

***A Harbinger of Harmony* by Basavraj Naikar, Kanva Publications, Bengaluru, 2015, Pages 104, Price 75.**

Basavraj Naikar is a writer with varied interests and his corpus reflects this prismatic diversity. From academics and research to literary criticism, creative writing and translation, you name it and he does it! His contribution to the praxis of cultural studies and translation in Indian Literature is priceless.

*A Harbinger of Harmony* is a work following in the footsteps of his other works of regional and cultural study like *The Vacanas of Sarvajna*. It captures the life, philosophy and songs of Sharif Saheb, a saint of the nineteenth-century Karnataka. The book is a quick-read of 90 pages. It documents the long-ignored literary contribution of the saint. His songs are an inextricable part of the oral culture of Karnataka and since time favours the written word, this work attempts to include and document the literary outpourings of the saint into the written tradition of Indian English Literature.

The book consists of four sections discussing the spiritual, folk, religious and the literary contribution of the saint. The title is suggestive and hints at the essence of Sharif Saheb's teachings and philosophy. Sharif Saheb, although born a Muslim, from the beginning had a uniting view of different, apparently opposed religions. His precocious nature took him to the doors of different philosophical schools of Virasaivism and Hinduism. His longing for a guru was satiated by a Vedic scholar, Govindbhatta. His own philosophy is a confluence of all these philosophies. His life had been a difficult journey and it is this that compels him to become more spiritual. He is often called the 'Kabir of Karnataka' for holding this non-conventional view of religious unity. His contribution to the oral culture is evident in his philosophical songs, dandakas (a song written in praise of a god or goddess), prophetic songs, rivayats and Lavani (a popular folk dance and song form of Karnataka and Maharashtra).

Naikar translates and documents ten such songs in the book which are deeply philosophical, symbolic and earthy. The imagery is replete with the everyday idiom of common Karnataka life. "Brothers, look at the temple" needs to be noted here for its imagery of temple attributed to the body and the minute spiritual awakening process elucidated in the lines:

There is a triangular stone  
 Within which is a slippery stone.  
 The Abstract Hero manifests  
 In the concrete form  
 And yet remains hidden.  
 Brothers, look at the temple. (73)

Apparently, the imagery is concrete but has covert meanings. At a philosophical level, it may allude to the seat of the eternal, abstract Divine in the human body itself. At a more subtle level, one finds an allusion to the awakening of *kundalini* in this stanza where the triangular stone could mean the *muladhar chakra*. This idea is concretised in the next stanza when he sings about the six and three stairs of the temple and the resultant ecstasy that grips the seeker there which alludes to the movement of *kundalini* to the *sahasrahaara*, the seat of eternal joy, which according to Laya Yoga, happens after crossing the six levels of existence which are referred to as

chakras in the yogic tradition. So, the book is a collection of such jewels but at times the language seems disjointed and it lacks flow. The documentation is neat but only a superficial delineation of the literary contribution of the saint has been done. Some ideas of the saint on women translated by Naikar could call for a feminist argument. The depth of the thought has been missed in some places and a better analysis of his views on women and detachment could be done to contextualize the saint in this postmodern world.

**Deeksha Sharma**

**DISCLAIMER**

Articles in this journal do not reflect the views or policies of the Editors or the Publishers. Respective authors are responsible for the originality of their views/ opinions expressed in their articles - Editors

*Dialogue: A Journal Devoted to Literary Appreciation*  
Vol XII No 2 December 2016