

**Ideological Clash between Chauvinism and Imperialism: A Thematic Study of
Basavaraj Naikar's Historical Play *The Rani of Kittur***

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Abstract

The world history delineates chronologically the causes and consequences of various racial battles fought in different periods of past from time immemorial. These battles were fought between races of heterogeneous social and cultural background. In each of these fights, the natives have been all along vanquished by the external forces, who conquered their territories and settled down in the alien lands for inhabitation. The native inhabitants of the land being subjugated by the invaders reconciled with the new race in their social, economic and cultural life.

Key Words: Ideology, Chauvinism, imperialism, The Rani of Kittur

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In America, Africa and India, the colonizers suppressed the rising of the natives for freedom and forcibly colonized these countries by their invulnerable armed forces taking advantage of lack of belligerent tendency and military strategies of the inhabitants.

India was colonized by the Britishers who ruled over it for nearly two hundred years. They came to this country by way of trading with Indian kings and gradually

settled down in this land being allured by its rich raw materials and wealth. With the passage of time they gained supremacy over Indian kingdoms by adopting the policy of conquest and annexation. They conquered one kingdom after another and annexed them to the East India Company. The Britishers colonized India obviously with imperialistic and expansionistic objectives. They dominated over Indian social economic and cultural life as the supreme rulers of the country. As Indian found the colonizers imperialistic, oppressive, unscrupulous, treacherous and opportunistic, they struggled and revolted against their arbitrary and autocratic rule. But the Britishers put down their rebellion by their aggressive military operations. As a result the smoke of resentment and antagonism that arose from their tyrannical rule and hegemonistic attitude conflagrated in the form of Sepoy Mutiny, known as the first war of independence. The Mutiny first broke-out at Meerut in 1857 and spread over to Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Gwalior and Jhansi. It

encompassed major cities of Northern India and gained momentum.

The outbreak of Sepoy mutiny recalls a similar uprising that emerged in a small princely state of Kittur in 1824 against the colonial rule of the British. Although it was not widespread like Sepoy Mutiny yet it is recounted in history as a terrible rebellion fought for the sake of patriotism. It was a sanguinary battle against the imperialism of the British. The history of rebellion that arose at the kingdom of Kittur has been represented in the form of a historical play by Basavaraj Naikar. He conceives the plot of the encounter on the basis of historical evidences and dramatizes it in a realistic and panoramic technique.

The entire play is divided in to five Acts and each Act into some scenes. The presentation of the scenes leads the play progressively to develop and attain its climax in scene-IV of Act-IV that highlights the consequences of the victory of the kingdom of Kittur. The subsequent scenes of Act-IV focus on the treachery and conspiracy and the resurgence of attack on the fort of Kittur. Then the stream of the story flows towards its anticlimax in the scene-VI of Act-V that depicts the defeat of the queen's army. Thus, the various scenes incorporated in all these five Acts drive the conflict of the play step by step to the point of emergence of fight between the army of the queen and that of the British. The plot of the play has been so ingeniously constructed that each of the scenes contributes to the logical development of the theme. The dialogue between the protagonist and her officers manifests their chauvinistic sentiments and antagonistic attitude towards imperialism. Similarly the imperialistic objective of the

Britishers is crystallized in their conversation with each other. Since we are preoccupied here with the expatiation of the theme of chauvinism and imperialism, we shall concentrate relevantly on this issue and deal with it with greater emphasis and precedence. The entire play centres round the principal issue of clash between chauvinism and imperialism. Each of the hostile races embattles with the other for vindication and sustenance of its ideological objective. The kingdom of Kittur champions the cause of its motherland with the inspiration of patriotism and fights with the Britishers to thwart their imperialistic mission, which is the guiding force of their existential principle. The Rani of Kittur and her subjects fight with a spirit of excessive patriotism against the East India Company to give a crushing blow to their imperialistic goal. This fight between the native patriots and the alien forces has to be construed and interpreted as a clash between chauvinism and imperialism in an ideological perspective.

Chennamma, the queen of Kittur is portrayed as the protagonist of the play. She is iconised as a rare lady of chauvinism, heroism, dedication and compassion. Patriotism flows in her veins and inspires her to fight against the British for the protection of her kingdom that was the target of the enemies for annexation. As she notices that her kingdom is looked upon by the British as a covetous property and their avarice is centralized on it for annexation, she militarizes her subjects and strengthens her army in order to enable it to vanquish the enemies. In anticipation of attack by the British, Chennamma emboldens her soldiers with the spirit of chauvinism by her inspiring words and impels them to vow for the

defence of her own territory. Let us illustrate now with quotation from the play how all the characters introduced in the play make whole hearted commitments to sacrifice themselves for the mother land with the inspiration of chauvinism.

In the scene-III of Act-III the playwright depicts the scene of coronation of Raja Mallasarja performed in the presence of all officers and courtiers of the kingdom. All these most devoted officers take a vow in the ceremony to sacrifice their lives for the protection of their kingdom from the enemies Gurusiddhappa, Rudrappa, Rayanna and Balappa swear with love for kingdom to defend it at the cost of their lives.

In the scene IV of Act III Chennamma, the queen of Kittur asserts her determination to wage a war with the British in order to protect her kingdom from their attack. She speaks with fury “We cannot tolerate this slavery anymore. We shall fight with the red-faced monkeys until our last breath” (1). She refers to the Maharaja of Kolhapur and Says “They may also lend support to our patriotic cause” (2).

In the scene VII of Act III the queen reiterates “The kingdom of Kittur is ours. We are the master of our own territory. These Britishers have come to our land on the pretext of carrying on trade and now they want to see that we quarrel among ourselves. They want to grab our land and rule over us” (3). In the same scene Chennamma further says referring to the strong will of her soldiers “Patriotism, love of this sacred land and love for freedom flow in their veins. Kittur will fight to the last man on its soil. They would rather die than be the slaves of the British” (4).

She further inspires her army officers in the scene VIII of Act-III “I want you all to fight bravely in the war with the company Sarkar and defeat them or else sacrifice your lives for the sake of your kingdom”(5). In the same scene Gurusiddhappa, the Dewan affirms his decision to fight valiantly with the East India Company “Today we all swear that we will fight for our kingdom until our last breath. We shall strive for either victory in the war or lay down our lives and attain heroic heaven” (6). The statements made by the Dewan are revelatory of his chauvinism and antagonism towards imperialism.

In the scene-III of Act-VI the patriotism of Chennamma is acknowledged by the British Officer’s. Thackeray and Captain Black. The latter says to the former “We must admire her (queen’s) patriotism as well as her mettle” (7). Thackeray speaks in reply to Black “her uncompromising patriotism is okay but it runs counter to our interest” (8). Patriotism manifests in the speeches of the Officer’s and courtiers of the kingdom. In the scene-V of Act-IV after victory in the first war Sardars address Chennamma “we have all fought for Kittur kingdom out of our patriotic zeal and respect for the royal family” (9). In the scene I of Act V the queen infuses her army officers with patriotism and speaks to them “My dear brothers. “The Kittur kingdom is yours and you are the kingdom. All of you get ready to bring victory or to die a heroic death on the battle field” (10). In the scene VI of Act V after being defeated by the British Chennamma praises her soldiers for the exhibition of gallantry in the war. “Of course our soldiers are very patriotic and valiant. They clear the debt they owe to the kingdom” (11). Thus, we notice the

manifestation of patriotism and bravery of the officers of kingdom in their excited speeches against the Britishers.

In like manner Laxmibai the Rani of Jhansi plunged into the stream of Sepoy Mutiny inspired with chauvinism and fought valiantly with the Britishers, who embattled with her with a view to capturing her kingdom and annexing it to the East India Company. She terribly reacts to the massacre of women and states "The foreigners have killed my mothers and sisters, I shall not spare them" (12). With the enforcement of Doctrine of Lapse, the Britishers conspired against Laxmibai to dethrone her and depose her from her kingdom. With this evil intention in mind as they threatened her to surrender her fort to them, she was exasperated at their insistence and challenged their audacity and insolence. She conveyed her message to them in her words "I shall not surrender my fort nor the land of Jhansi" (13). The imperialistic attitude of the Britishers flared her patriotism and prompted her to land on the battlefield as an invincible warrior and fight gallantly with the enemies. She dictates her army to wreak vengeance on the Britishers "Dear soldiers fight valiantly with the enemies and set an example that the tigress cannot rest in peace without killing its prey" (14). She persisted in her fight indomitably till she lost her fort due to machination of a traitor like Phula who treacherously opened the main gate of the fort and facilitated the access of the British army. As Laxmibai found her fort insecure and indefensible, she fled clandestinely on horseback to escape the captivity of the enemies.

In the case of kingdom of Kittur, Chennamma, the queen a strong headed

lady with iron will have to brave many impediments to thrive. She is neither disheartened nor demoralized due to onslaught of misfortune. She had to bear the brunt of the death of her husband Raja Mallasaraja and son Sivalingarudrasarja. Her disaster aggravates when the officers of the East India Company seized her treasury in order to plunder all cash. She was threatened by those officers to surrender her fort but she flouted their orders and remained unyielding. This threat sounded to her by enemies inflamed her anger and prompted her to wage a war with the East India Company. She sought in her first fight with the enemies the assistance of her most reliable and trustworthy officers like Gurusiddhappa, the Dewan of Kittur, Virappa the commander of Kittur army, Marihal the lawyer of the state Sardars and courtiers. Since she was a benefactress of the state and contemplated its welfare, all these officers therefore supported her ungrudgingly and wholeheartedly and committed to fight with the Britishers heart and soul. Chennamma, the protagonist of the play challenges the arbitrary action of the East India Company and professes her determination to resist their military exploits for the protection of her kingdom. She reaffirms the commitments made by her soldiers in the following words "They (the soldiers) would die rather than be the slaves of the British" (15). These statements made by Chennamma and all her officers are illustrative of their chauvinism that manifests in their fight with the East India Company which represents imperialism. In her first fight with the Britishers she won victory over enemies by killing many soldiers. She directed Balya to kill Thackery the collector of Dharwad. Her

army triumphantly captured Elliot and Stevenson two officers of the company together with their wives and children. She imprisoned these officers and treated them as hostage in order to coerce the East India Company to grant her autonomy and self-governance.

As the Britishers found their position precarious due to imprisonment of their officers, their wives and children, they desperately resorted to treachery and made a false promise to end all hostilities with the queen of Kittur. Chennamma, the queen was beguiled by their false assurance and released the imprisoned officers along with their wives and children with the assumption of restoration of full autonomy. As the vested interest and ill-motivated purpose of the British were served consequent upon the release of the officers,

Mr. Alphinstone the Governor of Bombay unscrupulously ordered Mr. Chaplin, the Commissioner of Deccan to attack the fort of the queen with a vast army so as to defeat them and capture the fort. The fight between the army of the queen and that of the East India Company ensued with gallantry. In consequence of this battle, the army of Kittur was defeated miserably due to treachery hatched by the Britishers. Although the former fought with the spirit of excessive patriotism yet it could not overthrow the enemies being victimized by conspiracy. But the queen of Kittur professed her gallantry and valour till the end of the battle after which she was constrained to surrender her fort desperately to the imperialists in consequence of her discomfiture. Thus, the heroic sacrifice and martyrdom of the queen bear authenticity to her embodiment of chauvinism for the motherland and deep rooted animosity towards imperialism that

was deeply ingrained in the mind of the Britishers.

In similar rebellions launched by other Indian kings to defend their kingdoms the Britishers have invariably resorted to conspiracy and treachery in order to conquer them and annex their territories with the spirit of imperialism. Thus, in all cases of battles with the Britishers, the chauvinism has all along been defeated by imperialism. But the only exception is the final war of independence waged by Gandhiji that resulted in the victory of chauvinism over imperialism. It has to be conclusively assumed that the fight between the kingdom of Kittur and the East India Company was in a sense a clash between chauvinism and imperialism in which the latter gets the better of the former.

The fight of the Rani of Kittur resembles to a great extent that of the Rani of Jhansi. Both the queens had to face the similarly insurmountable hazardous situations in their conflict with the East India Company. Both were heroic and valiant in their defence. They had to bear with the tragedy of the death of their husbands and sons. As each of them adopted a son, the Britishers denied them the right of adoption by enforcing the law of Doctrine of Lapse that was designed to dispossess the kings or queens of their kingdom for having no heirs. Both the queens were threatened to surrender their forts to the British. Chennamma and Laxmibai both challenged respectively their threats outright and refused to submit to them. They fought with the Britishers heroically and valiantly and nevertheless lost their kingdoms. They became victims to treachery in their respective fights with the British. The only difference between these

queens lies in their exhibition of heroic adventure in the battle. Whereas Laxmibai fought physically as an invincible warrior, and as an adventurer, Chennamma fought with the Britishers by deploying her army without taking part physically in the fight but she tactfully maneuvered it. However, both the queens were epitomes of chauvinism, heroism and adventure. These heroines are acknowledged as the sources of inspiration of patriotism and martyrdom for the women of the world. Both these heroic ladies had to lose the battles but exceptional is the heroic achievement of St. Joan who led her army strategically against the English and defeated them for the sake of her love for France.

The history of Europe narrates the adventure and miracle of a lady named Saint Joan. She is known as the most notable warrior saint in Christian calendar. Although she claims to be a Catholic yet she was a protestant martyr. But she was ill-reputed for her heresy, witchcraft and sorcery. She reiterated that her voice was the voice of God. She was having conversation every day with saints Catherine and Margaret. She enthrones Charles the uncrowned prince to the throne of France after the death of his father. She claims herself to be a soldier and dresses herself as a soldier. She speaks to the prince "I am a soldier, I do not want to be thought of as a women" (16). She plans to lead a French army against the English in order to drive them away from Orleans and from France and to crown Charles in the cathedral at Rehim. She speak to Charles "I am sent to you to drive the English away from Orleans and France"(17). She is endowed with superhuman courage by virtue of which she overcomes all dangers and obstacles, which she encounters in her battle with the English. She leads the

French army strategically to enable it to overpower the enemies. She states "our men will take them (fort) I will lead them"(18). She enables the French army by virtue of her masculine spirit to vanquish the English army. Chaplin one of the army officers of the English confesses "The matter, my lord, is that we the English have been defeated. We are being defeated over and over again"(19). In consequence of their defeat, they ascribe this failure to the supernatural power of sorcery exorcized by the girl Joan.

Joan as a sorceress is condemned for her delivery of voices from God. Chaplin states "she acts as if she herself were the church. She brings the message of God to Charles"(20). On the whole Joan is recognized as an invincible soldier and a dangerous witch, who is tried by an ecclesiastical court and burnt to death by its order. She faces her trial courageously and braves death sentence with temerity. Thus, she is upheld in the history as the most courageous women for her adventurous military exploits against the English. She is also recognized as venerable for her sacrifice and martyrdom.

Another rebellion against the British was masterminded by a freedom fighter Bhaskara Rao in Naragund state in Karnak in the latter half of 19th century. He crusaded against the colonial rule of the British and their policies which were prejudicial to the interest of Indian. But the latter suppressed the freedom fighters and enforced their laws to paralyze the natives. Venkatappanayaka of Surpur one of the supporters of Bhaskararao asserts his decision to fight against the Britishers "Let us swear by the name of God that we are willing to sacrifice our lives for the freedom of our country. Either we should

achieve victory in the holywar or attain heroic heaven on the battlefield”(21). Bhaskararao, who had no heir, was debarred from adopting a son. He swears “I will not have any peace of mind until we drive out the red faced monkeys from our country. That is why all the patriots have decided to fight with them”(22). He had to encounter many obstacles due to partial and discriminatory administration of the colonizers. He sought the help of the kings of princely states to join his rebellion against the British but the latter resorted to treachery and conspiracy against him. They malignantly won over some of his most trusted officers Banyabapur and Krishnajipant to their side and exploited them to commit treachery with Bhasakararao. Krishnajipant one of the traitors articulates pretentiously and hypocritically in favour of Bhaskararao “Sarkar you have declared war on the British people on patriotic grounds”(23). As a result of the conspiracy of the traitors this crusader was disheartened and fled like the Rani of Jhansi from his kingdom to escape the captivity of the British. He could not bear with the arbitrary and autocratic rule of the colonizers. Since he opposed their imperialistic objectives, they tried to capture him and hang him but their plan was thwarted due to his flight and disappearance. Bhaskararao was filled with the spirit of chauvinism that inspired him to rebel against foreign rule in order to protect his land. Bhaskararao inspires his fighters “We must fight for our freedom until our last breathe and attain heroic Heaven on the battle field” (24). The upheaval of this rebellion also coincides with the outbreak of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857.

The battle of the Rani of Kittur is reminiscent of another Sepoy Mutiny that

broke out at Khordha in Odisha in 1817. This rebellion fought by the sepoy of Khordha against the British is comparable with that of the Rani of Kittur for the similarities of resistance. As the Britishers after capturing Cuttack, Baleswar, Puri and Ganjam, proceeded towards Khordha to conquer it, the inhabitants of this place who were the born warriors and expert in sword fighting resisted their advance by fighting valiantly and killing numerous soldiers of the army of the former. In this rebellion, a great warrior Boxi Jagabandhu played a dominant role as a torch-bearer and infused the soldiers of Khordha with the spirit of chauvinism and commanded them to fight valiantly and vanquish the British soldiers. Herkot a British officer asked Jagabandhu “What is your last decision”. The latter replied “My last decision is to wage a war with you”(25). As the warriors of Khordha killed many of the soldiers of the British who advanced towards this territory with self-confidence of victory, were miserably overthrown and shocked. Impey an officer of the British army said “Khordha is burning due to mutiny of the soldiers”(26). This victory of Sepoy of Khordha is attributable to the heroic fight of Boxi Jagabandhu, who is the mastermind behind the rebellion. G. Martindel wrote desperately to the East India Company “There is a little chance of accomplishing the early seizure of Jagabandhu”(27). This defeat of the Britishers demoralized and mortified them and compelled them to surrender to Boxi Jagabandhu and his army of Sepoy. They had to compromise with the inhabitants desperately as a result of which the freedom of Khordha was safeguarded and protected.

Similarly history of Odisha introduces a chapter to recount a similar rebellion

launched by a heroic personality Veer Surendra Sai in the district of Sambalpur in 1827. This leader of the rebellion was an undaunted crusader against the Britishers and fought continuously for 20 years to drive them out of Sambalpur and restore kingship to the kingdom. Surendra Sai getting hot blooded with chauvinism mobilized a strong army and fought with the enemies to justify his claim and right of ownership to the throne of Sambalpur as its virtual heir but the Britishers arbitrarily deprived him of his kingship and enthroned a weak one as the king of Sambalpur so as to serve their vested interest. Surendra fought with the British with such valour that it jeopardized their existence at Sambalpur but all his plans to defeat the enemies were foiled due to machination of the traitors who opposed him and sided with his enemies with a view to securing their favour. They ingratiated with the British Officers and divulged the clandestine activities of Surendra Sai in order to undermine his adventurous struggle. They even played the villainous role to help the Britishers to capture him. Consequently, Surendra Sai was arrested and imprisoned in the Asurgarh fort where he was reduced to skeleton and breathed his last. Thus, this rebellion launched by Surendra Sai at Sambalpur resembles to a great extent that of the queen of Kittur.

In this context reference may be relevantly made to Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* in order to bring to light the colonial encounter that subjugated the natives of a Nigerian village Umuofia. This novel depicts the racial fight between the Umuofians and the Europeans and its disastrous consequences reaped by the natives. Their defeat resulted in their disintegration of racial unity and

degeneration of their culture due to the colonization of their land by the Europeans who thrust their own culture on the natives by exercising their supremacy over them. Hence, the fight between the Umuofians and the Europeans can be ideologically interpreted as a conflict between chauvinism and imperialism. In every case of warfare the natives are all along vanquished and suppressed by the external forces. Thus, it has to be assumed according to the law of life that the weaker one is generally discomfited in the fight by the stronger force. Hence, all racial fights described above have been defeated by the external force except in the case of Khordha rebellion in which the Britishers had to submit to Boxi Jagabandhu the harbinger of Khordha rebellion. This is the only rebellion that defeated and mortified the British who found no other alternative but to compromise with the native warriors of Khordha. Hence, the people of Odisha claim this rebellion to be recognized as the first war of independence.

Among the rebellious lady fighters, who have exhibited their uncommon and unparalleled heroism and bravery in their fight against the British imperialists are the Rani of Kittur, the Rani of Jhansi and Saint Joan of Arc. These ladies have been immortal in the history for exhibition of their gallantry, sacrifice and martyrdom. Most particularly the Rani of Kittur and the Rani of Jhansi are enshrined in the memory of Indian women for their patriotic fight for their motherland. The playwright Basavaraj Naikar has transmuted the history of the Rani of Kittur in to a play and dramatized it so as to impress upon the readers and the audience, the glory of the gigantic fight of the queen with the British colonizers. He has assigned the protagonist a pivotal role

in order to elevate her position as a freedom fighter. His play assumes much significance for exploration of the history of Rani of Kittur a small kingdom in Karnatak. The characters related to the queen are all embodiment of chauvinism and the British officers who plan to capture the fort of Kittur breathe out the air of imperialism in all their military operations. The play is concluded with the portrayal of the tragedy of imprisonment of the three surviving queens of Kittur in the fort of Bailahongala. Thus, ends the play with the annihilation of the kingdom of Kittur and its annexation to the East India Company that reigns in India with its unchallengeable paramount power and authority. However the Rani of Kittur is ever acknowledged as an exceptional lady of heroism and valiance for her heroic sacrifice for the cause of her own land of Kittur

In conclusion, it is established that the playwright has written the play. *The Rani of Kittur* with a view to highlighting the hidden history of the battle fought by the army of the queen of Kittur with that of the British imperialists. Credit has to be

Notes and References:

1. Basavaraj, Naikar, *The Rani of Kittur*, Bangalore : CVG Books, 2015, P81.
2. Ibid P84.
3. Ibid P85.
4. Ibid P86.
5. Ibid P88.
6. Ibid P89.
7. Ibid P105.
8. Ibid P105.
9. Ibid P112.
10. Ibid P128.
11. Ibid P138.
12. Raghunath, Rout. *The Rani of Jhansi*, Cuttack : Students Store, 2012 P2.
13. Ibid P26.
14. Ibid P38.

attributed to Basavaraj Naikar for the skilful exploitation of the historical theme of an encounter between two hostile races on the issue of the conflict between chauvinism and imperialism. The play serves to awaken patriotism in the millions of Indian mind and provoke their antagonism against imperialism. Thus, the play exerts tremendous impact on Indian particularly on the women section of the country, who draw inspiration from the Rani of Kittur to be brave and daring in the battlefield of social and familial life.

After a succession of numerous battles were fought for freedom and independence from the time of inception of civilization till the dawn of the twentieth century, imperialism as an ideology that posed a menace to humanity, gradually declined and died out completely in the global sphere. With the democratization of the nations of the world the patriots, the nationalists and the denizens heave a sigh of relief due to the extinction of this anti-democratic dragon, imperialism that is irretrievably buried in the past without any hope of its resurrection.

15. Basavaraj, Naikar, *The Rani of Kittur*, Bangalore CVG Books, 2015, P86.
16. Bernard, Shaw. *Saint Joan*, London: Orient Longman, 1995, P-90.
17. Ibid P95
18. Ibid P101
19. Ibid P114
20. Ibid P-106
21. Basavaraj, Naikar. *A Dreamer of Freedom*, Bangalore: CVG Books, 2015 P-109
22. Ibid P-110.
23. Ibid P-127.
24. Ibid P-127.
25. Baidanka, Das. *Baxi Jagabandhu*, Cuttack: Satya Narayan Books Publishers, 2013, P10.
26. Ibid P-35.
27. Ibid P49.