

Book Reviews

Ragini Ramachandra and S. Ramachandra. *A Cruise of a Lifetime* (Voyaging down the Rivers Danube, Rhine and Main). Mysore: Dhvanyaloka Publication. Pp.62. Rs.800/-

I must confess, I am right now a reluctant traveller though in my younger days I *have* visited places and admired for instance Picasso's *Guernica*, Rembrandt's self-portraits, besides his famous *Night Watch* and the magnificent *Madonna and the infant Jesus*. Like Emerson I also have come round to believe that a "wise man stays at home, he never stirs abroad". I like to curl up with a book and if it is a travel book like Ragini and Ramachandra's *A Cruise of a Lifetime*, so much the better. That is because Emerson whom the authors quote also said "Go where he will, the wise man is at home, his hearth the earth, his hall the azure dome; Where his clear spirit leads him, there's his road\ By God's own light illumined and foreshadowed". I find that because of the indefatigable duo who have produced such an informative and aesthetically pleasing volume, I can enjoy travel, cruise through rivers, visit monuments, cathedrals, museums, and experience Nature through them. For that I must thank them. They have made it possible for me to experience the wide world and still feel at home. Ragini Ramachandra and her husband Ramachandra never cease to surprise by their insatiable urge to record and preserve impressions and experiences which they have had as seasoned travellers. *A Cruise of a Lifetime* is their 14th travelogue and its combination of elegant prose (Ragini) and brilliant photography (Ramachandra) makes it a coffee table volume. That is because the duo are persons of taste and sensibility, deeply rooted in Bharat, but true to the spirit of our culture, willing to expose themselves to the breeze of other cultures.

Thus their rootedness in their own culture allows them to experience and travel with maturity. They are not tourists (the typical American sort who 'do' places and are noisy and if I may add philistine) but travellers. Travel is a quest. It is a process of growing and realizing oneself. The quotes from Emerson and Thoreau, favourites of the authors, set the tone for their discourse. The writing is always simple and matter of fact when Ragini is describing the sights and the sounds, the monuments and the joys of nature, but when she contemplates the meaning of what they have seen or heard or smelt, their sensuous apprehensions provide the base for philosophical comment and the style becomes truly literary. We have grown used to this pattern in their earlier books but in this volume I think the trait is a degree or two higher. I think there is more text and more visual appeal in this volume than in their earlier travelogues.

After Corona had released the world from its deadly stranglehold, Ragini and Ramachandra decided to get away and took advantage of a tempting offer from Avalon Visionary which would take them on a cruise along the magnificent rivers of Europe – the Danube, the Rhine and the Main, besides allowing them to take in some cities in Hungary, Netherlands, Slovakia, Austria and Germany. Some of these places they had already seen but it was exciting for them to revisit them. Wordsworth and the Romantics were always revisiting places and recording their impressions. This Romantic cast of mind envelopes Ragini and Ramachandra during these travels.

When the cruise begins, the authors are in the hands of Nature, exchanging the crowds and the bustle of the city. This contrast comes up again and again even as the luxury liner made the river a part of themselves. Their room overlooks the river and they are so close to it that they could very well have been rowing in an open boat.

Upon watching the early dawn, the irrepressible Ragini writes:

'It was the hour before the gods are awake' as Sri Aurobindo would put it and our lives 'shuddered with a strange felicity'. Discovered the meaning of 'tranquility' for the first time as it were. It was almost like re-living Wordsworth's 'serene and blessed mood' thanks to the ineffable 'bliss of solitude'. It was just the water, the trees, and the sky. To be enveloped with such serene surroundings was pure, absolute bliss. One could spend hours gazing at the calm, placid waters and the flight of birds towards an unknown destination, lending a sense of mystery. Enraptured by the pristine beauty of Nature, there was a sense of upliftment.

Such descriptions recur in the travelogue testifying to both their literary sensibility and their own enjoyment of God's creation. Their trips away from the ship involve walking or travelling on coaches or sometimes even trains thus providing variety in their mode of travel.

Food is an integral part of travel celebrated with relish in this volume whether on the ship or while passing through places like Rudesheim, Vienna, Nuremberg and Amsterdam, each famous for its world-renowned products such as cheese or chocolate cakes or ginger bread or coffee, making it a "moveable feast" for them. Music too plays an important role in their travelogue, expectedly with Vienna the City of Music on their itinerary, the city of Mozart, Beethoven and Strauss apart from Rudesheim where they are taken to an hour-long concert in Schloss Engers, an elegant concert hall where 120 concerts are presented every year. The artistes were an elderly gentleman on the piano and a younger person on the violin. As true connoisseurs of music they wax eloquent about the concert:

There were three items including Beethoven's Sonata. The violinist performed with a finesse that made the hall resonate with melody. At times so subtle, so delicate that it was hardly audible as it were! Then it would rise to a sudden crescendo offering the listeners a superb taste of rise and fall, height and depth.

The concert concludes but there is a call for an encore and they leave the hall in a state of reverie, the consolidated effect of the whole day. This description of the music is almost professional and there is an inwardness with it. Incidentally, Rudesheim also hosts the Mechanical Music Company Museum. Here they get to see various mechanical music instruments, all self-playing. Familiar tunes from say *The Sound of Music* gave them a thrill and they leave the museum exhilarated. Yet another occasion is when a musician from Germany plays on an unusual instrument with 42 strings to it with aplomb on board the ship whose admiring references to Pundit Ravishankar warms the cockles of our authors' hearts.

A notable example of their sharp eye for detail and acute observation is seen in the description of the sprawling Palace at Wurzburg, designed by the then young and unknown architect, Neumann, somewhat reminiscent of Buckingham Palace, which took 60 years to build. Yet another instance one might mention is what the authors have to say after getting a feel of the architecture at Volkach, the City of Seven Hills:

With so many lovely buildings and quaint looking structures, the atmosphere breathed of centuries of history. As we walked through a beautiful boulevard lined with rows of trees on either side to reach our coach, we noticed how Art and Nature merged to make for a benign wholesomeness. Soothing greenery on the one hand and artistic specimens on the other, fused inextricably to bewitch

the onlooker!

It couldn't have been put better, one feels. On the basis of my familiarity with their earlier travelogues and now this one (of which I have only given a glimpse) I think I can assert that Ragini and Ramachandra's travel writings can be read with much pleasure. I feel grateful to the authors for taking me on their journey, letting me cruise with them, walk, ride coaches — all this in my mind of course. And I am the better for the experience.

Mohan Ramanan

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Basavaraj Naikar, *Songs of a Ferryman, (Vacanas of Ambigara Chowdayya)*, Emerald Publishers, Chennai. Pp.360.2023. Rs. 500.

This is one of the contributions of Basavaraj Naikar to the literary horizon of trans-creation. Basavaraj Naikar is known for his silent, vigilant and earnest work as Professor of English and as writer both in Kannada and in English. The traces of his vast reading and scholarship are rampantly found in his literary productions.

The book consists of select *vacanas* of Ambigara Chowdayya in translations. During the twelfth century, a great movement was launched in south India in view of bringing a reformation along with the renaissance of enlightenment that involved self awareness as well as the social. Chowdayya was one of the enlightened individuals, called *saranas* or devotees. The *saranas* were not blind and ignorant followers. They were romantic in the sense that they could not give up their staunch individualism for the general obeisance. They accepted Basavanna as their spiritual leader. Chowdayya adores Basava in one of his *vacanas*.

It illustrates the unitary voice of all the enlightened devotees of Lord Siva, whose formlessness is to be found in the form of *istalinga*. It is a philosophic concept popularized and brought to the reach of the common man through the medium of *vacana* written and sung in vernacular tongue.

The unique quality of Chowdayya's *vacanas* is to use the simple archetypes which are converted into general myths. The illustration is in the use of the signature, Ambigara Chowdayya itself. Chowdayya was an individual who became an enlightened *sarana* and who continued his inherited profession of being an *ambiga* or ferryman. He represented the legacy of his family elders. Where the others *saranas* chose their personal gods as the signatures for their *vacanas*, Chowdayya selected his own name as a signature for his *vacanas*. The profession of an *ambiga* is to row the catamaran or a small boat carrying the passengers from one bank of a river to its opposite bank. Symbolically it connotes the job of helping the ordinary people of the mundane world across to the spiritual world.

The present collection contains 175 *vacanas* of Chowdayya, who was an ardent follower of Basaveswara. He is said to have belonged to a village on the bank of River Tungabhadra, which was later named after him as Chowdayyandanapura in Ranebennur taluk of the present Haveri district.

Translating or trans-creating the Kannada *vacanas* into English is not an easy task, because this form of poetry is loaded with mystic, metaphysical and symbolic meanings. In this regard one has to appreciate Dr. Basavaraj Naikar's attempt of bringing the original Kannada

vacanas into English and also providing a detailed critique of each *vacana* for the benefit of non-Kannada readers who are not familiar with Virasaiva or Lingayat religion and philosophy. Thus he has taken the *vacana* poetry beyond the geographical limits of Karnataka and India and given them a global visibility.

Chowdayya's *vacanas* are full of religious thought, glimpses of mystic experience and strong dose of social satire in them. He uses the Virasaiva technical terms like *guru*, *linga*, *istalinga*, *jangama*, *kayaka*, *dasoha*, *Sivayoga*, *pancacara* and *astavarana* etc, abundantly. As a result the non-Kannada readers not familiar with the technical idiom of the new and protestant religion called Virasaivism may not be able to grasp their full meaning. So Dr. Basavaraj Naikar has explained their meanings, the symbolic significance and philosophical/metaphysical /mystic aspects of many other words in his elaborate critiques appended to the *vacanas* thereby helping the readers to grasp them easily. He has highlighted the distinct imagery employed by Chowdayya and shown their importance quite clearly. The *vacanas* of Chowdayya as well as those other *saranas* like Basaveswara, Allamaprabhu and Akkamahadevi are universal in their appeal and still relevant to human life today. The earlier translators like Armando Menezes, S.M. Angadi, A.K. Ramanujan and K.R. Srinivas Iyengar had concentrated their attention on the other mystic poets like Basaveswara, but none had taken up the task of translating Chowdayya's *vacanas* exclusively. In this regard the work of Dr. Naikar is praiseworthy. The detailed critiques and explanations that he has offered along with the translation will help the reader to a great extent to understand the hidden meanings and implications. Likewise his extensive use of diacritical marks helps the non-Indian reader to understand their pronunciation correctly. Obviously, the translation is highly useful to the students of comparative religion and mysticism, comparative religious poetry and translato-logists all over the world. The book deserves to be on the shelves of all the important public and personal libraries.

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Mirza Sibtain Beg. *Khusrau Parviz and Shirin*. Authors Press, New Delh, 2023, ISBN: 978360957346

A gripping theatrical rendition of the fabled love affair between the Sasanian Persian King Khusrau II (also known as Khusrau Parviz) and the Armenian Christian princess Shirin, *Khusrau Parviz and Shirin* is Mirza Sibtain Beg's debut play. The play is a captivating, dramatic retelling of the story. The drama, which is broken up into ten episodes, takes the reader to the splendor and mystery of Persia in the seventh century. There, a passionate yet tragic romance takes place against the backdrop of political plotting and cultural conflicts.

One of the most impressive strengths of the play is the fact that it is faithful to historical events. Beg, a professor of English literature has carried out a substantial amount of research on the lives of Khusrau II and Shirin. He has painstakingly woven in specifics about their histories, the political climate of the time, and the cultural norms that dictated their relationship. The tale is given a sense of reality and depth as a result of this attention to historical authenticity, which enables the reader to submerge oneself in the realm of the Sasanian empire completely. As a result of reading the following opening, it is not difficult to recognize Professor Beg's scholarship. :

Be seated my worthy courtiers!

You are part of our all glories,
 What Achemenids lost, we subsisted,
 Took Persia to zenith, peace scented,
 Under the light of Zoroastrianism, we shone,
 All faiths lived heaving breeze and amity won:
 Jews, Christians, Pagans tested fruits of prosperity,
 Mighty, weak, rich, and poor bloomed on territory,
 Waived taxes, opened treasures, new vistas spawned,
 Jobs boomed, trades flourished, talents and skills honed,
 Cemented silvery bonds with Romans, Huns, and Arabs,
 Divided empire to tetrahedron by able military's webs,
 Patronized learning, Gundeshpur Academy played pivotal,
 Justice delivered, tourism thrived, and progress was on anvil. (16)

Another one of the play's highlights is the way in which the main protagonists are portrayed. The character of Khusrau II is portrayed as a monarch who is impulsive and passionate, and whose love for Shirin goes against the norms of society as well as the political expedient of the time. It is both admirable and heartbreaking that he has remained constant in his dedication to Shirin, even in the face of strong resistance from his court and his family. On the other hand, Shirin is shown as a woman equipped with a strong will and a high level of intelligence. Her undying loyalty to Khusrau matches her beauty. An intriguing and multidimensional figure, her character defies the conventional concept of women as mere objects of desire. Her tenacity and resolve make her a compelling and multifaceted figure.

Shapur, Khusrau's childhood buddy, and Miriam, Khusrau's first wife, are two examples of supporting characters who play vital roles in creating the narrative and providing depth and complexity to the drama. Both of these characters are part of the supporting cast. As a result of their encounters with the main protagonists, they gain significant insights into the socio economic and cultural conventions of the historical period. Additionally, their problems and motivations contribute to the overall richness of the play.

Despite the fact that the play has a great deal of appeal, it is not devoid of any shortcomings. There are instances when the conversation comes off as clunky and excessively formal, which takes away from the emotional impact of the events to some degree. In addition, the play's pacing could have been more streamlined since some passages seemed to drag on for an excessive amount of time or lacked the necessary amount of dramatic intensity.

Khusrau Parviz and Shirin is an admirable work by Mirza Sibtain Beg, which demonstrates his brilliance as a playwright and his capacity to infuse a classic love story with fresh life and energy. For anyone who is interested in historical dramas and tragic romances, this play is a riveting read since it is historically accurate, the characters are well-developed, and it explores timeless topics such as love, power, and cultural clashes. In spite of the fact that it is not flawless, the play has the ability to strike a chord with audiences who value intricate character interactions and intricate narrative techniques. Mark out the following lines :

My husband, I come,
 Now all my pains will overcome,
 To snuggle with thee in grave,
 A brave soul is to splice with that of brave,

The litter of my love came to your place,
 It'll not go anywhere, but die with grace,
 Coward Kobad can't fathom power of love,
 A beast whom lust did drove,
 Our love tale will radiate like legend,
 To enlighten lovers with souls Godsend. (93)

Hence, *Khusrau Parviz and Shirin* is an encouraging first work by Mirza Sibtain Beg. It will be fascinating to observe how his writing develops and matures in the novels and other works that he produces in the future.

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Basavaraj Naikar. *Emperor The Great Sri Krishnadeva Raya (A Historical Play)*. Chennai: Emerald Publishers. PP117. Rs 200.

Naikar is a prolific writer and a person who has a fascination for History. He has written a number of historical novels mostly concentrating on Kannadiga heroes and heroines. The play under review is his ninth play and focuses on the great Krishna Deva Raya who kept the foreign Muslim Sultans at bay and gave name and significance to the Vijayanagar Empire. This Empire was a shining example of a Hindu kingdom which inspired many patriots in the future to fight for Bharatiya freedom. Unlike a historical novel where the novelist has the freedom of description and to include long passages of explanation, a play has necessarily to depend less on description and more on action and dialogue. A Historical novel is closer to the ancient Epic form. It is the Modern form of the Epic. A historical play, on the other hand, must exercise utmost economy and must deploy time and space intelligently. Naikar, for example, uses the technique of the blackout, or light fading and then coming on a few seconds later, to depict the passing of time and development in the action. In this respect Naikar genuflects ever so slightly towards the culture of classical Sanskrit drama.

The incumbent Emperor Vira Narasimha is dying and he asks his Minister Timmarasu to ensure that Krishna, his step brother whom he hates, is blinded or in some other way disposed of, so that his son Iswara Raya can ascend the throne. Timmarasu does not do this bidding but satisfies Vira by showing him a pair of plucked out eyes which he claims are Krishna's. In the meanwhile in Scene 2 Nagaladevi, mother of Krishna, prays to the seer Vyasarayya to save Krishna. Vyasarayya asserts that Krishna's horoscope indicates that he will be Emperor and no harm can come to him. Timmarasu calls a meeting of officials after Vira's demise to choose the next King. Through deft manipulation he gets Krishna Deva Raya declared as Emperor. In Act 2 Krishna is sporting with his love, the Devadasi danseuse whose life has been dedicated to art and who has none of the moral taint associated with her community. Chinna's love for Krishna and his for her is tender and sincere. Minister Timmarasu discourages Chinna from meeting Krishna because in his political calculations such a marriage might bring dishonour to the King and the Kingdom. The King has to marry into royalty. Timmarasu meets Krishna and gives him advice on political and diplomatic matters. He raises the Chinna question and when he finds Krishna is firm in his resolve to marry Chinna, they consult the Royal Guru Vyasarayya who advises a way out of the problem. The arrangement is for Krishna to marry the Princess Tirumala Devi of royal lineage and then take Chinna as a second wife. Thus political necessity

and personal predilection are both satisfied. Indeed Tirumala Devi approves the arrangement and welcomes Chinna. Vyasarayya likens Krishna to the Lord whose Dharma Chakra restores Dharma when it is in decline. He exhorts Krishna to go like the Lord and establish Dharma. Vijayanagara is surrounded by inimical Muslim Sultans and they need to be contained if the kingdom is to be saved. The wheel of Dharma is in Krishna's hands and he must wield it well. With Dharma as his inspiration Krishna Deva Raya speedily brings all the Northern Muslim Principalities under his control. With the Sultans of Bidar, Gulbarga and Govalkonda defeated, he now turns his attention to the Bahamanis whose Sultans have ravaged Hindu temples, indulged in arson and raped Hindu women. Vyasarayya asserts that the King, as the upholder of Dharma, must move the wheel and punish the Bahamanis. How can he tolerate this situation? This Hindu King defeats the Bahamanis but generously returns his Kingdom to him. His nobility is seen in the way he honours his soldiers for their heroism and sacrifice. The families of soldiers who had died in battle are suitably provided for. That is how much he cares for his soldiers. A dimension of Krishna Deva Raya's character is his curiosity and willingness to learn from foreigners like the Portuguese traders. To further contain the Sultans Krishna cultivates the Portuguese by buying horses from them and making sure that they support him against the Sultans. He even evinces an interest in western music and musical instruments. Likewise Krishna evinces interest in paper which the Europeans write on, while in his Kingdom as

elsewhere in Bharat, the learned used palm paper. Father Louis visits the court and asks for permission to establish a Christian mission. He gets permission and a mission and a church are established. That is a measure of Krishna's toleration and ecumenism. Meanwhile Kalinga is at war with Vijayanagara and Krishna defeats Pratapasimha, the Kalinga ruler. In characteristic style he makes friends with his defeated enemy by taking the Kalinga Princess Jaganmohini as his third wife. However, Jaganmohini is vengeful and plots against her husband but her brother Virabhadrasena is convinced that Krishna Deva Raya is a just ruler. Krishna's act of returning his Kingdom to the Bahamani Sultan had a political intent of weakening the latter's vassals who were troubling Vijayanagara. But Kalinga had to be attacked because Pratapasimha made common cause with the Muslim Sultans to attack Vijayanagara. Jaganmohini is not happy but her brother is helpless against her hatred for Vijayanagara. We don't hear much more of her plot. Perhaps Naikar was concentrating on the glory of Krishna and merely touched on episodes. We are introduced to the nine jewels or Ashta Diggajas of the court and we get a glimpse of Tenali Rama's cleverness. News that Bijapur is going to attack is received. The Sultans are converging against Vijayanagara. Krishna wins a decisive victory. The Sultan accepts Krishna as the hegemon of southern India. That is why Krishna is called an Emperor. The Bidar Sultan has to prostrate at Krishna's feet and this of course is an impossible demand. He tries to wean Krishna to Mudgala but when Krishna reaches the palace the Sultan flies away. Krishna enthrones Valiullah. Thus Krishna is given the title Yavana Rajya Samasthapanacharya. In order to ward off the ill effects of some evil planetary conjunction Vyasarayya sits on the throne for the period and saves Krishna from danger. The gold an unwilling Vyasarayya receives is sent to construct agraharas for his Dasa disciples. Krishna wants to enthrone his son the young Tirumalaraya but the latter dies before he can be enthroned. Saint Purandaradasa comforts Krishna and exhorts him to turn to God. It turns out that Minister Timmarasu's son Timmanna had slowly poisoned Tirumalaraya and Krishna in a fit of rage throws Timmarasu into prison and blinds him. Vyasarayya who returns from Tirupati berates Krishna for his adharmic act. Krishna is contrite and releases Timmarasu from the dungeon and requests him to resume his

ministership. Vyasaraya establishes a religious community with the gifts he had received from Krishna. Dharma has been restored. The play ends with Krishna's death and his last exhortation to his ministers to be sure to recover Belagavi.

This brief summary of the play should give the reader a sense of the various aspects of this premier Hindu Kingdom and its greatest ruler Krishna Deva Raya. Naikar has written a play in seven acts with several scenes in each Act and there are a plethora of characters. He gives us a good idea of the reign of Krishna Deva Raya and the magnificence of the Kingdom. History books relegated Vijayanagara to a footnote and Left historians have expended much ink on the Mughals and the Sultans, playing down their atrocities against Hindus. They have distorted our history, denigrated Hindu and Indic civilization, and made it appear that Bharata was never a nation but only a collection of Principalities at war with one another. Naikar does his bit for the retelling of Indian History which is an on going enterprise. He presents the Hindu Emperor as an embodiment of the best qualities of Dharmic Culture. Like Lord Rama he stabilizes Dharma, rules justly on the advice of holy men and ascetics and is firm in putting down Adharma represented by the Yavanas. I Might add that the play is packed with episodes and its unity is based on the single intention of showing forth in a positive way a Dharmic Emperor at work. The chief character is the Emperor and all other episodes and characters are meant to project his greatness and nobility. We also by default realize the perfidy of those who invaded us and plotted to destroy our civilization. Hindu generosity and tolerance has been repaid by betrayal. Naikar affirms the Indic consciousness and he must be applauded for this. He is not afraid to use Sanskrit phraseology as he does in Act Three, Scene One when he gets the priests and panegyrists to intone. In exchanges between Krishna and his first wife Tirumala Devi there is humour as there is in the scene when Tenali Rama appears. There is something awkward about Krishna using the term 'mega' adventure. It is a contemporary word but doesn't seem appropriate in the speech of an Emperor. Ramalingam when reporting to the King lists the Mughal Emperors but at least Aurangzeb who is from the 17th century could not have been known to Ramalingam or Krishna both of whom lived in the 15th century. All in all a very good play.

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Basavaraj Naikar, *Fall of Kalyana*, Bengaluru: Basava Samiti, Pp.120. Rs.200.

Exegetical thoughts on life and cultural unity

'*Fall of Kalyana- A Historical and Religious Play*', a Kannada classic of twelfth century is about Basaveswara, a man of strong convictions and secular ambience who influenced social, cultural and political life of the age. Dr. M. M. Kalburgi's play highlights the revolt against the orthodox ritualistic life of Brahmins of Bagewadi. Basaveswara is one of the greatest reformers of Karnataka. His mystic words are memorable. He is part of writings of many authors and poets of the area glorifying his entrancing and mystic words of vision and wisdom enshrined in *vacanas* –mystical utterances. For the pleasure of non-Hindi and non-Indian readers, who show interest in various cultures and languages, this play is brilliantly translated by Dr Basavaraj Naikar, an extraordinary bilingual scholar in English and Kannada letters and a recipient of several prestigious awards.

A highly learned and celebrated author and a Professor Emeritus, a former Professor

and Chairman, Department of English, Karnataka, Dr Naikar's contribution to religious literature for non-Hindi readers will remain unforgettable. Indian cultural heritage is unique in its spirit of 'oneness,' secular and universal consciousness, and it is civilization of ideal absorption of cultural thoughts and variations in lexis, habits and approach to life and existence beyond regional and other identifiable borders. Herein is concealed the exclusivity of Naikar's contribution.

The play opens with a caution and nervousness when Basava's intimate relations ask him not to violate 'the sacred thread'- a ritual. He disagrees with priests, and therefore, after tearing the thread, asserts that he would wish to be a human being instead, and take path of *dharma* and not rites. Basava does not believe in priestly teachings- praying or chanting. Thread stifles growth and barely contributes to knowledge ...and rituals do not make man a god. He is against castes and class. The thread symbolizes dead customs and rituals that are detrimental to creative intellects and do no good to low caste people including the poor and the women. Despite Brahmins' exhortations and priests' stipulations, he disagrees to trust any code of ethics, and resolutely stands against ritualistic living and societal discipline.

He does not accept counsel of priests even on persuasion. However, in a long and bitter argument, nothing concrete emerges. Basava stands firmly and defies what *Manusmruti* had said.

Some students at a Monastery express keen desire to know about Siva and the individual soul –*Jiva*. Siva, the god is present in all living beings irrespective of the nature and qualities whether virtuous or sneaky. Basava asserts that it is not true. God lives in noble embodied beings. Undoubtedly, god exists in all animate and inanimate created beings, is the thematic asset of Indian scriptures.

It alerts the teacher who wishes to know Basava. Basava discloses his identity and expresses the desire to study. At home, Basava's parents feel anguished at the apathetic and inconsiderate attitude of Brahmins. They think 'the self' as demolisher of self-regulating thinking that grants liberation. Afterward, Basava speaks of absolute futility of learning, which suffocates the soul within. The priestly culture where the autocratic laws govern the scholastic milieu, rituals do nothing to sanctify and elevate intellect, and mechanical sacrificial fire does not lift him up. Even study of books appears obscurantist meant for a priest, and thereafter, he speaks about the purification of Monasteries. At this stage, the teacher deliberates deeply, and finds something different and unique in Basava and enlightens him on to the right path. Basava is mystical and talks of life beyond. The soul is important but needs to undergo sanitization. Life exists in dynamism and not stagnation. The soul within should be dynamic, he insists.

Life maintains unique and strange definiteness, not simple or straight, for the inner world has its density and solace. Mayor father Madarasa of Basava on deathbed, speaks about the anguish of ostracism, societal apathy and disconnects. Societal boycott disillusion. He recalls pain and torture the family suffers, and still desires that Brahmins give him funeral rites after he dies sans a drop of water. Brahmins oppose Basaveswara, wish to reprimand and teach lessons to him, who is adamant and works against Vedic Brahmins.

Without caring for threats or fears, Basava speaks against inhuman laws and ethical values Brahmins talk about. He remains inflexible and wishes individual freedom. To help him, none else comes forward, and therefore, he carries the body of father to the farm. A spirit of renunciation fills him. He takes his sister along with him and leaves for Bagewadi after

giving land and property to the servants, and tells that they are the real owners of everything. Now ...a spirit of abandonment fills him, for diseased rituals, dogmatic religious conduct of pundits and pontiffs disappoint him.

Deeply engaged in the worship of the *istalinga*, Basava is unaware of the world outside. At that moment, a sheep with a lamb suddenly comes and stands behind the symbol of Linga. The bell and the *arati* fall down. The sound disturbs and the bleating of the sheep in fear causes anxiety as two brahmins with a knife enter hurriedly. The Brahmins want to sacrifice the animals before lord Varuna. Basava stops them and offers 'the self' for sacrifice. Brahmins are terrified, and therefore, run away. At this moment, Basava underlines flaws of religion not conducive to humanity.

Basava worships *istalinga* with his back to the idol of the deity. If a man is impure inwardly, he gains nothing in deity worship. However, outside worship is essential for the cleanliness of the inner self. Spiritual purity is of great significance. To eliminate variation, it is better if one considers the soul as god. Saiva priests do it at home and carry the idol when on a journey. Icon of Saivas symbolizes Linga, a symbol of the soul, the inner soul. Consider soul as god, the guru reiterates. Material insignia is a means for fine-tuning of 'the self'.

'The *istalinga*' accepts no social division the Vedic priests create but they maintain that the thread causes disintegration. It creates classes based on birth whereas *istalinga* believes merit irrespective of any caste. It is path to spiritual purity. A unique experience in spirituality to worship *istalinga* it is. Meditation wipes out of fungus or grime of mind. It is service to 'the self-god,' a path to self-cleansing that ultimately leads to truth, peace and compassion disinfecting a human being. Isanyaguru agrees and tells the way the body turns spiritual. Basava's faith proves that dynamism continues while the static perishes.

Guru Isanya tells the head priest that Basava is right and wants fresh ideas and freedom of expression. The priest underlines Basava's flaws ...his opposition to rituals. Other Brahmins recall his conduct at Bagewadi where he challenges authority and confronts hostility. However, Basava retaliates and tells he did no offense and strongly says that culture faces disintegration in the temples and the monasteries. Pasupati gets angry and thrashes him with the cane. Isanya stops and assures him that the boy would act properly and respect *agrahara's* rituals.

Basava's thoughts do not change on the fault lines of culture of temples and monasteries. The priests and the monks believe in rituals instead of building a human being of truth, righteousness and honesty. The centers of religious education and teaching are exploiters of the poor and the vulnerable. Acts of charity and generosity are hollow but perpetuate poverty, promote unethical practices, exploitation etc. little caring for love and compassion. Priestly class is hypocritical and dogmatic, offers nothing to uplift plight of the subjugated. The rich and the powerful appear unjust and callous and continue injustice, fraud and mendacity. Obviously, iniquity spoils domestic life. The body is the temple and god dwells inside he affirms. A dynamic life will infuse meaning and substance. The fierce struggle continues where the teacher respects his thoughts and reformatory measures but the priests and brahmins disagree. He understands that the orthodox culture of monasteries and temples only persecute.

Indeterminate unique power is quite different guru realizes. Basava abhors unforgivable, inhuman and repulsive affairs of the temples, *agrarahas* and monasteries. The pontiffs and priests live in sins and keep hiding crimes and vices. Holy places are centers of black marketing, deception and deprive the poor of land. Misdeeds of pontiffs, unfair conduct, and fraudulent acts help religious heads. People wish celibates should control religious centers. Lack of dynamism and chronic stagnation kill religious spirit. Pseudo scholars and disciples enter the centers, contaminate and pollute the entire environment. Petty religious minds, heads, chiefs etc, occupy important seats. It is a method to gain control and ownership over monasteries and temples.

Wisdom, if used for the good of man and society, is good. Worldly or universal experience is in truth 'socialization of spiritual experience.' Self-purification is essential and it is path to sanctification of society and humankind. To attain the objective, the old structure of ethical and ritual values needs total destruction. Here, one confronts corruption and imperfect system. Vedic philosophy is decontamination of individuals before one reflects on humanity. Selfish rulers, priests and the powerful continue exploitation. In society, two classes survive - the exploiter and the exploited. To expand the region of goodness, Basava goes to city Kalyana and works for the wellbeing of society, and wholeheartedly continues the task of reformation.

King Bijjala of Kalyana airs his anxieties about the sad and unsatisfactory affairs of the state and after genuine dialogue, thinks cautiously, and finds Basava the right man and after consultations, appoints him Accounts Officer. For Basava, it is an opportunity to broaden vision, serve man and society and bring virtuous set up. As an intelligent and sincere worker of unrivaled ethical values, Basava straightens the accounts, eliminates all flaws sans any lenience, and earns appreciation from all the right people

He thinks religion is the cause and source of caste. Lack of hard work does not help the poor. Top men in temples and on religious seats are of no use and wish the poor to stay pathetic and vulnerable economically despite words to the contrary. To undo injustice, the poor and the exploited must ignore these forces and work hard. Think this body is the temple and begin to wear *istalinga*, a symbol of deity, a sign of equality and spiritual glory. One must get rid of the wicked sway of religious heads. The poor must also work hard. Treasury would provide necessary help and infuse will power so that they work together collectively. To fight against reactionary forces treasury will give all help to live independently. The state treasury belongs to people and it must benefit ordinary men, the poor and the deprived. To move ahead is life and dynamism, to stay back is death.

He gives the message of social equality when he sprinkles water on the feet of social workers –the *jangamas* and tells that soul lives in everyone and it has no caste. Nobody is a servant and none is the master. Know that all are equal. Basava exhorts that workers are gods for a man of pure mind and heart. Work is not only physical but mental also and it benefits the entire society. Work is worship neither low nor high. It is devotion and a worker is a god on earth. Know good work is god. It is heaven on earth. Nothing belongs to man. God is the owner of everything. Serve all –the noble souls, the gods in human images, and a servant of god and society.

Thus, work culture becomes the strength of Kalyana city. Work and a spirit of denial of 'the self' the ego is the objective of life. To work with a pure mind is also a religion and

considering 'the selves' as servants of the god sans ego is the way to socio-economic concept that destroys barricades of caste and class. It should become a collective movement, and women must join it, Basava emphasizes. Women become active as the socio-spiritual academy is contributing to the cause. It works against exploitation and encourages cooperative culture. Intensity to convey message takes the form of *vacanas* –mystical and philosophical lexis, *vacanas* form a different literary idiom for any social movement.

Basava puts restriction on unproductive expenditure and cuts down monetary support to *agraraharas* –areas known for rituals, constitute an absolute waste without any rationale. He regards human beings as gods. He preaches equality among all. Money creates fissures in the society, and one finds the rich and the poor in conflict. Hard working people are gods for Basava as said earlier. Basava's acts are against the pontiffs and Brahmins, monasteries and temples. He wastes money of treasury on the poor and cares little for Brahmins. Monetary grants appear inadequate. No one enjoys royal privileges now. Basava's approach worries the king. Conscience is the guide of ethical principles for Basava. He protects the treasury from unjustified expenditure causing loss to the state wealth.

People interested in material things are angry and agitated ...and it leads to protests against Basava. Times look crucial and dangerous. Basava foresees danger ahead. However, he stays firm in his reformatory steps to correct inhuman practices. He is stunned on hearing about the jumping of servants and wives of the dead masters into pyres and so, stops this social evil. He thinks it as a royal creation...to fool and subdue the poor and ordinary people. Royals are meant to save life of people and not to end it...they are wealth of the country and the treasury and land is the property of citizens. A king should sacrifice his life for anyone. He is also a loyal servant and life-breath of the people, and therefore, nurse *velevali* –intimate and close relations with the citizens.

Basava speaks about the flaws of caste. Purely for selfish purposes, man creates divisions based on caste and class. No difference exists between the mental worker and physical worker. Devotees of whatever caste they belong to are equal. The principle of *kayaka* –any mental or physical work dedicated to god, has brought immense improvement. If social wellbeing is the objective, a man can correct many wrongs. An untouchable evinces faith in the principle of *kayaka*. All take the same food- a hard worker produces. Basava desires end of the division between the high and low castes and the evil of untouchable from Kalyana. Therefore, all admire him and wish change in obsolete and dogmatic attitude.

The king tells Basava that he utilizes money of treasury without sanction, defies laws of society, and humiliates nobles and royals, religious heads and works against Brahmins etc. Basava humbly submits that people are the lords. The treasury belongs to the people who also contribute to it. Basava tells that they are our people so there is no crime. He did not violate any royal order and what he does is not against scriptures. However, he refuses to accept the Laws of Manu and calls workers and manual labourer the masters. To bring equality and eliminate exploitation one has to destroy the edifice of castes, high and low concept of human beings. The king deeply feels that caste system is the source of troubles to man and society but is silent.

To oppose the king is not good he tells a gathering of *saranas*. It is better to continue with the reformist work through other means. When we use money of treasury for welfare, it brings awareness among people –*kayaka* and *dasoha* (a servant of god). We know elevation in status of women. All participate in noble activities of Socio-spiritual Academy and work for the

uplift of the most ignored, neglected, poor and socially low caste people. Those who lead must set an example, Basava wife says. Even a second wife of her man –may be a *Ksastriya*, is not a crime if it fulfills the sacred objective. To attain the sacred objective, Nilambika a sister of Bijjala decides to become spouse of Basava. Basava feels it would weaken... and afterward eradicates the evil of *varna* system. The thought spreads and *saranas* work toward reforming the ailing system. Not only the royal woman but also the sister of Basava feels that women live a cheated life. As reformation continues, she breaks away from long-established mode of life, and begins to live a dynamic life where she walks ahead with zeal and devotes time and energy to the wellbeing of man and society. A principled life or ideology of liberty is better than a physical existence with immense wealth and pleasures.

Saranas live a life of principles, Basava knows. He loves *saranas* who work, physically and mentally in the name of god, and think about the wellbeing of people, and respect and preach equality. *Kayakas* are pure and clean in acts. When he notices cruel circumstances force a woman into prostitution, he works hard to improve the miserable plight of such women. A *sarana* is generous, who comes forward and marries the woman. The prostitute is happy and tells that there is no other way to transform a land of human beings into the land of gods –now Kalyana is Kailasa. Thus, the great reformation begins while *saranas* assure him that they are ready to work for welfare of society.

On the other hand, the priests consider Basava a curse to the land where untouchables get equal status and share food with the class and he believes in helping a woman of easy virtues and inspires a *sarana* to marry the fallen woman, stops burning of woman on the pyre of her husband or servant of a master. He encourages widow marriage, continues to unite people of all castes and classes, and reduces monetary grants to religious places. He strengthens the concept of *kayaka* and *dasoha* and work culture, spends money from the treasury for the uplift of the poor and workers etc. He tells that god lives in all. However, the powerful men think that he is steadily weakening the social structure. In truth, principled *saranas* repose faith in *kayakas* and *dasohas* and perceive no distinction based on castes, *varnas*, work etc among *saranas*.

The temple-culture and monasteries confront immense assault from the progressive minds under the guidance of Basava who extends whole-hearted support to the growth of *saranas*. Opposition to reformatory movement is natural. These religious heads think Basava is nobody to counsel priests and pontiffs. All are gods on earth –know that a human being is an image of god, he affirms. Priests disagree and so the argument continues.

These religious top men want him to bring changes within the framework of existing Vedic society. Saiva Jangama community wields the authority to manage the religious matters. Only Prabhudeva is fit to hold the spiritual Chair. Basava expresses genuine concern for the wellbeing of the people. It is good if enlightened *jangama* – energetic social workers and educators, strengthen society. Virtuous thoughts work for the people where all are equal without prejudice and injustice. Basava holds that society is still and steady when it talks of *karma* but grows dynamic and vigorous with the energy and concept of *dharma*. Constantly going ahead in life is the right concept of life. However, none from priestly class agrees.

Pontiffs are definite that Basava will not improve but would work against temple culture and monastic way of life. Concept of equality of man is redundant because for him, god lives in man. *Varna* system will continue with rare exceptions, they wish. A *sudra* should not

hold a religious status because it is humiliation of priesthood.

Religious heads continue efforts to weaken Basava's status. One notices a few signs of division in Basava's organization. Brahmins are against *saranas* now. The marriage between a *sudra* and brahmin is condemned. Economic reforms do not find favour. Reduced monetary benefits to the class, create resentment, they talk. *Kayakas* help Basava and damage their rights. Thus, at this stage, marriage incident gets central position of protest and assault.

The Vedic Brahmins, the Saiva pontiffs and royals agitate against Basava the enemy of temple and monastic culture, traditions and social organism. They know that Basava is against the existing system, and with the force of *kayakas* and *dasohas*, he moves ahead, for whom every human being a god. All social measures Basava takes prove a big challenge to the existing priestly class. Ultimately, the king orders Basava's arrest. Basava pleads that he works for the construction of an ideal society. *Saranas* wish that man should work and benefit the society. However, the king asks Basava to abandon the objectives of religious, economic and social equality. When he opposes, the king sacks him.

Basava goes out of the city of Kalyana but the torchbearers say that he lives in the hearts and would live forever. Truth will not die. Karma is supreme. They love culture of social, economic and spiritual uplift instead of priestly and monastic way of life. *Saranas* do not want violence as an answer to hostility. The cruel killing of two *saranas* is the cause of anger. It is the end of torch bearing service to the king he speaks. At the vantage point, the torchbearers throw the torches away, raise slogans against the enemy of *saranas* and non-believers, and thereafter, pull Bijjala out of the palanquin, and kill him. There is obvious chaos around while the soldiers catch hold of torchbearers and kill. Thereafter, the soldiers rush to the Socio-Spiritual Academy and slaughter many *saranas*. A few of them take collections of *vacanas* with them even as soldiers chase. However, the truth that the static perishes and the dynamic lives remains alive in slogans one hears in the background.

The connect between acts of the play *Fall of Kalyana* is superb. The dialogues and the play's effortless pace portray the age effectively through the storyline temptingly underscoring latent presence of the translator's acumen as he heads toward near perfection. Theme elevates, keeps the interest intact and speaks of Naikar's hold on the journey into the idiom of two languages.

The theme is ancient and it is contemporary as well. All revere and eulogize eternal values of principles, truth and righteousness but cultivating these qualities is a dilemma with the dim-witted, the wise, the priests, the pontiffs, the politicians and the teachers. Possibly, it is collapse of man in whatever status he is. The play is an illustration of conflicts, emotions, and the conversation expresses experiences, and straightway links the story to sentiments and feelings of audience causing strain, excitement, curiosity and strong sense of compassion. It speaks of eternal message of peace, harmony, love and empathy through the character of civilization that seems a strong forte of the playwright. A great read indeed.

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Sharmistha Shenoy. *The Hyderabad Heist: The Untold Story Of India's Biggest Museum Theft*, Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 2023, ISBN – 978-93-5520-984-9, Rs 395/-

Sharmishtha Shenoy is a Calcutta based experienced IT professional having worked in TCS, Satyam, Microsoft and Infosys. She is the author of the *Vikram Rana Mystery Series* books, including *Vikram Rana Investigates*, *A Season for Dying*, *Behind the Scenes*, *A Thousand Scars*, *Silent Witness* and *Fatal Fallout*. She has also authored *Murder in the Chowdhary Palace*, a mystery novel. She writes mystery novels as she loves reading the same.

The Hyderabad Heist: The Untold Story of India's Biggest Museum Theft (2023) is a mystery non-fiction. In *The Hyderabad Heist*, Sharmishta Shenoy depicts the picture of a real theft at The Nizam's Museum on 3 September 2018. The soul of this nail-biting story is the occurrence of India's greatest theft by the petty criminals of Hyderabad with their dream to be the real Badshahs leading to the nut-cracking struggle of the Hyderabad Police and their commissioner's determination to recover the artifacts.

The cover of the book is well illustrated depicting a picture of Hyderabad. The Minar is symbolic of Hyderabad and the diamonds red in colour scattered all over the cover symbolize theft and evil. There is a miraculous combination of red, white and black colours as well as the arrangement of templates. The cover is beautifully designed so as to attract the readers. The book is easy to carry and the suspense of the story is so gripping that I didn't feel like getting up until I finished the book. The book has 12 chapters, a foreword, a prologue, and an epilogue, covering the entire story in a total of 189 pages. The epilogue gives a glimpse of Nizam's legacy. The epilogue is followed by a biographical note on Commissioner Anjani Kumar.

The story starts with the crime committed and the discovery of the crime by two students shooting a video for their YouTube Channel being suspected as the real criminals. The novel from the beginning when the crime is discovered till the end when the criminals were caught up is full of mystery leading the reader's excitement from one page to another. The reader cannot stop reading the story as it leads his excitement to "what will happen next".

To fill the readers' minds with excitement leaving mystery to the police, the novel contains a prologue describing the crime scene early in the morning, inviting an unexpected challenge to the Hyderabad police and especially to one of the most capable police commissioner Anjani Kumar, the then Police Commissioner of Hyderabad.

The novel's plot develops through the investigation of the historical artifacts stolen by the Khooni Badshah and Ghulam. Ghulam being an intelligent though illiterate guy invites greater challenges for the police. The reader will feel excited while reading the planning of the crime with extra care taken by Ghulam and planning to dispose of the artefacts. Throughout the story, especially the crime scene and the scene at Sajid's house forces the reader to turn the pages quickly out of excitement. It also gives goosebumps to the reader while experiencing the character of Zain.

Sharmishtha Shenoy uses a very day-to-day language combining the local language of the criminals and the police people, right from the beginning when Ghulam says while committing the crime "No Ustaad, paap lagega...." and Badshah responds "...Arre kuch nahi hota", till the end before Badshah was caught up when Sajid welcomes him saying "Arre, aao miyaan...." This allows the reader to absorb the novel with reader-friendly language. Although the ending of the novel is quite sloppy leaving the reader's curiosity unfed to witness the

punishment of the criminals for the crime.

This novel is fit for readers of any age especially those interested in crime fiction and mystery stories. One could directly relate the story to Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky as the commissioner Anjani Kumar himself pens in the foreword of the novel. I feel that the dramatic unfolding of the events in the book is suited even for film adaptation.

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