

**Rayappa Pattar, *Sangya-Balya: A Tale of Love and Betrayal*. Trans. Basavaraj Naikar. Delhi: Macmillan, 2009. 92 pp. ISBN 023-063-811-2.**

*Sangya-Balya: A Tale of Love and Betrayal* is a popular folk drama of North Karnataka composed by Rayappa Pattar (1860-1950), also popularly known as Pattar Master, who was a resident of Bailawada village in the Bailahongala taluka of Belgaum district, North Karnataka. The play may be located in the tradition of Indian folk theatre, particularly Kannada folk theatre which comprises an array of fascinating forms. The most important of these is the *Bayalata*, or open air theatre, which includes forms such as *Dasarata*, *Sannata*, *Dodddata*, *Parijatha*, and *Yakshagana*. Basavaraj Naikar's rendition of Rayappa Pattar's original text from Kannada into English brings to life a well-known *Sannata* text from North Karnataka: *Sangya-Balya*. Indeed, as the translator clarifies in his introduction (ix), *Sangya-Balya* is a *dappinata*, in which songs (sung to the accompaniment of a small, flat drum called *dappu*) play an important part and is one among the three *sannatas* written by Rayappa Pattar, the other two being *Setti Malinga* and *Pundarika* (also known as *Bavanata*).

Unlike many translators who take their sources for granted, Dr. Naikar has acknowledged in his introduction both the composer and the minstrels who recorded the text. As pointed out by Naikar, the oral composition of Pattar Master was recorded by Basavanagouda Patil, Gangappam Mulimani, and Fakritappa Madiwalar of Mutanala village, and published by Dr. Mallikarjun Latthe, in 1991. Professor Naikar's translation of the play into English is based on this secondary source.

The theme of the play as rightly pointed out by the translator, is the role of elemental passion in interpersonal relationships. This is amply borne out by the plot of the play which is simple and straightforward. Sangappa, also called Sangya, is the protagonist of the play and is a rich landlord of Bailahongala. Balappa or Balya, a poor young man whom he supports financially on humanitarian grounds, is his close and loyal friend. Sangya falls in love with a young lady called Ganga, wife of Virabhadra, whom he meets at the annual fair of Lord Basavanna. As he supports Balya financially, he forces the latter to act as a go-between and win Ganga's love for him. The reluctant Balya, forced because of his indigence into doing Sangya's bidding, is insulted by Ganga as she spurns the illicit love of Sangappa. On the advice of a *koravanji*, or fortune-teller, the services of Paramma, an old woman who is Sangya's aunt and Ganga's neighbour, are procured by promising her money, gold, and bungalows. As a result, Ganga is trapped and she agrees to the illicit affair with Sangya in the absence of her husband, who is away on a long business trip to Bellary. With

the passage of time, the love between the two blossoms, and becomes the topic of the village gossip. Upon returning from Bellary, Virabhadra unexpectedly hears the village gossip about his wife's adultery and is furious. At this point, the theme of revenge is introduced into the play. Virabhadra is dissuaded by his younger brothers from murdering Ganga, and so he sends her away to her parental home at Bailawada after confiscating her jewellery. He then persuades Balya to betray his friend/master and proceeds cold-bloodedly, despite Ganga's best efforts to prevent him, to murder Sangya, after which he surrenders to the *mamledar* or magistrate at Belgaum. Thus, as the translator rightly says, "illicit sex, crushing poverty, and betrayal happen to be the main thematic concerns of the play" (Introduction vi).

The translation successfully retains the flavour of the oral narrative by foregrounding a unique feature of the *Sannata* play, which is the preponderance of music and songs. The play starts conventionally with a prayer to Lord Ganapati, the god who wards off evil and makes beginnings auspicious. The first song of the play after the choral ode is sung by Sangya dolefully, as he laments not having met his childhood friend Balya for some time. A prose dialogue containing a summary of the song follows almost every song. In his Introduction, the translator points out that this may seem redundant to Western readers, but rightly adds that this feature is effective on the stage in the presence of a live audience and should be viewed in that context (viii). Naikar's decision to retain the songs along with their summaries is indicative of a holistic approach to translation, keeping it faithful to the original text/form.

The play upholds the patriarchal norms and evinces a strong male-centred bias. While it is true that violation of chastity is the cause of the tragedy in this play, it is also true that Ganga's desires and feelings do not find much scope for expression. As her husband Virabhadra gets ready to go on his long trip, Ganga pines for his love: "I am a young lady who cannot stay alone here. My body and youth will go waste, what shall I do?" (28). Ganga's plaintive pleas fall on deaf ears, and her frustration is intensified when she understands from Paramma that her husband now mistrusts her. This aspect of the play may perhaps be attributed to the fact that Rayappa Pattar, or Pattar Master, belonged to the *Haradesi* tradition of singing (which upheld male superiority) as against the *Nagesi* tradition (which upheld female superiority). It may also be ascribed to the times in which the play was written and the moral code of the folk culture.

Undoubtedly, the moral vision of the play is closely tied to its folk origins, and this feature has been retained in Prof. Naikar's translation. Folk plays that portray love, magnify its dangerous aspects and assert the working of justice. In this sense, anything excessive has to meet with retribution in the traditional viewpoint of the folk, and hence murder followed by punishment becomes inevitable. The presence of the policeman in the play is a symbol of this worldview, but also an indicator of the changing times under the British regime.

*Sannata* is an operatic performance that, unlike the other types of *Bayalata*, brings folk theatre to the social plane. It is essentially a social play, which engages with issues and concerns that are central to the society.

Basavraj Naikar's translation brings out the complexities of the native language well, including the humour which is at times crude, even though he has confessed to the impossibility of translating the flavour and rhythm of the original. The rough and ready give and take of folk life are presented with great enthusiasm, as in the scenes between the Marwari and Sangya-Balya in the first act, and between Paramma and her husband in the second act, and also between Ganga and Balya in the third act.

The translator confesses that he undertook the translation because he felt that the elemental theme ingrained in it has universal appeal and therefore deserved international publicity. He is undoubtedly successful in translating and transplanting the non-native reader into the native language and culture. Coming at a time when there is great interest in translations from regional languages of India into English, there is no doubt that Naikar's translation is a timely intervention and a notable contribution to the field.

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