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Acharya Chatursen

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Acharya Chatursen is one of the finest writers of modern India besides being the most versatile writer. His entire oeuvre is very impressive, but 'Vaishali Ki Nagarvadhu' is outstanding. A Mona Lisa in prose form.

'Vaishali Ki Nagarvadhu' was written during 1939 to 1947. Chatursen studied the whole of Jaina, Buddhist and Hindu literature to research the life and times of the central character of this novel - Ambapali, the courtesan who ruled the hearts of the rulers.

Set in the Buddhist era, some 2500 years ago in the North Indian kingdom of Vaishali; this thoroughly researched novel works on two levels. On one level, it is the story of the courtesan Ambapali, who is closely linked to the powerful rulers of Vaishali; and whose beauty and clout at the royal court are legendary. Her glamorous life comes to a standstill when she learns the Buddha's path. The change in her, her spiritual awakening, her spiritual ascension, and seeking enlightenment within - these elements make the second level, the spiritual high point of the novel.

Ambapali, compelled into courtesanship, ruled the kingdom and its ruler's heart for nearly fifty years. Her parlour was a seat of power and her life the cynosure of the kingdom's eyes. From a setting like that, she could rise above it all, shrug it all off like a dream, and discover for herself the Buddha's path. Alone and unafraid.

This novel is a moving spiritual journey, and a feast for the lover of literature, history and spirituality. In the words of the author, a prolific writer actively writing for forty years before producing VKN, "Main ab tak ki apni sari rachanaao ko radd karta hun, aur 'Vaishali Ki Nagarvadhu' ko apni ekamaatra rachana ghoshit karta hun."

Chatursen further goes on to say that while reading this book the reader ought to look out for a higher level in this book, which relates to spirituality and the ascension of the soul. Possibly the reader will find for himself the highest and most sublime truth of the universe; which took Chatursen ten years of the most intensive study of Jaina and Buddhist spiritual literature to discover.

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Date : Published 2009 by Rajpal & Sons


ISBN : 9788170282822

Author : Acharya Chatursen

Format : Hardcover 445 pages

Genre : History, Literature

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Sushant Jha says

The story of a rebel woman who let her birth-place destroyed by the neighboring enemy for the revenge of insult she was suffering from. Amrapali, the Nagarvadhu(royal courtesan) of Vaishali was daughter of a retired army chieftain and was born in a mango orchard; hence called Amrapali(Amra meaning mango and pali meaning to get protected). She grew up into a beauty queen. Lords and business tycoons of Vaishali started fighting among themselves for getting her. At last, she was forcefully declared Nagarvadhu of Vaishali which she protested. It was the insult of Amrapali and she tried to revenge it. This is the plot of the novel.

This is a well written novel from Acharya Chatursen and its craft is marvelous. Must read for those who love historical novels.

Santosh Kashyap says

Acharya Chatursen has tried to portray 2500 years old society with the tale of a beautiful young lady Amrapali. The socio-economic-political portrayal of the time is commendable. At times it has even produced profound dilemmas about the right action for a king, a soldier, a courtesan, a citizen, a friend, a sister, a brother, a father, a son...without getting into too much of historical controversies it has put another veil of doubt on the birth origin of Amrapali...

Ayush Sen says

good book if you had'nt read book like Mrityunjay, Yayati and Shriman yogi.....being a true reviewer the way "Acharya Chatursen" wrote beauty of 'Nagarvadhu' and some romantic conversation is charming ,most important is exotic conversation and some love scene.....but from my perspective these is not only about beauty of amrapali.....but it involve many thing like bravery of somprabh politics of varshkarma.The way writer depicted ancient time(about 2500 year ago)the scene ,way people fight ,prostitute,how people greet each other e.tc are awesome.

but there is nothing like Buddhism and Jainism in these book, if you are looking for a book which take you on spritual journey ...then these book had nothing like these,only 4-5 chapter related to "Bhagwan Buddha" and "Bhagwan Mahavir"...and truthfully those chapter are too boring
there are lot of unnecessary Character and Stories in these book,
these book is not like what i am expecting....or may be my taste is different ,thats why i am going 3/5 for these.

Nandan Dubey says

Vaishali was first democratic kingdom(around 2500 years back) of North India. It is contemporary to Lord

Buddha. Chatursen claims that Novel is written after good amount of research and truly explains the society at that time. It story about Ambapali a very beautiful or let us say most beautiful in whole kingdom. Novel starts with her father is moving to some other place with her and also worried about people not noticing her beautiful daughter otherwise he know that they will claim her as Nagarvadhu. Anyway she becomes nagarvadhu but after some time she leaves it when she comes to know about Buddhism spirituality.

Pras says

This is an epic! The history, diplomacy and society of ancient India has been described in vivid details. The story is engaging, and never loses pace. A masterpiece!

Chandan Kumar Jha says

splendid !!!

Mukul Joshi says

masterpiece! It is always amazing to read Acharaya Chatursen.

Salil says

This book is unlike anything I've ever read, and I've read a lot. But nothing comes even close to this book in richness of language, characterisation and vastness of canvas. The vibrant culture, mysticism, rich philosophy, splendour and contradictions of Indian society in 7th Century BC come alive from the quill of Acharya Chatursen Shashtri. Must read for all lovers of Hindi literature and Indian history.

Pranvir17 says

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Jaspal Rana says

I vaguely remember attending a play on the life of King Bimbisara of Magadha when I was in high school. I don't remember the story, I certainly don't remember the actors. But I do remember a dance sequence in the play performed by the character of Amrapali, and the haunting lyrics of the background score - *so rahi hai Vaishali, jaag rahi hai Amrapali* (Vaishali sleeps while Amrapali awakens).

That memory of a long forgotten past (pardon my melodramatic expression) was probably the reason I decided to read Vaishali Ki Nagarvadhu. And I wasn't disappointed.

Acharya Chatursen weaves a magnificent landscape with his pen. The landscape happens to be that of ancient India - which is at once beautiful and frightening; which is a land of wars, conspiracies, betrayals and usurpation; where the realism transcends reality; where the men with swords command the maximum respect and yet they bow before the wise. And in the midst of these stands Amrapali.

The story is about Amrapali who was found in the woods of Vaishali as an infant and adopted by a member of the royal guard. She grows up to be the most beautiful woman of the kingdom. She is courted by the members of the aristocracy, peerless warriors, wealthy landlords. But she wants neither the riches nor the power, she wants only the simple pleasures of life which most of us take for granted - she wants a husband, she wants a home, she wants to be a mother.

Her dreams are shattered when she is elected to be a *nagarvadhu* (literally, bride of the kingdom). She becomes a royal courtesan, not belonging to one man but to many, prohibited to marry or to have children. Anybody who was rich could own her for a few hours by paying an obscene amount of gold. And thenceforth begins the saga of her life as she grows accustomed to her new role, her turbulent and forbidden love affair with King Bimbisara of Magadh, and the central role played by her in the destruction of the clan of Lichavis.

Sonu says

I want to know what is reason of being prostitute

Arkjesh Kumar says

Master piece of Acharya Chatursen. Fabulous.

Chandan Kumar says

The book is pretty good except for following points.

1. Abundant usage of difficult Hindi words. English dictionary or Wikipedia was of no help.
2. It doesn't have any pictorial representation or map to show kingdoms, cities and boundaries. You will have to go back and forth between Wikipedia and book. Even the Wikipedia doesn't have a good map of sixteen Mahajanpad of ancient India. So, it's left to your imagination.

3. There are arbitrary jump in narration at few places. I'm not giving examples to avoid spoilers.
4. Some of the subplots are left unresolved.
5. Couple of chapters feel like out of place. It's not adding anything to the plot line.

Anurag says

ההתאמה הזו תהיה רצונית, כפי שיש להבין, לא רק בשל העובדה שיש להם את אותו המצב, אלא גם בשל העובדה שיש להם את אותו המצב. ההתאמה הזו תהיה רצונית, כפי שיש להבין, לא רק בשל העובדה שיש להם את אותו המצב, אלא גם בשל העובדה שיש להם את אותו המצב.

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Acharya Chaturseen mentioned in the prologue that despite writing several books, he'd consider this one as the sole work of his. This was his masterpiece and he has done full justice to it. The plot is well researched (as good as it gets), and serves as a good reference for anyone interested in India during the Vedic ages. The geography, political scene, socioeconomic, religious and cultural aspects of that era have been described very realistically. One cannot help but wonder at the wealth and splendor of the kingdoms and republics alike, and

yet cringe at the society rigidly divided on the basis of caste or race.

The beauty of this book is its language. Language and Acharya Chaturseen's attention to details while trying to be as factually correct about the setup make this plot so intriguing, interesting and alive.

Unfortunately, language is also what makes this book a little difficult to read. I must admit, I didn't understand many words which seem to originate from Sanskrit. As a reader, I feel I am being unfair to the author when I don't absorb every word and every sentence written in the book. Sadly, I couldn't find the meanings of several words even on the internet. And so I couldn't understand many sentences and have definitely missed out many expressions and connotations that rely on a language.

I'd recommend this to everyone who's interested in Indian history, and it'd be best if it's read in its original language.
