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Patriotic Rebellion in Basavaraj Naikar's *Rayanna, the Patriot*

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Abstract:

The novella *Rayanna, the patriot* (2015) by Basavaraj Naikar deals with patriotic rebellion of Rayanna, the hero of Kittur kingdom of South India in the second decade of the nineteenth century. With the defeat of the Kittur kingdom, the heroic Rani Chennamma and her confidants were imprisoned. Young Rayanna's father and many other soldiers were slaughtered. Rayanna wanted to reinstate the Rani to the throne of Kittur by fighting against the Company Sarkar. Rayanna started organizing his own army. He joined hands with other rebel patriots. In his effort to make rebellion he killed some betrayers and looters who used the name of Rani Chennamma and Raja Mallasarja. Rayanna's party started their rebellion with the looting of Government treasuries in Bidi village and Sangolli. They invested the money in recruiting soldiers and strengthening their army. While Rayanna was planning for a great rebellion against the Company Sarkar some treacherous soldiers in his army were bribed by the Company Sarkar. So he was trapped easily by his bodyguards. On 16 December 1830 Rayanna was hanged by the British authority. Some of his confidants were also hanged. Though the rebellion ended in smoke the patriotic spirit and zeal of Rayanna and his soldiers is still preserved in the history of India and given due honour by the Indians.

Keywords: Barbate; Confidant; Custody; Demise; Genetic; Metaphorical; Predicament; Reinstate; Surety; Whiz.

Basavaraj Naikar's *Rayanna, the Patriot*, the last of the four novellas in the collection *Jakana, the Architect Divine and Other Novellas* (2015) deals with the patriotic rebellions of Rayanna, the hero of Kittur Kingdom of South India in the second decade of the nineteenth century. After the defeat of the Kittur Kingdom in the hand of the Company Government, many soldiers of Kittur kingdom, even including Rayanna's father, who was a *walika* (distributor of sarkari letters), were slaughtered. The heroic Rani Chennamma and her confidants including the Rayanna were taken into custody. After many a month in the jail Rayanna was declared innocent and released from the jail. But on his way to his native village Sangolli he saw the Union Jack in place of the Kittur flag of Nandi Signet inside Kittur fort. He became angry and remembering Rani Chennamma he swore,

“My reverend mother, I’ll not rest content until I regain the Kittur kingdom from the Company Government and enthrone a descendant of your family. I’ll not be Rayanna of Sangolli if I did not fulfil this vow” (R.P.: 262-263).

When Rayanna was at home his mother asked him to attend to agriculture and lead a peaceful household life. But he replied that he had his own goal and direction in his life. He would not be happy until and unless he enthroned Savai Sivalingarudra Sarja on the throne of Kittur Kingdom by defeating the red-faced monkeys. Rayanna’s patriotic zeal can be seen in another situation when he was arrested by the Company Sarkar on the manipulated information of the treacherous Balappa Kulkarni, the accountant of Sangolli under the Company Sarkar. He was in jail for some time but was released when his friend Saidanavar stood surety for him. He came to know that in his absence Balappa mercilessly tortured his mother by putting a stone slab on her back. At this he felt as if lightning had struck him. So he swore by saying, “..... There cannot be anything more humiliating than this. I shall not leave him alive.” (R.P.:272).

Rayanna’s loyalty to the kingdom of Kittur was so deep that he felt it was his moral duty to protect the future king of Kittur, the boy Sivalingarudra. By then the Company Government confiscated his land for his refusing to pay the land tax which he thought, should have been paid to Rani Chennamma’s family as the land was granted to his family by them. He became furious against the Company Sarkar who had no right on that land. Patriotism was part of his respiration. Now he did not bother about his home or land or wife or relatives. He dreamt of recovering the lost glory of Kittur Kingdom. Besides his genetic mother, he considered Rani Chennamma as his metaphorical mother.

Once Rayanna heard that some patriots of Kittur were planning to fight against the Company Government to recover Kittur Kingdom and to release Rani Chennamma and Rani Viramma. Rayanna felt deeply enthused to learn the news of patriotic awakening of people. He therefore, began to plan rebellion against the Company Government by joining hands with other patriots like Babu Bhandari, Devalatti Gantya, Devaragi Ranoji, Bhimanayaka, Suleiman of Nandagada and Siddayya Janjama, etc. Initially Rayanna had a band of about fifty patriots. Gradually his band went on increasing in number. The patriots wanted to drive out the Company Government and reinstate Sawai Mallasarja and the regent Rani Chennamma in Kittur kingdom. Within a span of three years the number of patriotic soldiers had swollen from fifty to a thousand. Even the Siddi and Kapre Negroes joined this group.

Once Rayanna in the guise of a *Jangama*, went into the Bailahongala fort to meet Rani Chennamma and get her blessing for the victory in his rebellion against the Company Sarkar. When the Rani expressed her unhappiness inside the jail, Rayanna said,

Now kindly stop worrying about the kingdom and take care of your health. Mother, now the time is coming for the recovery of our kingdom. I am building my private army under the guidance of

Virappa Nayaka..... We are planning to attack the Company army all of a sudden and regain our kingdom. (R.P.: 289-290).

After a few weeks Rayanna got the news of the demise of Rani Chennamma in the fort of Bailahongala. After a few weeks the junior Rani Janakidevi also died. Now only Rani Viravva was alive. She was the last resort for the patriots. Rayanna got financial help from Rani Viravva and with which he recruited some new soldiers. Habsi Gubba, locally popular as Gajavira, who came from Abyssinia also joined Rayanna's army along with his group.

In the meantime a *halaba* called Parashya from Halyal had accepted the invitation of the Company Sarkar to capture Rayanna alive or dead. As he wanted the fat prize in terms of cash and land he began to search for Rayanna. On hearing this news Rayanna grew immensely angry and impatient. He also began to search for Parashya. Ultimately he saw Parashya standing on the rooftop of the fort. When the two met suddenly Parashya shot at Rayanna's neck. But the bullet whizzed fast and hit the thigh of Rayanna. Tying a piece of cloth torn away from his dhoti to his wound, Rayanna jumped on the rooftop, pursued Parashya and severed his head with his sword. The villagers from the surrounding villages saw the severed head of Parashya hung at the entrance gate of Halyal, heaved a sigh of relief and praised the heroism of Rayanna.

Rayanna begged help from King Chandrasena of Shivanagutti who expressed his predicament under the dacoit activities of a rowdy called Vakkala Bharama of Kukanur. Because of this he would not be able to help Rayanna. At this Rayanna begged a hundred soldiers from Chandrasena and went to search for Bharama in the Cholachagudda forest. There ensued a scuffle between Rayanna and Bharama and in the fight Rayanna killed Bharama. After this Rayanna got financial help from king Chandrasena and also the fifty soldiers who were followers of Bharama as a part of his army. Now Rayanna's soldiers grew up to be about five hundred.

Rayanna's party decided to inaugurate their patriotic rebellion with the looting of Bidi village near Khanapur. They went to the village, overpowered the guard, a barbate man called Pir Mohammad and killed him. Then they opened the treasury and took all the money which amounted to one thousand nine hundred rupees, and then set fire to the doors, windows and beams of the treasury room. After that they entered the office hall and set fire to all the Government records, files, registers and documents. Then the party walked out of Bidi and reached Samshergad. There they celebrated their victory.

The next night they entered the campus of the *Sarkari Kacheri* to loot it. At first the watchman blocked them. But after pounding the watchman severely Rayanna's party broke open the door and entered the kacheri. They took out the cash of five hundred rupees and rode away from there.

Once Babu Bhandari, the leader of the army of Rayanna, was against the general will of the rebel party as he was bent to loot and enjoy in the name of Sawai Mallasarja of Kittur. So

Rayanna's companions attacked him and afterwards he left the party. Rayanna asked his companions to bring back Babu Bhandari alive as he did not like to make a rift within his own party. He also said that their fight was against the Company Sarkar and not against their own men.

Accordingly Rayanna's companions searched for Babu Bhandari. Ultimately they tracked him down. But they became angered by the horrible sight of the *achari's* two sons who were killed and mangled by Babu Bhandari. So, somebody lifted his sword and severed the head of Babu Bhandari. Although it was not the will of Rayanna, he had to tolerate it for the integrity and unity of his party.

Mamledar Krishnarao and Collector Nisbet were talking about the difficult task of controlling and capturing Rayanna. Krishnarao said:

.....That Rayanna is not an ordinary fellow. He will rebuild his army and renovate his rebellion. He moves like lightning from place to place. It is very difficult to catch him (R.P.:334).

Krishnarao introduced Mr. Padalli Bhimya to Nisbet. He said that Mr. Padalli Bhimya was a companion of Babu Bhandari. After the death of Babu, he came out of the rebellion. He wished to capture Rayanna through him. He would pretend to be loyal to Rayanna for a few days. After earning his confidence, Bhimya's party would capture him and hand him over to them. Nisbet was overjoyed to hear the plan. Soon Bhimya became a close friend of Rayanna and enjoyed his confidence. Rayanna was taken in by Bhimya's assurance. He said to him that he had full faith in him and they should fight until their last breath and leave the rest to the will of lord Shiva. Then he wanted to swim in the brook. So he gave his sword to Lakky, a follower soldier of Bhimya. He jumped into the river and swam. Lakky kept the sword in a big bush and conspired with Bhimya to trap Rayanna. Then everything was manipulated and they surrounded Rayanna when he walked back to the bank. Rayanna was surprised by the unexpected attack of his betrayers. When Rayanna asked Lakky for his sword Lakky turned a deaf ear to him. Instantly the gangsters of Linganagouda and Venkanagouda pinioned Rayanna with a rope and tied him tightly to a string cot. As Rayanna was carried to Dharwad tied to a string cot he introspected his own life and wondered at the treachery of his own maternal uncle, Lakhya:

O Lakky, elders say that the maternal uncle is next only to father in filial love, affection and protection. You are the younger brother of my mother, my beloved *mava*. Is this the affection that you have shown to me? What will your sister and my mother in Heaven feel when she comes to know your treachery? Do you think I am afraid of death? Never! I prefer death to dishonour. I have the satisfaction of laying down my life for my revered mother Rani Chennamma and for my brother Sawai Mallasarja (R.P.: 342)

While Chennamma and Gajavira were walking in the lanes of Sangolli a boy called Ninga told them that their beloved hero Rayanna was arrested by the Company Sarkar. He also added that Rayanna wished that Chennabasu would continue his rebellion against the Company Sarkar after his death. In the meantime, the patriot Rayanna was put behind the bars at Dharwad.

Collector Nisbet noticed that the palace of Raja Mallasarja and Rani Chennamma at Kittur was a constant reminder of the past glory of the kingdom. Rayanna also was inspired by the sight of the palace to begin his patriotic rebellion. So Nisbet issued an order to demolish the Kittur palace and fort. Accordingly the palace and fort were demolished within a month and Nisbet heaved a sigh of relief while the natives of Kittur shed tears at the sight of the demolished palace.

At Dharwad the jail officers were confidentially instructed by the superior authorities to harm the prisoner, Rayanna, without letting him know it. So, whenever Rayanna felt thirsty and asked for water, he was given only diluted limewater and never pure water. After sometime Rayanna began to suffer from lack of appetite and liver problem. The jail officers enjoyed the plight of Rayanna.

After the arrest of Rayanna and taking him prisoner on the 8th of April 1830, most of his followers grew disorganized and scattered all over the countryside of Kittur Kingdom. Some of Rayanna's followers were arrested and some others surrendered themselves. Thus the total number of prisoners amounted to four hundred. So the Company Government ordered the trial of only important rebels including Rayanna. Accordingly Rayanna and his close companions were brought to Nandagad, one of the important centres of Rayanna's insurgent activities, for trial.

On 16 December 1830, the British authorities gathered under a banyan tree outside Nandagad and sat on their chairs in the presence of the people of Kittur Kingdom who were eager as well as scared to hear the news of the trial. The Visiting Commissioner, Mr. Anderson sat on a chair. The Amaldar asked Rayanna why he was apprehended and brought there. Rayanna replied that all of his partymen who were the natives of Kittur Kingdom wanted to reinstate Sawai Mallasarja on the throne of Kittur Kingdom. So they started a rebellion by burning and looting many *Kacheries* and treasuries of the *Ingrezi Sarkar*. The court under Mr. Anderson found all the prisoners guilty of treason and recommended death-sentence and confiscation of their property. Mr. Anderson gave his judgement, "Since Rayanna happens to be the principal offender, he should suffer the supreme penalty of the law. Rayanna and his companions should be hanged to death" (R.P.: 350).

Rayanna reacted boldly that he had not committed any crime. On the contrary, he had fought for his kingdom of Kittur, for his reverend Rani Chennamma and Rani Viravva. He had fought for a patriotic cause. The British officers asked him what his last wish was. He replied with patriotic conviction that his patriotic mission should be continued by his fellowmen and they would drive out the *Ingrezi Sarkar* from their land. He also boldly added that after his death,

they might bury him by the side of the road to the east of Nandagad leading to Kittur and plant a banyan tree on his grave, so that people might remember him and his mission. Rayanna's mother Kenchavva and elder brother Siddanna and Siddanna's son went near Rayanna and hugged him by turns and shed copious tears. Then they disentangled themselves from him. After this Rayanna was led to the spot where a sturdy noose was hung from a big banyan tree. He mounted the steps of the scaffold and stood on the big stool. One of the peons covered his face with black cap and fastened the noose around his neck. Then another peon suddenly pulled the stool from beneath his feet. Instantly Rayanna's body hung limp in the air. The officer removed his hat. Chennnabasu in the guise of *bairagi* saw the whole thing and shed incessant tears. The patriots of Kittur Kingdom began to sob and wail at the sight of Rayanna's death. Other prisoners were hanged at other places.

According to Rayanna's last wish, the Company servants buried him by the side of the road leading to Kittur City. The barbate *bairagi* Chennnabasu planted a banyan sapling on Rayanna's grave. As years went by, the tree grew into a huge shape of an umbrella. The people of Nandagad built a temple beneath the tree. The passersby, who went along the road, paid their silent homage to Rayanna, who fought and fell for their freedom from the British rule. They composed and sang patriotic songs and ballads immortalizing the heroic deeds of Rayanna and his companions.

The *bairagi*, who was nearly seventy-five year old by now, spent his time sitting in front of the temple near Rayanna's grave. An old woman used to offer him jowar porridge every day and this sustained him. One day bowing down to the feet of the old woman he gave her a golden cask which was given as a gift to him by his beloved friend Rayanna. Pleasantly surprised by the sight of the shining cask, she secured it in the hem of her sari. Then the *bairagi* fell into a deep sleep and never woke up. Thus ended the saga of patriotic rebellion under the leadership of Rayanna in Kittur kingdom.

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