

A Review of 'That Chanakya Lives'

Abhisek Mekap

Name of Book: That Chanakya Lives Author: Dr. Ratnakar Chaini Translation: Sanjeet Kumar Das Publisher: Urania Publishing House Year of Publishing: 2023 ISBN: 978-93565-5-8019-0

'*THAT CHANAKYA LIVES*' is the first work of translation by Mr. Sanjeet Kumar Das. This book is the English translation of one of the famous Odia plays '*Athach Chanakya*' by the renowned and acclaimed playwright of Odisha, Dr. Ratnakar Chaini. Chanakya is a well-known figure and polymath in Indian history who made an orphan child, one of the greatest emperors of India and the founder of Maurya Dynasty. Titular character Chanakya as the protagonist but not the hero of this play.

The play starts with return of a young and "fresh Takshila-returned educated Brahmin" Chanakya to his hometown Magadha. He discovers from Bilom the atrocities of the then tyrant absolute monarch Maharaja Nanda of Nandadynasty who dominates and oppresses the citizens of Magadha. He has made Buddhism the state religion and accepting Buddhism an essential prerequisite to live in his kingdom. The state is in a state of anarchy as anyone who is not submitting to king's will and not converting is murdered, jailed and in case of woman raped. The plot revolves around how Chanakya trains and successfully uproots the barbaric king by training and preparing Chandragupta. In the play there is two intertwining and interesting love stories. one incomplete another fruitful. The play discovers the subtle side of Chanakya, love story of the staunch figure and his passionate love towards Suhasini. Suhasini also loves Chanakya dearly so much as so, that she sacrifices her life and frees Chanakya from prison rather than her own father because She shares the same dream that Chanakya sees and plots in releasing him so that Chanakya lives for the people of country and live for ages. The other love story is of Chandragupta and Malavika. Which is somehow a successful love story later when Chandragupta becomes king Malavika becomes queen.

The central theme of the play is power and how power corrupts people, be it Nanda or even Chandragupta as later Chanakya realises Chandragupta is no more the disciple he trained or the ruler he envisioned. As he is busy celebrating first anniversary of his government decorating and beautifying the palace while farmers are facing problems to cultivate.

Chanakya thinks the change as only the change in name of the emperor. Unlike Suhasini, Malavika is rebellion and revolt incarnated, she does not hesitate to instruct Chanakya and threaten him. Queen Malavika insulting Chanakya becomes his point of realisation, Later the mute spectator throughout the play Journalist gives the gist of the matter when he says “there is no definite borderline between just and unjust, between virtues and vices. All the people are good until they get a chance to do something wrong.”

This play gave Dr Chaini huge admiration and accolades, The artistic brilliance of him is depicted in how he creates a classic by amalgamating historical fact with fiction, with some eminent characters from history and some of authors own creations, this play can be put into the genre of Historical fiction but is written with accordance to the present scenario and will be relatable for ages. It is also relatable in contemporary scenario as we can witness many political parties which promise lots of thing for the upliftment of poor but no matter which party wins, the condition of poor remains the same. It does not matter whether Nanda is on the throne or Chandragupta, power makes the ruler blind. As rightly said by Lord Acton, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” It deals with the two central themes of human existence Power and Love and complexities of both the most powerful feelings. It can also be called a Modern Play as it is relevant in the modern society and is satirical representation of Power relations in the society.

Translator Das does a commendable job in rendering this Odia masterpiece into English, he ensures the minimal loss in translation and make sure the sense and essence of the play is conveyed keeping central theme and message of the play intact, A fine work in which there is no such barrier in the path of a reader and keeps the reader hooked to the book. This play can be easily finished within one or two sitting. A joy to read.

Author’s Profile

Abhisek Mekap

Student of M.A.in English (2021-23)

Central University of Odisha, Koraput

Email: chiku.am7@gmail.com