

Thematic construction of Betrayal and Self Betrayal in the Queen of Kittur: a critical study.

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Abstract:

Basavaraj Naikar's *The Queen of Kittur* portrays the heroism of Rani Chennamma of Kittur, who fought for the autonomy of the kingdom. In the annals of Indian history, Rani Chennamma is the earliest Rani, who rebelled against the British rule before Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi. The unsung heroine of Karnataka has a special place in the history of Colonial India. The novel portrays Rani Chennamma's effort in protecting the kingdom from the Peshwa's, neighboring kingdoms and the British. Ironically, she was betrayed by her own people. In spite of the heroic admiration of Rani Chennamma, it is pertinent to study the themes of betrayal and self-betrayal to understand the defeat and failure in the hands of the British. This paper is an attempt to focus on the themes of betrayal and self-betrayal.

Key Words: Colonial India, Autonomy of The Kingdom, Betrayal, Self-Betrayal

Basavaraj Naikar's *The Queen of Kittur* portrays the colonial encounter between Rani Chennamma and the British around 1824 for land and authority over kingdom. The patriotism of the natives and the shrewdness of the British are eloquently narrated. Although Rani Chennamma succeeds in killing Mr. J. M. Thackeray, the Collector of Dharwad, in the first battle subsequently in the second battle she was betrayed by her own courtiers. She was defeated by the East India Company headed by Mr. Chaplin. The kingdom of Kittur was annexed to the British and she was imprisoned in the Fort in her own town, Bailahongala until her death.

The Doctrine of Lapse:

Rani Chennamma fought against the Doctrine of Lapse which was officially codified by Lord Dalhousie. Lord Dalhousie was the Governor General for the East India Company in India between 1848-1856. Under this rule the native rulers were not allowed to adopt a child if they had no children of their own. Their territory formed part of the British Empire automatically. It gave power to the British Raj to annex independent states. In case the ruler died childless, the right to rule the state lapsed to the British Empire. Rani adopted a child and went against the Doctrine of Lapse to save the kingdom from the British.

Raja Mallasarja

Raja Mallasarja, a versatile king who is fond of Indian traditions, puranas, culture and rituals takes the hand of Chennamma as his second wife. Rani Rudramma, his first wife being childless accepts Chennamma. He is charitable, well acquainted in religious activities and worships Goddess Kariyamma. Raja learns about the company sarkars who are growing more powerful. He receives several messages from Desai's to join fight against British. He visits the Kingdom of Kakati to take help from Dhulappagowda Desai. In the forest he meets

Chennamma, Desai's daughter and falls in love with her. Thus, Kittur Chennamma was married to Mallasaija Desai, the king of Kittur, at the age of fifteen and became the queen of Kittur. She had one son, who after the death of her husband, also died. She adopted Sivalingappa with the aim of making him the heir to the throne of Kittur.

Raja Mallasarja helps British

The theme of betrayal is one of the major themes in the historical novel *The Queen of Kittur*. The clashes between the British people and the local kings and Desai have awakened Raja Mallasarja to save themselves from the British. As General Wellesley was crossing their kingdom on their way to Pune, several natives rendered help to him. Raja Mallasarja took this as an opportunity and also offered help to Lord Wellesley.

When Lord Wellesley came near the border along with his troop, Raja Mallasarja, Diwan Gurusiddhappa and his military commander met him and voluntarily promised to help them. "We shall give you the fort at Sangolli where you may keep your ammunition. We shall also appoint a few soldiers to guard it. My military power is very limited. Nonetheless we shall spare a hundred horses and a hundred-foot soldiers" (30). Raja further emphasized his desire to help them that they would in turn help and give freedom from Peshwas. "We are quite independent, but we have been giving an annuity of Rs. 60,000 every year to the Peshwas. But we would like to have our autonomy as usual. Your Excellency must help us" (30). Raja Mallasarja sent a hundred horses and a hundred native soldiers to Lord Wellesley's camp and is very happy that he had won the goodwill of the British authorities. Thus, the natives help the British only to seek freedom from the Peshwa.

The novel not only portrays the conflict between the British and the natives but also portrays the conflict between the native rulers. Bajirao Peshwa learns about the growing popularity of Raja Mallasarja. Bajirao Peshwa fears Raja Mallasarja and writes a letter to Lord Wellesley to dethrone Raja Mallasarja by cancelling the autonomy of the kingdom of Kittur. Having received help from Raja, Lord Wellesley replies that they will not wage war against Raja Mallasarja. Later, Bajirao learns the goodness of Raja Mallasarja. In Pune, both the parties meet and made an agreement that Raja Mallasarja of Kittur, should pay Rs. 1, 70,000 every year and enjoy autonomy. Both the parties signed the documents. Raja Mallasarja had in fact helped Bajirao in defeating Tippu Sultan of Srirangapattana.

Self-Betrayal: Bajirao arrests Raja Mallasaija

The growing popularity of Raja Mallasarja in near and far places arouses jealousy in Bajirao Peshwa. Moreover, when Bajirao Peshwa visited Lord Kartikeswara, on the way Allappagowda Desai, who was angry with Raja Mallasarja for refusing to adopt his son for the kingdom of Kittur poisoned the mind of Bajirao. Thus, Bajirao's jealousy on Raja Mallasarja grew to such an extent to harm him. .

But Raja Mallasarja being innocent of Bajirao's hatred towards him goes to meet him, but he hardly returns. Later they learn that Raja Mallasarja was imprisoned by the enemies. Gurusiddhappa went in search of Raja, met Bajirao and they demanded to keep their army in Kittur and bear all the expenses of its maintenance. He agreed to pay Rs. 1, 75,000 as revenue to Peshwa. Thus, Raja Mallasarja returns to Kittur. However, his health slowly deteriorates and dies. He assures Sivalingurudrasarjato control the kingdom. Thus, RajaMallasarja's life comes to an end causing immense grief to Rani Chennamma. .

Self-Betrayal: Venkatarao and Mallappasetty favour British

As Prince Sivalingurudrasarja was enthroned Venkatarao and Mallappasetty impress upon young Raja. Thus, Raja Sivalingurudrasarja became intimate to them. Diwan Gurusiddhappa observed this and informed Rani Chennamma. Raja Sivalingurudrasarja being young fails to take the right decision and relied upon others. The King received a letter from Bajirao Peshwa seeking help to fight against the British in Belgaum by providing soldiers, horses, arms or food grains. He also received a letter from His Excellency Elphinstone, the Governor asking for help with men and materials in the case of a fight with the Peshwas.

Thus, they received letters from both the sides. Mallappasetty and Venkatarao favour to help the British, because the Peshwas are their enemy. Rani Chennamma sensed the gravity of the situation, and said that British are the common enemies. So, helping Peshwas would be the right decision. But as all the members in the court support to help the British, the soldiers were sent to Belgaum.

“The soldiers of Kittur rode with their saranjam to Belgaum and joined the British army under the leadership of Brigadier-

General T. Munro the battle started and continued for nearly

twenty days. The soldiers of Kittur contributed their mite to the British army. At last, the Peshwas were defeated by the British.

The Peshwa banner was lowered and the Union Jack was hoisted on the fort of Belgaum” (74).

G T Munro was happy with the Raja of Kittur for the timely help and thanked him. Thus, the British won over the Peshwas with the help from Kittur. The Peshwa kingdom was annexed to the East India Company. They arrested the Peshwa, King Bajirao II and kept him as a prisoner. They fixed his yearly pension at Rs. 8,00,000 per annum. Thus, all peshwa came under the control of British. Without the help from the natives winning Peshwa kingdom would have been a difficult task for the British. Thus, the British were cruel and cunning in defeating the natives and annexing the territories under their rule.

Betrayal: British betray the Natives by denying freedom

On conquering the Peshwa kingdom the British invites the Raja of Kittur to enter into a new agreement. Diwan Gurusiddhappa asserted that they are independent and need not attend the meeting. Venkata Rao, differs and says they have to make fresh treaty. Mallappasetty also agrees with him. Thus, they both go to Belgaum to meet Thomas Munro. They brought the documents which say an annual Rs. 1, 75, 000 should be paid. Also, Khanapur taluka should be given to the company sarkar.

This act of betrayal was sensed only by Guru Siddhappa and Rani Chennamma. Rani says, “What’s this? We have not won our freedom at all. We have only exchanged our masters. Can

we not live independently? Why should we give up Khanapur to the British? I would not have agreed for such terms and conditions if I could attend such a meeting” (81). Sivalingaradrasarja being young and inexperienced becomes a victim in the hands of Mallappasetty and Venkata Rao.

Betrayal: Thackeray poisons Raja Sivalingarudrasarja

As the people complain of wild animals in the forest of Balagunda Huliyakattala Raja thought

it was his duty and rode to the forest. He saw Thackeray in the forest who has come for hunting. Raja was thirsty; Thackeray thought this was an ideal time to kill Raja. "He opened the lid, dropped a couple of poisonous pills and shook it properly. The gullible Raja watched everything innocently. Then Thackeray handed over the vessel of milk to the Raja, who took it and quaffed it at one go. Thackeray sat watching him curiously" (84).

Raja lost consciousness by drinking the milk given by Thackeray. Thackeray was happy to execute his plan successfully. Thus, the British betrayed the native rulers although they sought help from them. On the next day people found Raja in a semi-conscious state and lost the power of speech. Meanwhile Diwan Gurusiddhappa advises to adopt a boy. Thackeray, the collector of Dharwad visited Kittur out of courtesy. He says, "Please get well, soon". He sends British physician. Who says, "You see, I can give medicine for the temporary relief, that's all. I don't think I can cure him of it completely as I suspect that it has reached an advanced stage now. It is a bit too late to control it now" (90).

Raja Sivalingaradrasarja tests the boys and adopts Sivalingappa, who was enthroned. Slowly Raja's health deteriorates and dies. Rani Chennamma addresses her people that as Sawai Mallasarja II is young, hence she would guide him. From then on Rani plays a major role in the kingdom of Kittur.

First Battle

Rani sends a letter to Thackeray informing the adoption. Thackeray refuses to accept and claims Kittur to be under their control. He goes to Kittur with 500 soldiers to seize the kingdom of Kittur. He seizes the treasury of Kittur. He ensured that all the chests were sealed with additional locks. He says to Mallappasetty "From today I have appointed you and Venkatarao as the internal supervisors of the kingdom of Kittur. And Mr. Venkatarao will be your counterpart from our side. You must see that the treasury is guarded properly." Thackeray seizes the treasury as he does not approve the adoption claiming it to be illegal. He writes to his officer mentioning the treasury and the safety of it. He has taken Mallappasetty into confidence. The British officers dismissed Sardar Gurusiddhappa as Diwan. Thackeray has appointed Mallappasetty and Venkatarao as the joint managers of the kingdom. Thackeray has posted his own guards near the western gate inside the fort.

Rani calls Avaradi Virappa and enquires the strength of the army. She tells him to be ready for the war at any time. Rani spreads the spirit of self-confidence and determination to her people. Thus, she inculcates love for mother land. The native commander with five blacksmith went near the treasury and broke the locks. Thus, they drew the company soldiers away from the spot. During the Navaratri festival celebrations, the rituals, traditions, and customs of Indian life were practiced.

Thackeray plans to defeat the Rani of Kittur. Thackeray sent Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Elliot to Kittur and ask for the bond of the treasury. The soldiers of Kittur fought against them and arrested them. Rani Chennamma was surprised to see English women and children being arrested. Rani was kind hearted, generous and hospitable towards the enemies. She let them free and gave them food, shelter and comforts. Thackeray was pleased by the gesture of Rani. However, he demands to surrender the kingdom peacefully to the company and be satisfied with an inam of eleven villages. Rani refuses to do so.

Thackeray plans to attack Kittur, therefore, Rani also makes preparations. She instills courage, confidence and will power among the people to fight against the British. The Kittur soldiers were engrossed in hacking, striking and mangling company enemies. They killed Thackeray. People celebrated the victory against the British. It appeared as if people were celebrating Diwali. Elliot and Stevenson who are arrested are taken care in Kittur.

Second Battle

Chaplin, the Commissioner of the Seddan, at Pune was shocked to hear the news of Thackeray's death. He appoints Mr. R. Eden as the acting Political Agent with headquarters at Belgaum. The soldiers of Kittur were planning to attack the treasury at Dharwad. Mr. R. Eden reached Belgaum and studies all the activities. Rani was not reconciled by the British. Captain Chaplin was a shrewd politician. He plans to defeat Rani by taking the help of the natives. "All right, Mr. Sivabasappa, you help us secretly to defeat your Rani. Then we shall definitely give the right kind of reward" (233). Thus, Sivabasappa felt elated about the future and favours British.

The generosity and kind heartedness of Rani is shown by the act of releasing Mr. Elliot and Stevenson because of the promise made by Mr. Chaplin to stop the war. Mr. Chaplin was very happy to see them. Mr. Chaplin wrote a letter to Mr. Newman on the developments of the place. After the release people thought that they would retrieve their autonomy. But Mr. Chaplin asked the people to surrender. Thus, the British betrayed the natives.

Rani Chennamma was shocked to learn the cunningness of the British. In her words, Mr. Chaplin seems to be a treacherous fellow. Yesterday only he had promised that all hostility would be stopped if we released the prisoners. We all took him on his word. But this morning he has gone back on them. This is sheer treachery and shamelessness (243).

Mr. Chaplin received a letter from Rani, but does not pay any heed because Mr. Elliot and Stevenson are released. He thinks that it is his duty to help the Company government to extend territory. Therefore, he did not consider Rani's letter for freedom. Mr. Chaplin admired the courage and strength of Rani. He was empowered by Governor Elphinstone to declare martial law. When it was brought to the notice of Rani, she roared like a lioness, "My countrymen, there is no way out for any of us now. Our choice is only between freedom and heroic death on the battlefield. There is no time for us to tarry" (246).

Both the armies rushed at each other. Many soldiers were shot.

They pierced the soldiers of Kittur with their bayonets and fire their guns at them thereby causing a number of deaths and wounds... As the fighting continued more and more soldiers of both the armies fell and the battlefield was strewn with count dead bodies (250).

Throughout the day, shelling continued between both the parties. The soldiers of Kittur died large in number. The Company soldiers triumphed with joy of victory. The soldiers of Kittur fought with an unprecedented bravery and hacked many Company soldiers to death. As sun descended most of the soldiers lost their lives. The soldiers of Kittur lose the battle because of self betrayal. Sivalingappa was also arrested by the British.

Self Betrayal: The canons are adulterated by the natives

The self betrayal is the main reason for the defeat. The canons could not fire because the gunpowder has been adulterated with cowdung and grains of millet. Gurusiddhappa reports to Rani, "How shall I tell you, Rani Sarkar? Our own people have mixed cowdung and grains of

millet in the gunpowder. Out cannons have, therefore, been silenced forever. I do not know what to do" (256).

The cannons of Kittur remained unused because of the gun powder. Everybody including Rani wanted to protect the fort. Outside the fort Colonel Deacon stood with his army in front of the main gate. Nothing could break the wall of Kittur because it was made up of hard, red granite stones. Even the gates were made of strong wood and steel and could not be broken easily.

Surrender of Rani:

Rani Chennamma knew that Kittur was surrounded by large army of the company. She guarded the young Rani Viravva and was ready for any eventuality. She felt that the end of Kittur was approaching. When the main doors of the fort were broken by the company soldiers, Gurusiddhappa requested Rani to escape. But Rani stood courageously and fearless to move, she was ready to face the danger.

The Company soldiers entered the inner chamber of the fort and were happy to see Rani Chennamma and her daughter-in-law Rani Viravva. There was no limit of joy for Colonel Deacon and other military officers. They hand over everything. Mr. Chaplin writes a letter on his victorious victory over Rani Chennamma.

Colonel Deacon comes and arrests them. Mr. Chaplin was happy to know the details of Kittur property and wealth. Rani endured the sufferings and she consoled other women folk. The company got signatures from Rani on many documents. The company granted eleven villages for her livelihood and necessary staff to take care. The royal women were arrested in Bailahongala.

Punishment for Native Betrayal

Mr. Sivabasappa, visits Mr. Chaplin and narrates his talent in adulterated the gunpowder with cowdung and millet and made it dysfunctional and expects a reward. Mr. Chaplin considers him to be undeserving and orders to kill him. Thus, the company betrays the persons who render help to them.

Five years in Jail:

Although Rani Chennamma lacked nothing in the jail, the agony of having lost the prestigious kingdom could not be forgotten so easily. Rani Chennamma engaged herself in religious austerities in order to forget the agony of her soul. She engaged herself in the worship of Ishtalinga.

Rani Janakibai became a widow quite early, but with the support of her mother-in-law she sustained. But gradually she became lean, reclined on her bed and died. With this death Rani senses emptiness in life. Rani Viravva was only eighteen years old and she was spirited like Rani Chennamma.

Self Betrayal: Rani Viravva poisoned by native

Rani Viravva learns that a fresh rebellion against the government is starting. Hence she secretly supports them by sending gold and money. The Company officers on knowing this immediately shifted Rani Viravva to the fort of Kusugal. As she reduced her food intake, the Collector of Dharwad shifted her to her relative, Mr. Happalisetti. Rani felt better amidst her relatives. She spent her days in daily puja. She was not allowed to meet any native of Kittur. The company authorities feared that her presence was a legal threat to the government. The

Collector calls Mr. Happalisetti and enquires about Rani Viravva, and entrusts a confidential job to finish Rani Viravva. Mr. Happalisetti is threatened he has no choice to refuse. Thus, he becomes an instrument of self betrayal.

Within a couple of days, he consulted a private hakim and bought a poisonous herb. He asked his wife secretly to grind the herbal root and mix it with gravy every day and serve it to Rani Viravva.

His wife who was greedy by nature and who dreamt of having a big sum of money from the Company officers began to manage it very systematically. Even while offering the poisoned gravy with rice to Rani Viravva, she would talk sweetly and humour her (302).

There were no well wishers who would detect Mr. Setti. Everybody pretended to be worried of her health. Within a fortnight Rani Viravva breathed her last. The death of Rani Viravva shocked Rani Chennamma. She suspected some foul play. She stopped taking food and water. Soon Rani Chennamma dies. 5 years in the fort of Bailahongala.

Conclusion

To conclude, the novel illustrates how self betrayal plays a vital role for Rani Chennamma's defeat in the battle. In the name of expanding the territory the British sought help from the natives and in turn betrayed them. The natives being naive, innocent and unaware of the cruel minded British render help to them only to be betrayed. The British Officers lured the natives only to defeat Rani Chenamma. Raja Mallasarja helps the British and is betrayed by the natives. Raja Sivalingurudrasarja was betrayed by Mr. Thackeray. Thus, the theme of betrayal runs parallel to the theme of self betrayal. Sivalingappa was betrayed by natives and killed in the battle. Rani Viravva was poisoned by her relative. On conquering the British demolished the fort to erase the memories of Rani Chennamma. Thus, the British executed their power on natives, and in fact every native who helped the British was hacked to death.

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