



**BOOK REVIEW**

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**"AJAYA" a novel written by Anand Neelakanthan**

The 432 page book, AJAYA with its subtitle "Roll of The Dice", is a novel by Sri Anand Neelakanthan written on a religious story from the great epic 'The Mahabharata', of course, with a twist. That twist is in favour of Duryodhana, the crowned royal prince of Hastinapur, to discover the good things in him. The writer has named him Suyodhana instead, who is otherwise the main villain in the story.

The epic, *Mahabharata*, written by Veda Vya relates to the age of *Dappar Yuga*. The *Mahabharata*, is largely a fiction but the stories and the characters are well knit to portray a sophisticated social structure, social norms and ethics, a complicated diplomacy and particularly a royal hypocrisy ultimately leading to a big massacre through a great war wherein Duryodhana along with his brothers and all the supporting warriors on his side were finished. The *Mahabharata* story, written verse, is highly multi dimensional dealing numerous aspects of that time civilization of Bharatbarsha----Aryan and Non Aryan culture, social norms and taboos, caste system and untouchability, domination of the Brahmins and Kharityas and a number of others. But Neelakanthan's AJAYA is a fiction out of a fiction with lot of twists, of course, to shape the novel as a thriller in stead of a mythology. The Aryan society of that time was highly a caste based society where there was untouchability, exploitations, polygamy and polyandry and the systems were in favour of the Brahmins and the Khatriyas. The other two castes (*Varnas*) Baisya and Sudras were meant for service only. Kunti herself was polyandrous, her three sons and two of Madri were of different gods in stead of Pandu who had impotency, and she made Drupadi also to adopt polyandry marrying all the five Pandava brothers. Kunti's illegitimate son, Karna was born of God Surya, but being adopted by a Suta family he became low caste Suta. He faced the problems of getting himself educated through royal Brahmin *guru*, Durnacharjya but he had to receive the same from famous Brahmin warrior, Parasuram, in the guise of a Brahmin boy. Eklavya, the Nishad archer, had to lose his right thumb in the name of *Guru Dakshina* to be paid to Guru Durnacharya. This is an example of nasty Brahmin exploitation in the society in that era.

So the kingdom of Hastinapur was full of have and have-nots, high castes and low caste untouchables, Aryans and Non-Aryans. However the Kuru family was highly a composite family. Many of the kings married or had relations with low caste women. Vidura, prime

minister of the kingdom, a highly knowledgeable man of that time, was a cross product of sage Veda Vyas and a sweeper woman of the royal palace. Bhimsa, Vidura and particularly Durjyudhana did not support caste system and advocated equal right based on merit. Durjyudhana appointed Karna a governor of an *anga-rajya*, and that is why he became the *Anga-Raj* purely on basis of his merit. This is revolutionary and greatness of Durjyudhana, which none other could perhaps do. The Pandavas including their guide and philosopher, Sri Krishna were conservative and orthodox. These conflicts have been beautifully narrated in the novel. Yadavas were another class of people, known for rearing of cattle, had their state at Dwarka, at west of Hastinapur, on the sea side. They did not have kings but elected leaders for their own governance, as such, their system was somewhat a democratic system of panchayat rule. Sri Krishna's elder brother Balurama was such a leader. Sri Krishna, who was given credit of *avtar* of Lord Vishnu, was a high class diplomat and philosopher of that time who intellectually controlled the entire area from Dwarka to Haastinspur dictating do's and don'ts. He demolished number of Asura kingdoms and Naga Kingdoms with the help of Bhima and Arjuna. Mayasura, the famous Asura architect built the capital city of the Pandavas at Indraprastha with the help of Naga workers, but failed to get a place for shelter in the city. These events have been found beautifully portrayed by the author.

Earlier, Bhishma, conquered Gandhara kingdom and arrested injured prince, Sakuni and princess. Later Gandhari. Gandhari was forcefully married to blind king, Dhritarastra. who was a nephew of Bhishma Gandhari, in protest, blind folded her eyes for her entire life. Sakuni nurtured in his mind a hatred and bore a grudge of infinite magnitude against the Kurus and wanted total destruction of them through a great war. He was a very good dice player. The dices made out of the bones of his assassinated father, obeyed commands of Sakuni while those were spun by him. He uses this tool to dethrone Yudhisthira and seizes later's kingdom and all the earthly property including Drupody playing a game of dice where he makes Yudhisthira to lose and Durjyodhana to win. Thus igniting the situation, Sukuni completes all the base works to invite a big war between Pandavs and Kauravas to demolish the Kuru dynasty which was his goal to be achieved and a grudge to be satisfied, and he derives utmost pleasure at this achievement. The novel has been ended there. That is really a nice ending befitting the subtitle of the novel.

The story of Mahabharata has almost nothing to do with the present world except the portion covered under *Sri Mat Bhagavat Gita*, in the chapter *Bhishma Parbba*, which contains some vital social ethics. So is the story of AJAYA, it even does not contain the Gita in it. So the novel is no better than an illusion. The literary treatment of the book is fine but there was a scope to make the novel more compact with its prime characters more vocal but the narrations a bit short to add more literary beauty to the novel. The novel is worth reading.

By

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