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CULTURAL VISION OF NORTH KARNATAKA IN BASAVARAJ NAIKAR'S *THE GOLDEN SERVANT AND OTHER STORIES*

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ABSTRACT

India is a diverse country with number of diversities. Culture and region go together in every aspect of life. Literature is an important vehicle of culture. Against this backdrop, Basavaraj Naikar is the story writer of contemporary times. He hails from Karnataka. He has four story collections to his credit. One of his collections was shortlisted for Commonwealth Literary Prize. He represents India in his stories which present the culture, language, and typical lifestyles against all odds. He appears autobiographical here and there in the story. A writer of eminence and cultural ambassador, Naikar delineates in his lucid but impressive style the stories known for modernity and regional flavour.

Basavaraj Naikar occupies an important position in the history of Indian short story writers in English. A retired professor of English, Dharwad University, Karnataka, he is a translator, author freelancer and a story writer. My paper focuses on Basavaraj Naikar's second story collection *The Golden Servant and Other Stories*. The twelve stories reinforce the author's portrayal of the life, customs and manners of a particular region of India, a microcosm of the country, like R.K.Narayan's Malgudi. The themes in the stories are unquestionably significant comments on the universal human situation. The collection deals with the broad spectrum of his thoughts and perceptions ranging from the historical to the contemporary, religious to the secular and elemental to the academic in a realistic style. Basavaraj Naikar has been able to give us in his stories innumerable facets of contemporary India. Especially, the themes against worldliness, female heroism, chastity, violence and revenge, transformation approach of a woman, selfish and treacherous behaviour of a prince, rural life of revenge on separating close friends in cross roads, politics as greater than literature in the Indian conflict, illegal love and its alienating impact on the life of a woman, corruption of being a peon in the guest house, heroism of a Rani and her courage and the academic life in being research supervisors, non-academic atmosphere on the campuses, lack of proper libraries, exploitation of clerical and menial work coming in the academic progress of their work. Cultural vision is the chief forte of the collection. The entire oeuvre presents the problems and possibilities of life in the perspective of socio-cultural resonance.

The culture of India is the way of life of the people of India. The Indian culture often labelled as amalgamation of several cultures, spans across the Indian sub-continent and has been influenced by a rich legacy of history that is several millennia old. The Indian literature too flourished with tradition, custom and culture. Indian English Writers have amply demonstrated this reality in their works. Basavaraj Naikar hails from Karnataka whose writings reflect more or less regional, cultural and social perspectives rooted in Kannada land. He carries with him a rich legacy of writings which are known for cultural vision of north Karnataka, the

land from where he hails. He chooses only those aspects of life which he knows very well and presents with greater perception. As a sensitive observer of Indian culture and tradition, Naikar depicts the Indian sensibility and culture side by side. He presents the realities of contemporary existence in a comprehensive style. A crusader he is, he tries to bring awareness in the minds of the people of the tragic aspects of violence, crudity and mindlessness. As a writer, he is down to the fundamental truths and values that govern basic human relationships. He explores the complex life of contemporary South Indian society i.e. north Karnataka and presents it in all its openness and explicit realism.

The last story of the collection *How a Chronic Patient Became a Doctor* is both appealing and contemporary. It reflects the sordid realities of the life of research scholars in Indian universities. The story portrays the hurdles and barriers that a research scholar by name Nandiswar suffers at the hands of his supervisor for a period of fourteen years. Naikar satirises the unethical practices in the higher institutions of learning. There is nepotism, favouritism and jealousy and academically unhealthy spirit prevailing on the university campuses. Nandiswar, a registered Ph.D. scholar, has endless woes to narrate in his fourteen years of research. He is deliberately victimised by his supervisor. His academic career was ruined at last. Such unhealthy practices as found in Indian universities reflect only the gloomy picture of research. Ghost writers emerged on the scene to encourage pseudo-scholars. They do anything for the sake of money. He was subject to harassment and mental torture which speaks of deteriorating standards. Even, after submission of thesis, he had to wait for examiners' report for months and months.

The examiners' reports indicate that the research supervisor has done nothing before submission. He has neither knowledge of the thesis nor any inclination towards research. It is strange that Prof. Nagaraju, despite a non – Ph.D., guided Nandiswar against UGC rules and regulations. This is a reminder to the readers that UGC rules are flouted at the behest of a few individuals. A long struggle of 14 years for Ph.D. is really shocking and frustrating. Nandiswar has been ruined both in academics and employment. Dr.Purohit, a Professor from the same university, consoled Nandiswar after he was finally awarded Ph.D.

We know that your Ph.D. is inordinately delayed. But we admire your extraordinary courage and perseverance in dealing with the most egoistic man on the campus. It is as if you entered the cave, held dialogues with a tiger and came out safe" (Naikar, 319).

Nandiswar represents the so called research scholars in Indian universities who have been victimised, harassed and sexually molested by the so-called research supervisors. His chronic suffering is not just the isolated case but the sufferings of unknown research scholars in India. The sadistic nature of the supervisor has been rightly revealed. There is no academic ambience in the Indian universities. Bad politics is ruling the roost. He has been a chronic patient for fourteen years and became a successful doctorate later.

The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi and Other Stories presents the essential and significant aspects of south Indian society in a lucid style. It is basically a historical story that deals with the events occurred in the life of Rani Mallamma (Jasmine), the daughter of Madhulinga Nayaka. She has been proficient not only in education but also in military training. As a young princess, she saw the battles that her parents fought with the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English on the one hand and the Mughals and the Marathas on the other. Naikar writes: "the fire of patriotism was kept alive in her right from childhood. Ever since she had married Iswaraprabhu, she had identified herself completely with the Ratta or Rastrakuta dynasty from which her husband descended" (Naikar, 196).

As the Rani of Belavadi, she was courageous and her courage reflected in an incident when she had to fight with two tigers and kill them one after the other.

Instantly she sprang to her feet and stood ready to attack it. Before the numerous claws of the tiger could pierce her, she lifted her sword and struck it forcefully on the face of the wild animal. Suddenly, the roar of the wild animal subsided. Its head split into two halves and blood spurted out in a jet. The tiger sagged to the earth in a pathetic posture. Rani Mallamma then rushed towards the other tiger, which was about to pounce upon the horse. She took her lance and darted it forcefully at that tiger

which was thundering. Lo! The lance pierced the blanks of the tiger, which fell to the ground. Then she struck it repeatedly with her sword until it fell dead (Naikar, 200).

Raj Iswaraprabhu was overwhelmed with admiration about his heroic wife. He exclaimed, "Bravo, my darling Rani! I am really proud of you. You have put the men folk to shame. You have proved that a woman is never weak or helpless our kingdom is really proud of a heroic Rani like you" (Naikar, 200). In another battle with the army of Chatrapathi Sivaji, Rani Mallamma fought bravely against them and emerged victorious. Her exemplary courage to protect her people and kingdom from alien ruler was seen in her heroic battle. Her "never say die" spirit reflects her heroism.

We are the heroes of Kannada land. We must fight bravely in the battle. We shall achieve victory in the war or attain heroic death on the battlefield. Let our heroism tested finally (Naikar, 213).

Having lost her husband in the battle, she was determined to fight for the kingdom and the people. She resumed the battle with a renewed vigour and enthusiasm. She ordered the canons to be fired at the Maratha soldier's. As the canons rumbled repeatedly, several Maratha soldiers lost their lives and sagged down on the battlefield.

The senapati, who saw many of his soldiers dying, felt deeply disheartened. He noticed that their ammunition was exhausted. He felt disheartened and took to his heels. The soldiers of Belavadi felt ecstatic at the sight of the enemy running away from the battlefield. Everybody cheered, "Victory to Rani Mallamma, victory to Belavadi Kingdom (Naikar 216).

Thus, Naikar portrays vividly the eventful life of an important historical character i.e. Rani Mallamma through her extraordinary strength and exemplary heroism. He is a writer of historical consciousness. This consciousness is seen in his ability to metamorphose history into life. The past paves the way for the present. The present reflects the future. Naikar does it explicitly and realistically. Readers of next generation will remember the heroism of Rani Mallamma in the story collections of Basavaraj Naikar.

Blood for Blood is out and out a story of revenge or tit for tat due to rivalry and enmity between two factions. The title of the story is very apt. It shows the readers the well – planned covert operations between the police and murders gangs. The story reveals that the police, who are supposed to protect the innocent lives of people, act against the law and accept money to kill an under trial that is in their custody. It also shows how people are bereft of peace and happiness when they engage themselves in heinous acts. All in all, four gruesome murders take place in the story for different reasons. Man's greed for power leads him to commit such inhuman killings. Wives became widows. Naikar exposes the social hypocrisy of prominent people who live under the cover of prestige, fame, and honour. The murderer in Viranagowda "seemed to have admiration for Nehru and Gandhi" (55). Naikar reminds the readers that a khadi shirt and a Gandhi cap still give the people a cosmic image of Mahatma Gandhi. The story is ironical that people under the pretext of politics is using Mahatma Gandhi as an image of social prestige, and cultural passport.

The superb story teller in Basavaraj Naikar appears in the story *Change of Heart*. It is known for didactic element. Naikar conveys the moral more explicitly. *Change of Heart* deals with the contemporary social problem that is house robbery. He treats this theme in a different way. Three thieves enter the house of a couple on a new moon night. Having feared for life, the couple handed over the jewellery including the sacred *thali* to the thieves. Sivalila, the housewife had cautioned them like:

See man; please don't waste this gold by drinking or playing cards. You are like my brothers. You start some shop or some other business with that money and settle down to a respectable life instead of leading such an irregular life. That's all I wanted to say (Naikar 88).on learning about the robbery, the neighbours suggested the couple i.e. Sivalila and Siddhalinga to complain to the police. Another neighbour by name Lingaraj sarcastically commented: What can the police fellows do nowadays! Many times they are in league with such thieves. That's why thieves get scot free" (Naikar 89).

The typical and superstitious neighbour used the situation and commented: why not consult that astrologer Dixit and ask him whether you will get back your gold or not? (Naikar 89). Another neighbour Sivaganga turned up to advise Siddhalinga on the issue. Siddhalinga hit back to say: *perhaps you do not know these fellows. They do not hunt for the thieves but on the contrary, extract money from us. I am not the sort of person who would visit the police stations. As far as possible, I would like to be away from the police fellows, lawyers and even doctors (Naikar 89).* The observation is strikingly relevant considering the Indian scenario in mind. The law makers become the law breakers. The basic structure of society goes round police officials, lawyers and doctors. The perception of Siddhalinga gives us a negative picture of the different sections i.e. medical, legal and law enforcement agency. Soon, a period of fifteen days had elapsed when the thieves come back to the house and the leader of the gang apologetically remarked to Sivalila:

Dear Madam, you are not an ordinary lady, but a veritable goddess. You are like my eldest sister. That day when we robbed you of your gold, you advised me like a sister to make use of that money for some useful investment. I have burgled many houses, but never did I receive such a heartfelt advice from that day, your words have been ringing in my ears. Without my knowing, my heart had accepted you as my sister. I have now decided to stop thieving and start leading a respectable life. My dear sister, please take this gold and bless me to lead a pious life (Naikar, 92).

A kind of reconciliation and introspection changed their hearts and they returned the stolen jewellery to the couple. Neighbours have again come into the action and one Annapurna commented: *I had heard such things happened only in fairy tales. I could never imagine that there could be such good people even in the Kaliyuga (93).* Another neighbour Girija said, I had read somewhere that truth is stranger than fiction. Today I have realized the thieves have changed their hearts and returned them once and for all. The unexpected goodness of thieves surprised the neighbours. *Change of Heart* changed the minds of thieves for the better. Naikar has delineated North Karnataka for his stories. They are places historical, social and cultural importance. Places like Dharwad, City of Rocks, Malamaddi, Kuvempu, Yakkundi, Belavadi, Gokak, Naragund, Kalwad, Savadatti, Yamanur, Kalakeri and Kagnelli are figured in the stories. Culture reflects through language. Ancient Sanskrit terminology figures in the stories. They are, for example, *Hara Hara Mahadeva, Bhavathi Bhikashandehi, Rudrakshi Mala, Putrakameshti Yaga Istalinga Puja, Thali, Prasada, Mantras, Vibhuti, Hoilige, Khadi, Panchanama, Kaliyuga, Mangalyasutra, Sanyasini Darshan, Ekadari, Saguna Brahma, and Nirguna Brahma.*

In conclusion, I firmly hold that Basavaraj Naikar has proved that he is a brand ambassador of Indian culture, history and tradition. The stories are pregnant with realism. The core of Naikar's achievement as a writer of short stories largely lies in his loving and leisurely painting of the details of the sociological background of the region, which produces convincing illusion of reality. His kaleidoscopic knowledge of men and matters has been able to give us in his short stories innumerable facets of contemporary India. They are notable for the variety and multi-dimensional in nature.

Work cited

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