

Book Reviews

***Bird in the Sky* by Basavaraj Naikar, Bengaluru: CVG Books. 2015. Pp.198. Rs. 295.**

Dr. Basavaraj Naikar, an eminent scholar, a renowned teacher, an internationally reputed creative writer and highly decorated for his enviable accomplishments in richly varied and vast areas in literatures and translations, is a writer of this religio-spiritual novel, a rarely attempted genre, *Bird in the Sky*. I was scared and dumb-pale when I was asked to write a review of this hagiographical novel but it was after initial hiccups that I agreed. I received a copy of the novel and began to meet the challenge.

I read the astonishing biographical details of the Professor-writer of this novel and, then, the brilliantly informative and scholarly Preface to the novel. It made me more serious and I was enraptured by the intellectual, spiritual and miraculous ventures and performances of His Holiness Sri Siddharudha Swami born to Devamallamma and Gurushantappa belonging to the Lingayat business family of Chalakapur near Bidar. I have been very fond of reading biographies and autobiographies of great men from all fields since my student days but this biography sustained my unflagging interest till the miserable tragic end of His Holiness and aftermath who lived only to enlighten the densely dark paths of the masses around him and did all that he could to disseminate the fragrances of the Divine joy and happiness among them only to be trapped and preyed upon by the machinations of these life-long beneficiaries.

Even the childhood pranks of Sri Siddharudha astounded his friends, the villagers and his parents and shocked them all out of wits. He stunned the school teacher with his spiritual knowledge and never wanted to be at school for formal learning. After having his last meals with his parents, he renounced the world and his friends, Soma and Bhima, accompanied Siddha in his quest for the Supreme Guru. This was an adventure the difficulties and strains of which his friends could not endure and they were sent back to the village. His encounter with a Pontiff at Gowalkonda, after his meditation in a cave where he had a divine flash of wisdom, astonished the pontiff by his six qualifications for the seeker of a guru. As we move on to read a series of miracles one after the other, it purifies and chastises us in its own way.

The novel reads like a fascinating account of the unbelievable actions and performances of a highly gifted and enlightened personality sent hither by the Divine Himself to guide and direct the course of ignorant masses steeped in blind belief and superstition. There used to be a gathering, congregation of his followers and disciples from all religions and faiths, Hindus, Parsis, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs at the monastery for the discourses, discussions and religious festivals. Some of HH Siddharudha's disciples like Sayyed Amin, later Kabiradasa, one of the best disciples of Sri Siddharudha, make an interesting tale of their own. The profundity, immensity and intensity of the setting and the sermons and the message to the godless humanity in the terrible grip of spiritual draught troubled me a lot. I realized that the world belongs to the worldly only. Those who try to wean away the world from the world are welcome only for the worldly gains; once these gains begin to slip away, these men or messengers of God meet the fate of Swami Siddharudha. The fact is that this

hagiographical novel has intellectuality, spirituality and religiosity with its unbounded potentialities latent therein.

HH Sri Siddharudha had been preaching renunciation and conquering desires and greed, lust and pride and exercise self-control to achieve true happiness, realize the meaning of life and fulfill the joy of living. He also humbled the scholars who showed arrogance. They would all listen calmly, nod their heads with a sense of resignation and show themselves to absorb and assimilate the teachings and sermons of their God Himself “who can protect, destroy and create the world,” the real God, their Lord Nagabhushana Himself, they found it “impossible to describe the greatness of Master Siddha,” revered and idolized him as he performed miracle after miracle to alleviate their sufferings and pains and fulfill their wishes and desires.

Master Siddha’s spiritual discourses and discussions, his divine knowledge of the working of life, his stunning ability to understand and respond to the issues enraptured everybody wherever he went and with whomever he was. His followers, his disciples and the general public crowded his place. However, the way the highly Rev. Swami Siddharudha was involved in litigation, interrogated and examined in the court and later, forced to drink poison as a cure for all ailments by his very own, reveal that the world, if it gives bouquets today, the same world shall welcome you with brickbats. The Swami accepted all this with utmost humility as the Will of the Supreme Guru. Perhaps everything and everybody, the mighty and the meek, the Divine and the earthy, the learned and the ignorant are all bound to the wheel of Time. However, life beyond life is not meant for all. WE know how the world has treated its benefactors, be he Socrates or Buddha or Christ... or Swami Siddharudha.

An inimitable forte of this hagiographical novel is that its reading is very meaningful and faithful both for the ordinary and simple reader and the serious scholar of great literature who will certainly be fascinated at the extension of the boundaries of his knowledge when he reads Dr. Basavaraj Naikar’s brilliant and illuminating capsule history of religious literature only to end up elevated and enthralled.

Not only the title, but its print out in the dark background, symbolic of the darkness till infinity enveloping our world brightened with the name of the novel on the top with the name of the writer at the bottom within which is sandwiched soul in flight – all eclipsing the darkness leaving no room for doubt about the Truth!

The style of narration is truly marked by simplicity, sonority and spontaneity as is the unconscious necessity of such an attempt.

I am sure that the novel will enrich and elevate and enchant readers of all shades and hues.

R K Bhushan

What is a woman. This is trash. Leave it by Shweta Mishra ‘Shawryaa’. New Delhi: Authors Press 2016 P. 138

The book ‘what is a woman’ is authentically raising several burning issues related to female identity, equality, rape and harassment. It is a nonfiction subjective expression of the feminist author who dares to ask those questions which still remain untouched