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Basavaraj Naikar, *Bird in the Sky*, Bengaluru: CVG India, 2016. Pp. 200. Rs. 250.

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First of all I extend my most adorable kudos to Dr. Basavaraj for delving into the deepest recesses of human mind and incredible psyche in this spiritual faceted novel par excellence, in this mad and techno-savvy twenty-first century. This parrot (bird) is the most vital spiritually animating essence in all beings. He has transmigrated and transcended beyond stage and status of the so-called limitations of human mind. This epoch-making novel has spirit of spirit of specified kind in the domain of novel writing of this kind of genre and wordings too. He has tried his best to reveal the revelation of Paramahansa Siddharudha Maharaj of Hubballi in Karnataka State (26-03-1836 to 21-08-1929). This kind of intangible spiritual reality is energetically and ably caught in the appropriate words by Basavaraj. He has wielded his hand, heart, head and soul most perfectly to catch the eminence of the Avatar-Karya of Pramahansa. This is previously known but forgotten by mankind in the march of Time... is reasserted and reassured by this Good Samaritan. This novel presents and exhibits most successfully revealing the eternally existent soul and its effect on the human psyche. I am confident that the reader will revel by reading this important and would-be classic characterized by its liveliness and successful characterization. This historic novel is a literary masterpiece.

The towering symbol of parrot (shuka) in Sanskrit and in the prime religious Hindu texts like the *Bhagavat Purana* is conspicuous for its spiritual overtones. This novel bears most telling similarity with the celebrated “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” by William Wordsworth.

This fine novel depicts most entertainingly the microscopic philosophic details the miraculous life of the Mahaswamy and the evolution of his saintly personality from early childhood to his death. His biographical self has parallels in the lives of great religious heroes of mankind. Dr. Naikar has produced voluminous set of various types of literary figures of world literatures and of Karnataka also. They are more than three dozen and in thousands of pages. But this novel is the perfect epitome to his career as a writer. It adds more than third dimension and sixth sense also. He attains celestial heights in his writing career of more than forty years. It is so because his writing is the very listening to the notes of Anahat Nada—notes struck without touch in the heart and soul. It is so, because Siddharudhaji is the first modern Sadguru – the Perfect Master – who has transcended all the so-called religious cults, customs and conventions prevalent in the world. He believed and advocated and proved with his day-to-day life the prime

importance of the cosmic man. The Swamiji is the gigantic and global-minded ascetic from his very birth. In this context, the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks volumes in one sloka (couplet):

Avajananti ma mudha manusi tanumasritam

Param bhavamajananto mama butamahadharam. IX-17

The same blunder is committed by the people in respect of the Mahaswamiji. In this respect, this novel proves to be a milestone which strongly advocates, propounds and propagates Advaita Philosophy of the Vedas, which is concentrated in one human form, namely Sri Siddharudha Bharati. The nation-wide wanderings –tirthayatras – of Bharati are reconstructed as the primordial man before his attainment of the age of forty. The present reviewer has not come across such an example except the life-sketches by scores of disciples and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Belur Math, Kolkatta. This description is microscopic. And I am sure to declare that the writer has divine determination to present it most skillfully with hundreds of miracles in the life of the Mahaswami. It is the living example that justifies the ways of God to mortal man. This must be and ought to be his ancestral heritage in his past lives. This unfolds the truth of Out of Body Experience (OBE) and Near Death experience (NDE) which is being got proved by scientific machinery and latest psycho-analytic methods. One may refer to Arthur Koestler's *Kaleidoscope: Essays from Drinkers of Eternity* (February, 1981). Unfortunately the Western mind does not believe in the spiritual endeavour by the Hindustani and Oriental saints and Sufi saints also. Now there is more and more stress on the idea of the life of soul of pre-birth and post-death. They rely heavily on machinery than on the empirical knowledge of the mystics and saints. The Western thinkers are bent on proving everything clinically. But it wouldn't be proved in the clinic. If we apply our minds to the various miracles in the life of Bharati, we may succeed in perceiving this truth. But it won't bear fruit. It is evident in the last pages of this divinely inspired novel wherein the parents of Gurunatharudha vie for wealth and legal rights rather than accepting or saving the life of the Mahaswamiji. It reminds us of the sad anecdote of Judas, who became the cause of crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the sake of money. The same sad saga is repeated by people in this novel. The country would not be important, because saintly figures are the same everywhere. Mankind is the worshipper of Mammon and not of 'Spirit' and saints in this twenty-first century of internet, face-book, blog, twitter etc and uncountable gadgets. He 'knows' a lot but not the divine secret of mind, heart and soul. The man of this new millennia is a shattered person and much more proud and egoistic than ever. This denies him entry into the Heaven of spirituality. To prove it, I once again resort to Wordsworth's dictum in his Ode:

Not for those I raise

The song of thanks and praise;

But for those obstinate questionings

Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tumble like a guilty thing surprised.

And while we do so and act accordingly blindfolded, Wordsworth cautions us by composing these lines:

Our souls have the sight of that immortal sea,
Which brought us hither.

To write such an account and to publish it presupposes the dangerous signal of the poor memory of people. But Dr. Basavaraj Naikar has the iron-will, to quote again Wordsworth in his Ode, "Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might." The literary sojourn of Naikar is just like S.T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan":

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan,
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
And drunk the milk of paradise.

So this novel is an eternal source for the reader to drink the milk of paradise by reading and re-reading it. But for people it seems impossible and improbable! That is because their minds are weak and parochial. This novel deserves grand welcome by those who aspire for liberation-salvation from the cycle of eighty four lakhs of births and deaths (*yonis*). This is evident in the dialogue between Madiwalaswami and Siddharudha Bharati. Their tidings are divinely oriented. The novel certainly has this aim at its centre. The novel does anticipate that there are such souls and will be also in the ages to come in the world to read and absorb the anecdotes to avail spiritual might of this human life and to set out on a pilgrimage to such paradise wherein Sri Siddharudha Bharati longs us to be in this very life.

To analyze the entire novel is beyond my capacity. So, I will touch upon the salient features and facets of gemlike personality in this hagiographical novel. Hindustan has also produced accounts of saintly persons from the days of Mahapurana, the *Bhagavata* by Maharsi Vyasa. Books describing the lives of saints like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Omniscient Chakradharaswamy by Mahimabhat of Maharashtra, the noteworthy description in detail of the ceremony of Sanjivan Samadhi by Yogiraj Dnyaneshwar at the age of twenty two only at Alandi near Pune (entering into the cave while alive and getting that cave sealed) by the greatest saint of

Hindustan, Namadev. So, Dr. Naikar is very much in his glorious line of hagiographers indeed. He had earlier written one novel, *Light in the House* on Sharif Saheb of Shishunala.

The first Epistle General of Peter (*New Testament*) declares, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” (1. Peter 2017) “If we take an introspective look at the involution and evolution of human mind and soul, we come across difference in the consciousness of souls: a) there is a difference in the planes of consciousness of souls; b) there is a difference in the experience of souls and c) there is a difference in the state of souls. Most souls are conscious of the gross body (*sthula sarira*); some souls are conscious of subtle body (*prana*); a few souls are conscious of the mental body (mind/manas) and a very few souls are conscious of self” (Lord Avatar Meher Baba in *God Speaks*, 1955 & 2001) I have to refer to it in order to emphasize the ‘bhimaparakram’ in writing *Bird in the Sky* by Dr. Basavaraj Naikar. He is placed in the category of ‘a very few souls’ for his epoch-making novel, which is more subtle or so delicate /precise as to be difficult to describe. But he is the most successful in delineating the divine avatar of Paramahansa Siddharudha Bharati in the most concrete manner. To attempt to capture the godly figure and his miraculous life in words is a rare feat indeed! He has written thousands of pages on literary forms both in Kannada and English. But his ‘Bird’ which always soars in the Heaven is the fantasy brought to reality and to the real world too! I suppose he has spent his whole living life to perceive with genuine intuitive mind the ‘avatar-karya’ (mission of life) of the Mahaswamy. These pages which describe the hidden ice-berg of the Paramahansa up to his age of forty are simply marvelous and soul-searching. I have not come across such account in words except the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the inimitable account of Jesus Christ by Kempis (*In the Footprints of Christ*). Dr. Basavaraj Naikar is inspired by his reading the *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Yogananda. I know the great grand Guru of Giri, Puran Purush (Primordial Man) Yogiraj Sri Shyamacharan Lahiri (30-09-1828 to 26-09-1895). He was the direct disciple of Babaji whom Yogananda has described. Anyway, the soul of Siddharudha Bharati is very much active in this universe and gets all the things executed. So, this novel is nothing but his command to put it into an international language, i.e. English for the whole world to get the ‘light’.

The benign task of writing this novel is to experience the divine consciousness in this very life wherein Dr. Basavaraj Naikar has recorded, “His Holiness Gajadanda Swami explained: My dear boy (then Sri Siddharudha was a teenager) in the transcendental experience (*turiya avasthe*) the experience will forget his identity and is fully merged with the divine consciousness and totally oblivious of the world. The mortal world is illusory like a bangle or anklet of gold.” Then the boy-prodigy Siddha brought to the notice of his grand mentor that the symbol (*istalinga*) is required for a man, who wants to have divine consciousness. But once that target is achieved, then the means i.e. the symbol (*istalinga*) is not required. Sri Siddha further brought to the notice of his Sadguru that a man cannot sit and walk simultaneously; a man cannot follow two paths; path of knowledge (*Jnana-marga*) and the path of rituals (*Karma-marga*) simultaneously. These words of paramount wisdom in Siddha struck the ever alert mind of Sri Gajadanda Mahaguru. It dawned upon the most sensitive mind of the Guru that Siddha was able to understand and perceive the Veda and Vedanta without ever reading them. It was the same ontological knowledge in Jesus Christ before he was twelve years old. Hence Sri Guru Gajadanda Swami has nothing but to initiate Siddha into the order of *Avadhutas* (very symbol of renunciation). He renamed him as Siddharudha Bharati by showering blessings on him. He declared, “This new name is appropriate. May you shine forth as a beacon of light of spirituality

in the world!” He further predicted, “You experience the joys and sorrows of *prarabdha karma* with a sense of equanimity and become a great yogi” (Pp.35-36).

Then the whole novel is replete with thousands of miracles that have been given detailed account in words by the pundit Dr. Naikar. His real underlying motive in wrestling within his mind and writing this hagiography for us is to awaken our perceptive mind to ‘know’ the saint like Siddharudha. The whole life-sketch is to remind us to shed our ‘*shastradhara*’ (authority of code and conduct), ‘*Guru-prachiti*’ (Self-knowledge through the blessings of the Guru) and rely solely on *Atmaprachiti* (Getting dawned upon oneself), the eternal truth. But one in a million or tens of thousands of millions is capable of getting such perception in his own life. So, the way the divine characterization of this unique Paramahansa is delineated is meant to know our parochial minds which are deeply rooted in the meaningless rituals which are great boulders to cross to accomplish salvation. But the masses are the worshippers of mammon. Hence they are unable to get opened their inner eyes to see God face to face in the avatar of Siddharudha and the like in the whole world. The materialistic rituals and deadened minds of the caste-based people are miles away from knowing the serene entity of soul and its working most systematically and silently. The established order and rank and file of any so-called religion or cult is interested solely in money, matter and wealth to enjoy life and not to enter into divine frenzy and become one with God. For this the best example is canonizing of Joan, a girl of seventeen, burnt alive by the soulless church in fifteenth century and raising her to ‘sainthood’ by Shylokean minded rank and file of the Church in 1920. The world famous drama, *Saint Joan*, by the greatest realistic minded George Bernard Shaw in 1920, was intended to inculcate the realistic approach in the minds of the masses. But no! The world is not ready to welcome and appreciate Joan or Shaw, is shown most symbolically in the Epilogue to that celebrated drama. None is ready to welcome and accept St. Joan at all. The same is the saddening story of Sri Paramahansa Siddharudha Bharati. The *jangamas* administer poison, a deadly one, for the second time into the throat of the Mahaswamy who was ninety two at that time. This sacrilegious act was accomplished by the group which had lost the suit. They were bent upon destroying Sri Siddharudha. They wanted nothing less than his death. They, therefore, secured a bottle of deadly poison and forced him to drink it. It is like the death of Socrates and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The tone of the novel and the very characterization of Siddharudha are meant for us to have a rare opportunity of perception into our minds and souls. It wishes and longs to awaken the ability to see, hear and become aware of something like the Oversoul in everybody through our deadened minds and souls. To strike home the point once again the compassionate writer has cited the noticeable and eye-opening example of Basavanneppa Badiger, son extraordinary, carpenter Kalappa. That Basavanneppa carved a marble statue of Paramahansa, but one of the tourists from Mysuru, who was an expert in occult science, uttered his prophetic and ominous words: “It will be a beautiful idol and get worshipped in a temple, but the day it gets sanctified for worship will be the day the sculptor will get sanctified (die)” (P.196). Basavanneppa, the sculptor heard it. He was cock-sure to die shortly. He went in dejection to his native village. He was sleeping on the top of a huge wooden box (Such ‘sandooks’ are in every house in Karnataka). Then he had a dream in which his late father spoke to him, “My son, I am aware of the situation you are in. I appealed to Sri Siddharudha and he suggested the remedy. In the right hand corner of the box you are sleeping on, at the bottom is a small casket in which you will find the extracted tooth of Sri Siddharudha Swami. Get it anointed into an *istalinga* by a *jangama* and wear it around your throat as Lingayats do. Then you will survive.” But “Basavanneppa, being a

panchal by caste, wore the sacred thread around his neck like Brahmins, but the idea of the impending death was too horrifying compared to the violation of his caste-convention. So he got an *istalinga* made and wore it near his heart and so vanquished death on that occasion by the blessings of the late Siddharudha” (Pp.196-7). This is the most excellent stroke of anti-climax of the novel. The ordinary people or *jangamas* do not preserve God or saint in the human form. But who are made to know it, like Kalappa Badiger and his son Basavanneppa seek salvation in the easiest manner possible. So the people with the strongest belief that material possessions and physical comfort are more important than spiritual values are left as stones and with deadened wits. Their life becomes a dire tragedy like that of Duryodhana in the *Mahabharata*. He didn't request for the Lord, instead demanded millions of soldiers and met his fatal end. So is the fate of Ravana in the *Ramayana*. He had accomplished everything in the world but not the pious soul.

More than half of the novel is full of the miraculous *lilas* (Divine Frolics) of Siddharudha Bharati during his pilgrimage of more than twenty years through the length and breadth of Hindustan. His sole aim in touring the tradition-bound priests and people to recognize the Supreme Swan dwelling in the individual soul (P.33). This is what he meant to show: the principle of 'Kayakave Kailasa', meaning thereby that this human frame itself is the very Heaven of Eternal Ecstasy. One should be aware of the same and try to attain that deliverance in this life only. He declared with great gusto that he is the Supreme God (P.68) to the brahmin. But people failed to believe in him in those days. But professional minded people in all ages believe in fake saints and get their lives ruined. The very incarnation of Sadgurus like Siddharudha melt away the wrong and misleading conceptions of the world (Bhar-brahm). Their spoken words and mode of worship clear away the boulders in the path of spirituality. They open the flood gates of love and release the humanity from grief.

In Sri Siddharudha Swamy's life-span we can see clearly Lord Sri Rama, Sri Krisna, Gautam Buddha, Vardhaman Mahavir and Jesus Christ. Whatever unbelievable anecdotes took place in their divine life and in the human form are clearly discerned in the life of Siddharudha Bharati. But human beings are after worldly boons from such personages and not divine gift of electrifying salvation which can lead them to be one-with-God. Hence, there is an ever occurring cycle of avatars throughout the world. But people never pay attention to the fact that the Mahatmas like Siddharudha Bharati have greater importance than God which is noted down in the eleventh *skanda* of the *Bhagavat Purana*. It is revealed in the fine philosophical dialogue between Narada and Vasudeva. Narada stands for the farthest extension of human mind and its thinking from the time immemorial. Dr. Naikar would have still been greater author had he taken note of Sri Siddharudha Swamy's greatest disciple, Mother Kalavatidevi of Angol-Belgavi. The Swamiji had blessed her on Dussera of 1928 at Hubballi and bestowed upon her 'swayamprakasitva' (made her like the ever shining sun in the field of spirituality and ontological knowledge). She is the sole inheritor of his teachings. Nowadays more than six hundred Paramartha Niketanas are active throughout Karnataka, Maharashtra and in America too. These centres of highest self-knowledge which seek to accomplish his goals for which he had to his life sacrificed. These centres are beyond *karmakanda* (set daily rituals). These centres are the most disciplined and perpetuate to train the mind to seek God through harmonious *bhajans* sung by all the males, females and children from the age three. This is a highly heartening sign of the best and rosy future of humanity. Posterity belongs to humane humility of mankind and not to any established religion or cult. In this context I am reminded of a poem of Dr. Biplab Mazumdar of Kolkatta entitled "Towards Sky" – a poem about the legendary figure

of Ikarus in Greek mythology, who was lured towards the sky in spite of all the hurdles and prohibitions.

The golden lining and great hope is evidenced from the most heartening verdict given by the judge of Hubballi court, Sri. D.C. Joshi. Hence, acumen, the deepest sense of religion and God and above all an awareness of godliness in Sri Paramahansa Siddharudha is the very 'Light' in his heart. Such awareness was the rarest phenomenon in those days of the British Raj. A single man in the form of the judge stood like a Rock Gibraltar against the most irrational and mad mundane mankind in lakhs and lakhs of people. It would be apt to quote the proceedings itself: "Justice Joshi wrote that difference between Sri Siddharudha and Adi Sankaracarya that though Sankaracarya preached Advaita (Monism) philosophy, he did not act up to it, whereas Siddharudha acted up to it" (P.192). The colossal intellectual might of Sri Joshi is astounding. It is the living specimen of Man's Conscience also. The judge wrote in his epoch-making judgment: "In Para 2 of my deposition, I referred to the successor of the Adya Sankaracarya. I have known four Sankaracaryas. Those Sankaracaryas observe caste-discrimination and hence I say that did not act up to the Advaita philosophy propounded by them. Advaita philosophy does not permit the person to acquire property and other material things" (Pp.192-93). The questions and answers by the Judge and Sri Siddharudha are one of the most interesting dramatic passages in the novel, which cannot be quoted here. The dialogues show at once Sri Siddharudha's height of spiritual achievement and the worldly pressures put upon him by his adopted mother and the inevitable tension between the two.

In my opinion, the main motto of Dr. Basavaraj Naikar is to bring home the ways of God towards Man. And I am highly confident of the right psyche of the coming generation also. Those generations can apply their minds with the greatest possible equanimity of their minds and shower praises upon the writer for bringing forth the real nature of mankind; that it does not care for God, but their sole concern is for money and matter only. Hence I also pose the same question to all the humanity which Bernard Shaw had asked in 1920 in the Epilogue to *Saint Joan*: "When will the world welcome the saints?" *Hari Om Tat Sat*.