Chapter 3

The Regional Elements in Basavaraj Naikar’s

Light in the House

India is known for its religious/spiritual tradition first and foremost. Hindustan is of Hindu religion. Later Islam came here as if a conquest religion and therefore it is not yet accepted. Christianity too came in the same guise, though it is a mild religion. Religious sects that rebelled against extremism in Vedic tradition became new religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Lingayatism and Sikkism. There are other refugee religions like Parsism.

The Vedic traditions as Shaivism and Vaishnavism are powerful traditions with us. In Post-independence India everyone has a limited religious freedom. Now one can live in peace. Indians believe in religious consciousness, the holy texts, commentaries, gurus/sants/swamis/mahants etc. There are plenty of books on every great religious head as that of Buddha, Mahavir, Guru Nanak, Kabir, Basava, Akkamahadevi, Shisunal Sharif, and Siddarudhaswami of Hubli. S.T. Kallapur writes:

Hinduism has always laid great stress on moral and spiritual values, but human nature being what it is, there was constant neglect of such values. Every age provided saints and religious luminaires, who strove to revive spiritual values in society. The cultural history of our country bears witness to the existence of such yogis.(Kalhapur, Light ix)

Basavaraj Naikar’s second novel Light in the House (2009) is a perfect hagiography. The Deccan Plateau produced so many religious leaders in modern times (British reign) such as Ramanashri, Raghavendraswami of Mantralaya, the swamis of Dattapeethas, Kumaraswamiji of Tapovan Dharwad, Rajanish Osho of Pune, Sahrif Saheb of Shisunal, and his guru Govindabhatta of Kalasa,
Siddaruda Swami of Hubballi, Madivaleshwar of Garag, Murugharaja of Athani, Gavisiddeswara of Koppal and Kumaraswami of Hanagal. Nowadays we have Sri Sri Sri of Bangalore, Shri Siddeswaraswami of Bijapur, and even the rebellious Matemadevi. There is a regional tradition or local color writing on every one of them. Books on Raghavendraswami, the Rajanish Osho of Pune and Siddarudaswami are so many. The people adore these religious heads.

Sharif Saheb of Shisunala – the character in Naikar’s *Light in the House* acts as if a light in human mind. Sharif sahib is considered as a saint-poet. He is our veritable Kabir of Karnataka.

It is said, *Light in the House* (2006) is a pioneering work of Naikar who is an inspired forerunner in spreading the fame of Sharif Saheb, a peerless mystic and saint-poet of north Karnataka, in the English-speaking world. (Joseph 200)

Basavaraj Naikar’s novel begins with Prof. S.T. Kalhapur’s preface. Kolhapur himself a great scholar of English with a PhD from a university in the USA, praises the spiritual novel by his colleague Prof. Naikar. Kalhpaur writes:

Dr. Basavaraj Naikar has done commendable work in collecting information from various sources. The problem arises when there are two different versions of the same incident. For example, one version is that Sharif’s wife Fatima died in childbirth and the child, too, later because of cholera. The other version is that the child (a daughter) grew up and gave Sharif a great grandson whom he loved immensely. Such problems are not rare in Indian history since we do not understand the importance of history. (Kalhapur, ix)

Prof. Naikar’s Preface serves like an author’s note, helping the lay-readers, and, of course, the non-Kannadiga readers to comprehend the text properly. Naikar writes humbly:
I have presented the interesting life of Sharif Saheb, the great spiritual songster in the form of a novel for the benefit of non-Kannada readers, in order to inspire them to go back to his songs and philosophy, which taught the perennial Indian principle of ‘detachment’ or ‘resignation’, which is a panacea for all the maladies of worldly life. I hope my novel will help the reader to light the lamp of spirituality in his corporeal house. *(Light xii)*

*Light in the House* is not a big novel as that of Naikar’s first novel *The Sun Behind the Cloud*. It runs just for 172 pages. It has 37 chapters, each chapter serving as a unit of thought. The chapters have not titles as such, but numbers.

Another interesting thing, in fact, worthiness of the novel is that Naikar has translated Sharif’s poems in English; and he has interspersed the narrative with it. The prose narrative reads like Thomas Hardy’s Wessex novels where the verses intensify the effect upon the readers. S. G. Vaidya writes,

Both Guru Govindabhatta and Sharif taught the world with valuable words and dreamed of a harmonious and happy society. They taught the world to come out of countless contrabands that srangled people. Their teachings were the products of the practices and their own experiences. *(Vaidya 126)*

Chapter 1 starts with Sharif Saheb’s background. Accordingly, Naikar describes the village of Shisunala (also spelt as Shisuvinahala meaning genteel). It is in Shiggaon tehsil of Old Dharwad district (now in the newly carved Haveri district) of north Karnataka. It is the time of 1810s – 20s, the British ruling the country. The region then had princely states like Naragund, Mundaragi, Kittur, Chitradurga, Jamakhandi and Sorapura. The British war in Kittur should have happened in 1824.
Socio-religious scene is the old one itself. The Hindu-Muslim collaboration existed as it came down straightway from the Mughals. Christian Missionaries had justly begun their balancing act. Minorities existed side by side. Lingayatism as a religion was the predominant religion, even having its sway on Muslims.

Hajarat Imam Saheb, the father of Sharif Saheb was of Divakar clan of Shisunala. He was a semi-literate pious man with an abiding faith in Islam, yet he respected other faiths. In fact, the 12th century Shaiva faith dominated. The Sharanas’ lives as embodied in the works of Chamaras and Harihar guided the folks.

Thus Harajat Imam Saheb read the Urdu Koran at home and prayed in mosque regularly. Of course, he saluted at the Basava shrine as the Hindus saluted the shrines of Fakirs. Hajarat Imam Saheb was a small scale farmer.

Naikar himself from the rural Dharwad district (his native town being Naragund, the locale of Naragund kingdom of his first novel The Sun Behind the Cloud) describes the life of the bygone age. He thus describes the people’s way of life of the first decades of 19th century, when he describes Hajarat Imam’s happy life with his doyenne Hajjuma:

Imam Saheb went to the kitchen and sat on the wooden seat. His wife, Hajjumma, served him his breakfast of roti and lentils. He ate his breakfast silently. Hajjuma was pat-patting the jowar roti on a stone plate. The fuel sticks were burning in the oven thereby spreading the smoke all over the kitchen. After Imam Saheb finished his first roti, Hajjuma served him the second roti, which was hot and steaming. Then he ate the third roti also. “Take one more roti. You’ll feel hungry on the farm,” said Hajjuma. “No, no, this is enough. If I eat more, I’ll feel sleepy and therefore cannot work hard on the farm,” said Imam Saheb and washed
his fingers in the brass plate. He went to the outer room of his house and sat chewing betel leaf, nut and lime. Inside the kitchen Hajjuma cleaned the plate in which her husband had eaten his breakfast and burnished it with mud and water. Then she sat eating her own breakfast. (*Light 1-2*)

The way Hajarat’s wife cooked and served, and the way Hajarat adored her; and his style of functioning at farm are too faithful to the local realities. Look at the local colour word *roti*, and *pat-patting* the rotis.

Hajarat is a medicine man besides a farmer. He is a herbalist. Soon Shivappa, the streetman comes with an ailing child. Hajarat examines and treats the boy; and he does not charge him. This is very appealing. He says, “I do it out of a sense of service to society.” Hajarat Saheb assured the same to Kallappa to quieten his niece in the evening of that day.

Then Imam Saheb led the two oxen towards his farm. He had placed the black blanket on his left shoulder and the thronged whip on his right. The two white bullocks trod the uneven path tinkling the metal bells. Hajjuma looked at her husband until he disappeared. Then she fed the cows and calves. She then rested in the afternoon.

The social problem of a woman is implicit here. If she does not bear a child she feels bad. Thus Hajjuma was awakened by the prattling of the neighboring children outside the window. She washed her face and opened the door. She sat on the stone platform of her house where the children were already playing ‘tiger-house’. Naikar writes of her inward life:

She watched their games with great affection. Then the women of the lane came there eating the betel leaves and betel nuts. They chitchatted about their food, crops, rains and festivals in a random fashion. Hajjuma would take the babies of neighbouring women and cuddle them or rock them in her arms. She secretly longed for a child of her own. (*Light 3*)
The above paragraph speaks of house – and how a couple from a farming house conduct their affairs.

Hajjuma happens to be childless for long. Naikar puts it in her mouth as follows: “After the husband left his home, Hajjuma felt rather lonely and again wished, “How I wish I had a child of my own! O Lord Allah, please have mercy on me and bless me with a child.” (Light 5)

Imam Saheb confesses to a friend this:

“Physically, she is all right. But she is deeply worried about our childlessness. I have been helping a number of my villagers by my social service, but ironically enough, I have not been able to console my wife on this count. Tell me, friend, what I should do!” Imam Saheb grew pale with anxiety. There was pathos in his voice. (Light 6)

Soon a friend suggested that the Muslim couple must pray at Hajaresh Khadaris shrine in the village of Hulgur on New moon day. Imam Saheb believed it as Allah would not let the faithful to go wasted. However, this was his last attempt. Once the husband spoke it to his wife, the good wife agreed to it. The couple travelled to Hulgur by a cart. They entered the holy shrine of Hajaresh Khadari. Hajjuma prayed thus: “Your Holiness, kindly grant me a child and remove the stigma of my barrenness. If I get a son, I shall name him after you by way of my gratitude to you.” Hajjuma’s prayer came from the bottom of her heart. She forgot herself for a moment and felt a sudden thrill of horripilation. It is said,

She felt as if a new flash of energy raced through her veins. She sweated profusely. She had an unprecedented experience in her life. She was brought down from her trance only when the moulvi brought the platter of incense before her. (Light 10)
The couple walked out of the hall and sat under a tree in the compound. They had a lunch. Soon the pious man had a dialogue with another pilgrim:

“Brother, where do you come from?”

The pilgrim replied, “I have come from Naragund. By the way, where do you come from?”

Imam Saheb replied, “I come from Shisunala.” “Do you come here regularly?” asked the pilgrim.

“No, brother, I have come here for the first time. What about you?” asked Imam Saheb.

“Yes, brother, I have been coming here every now and then. Whenever I grow restless, I come here and get some peace of mind,” replied the pilgrim.

“Don’t you think the shrine is very popular in this part of the country?” asked Imam Saheb.

“There is no denying that, brother. Several pilgrims flock to this shrine for having their wishes granted by the holy spirit of Hajaresha,” replied the pilgrim. (*Light* 11)

The pilgrim recounted the history of the shrine thus:

“Originally Hajaresha Khadari came from Savanur. But the reason why he came to this little village and settled down here at Hulagur is rumoured to be like this: When Nawab Abdul Karim Khan used to rule over Savanur, he happened to rape the daughter of Hajaresha Khadari in 1780. Deeply annoyed by this sad event, Khadari is said to have left Savanur and settled down in Hulagur village. Then with his penance and meditation he fulfilled the desires of many believers in this village and endeared himself to them. That is the reason why those admirers built this
holy grave here after his death and started service and festivals in his name. In course of time they began to conduct the urus also every year on the Full Moon Day of the month of Magha. Countless believers flock here for attending the urus. Many visitors tell me that they have had their problems solved after visiting this shrine.” (Light 12)

The sthala purana sounded very true to Imam Saheb and Hajjuma. The couple returned to Shisunala.

Imam Saheb believed that God helps those who pray Him, or God helps those who help themselves as the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson has said. The couple’s wishes came true. Hajjuma became pregnant. A neighbor Mumtaj burst into a smile and said, “You have no reason to be depressed.”

The couple became spiritual with inward joy. The very next day they went to Hulagur in their cart and expressed their great sense of gratitude by offering a special service to the shrine of Hajaresha Khadari. After returning, Hajjuma’s interest in religion and faith in God went on increasing. Imam Saheb, who noticed her new interest in religion, tried his best to explain some religious ideas to her in his leisure time.

A few months later Hajjuma delivered a good-looking male child. One lady said, “See brother, your baby resembles you very closely in every facial feature.” “Yes sister, yes,” said Imam Saheb.

This is a spiritual continuation of traditions. On the fortieth day, Imam Saheb conducted naming ceremony. The womenfolk of both Hindu and Muslim religions gathered in his house. The multi-coloured wooden cradle was decked with garlands. The women sang to the accompaniment of dholaks. Imam Saheb’s heart was filled with a great sense of joy. The handsome baby boy was clothed in new bright-coloured garments. A black dot of soot was applied on its
cheeks to ward off the evil eye. Then five women placed it in the cradle and began to rock it slowly to the accompaniment of a lullaby song. They named him Sharif.

Little Sharif was a healthy and good-looking boy. He became addicted to studying. Sharif is an extraordinarily inquisitive boy. One day when a Rudrappa takes a medicine for stomach ache, Sharif asks his father for its name. Imam Saheb does not reveal it to him. Another day, Sharif asks as to why Imam Saheb has to do social service. The father cannot help but to explain it. He tells social service is a service to God. In reply to Sharif’s question about ghosts’ the sire explains:

“Beta, whenever a man dies with a sense of deep frustration or disappointment, he becomes a ghost and enters another living person for the fulfilment of his desires.”

Sharif seemed to be partially satisfied but became more curious. He posed the next question, “Abbajan, how is the possessed man freed from the ghost?”

“Dear beta, these ghosts will be driven out of the possessed man or woman by my incantations and rituals.” (Light 21)

The next day, Imam Saheb went to the local mosque. As usual he took his boy with him. He spread a small mattress upon the floor, knelt on it. Then he plugged his ears with his thumbs and prayed, “Allah ho Akbar. Ya Illalla, Mohammadur Rasulallah.” Sharif imitated his father, though he did not understand why he did what his father did. Soon Sharif asked his father about namaj. Imam Saheb said namaj is a prayer to God. But he failed to explain why the namaj should be said in mosque only.

On the way Imam Saheb took Sharif to the open air temple and bowed down to the idol of Lord Basavanna mounted on a stone pillar. The deity was
considered to be the Lord of Shisunala. Sharif imitated his father and bowed down to it. Sharif asked his father, “Abbajan, what is that bullock and why did you bow down to it?” Imam Saheb could not explain the boy what is the Hindu incarnation. Sharif grew adamant in philosophical / religious discourses as much as in his studies and country games.

The happy Muslim couple thought of Sharif’s education as it was most essential for a boy of such nature. Imam Saheb consulted an astrological almanac and singled out an auspicious day for the enrolment of his son in some good school. Accordingly, on the following Monday, Imam Saheb asked his son to put on a clean shirt and shorts. Then both walked past the temple of Basavanna and the mosque and reached the monastery where the local school was run by a jangama called Siddharamayya. They entered the compound where Siddharamayya was seated beneath the bhel tree teaching students. He was reciting the calculation tables and the small children were repeating the same in chorus.

Imam Saheb requested the teacher, “Siddharamayya sir, I have brought my son Sharif. I request you to accept him as your student and teach him whatever is possible. I shall return your debt in some form or the other.” (Light 25)

The bright marks of vibhuti on the teacher’s forehead made him look greatly. Imam Saheb had heard about the righteousness and reputation of Siddharamayya. Siddharamayya asked the boy,

“What’s your name, boy?”

The boy answered boldly and clearly, “My name is Sharif.”

“Why do you wish to come to our school, boy?” asked the teacher.
“I want to be a learned man,” replied Sharif boldly.

The teacher sensed that the boy was not shy like most of other boys. Then he said to Imam Saheb, “Your son appears to be very cute. I will be very glad to accept him as my student. He, can join the class right now.” (Light 26)

Sharif attended the school regularly. He learnt Kannada alphabets. He respected Shiddaramayya. He led the other boys, for collective learning and cultural activities. As the years went by, Sharif made conspicuous progress. His classmates simply wondered at the sharpness of his intelligence and powerful memory. They gave up the hope of competing with him. Besides, Sharif studied Virashaiva philosophy. He took an interest in Basava and Sarvajna.

One day, Imam Saheb gave hospitality to the teacher, and said:

“Sir, you have educated my son and enlightened him. you have given the wealth that cannot be stolen by any thief. I am very grateful to you for this vidyadana. It is never possible for us to return your debt. Yet we would like to do so at least symbolically. We request you to accept our gifts as a fee and bless our son.” (Light 28)

Siddharamayya was touched by the gratitude of Sharif’s parents. He said the boy is intelligent beyond his age. He called him ‘an awakened soul.’

Sharif had now learnt not only reading and writing, but was well acquainted with the essentials of Virasaiva religion and poetry in addition to other classics. He was rather unhappy that he could not go to the Ayya’s school again. But his quest for knowledge was inwardly growing boundless. He knew his own Qur'an.
Sharif as his father worried desired higher education, that is too Vedic education. How a Muslim boy should get Vedic education? A friend of Imam Saheb suggested that it was possible if he meets Govindabhatta of Kalasa, once Imam Saheb’s classmate. The friend said though born in Kalasa village, Govindabhatta has been running a Vedic school at Gudageri for the past many years. His ancestors enjoyed the status of royal astrologers in the palace of Vijayanagara emperors. After the fall of Vijayanagara Empire these astrologers migrated from place to place for their livelihood and finally settled at Kalasa.

After a couple of days, Imam Saheb took Sharif to Gudageri. Both walked the distance. Imam Saheb and Sharif saw the whitewashed spire of the temple. Both were eager to meet the preacher Govindabhatta. As they entered the main gate of the temple, they saw the bare-bodied Brahmin disciples chanting Sanskrit mantras.

Imam Saheb joined his palms and said, ‘Salutations, sir.’

Sharif stood awestruck by the side of his father. Govindabhatta, who saw the guest from a little distance stopped his teaching. As he came nearer the guest, he could identify the latter by his beard. “Oh Imam Saheb, what a pleasant surprise! Please come on and be seated here,” said Govindabhatta. The entire dialogue hints at the great intimacy between Imam Saheb and Govindabhatta. Because both happened to be childhood friends! Imam Saheb admired Govindabhatta’s spiritual courage to renounce the world.

On the other hand, Govindabhatta said even a householder could do this. The conversation between the guests and host is simply philosophical:

“Your son seems to be very cute,” said Govindabhatta admiringly.
“My son has a great quest for knowledge. He has completed his primary school education in the local Ayya’s school. He has already learnt the art of reading and writing and is acquainted with the Quran and the Virasaiva religious works. But he is not satisfied with that. He wants to know the Vedas and the Upanishads and other Sanskrit scriptures. That is the reason why I have brought him here. I’ll be very grateful to you if you can accept him as your disciple and teach him the Vedic and Upanishadic lore,” requested Imam Saheb. (Light 36)

Govindabhatta felt very happy inwardly. Govindabhatta agreed to admit the boy, however. He wished to sound the boy. He, therefore, asked the boy,

“What’s your name, young boy?”

“I am called by the name of Sharif, sir,” pat came the answer from Sharif.

“Then what’s the name of your father?” asked Govindabhatta.

“The name of which father, sir?” counter-questioned Sharif.

Govindabhatta was nonplussed by the young boy’s reaction and asked, “Why Sharif? You are asking such an embarrassing question. How many fathers a child can have?”

Sharif gave the answer instantly, “Sir, a soul is born countless times. And at each birth it has a father. Thus a man has several fathers. I, therefore, wished to know which of these fathers you referred to. Do you want to know my physical father or spiritual father?” (Light 36)

Govindabhatta was surprised. But he wanted to test the boy a bit further. “All right, Sharif, could you tell me the exact difference between a physical father and a spiritual father?” Sharif said, “Sir, the physical father gives us birth and brings us into the world of mortality and bondage, whereas the spiritual
father enlightens our soul.” Govindabhatta was really thrilled by Sharif’s awakening.

Govindabhatta loved the boy. The regular Brahmin disciples were observing everything from a distance and with a sense of puzzlement.

The next day Sharif came to the temple along with his guru Govindabhatta. The Brahmin disciples felt uneasy. But they could not express their feelings. Govindabhatta went on teaching Sanskrit lessons. As the days went by, Sharif began to excel in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita and other scriptural texts. He won the heart of Govindabhatta by his answers of advanced level spirituality.

Sharif had a tussle with his Brahmin classmates about the concept of pollution – the population of mind and body. The guru asked his Brahmin disciples – Gopal and Narayan – to tread on his shoes, which the two refused; but Sharif obeyed him. The guru said: “Dear Sharif, you are the only disciple who can accompany your guru.” So the two went to Mahakali temple.

Sharif stayed with his guru in Gudageri for many years. He mastered a basic knowledge in the Vedas and Upanishads.

After passing his mulki examination, Sharif Saheb could not continue his formal education. He learnt Urdu by self-effort. He did not want to be idle either. Attracted by the partial self-supporting system encouraged by the Board of Education, established in 1836 by the permission of Sir Thomas Munroe, Governor of Madras, Sharif Saheb wanted to start a school for the benefit of children. The elders of Shisunala came forward to extend their help. Consequently Sharif Saheb opened a school at the local temple of Chandreshwara and began to teach the students with a sense of dedication. Later he extended his educational service by starting schools in Basanala,
Mandiganala, Kyalagonda, Yerebudihala and Gunjala villages. Through his selfless dissemination of knowledge to rural students he became very popular.

Sharif left the job after a few years as it became perhaps boring. He began spending time in spiritual discourses. Sharif began to participate in bayalata dealing with the themes of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata. He had a handwritten copy of Prabhulingalile in his bag wherever he went. Because of his great respect for Basaveshwara, he composed a Basaveshwara Dandaka. Likewise, he had great reverence for Prabhudeva. That was the reason why he used to say that there was no devotee like Basavanna and no saint like Prabhudeva. He participated actively in Muharram, Alavi and Karbala and composed rivayats impromptu and experiment with them by introducing into them the technique of Hardesi-Nagesi or sawal-jawab so popular in lavani. He composed prophetic songs. Similarly he used to compose riddle-songs and throw challenges to his rivals to interpret them.

As days went by Sharif Saheb became an itinerant singer wandering in different villages, meeting a variety of people and reacting to them in the form of his instant songs. Basappa Kumbar would take down his songs. Once Sharif Saheb asked Basappa to take down his song:

Take down the song,
Take down and Understand its meaning.
When the immaculate knowledge Comes to the boiling point,
Concentrate your attention on that And grasp the essential Principle. (Light 44-45)
Sharif would meet his guru Govindabhatta again and again. He would hold discussions with him on various social, religious or metaphysical issues. One day, he asked about caste. Govindabhatta said:

“See, Sharif, you are absolutely right. Many people hang upon caste and colour of skin just for selfish ends. Casteism happens to be a means of livelihood for these people. But fortunately it is not for us. Internal purity is more important than anything else,” explained Govindabhatta. *(Light 46)*

The two rested a while. The guru smoke. The guru would occasionally take drinks and ganja. This was how the mystics of the region lived. The guru rested, as Sharif massaged him. The Sharif slept too with the words, ‘Guru, please bless me. The guru said to the sleeping disciple, “May all your feelings be expressed in the form of songs. May goddess Saraswati settle on your tongue.” Sharif was suddenly awakened by the electric vibration of spiritual power. “I am awakened, father. I felt as if somebody wrote something on my tongue. I am inspired to sing. Shall I sing sir?” asked Sharif seeking his guru’s permission:

Save me, holy sir, save me,
You, Ocean of Compassion. *(Light 49)*

This was an inspired song. Govindabhatta raised his hands blessing him, “My dear Sharif, may your songs enrich the world of Kannada letters. You go to your village, Shisunala and try to understand life.” Sharif agreed.

Thereafter Sharif Saheb stayed in Shisunala. One day, his own house leaked, while his mother worried about it. But Sharif worried about the house called his own body, “O God. This house is a house filled with darkness. O Gurunatha Govindabhatta, bring kindly light into this encircling darkness.” When the mother bothered about the dilapidated house, Sharif burst forth: “This
house is born repeatedly for eighty-four lakhs of times and dies an equal number of times. This house has rickety beams and rafters and a thatched cover. It has several holes in it.” (Light 52)

Hajjuma could not understand the philosophical significance of his words. By that time Imam Saheb arrived. He seemed to have overheard the dialogue between the mother and son. He said, “Don’t you worry about falling down, Sharif. In life as well as in yogic practice, people fall down only to rise high.” Sharif was really impressed by his father’s words. He burst forth:

The house is leaking, father
The house is leaking
Because of grass ignorance.
Alas, there is none to repair it!
I cannot climb to the roof
In this encircling darkness. (Light 52)

However, the parents were fed up of Sharif’s extreme spirituality. So his mother even ordered him to go away. He said, “Mother, you ordered me to go… I shall definitely go away. I was born in your womb as a result of your punya of many lives and of the blessings of Hajaresha Khadaralinga. Now you have gifted me away to Govinda Gurunatha. I shall, therefore, go into his spiritual gymnasium where I shall burn to ashes the taint of mortality and live in the service of Lord Shiva. I shall follow that path from which there is no return. Kindly bless me, mother.”(Light 53) Sharif walking away.

Sharif left for Kalasa. He felt that Kalasa, his guru’s place of living would then be his too. This body-churching was ingrained in him. He met the absurd Ramabhatta and Shambhatta who poked their noses unnecessarily.
Govindabhatta sensed sharif’s arrival. He called him his son. He said his wife Laxmi that Sharif will kill ‘death’ itself. The guru said to the hesitating Sharif “Purity and pollution are mental states and not concerned with body.” Character matters he felt. Govindabhatta goaded, “Sharif, today happens to be *amrita siddhi yoga*. Let’s begin a new chapter on yoga. You have your bath and come clean and fresh.”

“All right, father. I shall take my bath and attend the yoga class,” said Sharif.

Then Laxmi said casually, “Sharif, it is but natural for a growing vine to be afflicted with insects. May God bless you.” The divine couple heard him singing the following song:

The body is going a waste, friend,
This body is going a waste.
He who knows its power is a yogi.
How did you live your life, man?
You wasted it in merely growing old.
You fool….
I understood it inwardly
And married a husband of my choice,
I obeyed his orders
And severed my obligation
To all others of the world. (*Light 60*)

When Sharif was singing in this Hindu spiritual mode, a mullah called him for namaj. Sharif waved his reply in a song:

Tell me, the learned ones.
Where was the mosque
Of the mullah?
Tell me, the learned ones,
Where was the alavi,
Jaggery offering
And recitation of the Quran? (Light 61)

The second mullah could not understand its deeper meaning. He said, “Don’t ask us these riddle-like-questions. Please tell us whether you come to our mosque or not.” Sharif answered boldly that he shall go to his mosque and he shall not go to theirs. Sharif said the body itself is the mosque. He said, ‘the action done without a sense of ego happens to be namaz. This can be done in the name of Allah and Allam.

The two mullahs were really embarrassed. Unable to control their anger, one of them said, “Wait, we are going to excommunicate you from our caste.” Sharif did not care for their threat.

When Sharif went to take his bath, he saw a belle – quite pretty in appearance. He was rather attracted; and he lost his mind. He stood there scrutinizing himself, “My guru has asked me to come with a clean body and a pure mind. Now my mind is polluted by my attraction for the young belle here. When my mind has become impure, it would be absurd on my part to clean my body externally by taking a bath. It would be tantamount to betraying my mentor. I do not know who that young belle is. She must be somebody’s daughter, somebody’s sister, somebody’s wife and somebody’s mother. What right did I have to lust for her? O my guru what shall I do now?” He realized that he did a mistake by loving her body. Chapter 13 speaks of the self-inflicted atonement Sharif is to face.
The entire incident about the purity of mind and the pitcher-carrying belle – all look bizarre. But this is part of life.

Naikar speaks of telepathy. Once Sharif was beaten by his own invitation, his guru too felt the whiplashes. Govindabhatta could not control his pain and burst out, “O Laxmi, I don’t understand how my son Sharif could suffer these whiplashes!”

Govindabhatta said man commits sins, and if he repents he can attain grace in this life itself.

Sharif grew a bit confident and wanted to confirm the truth, “Kindly lift me up, O my guru divine.”

Govindabhatta lifted up Sahrif by the arms compassionately.

Ramabhatta and Shamabhatta realized that Govindabhatta polluted the Brahmin community by allowing Sharif to stay with him. Sinappa felt the guru was a stumbling block for Brahmins. They felt Govindabhatta should be excommunicated. The two bhattas shouted: “Down with Govindabhatta.”

The couple Imam Saheb and Hajjuma felt separation and sorrow about Sharif. As his parents it was quite legitimate for the two to think so. At last, they worried about the Muslim leaders’ decision to excommunicate him. Hajjuma broke into tears and said,

“Moreover they complained that our son has chosen a Brahmin as his guru as if Muslims were not available. They abused our son and us as they wished. They said they would teach a lesson to our son. They warned us to be careful in life as there could be variations in our luck.”

(Light 73)
After hearing the words of his wife, Imam Saheb realized the gravity of situation. She suggested marriage for him. “If Sharif is married to a beautiful girl, his mind will be riveted in her. Consequently, he will forget all these spiritual obsessions and gravitate towards a householder’s life.” (Light 72) Imam Saheb seemed to get some idea. He said, “Look here dear, just now some idea flashed across my mind. You know that our Sharif will not dare disobey his guru Govindabhatta. Why not request that holy man to order our son to get married?” Hajjuma liked the idea immensely.

The village gowda one day walked chasing a beautiful woman. This was his natural practice. He accosted her, “O my dear young lady, tell me who you are.” The gowda blocked her way. The young lady looked at him angrily and said, “You dirty fellow, don’t block my way.” The gowda felt nettled by her disrespectful language and said, “An ordinary woman like you talking so irreverently to me, the village chief?” The young lady retorted, “Fellow, do you have any decency? Do you know how to talk with a married woman?” Thus the gowda exhibited his hauteur.

Meanwhile, Shamabhatta arrived there with his own problem, talking to the chief. Sharif too came there with his lighted soul.

The gowda thundered, “Eh, Sharif, don’t you know that you should greet me, the village chief? Has that Brahmin guru not taught you the manners?”

Sharif stared at the gowda and replied, “my guru Govindabhatta has taught this lesson on the very first day of my training.”

Soon Gowda kicked Sharif. Soon the gowda had health trouble too. Hardly had a few moments passed by when the gowda began to feel a burning sensation all through his body. He did not understand what exactly was happening to him. As the invisible fire scorched his inner veins, he could not
tolerate the pain and began to cry and clap his mouth with palms. The acquaintances requested for Sharif’s presence. Once Gowda apologized to Sharif, his illness ceased.

Chapter 20 begins with a scene in telepathy: Govindabhatta was sitting on the platform outside his house. He suddenly felt a longing to see Sharif. He, therefore, called him ‘Sharif.’ Sharif was not around there. But nobody knew that there was telepathic communication between the two.

But soon there came Bandibhatta, the guru’s eldest brother with the anxiety of pollution:

“Don’t you know, this man has been obsessed with that Muslim fellow Sharif day in and day out. Is it right on his part to do so? Our family deity is a terrific goddess. Besides, ours is a family of traditional Brahmins. It is because our Govindabhatta has been hobnobbing with Sharif that the entire Brahmin community of the village has grown fiercely contemptuous of us.” (Light 92)

Govindabhatta, who was listening to his brother’s complaint, questioned him, “Did you say Brahmins of our village? It is only today that I learnt from you that there are Brahmins in our village!” Soon Sharif arrived there, understanding Bandibhatta’s irritation. He was aware of how his own Muslim community grew uneasily about himself.

But Bandibhatta, being a practical man, said, “No brother, our family honour is going to mingle with dust on account of this Muslim fellow.”

Sharif Saheb joined his palms in reverence to his guru and requested,

“Dear sir, there is some truth in what uncle Bandibhatta is saying. There is going to be some trouble for me from our people and for you from your people. I, therefore, request you to leave me. Let me go back to
Shisunala and settle there. In the next life, I shall earn a great deal of *punya* and be born in a Brahmin family. Then I shall serve you and achieve *brahmajnana*.”

Govindabhatta replied instantly, “Dear son, don’t be under the illusion that a man can become a Brahmin or attain *brahmajnana* simply by being born in a Brahmin family. It is only those who know the Brahman, who can become the true Brahmins.” *(Light 95)*

The Brahmin leader Sinappa’s meddling had worked immensely. He had not invited the Bhat family for dinner.

Naikar describes how Sinappa began a programme with pomp and glory. But soon his food got poisoned. So Sinappa rushed back to Bandibhatta, anticipating Govindabhatta’s prophecy that he would repent. Bandibhatta was really surprised and said, “Why Sinappa, what happened?” “How shall I tell you, Bhattare? I did not invite you and your God-like brother Govindabhatta to the community lunch. Consequently, the whole feast prepared in the morning has grown stale and been stinking now.” *(Light 101)*

When Sinappa apologized for his blasphemy to Govindabhatta, and requested him for meals, the latter put three conditions:

1. That Sinappa must take Bandibhatta in a palanquin.
2. That he should allow Sharif for meals.
3. That Govindabhatta and Sharif would eat in one plate.

Sinappa was helpless and abided by Govindabhatta’s conditions.

Bandibhatta, Govindabhatta and Sharif reached the house of Sinappagowda. They were all welcomed. Then Govindabhatta saw several
Brahmins seated in front of plantain leaves ready to have food. Govindabhatta invoked the mother Goddess; and lo, the whole food items became fresh. All the folks had a hearty dinner.

One day the aged couple Imam Saheb and Hajjuma rushed to Govindabhatta in order to persuade Sharif for marriage. Hajjuma said,

“See, sir, our son did not stay at home. That is why we have to get him married so that we can have grandchildren at least around us at home.”

Govindabhatta replied in his typical philosophical way, “Sharif was married long back. He even had three children, who died and whom he buried.”

Imam Saheb and Hajjuma were y surprised. Imam Saheb exclaimed, “Marriage? When did you get married, my son?”

Hajjuma felt a strange agony in her belly. *(Light 106)*

Sharif listened to their words and asked, “Father, are you searching for a bride for me?” Hajjuma said, “Yes son, yes. We are searching for a bride for you.” He said himself that as a sisya he is a bride and his guru is his bridegroom. Later on Govindabhatta asked Sharif for marriage and worldly life. Govindabhatta said, “Your would-be daughter-in-law is in the Nayak family of Kundagol. Her name happens to be Fatima. We shall negotiate and arrange the marriage immediately.” The parents became happy.

Sharif’s wedding with Fatima took place according to Muslim practice. All the family friends and relatives attended it. They blessed the young couple. Sinappa, and even the Brahmin classmates Ramabhatta and Shamabhatta
attended Sharif’s marriage. When somebody asked the bridegroom for his wife’s name, Sharif burst forth:

   My wife, O my dear wife,
   How shall I tell them your name?
   O my dear wife. (Light 108)

Then Rambhatta added, “Sharif is a sort of a nincompoop. He never bothers about working hard for family.” Shyamabhatta said, “Although he looks like a fool outwardly, he seems to be an awakened man inwardly. (Light 109)

What one notices here is the working of Virashaiva religion on the peoples’ lives. This is unique to the Deccan Pleatue.

Fatima led a semi-happy married life for years. She was very good though illiterate. Once she said him in response to his helplessness:

   “No lord I am not your companion, but a humble servant. A firefly can never become a lamp no matter how many times it goes round the latter. You are a lamp of spiritual light, whereas I am a mass of forgetfulness. I can find happiness only by following you.” (Light 112)

Once Ramabhatta and Shamabhatta thought of what puja is. Sharif posed this question, telling: “Rayare, this is not the real puja. Puja in the real sense means puji, i.e., zero or void or perfection. While doing the holy worship, your mind should not dwell on anything except Lord Shiva or the Formless Absolute.” (Light 114) The whole chapter is brought out so philosophically.

Once there was a severe drought. Fatima was trying to pacify her baby, Lattuma, who was crying out of hunger. Fatima said, “My dear baby, you
should not have been born in such a poor family, where you cannot get even a little porridge. A swami neighbor helped them a little. Once a beggar had come, and, because of Sharif’s order, Fatima gave him whatever food she had. Hajjuma replied mechanically, “You may go to Bhimaraya’s house and borrow some jowar.” Sharif Saheb muttered to himself, “These days of famine have shaken people to the core. Let all the problems come crowding in.” But lo! Bhimaraya could not give Sharif much jowar as it was famine. He donated him some part of whatever he had had.

One day, a nasty incident took place. The village officer of Gudageri was beating up the priest of Goddess Dyamavva. He asked the priest, “You thief, tell me who did you give the nose-stud belonging to the goddess?” The poor priest replied, “No sir, I have not stolen it nor do I know who has taken it.” Somehow Sharif had secured the golden nose-stud, and how – it was a miracle. The temple officer had a trial. Govindabhatta himself came there and rescued his disciple. This is one of the miracles unique in Indian tradition.

Sharif Saheb was not happy of this world as he sang his own song ‘one should not return / to this mortal world once again!’ Shortly a barber came there disturbing the frustrated Sharif and the latter cursed him. One thing needs to be known that Sharif’s words would come true. The barber felt a deep pain in his limbs and was not in a position to understand the meaning of Sharif’s song.

The story of Sharif Saheb continues. Sharif’s father-in-law Hasan and mother-in-law Hussaini had come to meet him at Shisunala. They stayed there for about a fortnight. They were happy to note that their daughter was quite satisfied with her husband, although the latter had very scant attachment with
worldly life. Hussaini had encouraged her daughter Fatima to accept life with a smile and never complain against anything.

One day Sharif Saheb did not return in time and the parents-in-law waited for their lunch. Hussaini fainted because of hunger. Sharif was too adamant to allow her eat in time. He looked too cruel. Nonetheless, Sharif said:

“No sir. If there is no Heaven in parents’ feet, where else can it be found? In fact, parents themselves are the embodiments of Heaven. They are indeed divine beings. Wherever they are, that place becomes a holy temple. Serving the parents is tantamount to serving Allah and Allama. It is better to serve the living gods, i.e., parents than to go in search of stone gods in stone-temples.” (Light 141)

It was a market day at Hulagur.. All sorts of people were there unto. Chennappa met Sharif and exclaimed, “What a market-day is this!” Then Sharif reacted immediately, “Yes man, the market called the mortal world that we have been attending for several lives.” Then Chennappa tried to draw Sharif Saheb’s attention to something, “See there, sir, how this woman is seated here with all her goods.” Then Sharif burst into a philosophical riddle:

Be careful, granny,
Lest you should tumble down!
Be careful, granny.
Why do you stand here
In this busy market of Hulagur?
There is none here to help you,
Should you tumble down.
You witless woman, be careful.
You have kept the girdle in the basket
And money in your waist-fold.
Be careful about it all,
Lest you be pestered
By saucy girls.
You pray to the Lord of Shisunala
With a pure mind,
Lest you should be scared by the world
And slip down in the slush. (*Light* 146-147)

Lately Sharif Saheb developed a kind of cursing tongue. For instance, the case of the barber is already noted. One day a man called Fakirappa sought Sharif’s advice for marriage. Then Sahrif looked into his eyes and foretold of a bad marriage.

Sharif’s riddle at Sravan festival for Basava temple is too well-known:

The hen swallowed the monkey.
The goat swallowed the elephant,
The wall swallowed the lime-paint,
The drum swallowed the danseuse,
The one who had come to dance there. (*Light* 150)

Guru Govindabhatta became an old man, who was lying on his bedspread. Below his cot was kept a spittoon for containing his phlegm. Half a dozen disciples were attending to him. Govindabhatta asked his disciples in a weak voice, “Did my son Sharif come?” Shyamabhatta, who was seated near the door replied, “Holy sir, that fellow has not come yet.” Then Shyamabhatta held Govindabhatta’s right palm, placed it on his head and requested, “Holy sir,
kindly bless me.” Guru Govindabhatta said dryly, “I may bless you, fellow. But can you stand it?” (*Light* 151)

Govindabhatta at one stage asked the two disciples to drink his phlegm, which he believed contained his blessing. The two refused it outrightly. Sharif drank it. That means the guru was equally a mysterious figure.

Govindabhatta grew ecstatic and hugged Sharif affectionately. He said, “Sharif, you are the only true son. You are my everything. Let whatever come from your mouth be true. Whoever remembers or understands you may lead a life of milk and honey. This is my blessing to you.” (*Light*, 156)

This passage speaks of how the guru and sisya lived a great life in partnership.

Sharif Saheb attended the funeral of Govindabhatta dispassionately and then went away from there crooning a philosophical song about the human body:

You are born
In the house of filth;
You have to leave
This corporeal house.
After all, this is an empty house,
No matter how much you have in it. (*Light* 157)

One day Durgappa of Kundagol brought the news of Fatima’s death. Sharif said in his own way, “My wife has sought my blessings before departing yesterday. You have come to tell me the news only now, you fool.” (*Light* 160).

After the death of his dear wife and daughter, Sharif Saheb grew more and more disillusioned with the worldly life and began to spend his time in wandering and meeting his spiritual companions at different places. He used to
visit his close friends like Shri Nagalinga Swami of Navalgund, Shri Madivala Swami of Garag, Shri Shivananda Swami of Gadag, Shri Seshachala Swami of Agadi, Shri Siddharudha Swami of Hubballi, Shri Kalakeri Swami of Shirahatti, Shri Chidambara Dixaita of Agadi, Shri Balalila Mahanta Shivyogi, Shri Sangameshwara Swami of Gudageri, Shri Phalahareshwara Swami of Avaradi and Shri Adavi Swami of Ankalagi. Whenever he met Shri Madivala Swami of Garag, he shared the country wine and ganja with him.

Sharif Saheb used to visit the holy places like Chennabasaveshwara Temple at Ulavi, Khadar-Chavali at Hulagur, the Temple of Goddess Yallamma at Savadatti and other shrines at different places.

Once Sharif Saheb visited a mosque in Laxmeswar where the Muslims did not allow him for namaj. Sharif Saheb stood there silently. Lo! There appeared before him a column of brilliant light in which Muhammad Paigambar was revealed to him. When the other Muslims were pushing one another in the crowd, Sharif could see the Prophet Himself. He felt ecstatic and burst into an Urdu song:

*Ham to dekha Muhammad,*
*Nore gouhar*
*Ramte jakar*
*Atishe tavvapkar!*
*Shariyatme islamke dariya*
*Usme roshan Shisunalaasadar.* (Light 163)

Sharif Saheb’s life too came to a natural end. One day he was lying on his deathbed. A dim lamp was burning in the niche. His disciples and acquaintances were gathered around him. Sharif sang a song of death:

*I am leaving the mortal body,*
I am leaving the mortal body,
And returning it to the earth,
Following the path of great souls. (Light 164)

Fakirappa fell prostrate at Sharif Saheb’s feet and burst out desperately,
“Holy sir, I suffered in my life because I did not listen to you about my marriage.”

Then Shyambhatta stepped forward and requested, “Sharif Saheb, what is your advice for us? Kindly enlighten us.”

Sharif Saheb listened to their words carefully and replied, “I have already told you to light a lamp in your houses. All of you lit only oil-lamps in your physical houses. But nobody cared to light the lamp of awareness in the house called your body.”

The disciples felt disarmed by his answer. (Light 164)

Govindabhatta’s old disciplines came for Sharif’s guidance in vain.

Sharif Saheb raised his palms and said, “May Guru Govindabhatta bless you all! After I leave this mortal body, you lay this body by the side of those of my parents. Five days after the burial, you disinter and see the body. All right, now I leave this mortal body.” (Light 166)

The news of the death of Saint Sharif Saheb circulated fast in Shisunala. All the people flocked to the spot to have the last darshan of their beloved saint. The disciples began to make preparations for his funeral. But they did not know whether they should conduct his funeral according to Muslim practice or Virasaiva practice. So Sharif’s funeral took place in a synthesized mode – Hindu-Muslim mode. Naikar ends the novel giving us an aftermath.

In course of time Danappa Mantagani of Basanala village took interest and had a shrine built on the grave of Saint Sharif Saheb. But the shrine was
neither in Hindu style nor in Muslim style. It was a large platform amply shaded by the overhanging neems and jasmines. It offers an inexplicable peace of mind to the pilgrims. The Muslims recite their namaz and distribute sugar on the left side of the shrine, whereas the Hindus offer coconuts, fruits and camphor on the right side of it. People of all religions offer their reverence to the holy shrine well known as Sharif-Giri. On the last Monday of Shravan month and the tenth day of Phalguna month every year, fairs and rathotsava are conducted in Sharif Saheb’s memory.

Sabita Tripathy observes:

Basavaraj Naikar’s Light in the House is an attempt at the depiction of essential human values and to make the society free from religious intoleranc and aversion to other sects. Saints and mystics of India through their invaluable preaching and teachings down the ages have endeavoured their best to forge communal harmony between various sects and creeds. The noble values of Sant Kabir, the Sai Baba of Siridi, saint Mauneswar of Tinthani at Gulbarga, Sidharudhaswami of Hubli, Sharif of Shisunala and the Sufi saints have rendered yeomen service in reminding the people time and again for the need of communal unity by establishing a sense of brotherhood for peaceful coexistence in the society.(Tripathy 30)
References:


