



**MAKING A COMMON MAN TO AN UNCOMMON WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO *THE LEGEND OF NANDAN: NANDAN KATHAI* BY
INDIRA PARTHASARATHY**

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ABSTRACT

The Legend of Nandan: Nandan Kathai by Indira Parthasarthy translated from Tamil by C.T. Indra. It brings out the conditions of abject poverty, unhealthy and insanitary conditions in which the Dalit people have been sheltered, but they held a belief that they are accursed to live such lives. The protagonist Nandan, in a way has been the symbol of Dalit aspiration for liberation. His protest against injustice sought to find a voice for oppressed people. Centuries of oppression and indoctrination could have hardened their frustration and made them believe that they are destined to suffer as slaves and there is no escape other than the religious route. To prove his devotion to God he undergoes the ordeal. He thinks that his salvation lays in attaining 'mukti'(the feet of God) through 'bhakti'. The unchangeable devotion transforms a common man into a legend and makes him to be remembered for centuries.

In Indian writing in English, Dalits have been represented by various writers. In this order Indira Parthasarthy gains significance as a Non-Dalit writer. He is a well known Tamil Scholar, creative writer, critic and a sociological Chronicler. He is famous for his plays and novels in Tamil, which have been translated into other languages. Among them Nandan Kathai is translated into English as The Legend of Nandan by C.T. Indra.

Indira Parthasarathy's Nandan Kathai-The Legend of Nandan is based on reinterpretation of a story that has been in circulation among Tamil-speaking people for over a thousand years. The story is about the 8th century Dalit farm worker and temple servant, whose only ambition in life was to enter the Siva temple at Chidambaram in order to enjoy the beauty of Nataraja's cosmic dance.

The play brings out the condition of abject poverty, unhealthy and insanitary conditions in which the Dalit people have been sheltered, but they held a belief that they are accursed to live such lives. The protagonist Nandan has been the symbol of Dalit aspiration for liberation. His protest against injustice sought to find a voice for oppression and indoctrination could have hardened their frustration and made them believe that they are destined to suffer as slaves and there is no escape other than the religious route. He thinks that his salvation lies in attaining mukti (the feet of God) through bhakti. The unchangeable devotion transforms a common man into a legend and makes him to be remembered for centuries. He decides to change the paraiyan way of living and also to make them to think the ultimate truth of living.

Nandan doesn't feel ashamed of his birth as a paraiyan, but he feels ashamed by looking at the ways of his people's living. His people are living a barbarous life and they pour toddy even to Lord and worship Him. He wants to transform his people's mind. He decides his people must not think that their birth is not meant only to grow belly. The low castes like his paraiyan community are treated lower than some animals, for the Upper Caste people, who allow the bullock to go into the temple, do not permit the paraiyan. Even though these people are the one who were used to supply flowers and musical instruments made of leather to temples, for constructing temple ponds but treated inferior. At one point he decides to change the birth of his people by making them entering into the paarpaara temple. He thinks that they will realize the inner beauty of Almighty which transforms a man into a complete person, if they get to worship the Almighty in the temple. The inner beauty will create the intellectual thoughts and the people will start realizing their identity. It will erase their class discrimination and Nandan desires to achieve equality for his people. He raises his voice for his whole community, also he expects all his people to think that they are not slaves to the land lords. Nandan says that all living creatures in the earth are equal before God.

The author has so much courage to present the upper caste people's names in the play by the name of their caste. The upper caste people in the play are Mudaliyar, VEDIYAR and Udaiyar. The upper caste people take it as pride to call them by their caste name. Mudaliyar comments everywhere bhajan is going in the paracheri and the supremacy enjoyed by them have gone. The upper caste people are not able to tolerate the reformation which happens in the paracheri.

Nandan's words made the people to realize the mistake they are committing in their life. They decide to be clean and worshipped the Lord Almighty. He believes that there should not be any mediator between man and god and he can reach Him only through his bhakti. By true bhakti he can attain mukti. According to him mukti is deliverance that is they are not slaves.



Mudaliyar and Udaiyar decide to give physical torture to Nandan so they can make an end to the transformation but VEDIYAR says that he can be controlled “not by the stick, but by a trick”. (pp-14) He says that a VEDIYAR can win anyone with his “Tantram and Mantram” and reveals his secret plan to Mudaliyar and Udaiyar. He is going to make Nandan a real bhakta and he has become the devotee to the Lord Siva. They will create situations to make everyone believe that miracles have happened because of his bhakti.

The upper caste people rise against Nandan and his doings. In order to stop his sudden growth they start exploiting Nandan as a saint. They trap him saying that God appeared in their dream and commanded them to accept Nandan as his devotee. In the end with the help of Vedic Bhramin they convince Nandan to march into the fire. The upper caste people inform him that God has given a command to dip into fire so that he will get purified and to merge with God. They ask him to pray for the whole night so that the fields will be harvested by God’s grace.

Thus Nandan enters into fire with Abhirami, his beloved, to get purified. The trap planned by the upper caste people becomes successful. Nandan who believes in them surrender his life to fire. His ignorance makes his dedication as a genuine cause. Cunningly all turn against Nandan, even his fellow men dislike him turning as a spiritual man. Believing them Nandan accepts their words and prepares himself to dip in the fire.

As a common man he is unable to fight with the upper caste people he has a doubt with the VEDIYAR’s words but he believed in the Almighty that marching into the fire may take away his life but he doesn’t want to stride back because if he steps back the faith and the thought he has created in his people’s mind will get shattered and crushed.

Living in segregated colonies outside the village and working as bonded labour for upper-caste landholders, the "untouchables" could hardly be expected even to think of liberating themselves from the caste rigidities of the time. Centuries of oppression and indoctrination have hardened their frustration and made them to believe that they are destined to suffer as slaves and that there are no escape other than the religious route. The devotion towards God will liberate them from the ‘low birth’, which makes him accept the cunning words of the upper caste people.

Human beings believe that God created man, but the bitter truth is that man created God according to his desire. In the name of God, man gave Varna which divided man into various stages. Even today, variations are found at the every level of society. Centuries have passed but discrimination exists leaving suppression in the hands of oppression. To put an end to the oppression people like Nandan has to be born in the Dalit society.



Keywords

Mukti- Deliverance, liberation, here a euphemism for death

Bhakti- devotion

Bhakta- devotee

Bhajan- musical form of worship and collective singing of devotional lyrics popular in Hindu society marked by rhythmic repetition and a brisk beat.

Vediyar – Tamil way of referring to Vedic Brahmins

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