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BASAVARAJ NAIKAR'S *THE LIGHT IN THE HOUSE* : A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Basavaraj Naikar is one of the major Indian English novelists and short story writers and playwright in the contemporary times. He has published stories, plays and novels. Nearly thirty to forty books are to his credit. He mainly interested in the historical and religious issues of the past. Of his novels, *The Light in the House* has become very popular and it is about the life and times of Shishunal Sharif. It highlights the values of good behavior and firm faith in the existence of God and the life of human values.

Keywords: Naikar, novels, stories, hagiographical novel, Sharif, parents Hajarat and Hujjuma, Govindbhatta, songs, his wife and death.

Basavaraj Naikar is one of the most popular Indian English writers. He was a Reader in the Dept of English, Gulbarga University, Kalaburagi and as a Professor in the Dept. of English, Karnatak University, Dharwar. He served as professor more than 10 years and made writing as his profession. Mainly he wrote short stories, novels and plays. Also he edited the poetry of his guru, Prof T.R.Rajashekhariah, who headed the department from 1972-1984. Under him he did his Ph.D., on the "Epic Affirmation in the Last Plays of William Shakespeare".

Most of his creative writing books were published by Author Press, New Delhi. For his literary achievement, He had a D.Litt., from California University. At present, he lives in Dharwar in his own house, and continued his writing critical works and creative writing. The present paper examines critically his hagiographical novel *The Light In the House*, published in 2009. Dr.Sabita Tripathi comments-" ...it is an attempt at the depiction of essential human values and to make the society free from religious intolerance."[1].

The title of the novel *The Light in the House* is metaphorical, implying the streak of knowledge in the darkness of ignorance in the human being. It is a hagiographic novel on the life and spiritual achievement of Shishunal Sharif, a spiritual monk and disciple of one Govindabhatta of Kalasa village, in Dhasrwar district. He "depicts the vibrant and the resolute life of Sharif Saheb who is considered to be a symbol of harmony between Hindus and the a Muslims."[2]. The locations of are accurately mentioned . It is life story in the form of a novel. In the village of Shishunal, Sharif was born to the parents - Hajarat Imam Saheb and Hajjuma, his wife. By profession, he was a caretaker, ghost chaser and giving *talisman* to the diseased persons and children .In a sense, he was a *ayurvedik* doctor who gives medicine to the sick people in the village and cure them. By

doing so, he earns a meager income in which he leads his pious life. Hajarat and Hajjuma were childless for many years after their marriage. His friends advised Imam Saheb to pray from Hajaresha Khadari of a nearby by town named Hulagur for the blessing him with a baby. So he convinced his wife Hajjuma who follows her husband's advice. Both visit the nearby town and meet Hajaresha in his shrine and pray to him and come back. After some months, she convicted a male baby which she delivered on "seventh March of 1819" (p.17) after a year and it was named as Sharif. The parents were happy to have their wish fulfilled by the saint Hajaresha of Halagur. In his boyhood, Sharif was a very intelligent, and precocious child asking many unanswered questions.

` When he became six years old the parents Imam Saheb and Hajjuma thought of taking him to a school. They sent to the local school run by a *jangama* named Siddaramayya. He asked some questions which Shariff answered very well and he was accepted by the teacher as a student. Hajjuma was very happy " to know that her son had been accepted by the school run by the saintly teacher"(p.,27). As years went by, Sharif made a conspicuous progress in his studies. After the completion at Ayya's school, he invited them and worshipped and gave " a plate full of bananas, mangoes, coconuts , a pair of immaculate dhotis and a scarf as gifts." (p.28)

As per the wish of his son, he takes to Gudageri, where Govindabhatta runs a Vedik school to make his son to study Vedas and Upanishads, etc., Govindabhatta was a "liberal Brahmin" (p.33) . Luckily both Imam Saheb and Govindabhatta are known to each other for a long time. When he takes his son to Gudageri Govindabhatta is happy to accept him as his disciple tin his Vedik school along with the several Brahmin boys. He assured Imam Saheb that he 'will give him all the knowledge (I) he has"(p. 38). But the Brahmin boys were puzzled to know the entry of a Muslim boy (*a shudra* p.39) in their Vedic school to study Vedas and Upanishad in Sanskrit. It was a wonder for them. As Sharif grew with knowledge and regular lessons, they become jealous of him and plan to oust him from the school.

During his studies, he made a visit to Kali temple with his guru whereas the Brahmin boys "returned home with a sense of a shame."(p. 43). After he appeared for the *Mulki* examination[3] (i.e., seventh class) and became a teacher in primary schools. He served in the government schools at Basanala, Mandigunala, Kyalagonda, Yerebudoihal, and Gunjala villages. It is said that ' after s few years of service, he resigned his job, as he could not find any thrill in it for long."(p. 43). He studied *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha* and *Prabhulingleele* . He wrote dandaka entitled "Basaveshwara Dandaka"[4]. He participated both the festivals both Hindu and Muslim with equanimity of mind and involvement. He grew into "an itinerant singer, wandering in different villages and holy places, meeting a variety of people and reacting to them in the fork of hi instant sings."(p.44).

For some time, he serves h is Guru Govindbhatta. Returning to Shishunala from Gudageri he is complained of the leakage in the roof of his house by his parents but he metaphorically sings a song which implies the ill-knowledge is leaking into the mind of the human body. Parents first do not understand what he sings and later realize its meaning. Thus, on many occasions Sharif sing many songs occasionally with metaphors and symbols. The source of his poetry is folklore. There is another occasion of an old shirt which is to be repaired. He says that he will repair the old one with needle and thread and he does not want a new short from his parents. Once he goes to Kalasa village where Govindabhatta resides. on the way he meets Shymabhatta and Rambhatta who are surprised to see Sharif carrying his *chappals* in the armpits. He answers that he cannot wear footwear on the holy land of his guru. He sees his guru at home and sings a song on taking a bath. "Purification of inner being is more important than the purifying the put body"- he says to his guru.

There Sharif meets three *Mullas* who express their indignation and dislike for Sharif's rejection of Muslim practices of doing *namaz* and going to Mosque. To them he explains that the real mosque is your body and the God is inside your soul. It is not necessary to go the mosque for prayer. Being helpless, they consider him to be different and say good bye to him. One of them calls him a snake and other are angry to her his answers. They threaten him of excommunication from their religion for which he readily agrees. There is another incident of Sharif being enamored of a village girl, Ganga for which he demands of beating him with a whip to relieve of his sin. He is beaten by the girl and he feels happy. All Brahmins together decide to excommunicate Govindabhatta for entertaining Sharif, a Muslim by birth.

Imam Saheb being worried of his son's marriage, go request Govindabhatta his guru to advice Sharif to marry. Accordingly Govindabhatta asks his disciple to marry and a girl Kundapur, named Fatima is married to Sharif. The marriage is consumed in course of time. Yet another incident of a Gowda who eyes a young girl and for that sin, he asks sorry for on the Sharif whom he insults. The whole body burns and he rolls on the feet of him . Sharif forgives his mistake and goes way. Later Sharif begets a babygirl, named Lattuma and Once a beggar comes to their house and Sharif scarifies his porridge to the him. He thinking that the God himself has come in the guise of a beggar. Out of his poverty he goes to Bheemaraya to ask for *jawar* but his son, Murari insults him for which "he feels very bad."(p.123). For the insult, the Bheemaraya comes running asking forgive him as his house is ruined by his son's mistake.

There is another incident of theft of diamond ring of the Goddess Dyamavva[3] being stolen by somebody. The police officer catches some nearby ones and asks explanation from Sharif and Govindabhatta and he says that he Goddess herself has given it to him. The officer makes test by closing the temple and surprised to see it in Sharif's hands. Then he realizes the greatness of the saint. Sharif gives back nose-ring to the Goddess and asks her to bless them both. This is one of miracles performed by Sharif in his last days.

Hussain, his father-in-low and Husseini, his mother-in-law come and meet them and express their desire to take away their daughter to Kundgol. At that time, he says that she will not return again to her husband's house metaphorically. They are surprised to know the meaning that she will die. Accordingly they away and she dies after some time. The news of his wife's death is taken by him with a pinch of salt as he believes that he will meet her in the heaven. He sings another song about a n old woman for falling in the market of Halagur. It is a warning tone for everyone who goes to market and even to the good ones.

At last, Govindabhatta becomes " a shriveled old man" (151) was laying on the death bed. He calls on Sharif who comes and takes care of him whereas his own Brahmin disciples keep away from him. When Govindabhatta asks his disciples to drink his vomit they say no. Only Sharif, his true disciple, drinks the vomit and proves his devoutness to his guru who blesses him. He sings a song: "I got my guru today/ I got my guru today". (157). Next Govindabhatta dies instantly and the funeral is attended b y Sharif . One Durgappa brings the news of his death of his wife Fatima from Kundagol. Sharif remains undisturbed by the news and says that he will meet her in the heaven next. In his view, the death is not an entrance it is an exit to the human existence. Death is nothing for Sharif.

At last Sharif "lays himself on the deathbed."(p.164) Before his death, he advises Ramabhatta and Shyamabhatta to light the lamps in their bodies (metaphorically houses) and practice virtues in life so that they will attain peace of mind. All villagers the *darshana* of the dead body of Sharif and gives a holy burial to him in the Shishunal where a temple is built by Danappa Mantagani of Basanal village.

Thus Basavaraj Naikar end his hagiographical novel with the death of Sharif. His focus is on the brotherhood and religious harmony between the religions- Hinduism and Islam. O.P.Mathur says-" The saint Mohammed Sharif is a living embodiment of the virtues so relevant to the Indian society of today."[5] Sharif is a symbol of the religious harmony which is the dire need of time. It is divided made by the politicians for their benefit. The people should realize and remain one in one nation. He highlights the morals of good behavior, gentleness, love for truth and unshackling firm belief in the existence of God and life of morals.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. Dr. Sabitha Tripathi comments on the blurb.

2. Dr. Peter Joseph comments on the blurb.

3. Mulki was an old examination for qualifying for the appointment of teachers.

4. This incident is another miracle performed by Sharif.

5. O.P.Mathur comments on the blurb.

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