body is a mosque and not the building of bricks and by the term namaz he interprets it as conquest of ego. He elucidates na means ego and maz means "give up". He further adds that namaz implies surmountability of sense of ego and arrogance. Thus, Sarif explains these terms mosque and namaz from spiritual angles of vision.

Another incident that panicked Sarif was his betrayal of sensual desire at the sight of a lady. When he saw a lady taking bath near a well, he was momentarily bewitched by her voluptuous body. He desired to have her as his wife. The arousal of his lustful desire perverts his mind and soul. His moral depravity presupposes his deviation from the path of righteousness and integrity. The deviation obstructs his spiritual advance towards salvation and convinces villagers that Sarif has betrayed his guru by betraying his carnal desire voluptuously. This incident exerts its impact on the psychological state of mind of the offender. In this connection Sarif once hears a divine voice that accused him of having betrayed his guru by his aberration from the path of moral rectitude. This divine voice makes him cognizant of his immoral intention and evokes his feeling of repentance. He is impelled by his remorse to expiate his misdeed. With this feeling of considerable repentance he rushes to the door of the lady and meets her at her residence. He prevails upon the lady apologetically and contritely to whip him for nursing libidinous intention for her so that the sin he committed on account of his impious deed shall be expunged by the punishment inflicted upon him by the lady. This punishment inflicted on him by way of whipping him shall conduce to purification of his polluted soul. The ordeal that Sarif undergoes solicitously serves to oblivate his stigma and chasten his soul. After courting infliction of punishment, Sarif assumes that he regains his spiritual sanctity by way of atonement and obviates the moral lapse that hindered his pursuit for salvation. Such morally conscious personalities, who confess their guilts and expiate to regain their moral uprightness are rare in the world.

The scene I of Act IV gives an account of the miracle performed unintentionally by Sarif. In this scene the youngman meets Gowda the village chief who demands respect overbearingly by way of greeting him but the former ignores him and explains to him

citing his guru's version relevantly regarding definition of a village in order to humble him and curb his ego. He states that human body is the village and the head of a man is the office which is governed by awareness that serves as the chief. In this case also Sarif gives a philosophical interpretation of a village in order to give a crushing blow to Gowda's sense of superiority as a village chief but his statement failed to appeal to him. As a reaction to Sarif's explanation which proved unsavoury and insipid and provoked him where upon Gowda kicked down Sarif arrogantly and vaingloriously for not greeting him with respect. After a moment he himself is divinely punished due to his accidental fall on the ground. He yelled blatantly for sustaining injury. This grievous injury awakened in him a sense of realization and a feeling of repentance for his flagrancy and ill-treatment towards a blessed soul. He remorsefully begged forgiveness to Sarif for his impertinence and appealed to him to assuage his pain caused by injury. As his repentance moved the heart of the young man, he relieved him of his pain by his divine power. This incident proves Sarif as a saintly personality. Any ill-treatment meted out to him results in the instantaneous punishment to the offenders in as much as Sarif is a blessed soul, a beloved of God.

Another incident described in the Scene - III of Act IV also bears testimony to embodiment of divine power in the personalities of Govinda and Sarif. Sinappa, a neighbour of Govinda deliberately excludes the family of the latter from inviting to a communal dinner in order to affront the members but he had to face the worst consequences for this mischievous deed that precipitated embarrassing situation and resulted in his punishment. All the eatable items deliciously prepared by cooks had worsened and started stinking. Sinappa's entire programme of dinner was spoilt due to his knavery of humiliating a family of a blessed soul. As a result of this calamity Sinappa was overwrought and panicked. He could realize his guilt for which he was divinely punished. With this realization, he approached Bandibhatta and Govinda remorsefully and apologetically and prostrated at their feet and begged them forgiveness for his impudent, turpitude. Sinappa invited them to lunch and importuned them to bless his programme of dinner. As he admitted his fault with much repentance, Govinda imposed on him three conditions for mollification of their emotional and psychological wounds. Sinappa readily agreed to comply with all these conditions in order to gratify them. As instructed by Govinda, he took Bandibhatta on a palanquin in a procession through the village with utterance of slogans in praise of them and welcomed Sarif to partake of lunch amidst the invited Brahmins. Then, Sarif came to the house of Sinappa as bidden by Govinda and sprinkled holy water on all the food items in order to make them esculent, whereby the deliciousness and the taste of the food were revived by the divine hand of Sarif. With the revival of the splendour of the programme of dinner, it was enthralled and enjoyed sumptuously by the invitees.

As regards the villagers' belief in the divinity of Sarif there ensues a conversation between Syamabhatta and Ramabhatta in the scene - II of Act - V. The former asserts that he regards Sarif as a God for embodiment of miraculous power in his personality. Syamabhatta while speaking to Ramabhatta cites Sarif's philosophical impression on his

wife Fatima and quotes his statement about her. Sarif had stated that Fatima was not merely his wife. She was also his niece and maternal aunt. Just as Ramakrishna Paramahansa looked upon his wife as his mother, so also Sarif considered his wife; in the same angle of vision. As he assumes philosophically, Fatima manifests her various entities of a woman and represents ideal womanhood. She too regards her husband as God and owes her gratitude to him for having propitiated her with spiritual gratification.

With regards to existence of God, Sarif holds a different view and casts his opinion in philosophical terms. As he interprets, body is the temple and mosque and his awareness of God is his Allah. He does not perceive God in the outer world and in order to find Him, Sarif dives deep in to his inner self which is the abode of God. Such an intellectual erudite explanation is suggestive of his godly qualities in him.

In the course of his conversation with Syamabhatta, Sarif as a true moralist advises him to dismiss all evil thoughts from his mind so as to enjoy peace of mind.

Scene V of Act - V throws light on the magnanimity of Sarif in feeding a beggar by sacrificing his food. When the entire family of Sarif was famishing in hunger, there comes a beggar unexpectedly to their door and begs food to appease his hunger. Sarif gives his own porridge to him and asks his wife and mother to give their share to the beggar considering him as an incarnation of God. With this assumption he sacrifices the food of the entire family to feed the beggar and relieve him of hunger. His exuberant humanitarian generosity and selfless ungrudging sacrifice not only magnifies his personality but also elevates him morally and spiritually.

Another Scene - I of Act VI delineates an incident of theft that had occurred in the temple of goddess. A nose stud is stolen mysteriously from the village deity by someone. An inquiring officer accused the priest of the temple of having stolen the ornament and whipped him mercilessly in order to elicit the truth. At this juncture there arrives Sarif who exonerates the priest from the charge of theft and admits his implication in the crime but denies the charge of theft and asserts that the nose-stud had been given to him by the mother goddess herself. This defensive statement made by him was disbelieved and distrusted by the officer who sought concrete and corroborative evidence by putting Sarif in to a test. As the officer got him into an embarrassing situation, Sarif prayed to the goddess to rescue him from the charge of theft by imparting credibility to his statement. His prayer melted the heart of the goddess who compassionately gave him her nose stud in the presence of all. As the mystery of theft came to light, the inquiring officer felt guilty and apologized to Sarif for his aggressive and offensive behaviour. This incident convinces everyone of possession of divinity by Sarif who could attain the Goddess's blessings and compassion by virtue of his devotion to her.

On another occasion when Hussaini, the mother-in-Law of Sarif asks him to point out his Mecca and Madina, he directs her attention to a Margossa tree on the field beneath which the dead bodies of his parents lie buried. He states that he looks upon his father as Macca and mother as Madina. He treats the place of their burials as Heaven and impresses

upon his relatives of his intensity of love and devotion to his parents whose blessings he seeks in life. After this explanation, he diverts his attention to his wife Fatima and prophesies her imminent death and attainment of salvation. He further adds that she was born in the world because of her pious deeds in previous life.

Fatima herself also predicts her impending death by virtue of her fore knowledge and asserts her intention never to return to this life again. Sarif espouses the prognostics of his wife and pronounces that she will also attain salvation as she has no rebirth. Thereafter, Hussain his father-in-Law asks him whether he will grieve her death. In reply to his query Sarif states that he will not lament her death as he is sure of getting united with her after his death. She can be separated from him physically but not spiritually. He further states his relationship with Fatima in philosophical terms.

In the scene IV to Act VI Sarif affirms that he has been liberated from the bondage of worldly life and hence he sets out his spiritual journey towards salvation. In the Scene I of Act - VII Govinda eagerly solicits the presence of Sarif as he intuitively prognosticates his impending death. In the mean time Sarif was performing his role in a *doddatta* at *yarasuppi* village but he could telepathically hear the voice of his guru and rushed to him hurriedly. On his arrival at the house of Govinda, the latter speaks prophetically his imminent death that necessitated Sarif's presence to entrust him with some important tasks. He instructs his disciple to highlight the glory of mother goddess for her munificence. On hearing from the tone of Govinda his readiness to depart from earthly life, he implores him to take advantage of his company in this post-mortal journey but his guru interdicts him and dissuades him from accompanying him to the land of death.

He convinces that, he represents an ambrosial tree and his disciple is the fruit of that tree. After a few moments Govinda breathes his last and goes to the immortal world of salvation. He has enkindled the light of spirituality in Sarif so as to enable him to follow his spiritual path. After Govind's death Sarif experiences psychologically that the former has entered into his heart and impels him to treasure his image in his memory. Govinda's death is providentially followed by the death of his disciple.

In the Scene - III of Act - VII Sarif sings out his readiness and willingness to die and depart from the world of mortality. He professes his intention in his own words "I am leaving this body" (*The Pilgrim of Life* 144). When Shyamabhata is sure of the death of Sarif he requests him to enlighten him with Brahmajyana but the latter declines to oblige him on the ground of his infertility and spiritual bankruptcy in his life. He attributes this spiritual infertility to him "Your field is infertile and does not yield any harvest" (*The Pilgrim of Life* 145). On account of which there is no possibility of germination of knowledge of Brahmajyana in his personality. He inculcates him to devote to pious deeds, provide shelter to the needy, feed the hungry and remove the obstacles faced by people and finally remember the Holy soul Govinda. He further advises the villagers to entrust all their previous deeds to Govinda who will burn them and purify their souls so as to qualify them to attain salvation. With these words of advice to Shyamabhata, Sarif's soul gets liberated from the network of worldliness and goes to Shivaloka.

Thus, ends the life of a blessed soul after the death of his guru and his wife who were ambitious of attaining salvation and with this aspiration in view they have led their lives with moral and spiritual rectitude. They have left behind them their immortal images to be enshrined in the memory of the inhabitants of three villages, Sisunala, Kalasa and kundagola particularly the lives of Govinda and Sarif are illustrative of their purity of soul and dedication to the service of humanity. All these awakened souls have attained a sublime stage in spiritual sphere without practice of yoga, meditation and penance.

In the context of Sarif's devotion to God, it is relevant to allude to a Muslim youth of Odisha who became an ardent devotee of Lord Jagannath. He is known as Salabega the devotional poet of the state (Mohanty). He was the son of a Muslim warrior named Lalbeg working as a soldier in the Mogal army of King Raja Mansingh in the year 1607. Salabega was inspired by his mother to love and devote to Jagannath. He came to Puri out of devotion to seek entrance in to the temple of God but was denied and prohibited. Consequential disappointment of having a sight of God impelled him to go to Vrindaban to see Lord Krishna in the temple. Later on, he decided to come to Puri to see Lord Jagannath on the chariot during carfestival as he was aware that God could be seen publicly during this occasion. With this intention he proceeded to Purion foot during carfestival but on the way he fell ill and was detained enroute. He prayed to Lord Jagannath to wait for him so as to enable him to have a view of Him. His prayer evoked the compassion of God who delayed the forward movement of His chariot foiling all the attempts made by the priests to pull it ahead. God remained stuck till the arrival of his beloved devotee Salabega. As soon as Salabega arrived at Puri and saw lord Jagannath His chariot started wheeling. This historical incident proves that God does not discriminate caste. He loves those who love Him devotionally. Although Salabega was born to a Muslim family he became a staunch devotee of Lord Jagannath, Sarif the disciple of Govinda, the main character of the play *The Pilgrim of Life* is comparable with Salabega for his devotion to God and Mother-goddess despite his Muslim birth and upbringing. Mother-goddess showered her blessings on Sarif for his devotional intensity and exculpated him from allegation of theft.

There were many other historical personalities who belonged to Muslim families but became devotees of god and preachers of Hinduism. They are Shiridi Sai Baba, Kabir and Mumtaz Ali Khan. All these figures are regarded as saints in the Hinduistic perspective in spite of being born to Muslim families. They were the pioneers of Hindu cult and devotees of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Shiridi Sai Baba is a saint who is worshipped by the Hindu and the Muslim (Kamath and Kher). He is believed to have been born to a Muslim family, but he became a proponent of Hinduism and loved Hindu scriptures, *The Ramayana*, *The Bhagbat Gita* and *the Yoga Vasistha*. He was absorbed in meditation for a long period and attained spiritual elevation. He loved both the Hindu and the Muslim in an equal eye of vision. He exhorted the Hindus to study the *Bhagbat Gita* and carry out the doctrines there of into practice in real life. This is an example of how a Muslim became a spiritual preceptor of Hinduism and popularized this religion. He is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva.

Kabir is another Muslim born poet who became a saint inspired by Ramananda (Pandey). He loved Hinduism, Jainism and Islam. He preached the value of righteousness. He was a devotee of Vaisnavism. He was a follower of Advaita philosophy. He has written poems on God and mysticism. Thus, we find Kabir as a Hindu devotee of God and preacher of religion.

Another personality, who became an advocate of Hinduism is Mumtaz Ali Khan later known as Madhu Karnath (Shri M). He was born to an affluent and liberal Muslim family of Trivendrum. He met Maheshwarnath Babaji and became his disciple. After his contact with his guru he became more interested in Hinduism and began his spiritual journey by devoting to meditation. He acquired the knowledge of Kundalini and preached its theory. He claimed with conviction that Mahavatar Babaji was his guru in previous life and therefore he was spiritually united with him in this life. Madhukarnath was a devotee of God and a follower of Nath tradition. He was regarded as a living yogi.

Sarif the Muslim boy of the play *The Pilgrim of Life*, dedicated himself to promotion of Hinduism like all these spiritual personalities depicted above. He is believed to be an awakened soul, an incarnation of God. From religious point of view the play focuses on Sarif's aspiration for salvation and his activities designed for achieving this ultimate goal.

Thus, the religious play *The Pilgrim of Life* is a presentation of a story of socialistic and religious significance. It dwells upon the exalted theme of spiritual pursuit for salvation which is the key note of this play. It necessitates its comparison and contrast with contemporary religious plays with a view to evaluating it indifferent perspectives.

The play *The Pilgrim of life* is thematically a unique one as it is not befittingly comparable and contrastive with any other Indian religious plays produced till the dawn of the 20th Century. R.N. Tagore, H.N. Chattopadhyaya and P.A. Kailasam are some of the dramatists who have brought out some religious plays which are not entirely religious in theme and thoughts. Let us now take a bird's eye view of some of their plays and stamp out religious aspects crystallized there in.

Tagore's *Chitra* is a mythological play based upon an episode from the Mahabharata. It depicts the story of love between Arjuna and Chitrangada, the beautiful daughter of Chitravahana the king of Manipur. As Chitra is rejected by Arjuna, on the ground of his maintenance of celibacy she implores Madana the god of love and beauty to bestow her with enchanting beauty so as to enable her to captivate Arjuna. Arjuna ignores his vow when he is infatuated by the beauty of *Chitra*. This episode of the play is characteristically mythological and not religious in presentation and treatment. Hence, this play entirely differs from *The Pilgrim of Life* in respect of thematic exploitation.

Tagore's another play which is virtually a religious one is *Sanyasi*. It deals with the theme of purification of soul and attainment of salvation. The story of the play is borrowed from the mythology Vishnu Purana. Jada Bharata a character from the scripture abdicates his throne and renounces the life of kingship in order to retire to the forest as a

Sanyasi. The Sanyasi by withdrawing from worldly life develops a negative virtue. Nevertheless, salvation comes to him through his inner metamorphosis of character and acceptance of purification of soul. This play approximates to *The Pilgrim of life* in respect of its contents of purification of soul and salvation. Both Govinda and Sarif of Naikar's play undergo spiritual purification by virtue of their service with a view to attaining salvation. Thus, in both the plays *Sanyasi* and *The Pilgrim of Life*, the themes deal with the aspects of Purification of soul and salvation. Hence Sanyasi is undeniably a religious play.

Tagore's another play that is religious in character is *The King of the Dark Chamber*. The chief character is the King of an anonymous Kingdom. The King elusively escapes the sight of the queen who desires with determination to trace out her husband and see him but her pursuit with this objective is defeated where as her maid Surangama is believed to have a knowledge of the Secret of the invisibility of the king. Despite queen's disillusionment and despondency, in the matter of her pursuit for her lord. She ultimately realizes the mystic nature of the King's escape from her sight. In her view God manifests in the personality of the king for which she is resolute to discover Him and see Him in her own eyes. The play *The King of The Dark Chamber* is thematically different from Naikar's *The Pilgrim of Life*. The playwright in this play deals with mysticism about God's appearance. The mystery of divinity is symbolic of the dark chamber which is enshrouded with enigma. This mystic play is religious in character in as much as it concentrates on the pursuit for God and attainment of divine knowledge. The latter play approximates to the former in the sense that where as the former focuses on queen's pursuit for a sight of God, the latter highlights the objectives of Govinda and Sarif to attain salvation. All these characters have religious desire to realize God Whom they pursue consistently. As far as the story is concerned, both the plays differ in respect of contents of the stories.

Basudev Rao has written a play based upon the epic *The Mahabharata*. The play consists of five Acts and twenty-Seven scenes entitled Nala and Damayanti. These two personal loves each other romantically like Romeo and Juliet. Although eight gods aspire to have Damayanti yet she disappoints them by preferring Nala to all these gods. Since this is a mythological play, it does not stir religious sentiment in the characters. Hence, it differs entirely from Naikar's religious play which presents the pictures of two religious minded persons who live in two villages in the Dharwad District in the north Karnataka in the later part of the 19th Century. These two characters are modern men of traditional outlook and hence they are not like Nala and Damayanti who are lover and beloved but unlike them Govindna and Sarif are guru and disciple in relationship.

A religious play written by P.A. Krishnaswamy is *The Flute of Krishna*. The main character in the play is the girl Vidyaratna who craves for infinite and dreams of Krishna's flute. She meets a boy named Murali and marries him as he bears the name of Krishna. On the wedding night Vidyaratna perceives Krishna's shadow behind her husband and therefore her face beams with immense joy for perception of God. This spiritual phenomenon prompts Murali to assume that his wife happens to be the bride of God. This play deals with Vidyaratna's embodiment of inner divine power by virtue of which she

could perceive the shadowy image of Krishna but her husband Murali is devoid of this power. However, this play emphasizes Vidyaratna's possession of spiritual power as Govinda and Sarif acquire this power by virtue of which they could predict the future of the villagers. From this spiritual angle of vision there is a little similarity between these two plays but in other respects they differ obviously.

T.P. Kailasam is a noted playwright who has produced plays under the influence of Indian mythology. His plays are *The Burdery*, *Fulfilment*, *Purpose*, *Karna* and *Keechaka*. All these five plays are thematically mythological, but they do not breath any religious spirit for which they are not be counted as religious plays.

Religious plays have been written in Sanskrit by the ancient dramatists like Bhasa, Bhavabhuti, Kali Das and Visakhadatte. Since their plays have been written in Sanskrit they are not worthy of comparison with the modern Indian plays written in English. A few playwrights like Basavaraj Naikar have conceived of writing religious plays in as much as they appeal to modern readers.

Modern Indian plays stand comparable with the contemporary plays of thematic semblance. From this point of view the plays written by Tagore, Harendranath Chattopadhyaya, Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad and Vijaya Tendulkar are comparable in as much as some of their plays have some thematic similarities with religious plays. If we evaluate Basavaraj Naikar's *The Pilgrim of life*, we find it a fascinating drama of absorbing interest for the subtle dramatization of pursuit of two characters for attainment of salvation. It is systematically divided in to seven Acts and each Act has some scenes the number of which varies from Act to Act. The dialogue of the play is ingeniously composed with unique subtlety. The playwright deserves admiration for having portrayed the characters in a realistic manner whereby they all appear to us like real men and women behaving and talking in the usual mode. Basavaraj Naikar has skilfully implanted spiritual thoughts in the mind of Govinda and Sarif so as to enable them intellectually to justify their religious views in a prophetic tone. Naikar has instilled in their mind the art of speaking logically and intelligently in order to prompt them to establish their judgments with irrefutable arguments. Their statements appeal to reader with conviction. There is no confusion that precludes comprehensibility and readability. Its clarity is unquestionable for straightforward expressions. It is fascinating for presentation of different episodes in different scenes.

The language of the play does not give rise to any confusion or obscurity for the flawless construction of sentences. The vocabulary used in the drama are recurring and of commonplace manipulation on account of which readers do not encounter any difficulty in respect of its readability and comprehensibility. It is worth mentioning that a few of the words are unfamiliar on account of which readers are baffled in understating the sentences which contain them. They are, *doddada Ele Saba*, *Ayyoyappa*, *Saba*, *Samba Hali*, *Hacha Oosh*, *alavi*, *jagarane*, of course these words are used in colloquial language. Besides' the play is replete with metaphorical explanations which are relevantly appropriate to the context. The play is, however, a uniquely religious one for dominance

of religious sentiments and feeling. The play has been built upon a sound dramatic structure so that the plot develops logically without any shortcomings and lapses.

Naikar's philosophical preoccupation in the play imparts to it a new dimension, magnitude and novelty as a religious play. Apart from religious The Pilgrim of life serves social and political purposes in the national interest. It further contributes to unification and emotional integration between two rival communities the Hindu and the Muslim. Besides, it serves to undermine the conventional practice of discrimination and rivalry between these two castes and promote their mutual understanding. In conclusion, the play has to be reckoned in the national and international sphere as a summum bonum for its embodiment of the theme of philosophical and metaphysical significance.

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