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Review of *The Rise of Sivagami: Book I of Bahubali*

Title of the Book: The Rise of Sivagami

Genre: Indian historical fiction

Author: Anand Neelakantan

Paperback: 474 pages

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Introduction:

The Rise of Sivagami (2017) is a fable portraying the events that takes place in the life of Sivagami. Sivagami is perceived as a powerful character in the film *Baahubali* directed by S.S. Rajamouli. Rajamouli while working on the script found that there were whole lot of characters emerging from the plots and sub plots. A film would never have enough time to cover them all. In order to prevent the dying of such umpteen number of characters he approached Anand Neelkantan who is a well-versed writer. Anand Neelkantan is best known for his works- *Asura: The Tale of the Vanquished*, *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*, *Ajaya: Rise of Kali* which paved way for writers like Amish Tripathi, Kavitha Kane et.al. Anand Neelakantan is one of the pioneer for penning the tales based on alternate mythology. Usually he captures the finest details of history and intricacies of the past in his works. Rajamouli after reading Anand's *Asura* felt that he must collaborate so as to give life to the theme of Mahishmathi. Thus, the journey of Sivagami began which acts as a prequel to the story of Bahubali. In the foreword to the book, the description of this novel is addressed by S.S. Rajamouli as, "How we thought of going before the beginning" (vii). The novel is well received and is translated into many Indian languages. The sole rotation of the plot is around Sivagami and Kattappa.

Characters:

Characters are varied depicting the enigmatic quality of life. They are real life portraits and resembles the ones in epics. Appears as if the characters are blinking at the readers with a sparkling eye ready to narrate their tale. Comparative to the movie the feeling and emotions of the characters in the book resonates in depth. Characters are prone to

author's imaginative faculty. Sivagami (protagonist) is a strong, powerful and fiery woman waiting for revenge. Her hatred towards kingdom of Mahishmathi knew no bounds and is exemplified through her dialogues. Fortunately, or not fate sends her to the same place where she displays both her meek and ferocious side.

Kattappa is a loyal servant serving the elder prince Bijjaladeva, just like his father Malyappa serving the King of Mahishmathi. Being the personal slave of prince, he has saved him from lots of threats and danger. Bijjaladeva is a womaniser and drunkard ruining the lives of women in the palace. His brother Mahadeva is a charming young boy brimming with virtue. He falls for Sivagami but his love goes unreciprocated since she is after them only for revenge. There is Shivappa, a rebel who speaks about ending the evils in the society and redeem the marginalised people. Unlike his elder brother Kattappa he has never ending hatred towards Bijjaladeva. Apart from these characters Anand has offered mannequin of characters that transports us to the ancient era.

Plot:

The novel begins with Sivagami, a five-year-old child taking an oath to destroy the kingdom that proclaimed her innocent father as traitor. She witnessed his execution which was carried out by Maharaj Somadeva. She lives with her uncle Thimma who decides to send her to the royal orphanage due to the naggings of his wife. Meeting Kamakshi and befriending her was a blessing in disguise. Since the girls in the orphanage have none to voice out they are forced into prostitution or sent to satisfy the warriors. Kamakshi was waiting for Shivappa to save her from the cruel place. Shivappa promised to return after putting an end to tyranny by killing the king. Kattappa despite seeing the faults of Bijjaladeva remained silent because of the promise made by his ancestors to serve the rulers. Also, there is conspiracy against the King and issues of smuggling Gauri dhooli, a powder of glow. It is a prime reason for the kingdom to remain unconquered and undefeated which is a secret.

Sivagami meets Prince Mahadeva but feels aversion towards him. But Mahadeva is lovelorn and does his best to save her from dangerous situations. Prince Bijjaladeva tries to molest Kamakshi and when Shivappa tries to save her, Kattapa attacks him and paralyses him. Understanding the situation Kattappa tries to save Kamakshi who mistook that Shivappa is no more. Without hesitation she jumped out of the window killing herself. Shivappa gets arrested for false accusations of killing the girl. Despite knowing the truth Kattappa remains silent. Sivagami fights bravely against the traitors and saves the king from the rebels. And so,

she is given the post of Boomipathi. But before that she has to perform an execution of a culprit. The novel ends with revealing the culprit, who is none but her uncle Thimma. Caught in dilemma as she needs the post in order to carry her plan just like Skandadasa said, "You can change a system only by being a part of that system, by being part of the change" (295). Whether the execution is carried or not will be revealed in the forthcoming books (unreleased).

Style:

The flow of story is gripping and energetic. The architectural design of Mahishmathi demonstrates aesthetic sense of the novelist. The idea of creating an imaginative kingdom is similar to that of R. K. Narayan's Malgudi, a fictitious town. A palace of extravagance, fine clothing, tribal people, pirates, life in orphanage are depicted in precise. The contrastive elements in the novel exemplifies the enigma of good and evil in the world. Much like what Charles Dickens mentions in *A Tale of Two Cities* as "best of times" and "worst of times" (1). Anand Neelakantan has done justice in sketching the pivotal characters. The dialogues represent the style used in ancient times, which transports us to that particular period. Appropriate use of language and words deserves appreciation.

Thoughts running in the character's mind are in italics in order to show variation from the normal expression. For instance, "He sighed and his brother's voice whispered in his mind: '*A good place for a dog*'" (27) - thoughts running in the mind of Kattappa is in italics whereas the normal font is the narration. This technique relieves monotony. Also, there are numerous ellipses […] which denotes the real-life conversation. For instance, "He was… he was not pleased" (29) and "yes…yes swami" (29) signifies the realistic conversation taking place every day. Thereby it brings sense of closeness with the characters.

Elements of history can be traced as when details about rulers of the past, rituals, secret passages, patriotism is drawn in detail. Flow of narration is full of twists and turn. Narration is done by various character to give variety. Based on narrations the chapters are divided.

Commentary:

Pivotal characters are round characters, highly organised and functions uniformly. The minor characters are round characters whose motives can be summed in a single sentence. Still adds their own essence to the novel by pulling the story forward. Though there

are minute flaws which disappears due to the grand portrayal of the place, plot and people. The clash between upper and the lower caste, trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, child labour, slavery, poverty sheds much light upon the past and the contemporary evils in a society. The commentary upon the conformist mind of people is an eye opener. The ending creates much anticipation to know whether Sivagami took her revenge or becomes a redeemer of the kingdom. A map is given to direct the readers more about the fictitious town.

Conclusion:

Anand Neelakantan has carved a tale of excellence built upon historical fiction unlike his previous works which belongs to alternate mythology. No matter what the genre is, there is always a tinge of social, political and cultural ingredient blended by him which elevates the work of art. *The Rise of Sivagami* is devoid of sense of weariness which is a milestone for the writer. Altogether Anand has given a beautiful narrative which ends with a twist thereby making the readers wait for the sequel. The comments and posts in the social media is a proof that readers are curious to know the destiny of Sivagami and Kattappa.

Reference:

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Chapman and Hall, 1868.

Neelakantan, Anand. *The Rise of Sivagami: Book I*. Westland Publications, 2017.