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CHANDRAKANTA BY DEVAKI NANDAN KHATRI. TRANSLATED BY PROF. RANA BHAGWAN SINGH & PROF. CHHOTE LAL KHATRI. NEW DELHI: PRABHAT PRAKASHAN, 2018. PP. 320 PAPERBACK PRICE 295. ISBN: 9789352667369

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Today translation is more than a pragmatic call reinforced by globalisation the world over. English has been the biggest beneficiary of this contemporary trend enriching itself with translations of the classics in any language. The lesser known classics in native languages find it an elevator to lift them up to a wider readership.

Chandrakanta's translation into English is a revival and recreation of the Hindi classic published in 1888. Even today it stands like the Taj Mahal in its glamour and historicity. The publication of *Chandrakanta*, to use the cliché, took the world by storm. Its novelist Babu Devakinandan Khatri became a star overnight and the book a household favourite. It became so popular and the story so gripping that many non-Hindi people learnt Hindi to read *Chandrakanta*. It is no exaggeration.

The popularity of *Chandrakanta* is due to its blended ingredients like fantasy, magic, romance, villainy, conspiracy, espionage, battles, wars etc., which make this novel sensational.

Apparently a love story, it has the features of a detective novel containing suspense after suspense in a weird world of forests and coves within caves with magical locks to unlock them that open up an underground world having a palace, garden, river and mysterious people managing things invisibly. Somewhere there is a statue of a lion, you pull out its tongue and the door of a cave opens; you strike a pillar inside and you see another cave below, a voice comes from somewhere directing you to make a move, chase someone to get the tilismi book containing the open sesame to Chandrakanta's whereabouts.

Devakinandan Khatri's speciality lies in creating a weird world of magic and charm having a tilism unheard of ever. His concept of tilism is that somewhere when a king had no heir, he consulted astrologers who predicted that the stars showed that there would be prince who would deserve his wealth and marry his future progeny. Then the King would get a tilism built and fill it with all his gold and jewels. It was, no doubt, a massive secret house in a series of caves one beneath the other in a forest. The tilism had magical locks, tricky safeguards and supernatural elements supervising and regulating the whole affairs. Then there

are the aiyars, humans beings having extraordinary powers to run fast, sing, fight battles, have knowledge of herbs and their medicinal application. The aiyars work as cunning spies as they can easily metamorphose themselves and take on the appearance and role of any person in all respects. Some aiyars also have an instrument called 'ramal' with which they can predict the coming events. The creation of such aiyars is all together new at the hands of Devkinandan Khatri. In no other literature do we have such characters with all round capacity to take on the appearance, voice, manners and activities of another person male or female. The aiyars are attached to some king or prince and work for him. They know how to make a person unconscious just by the smell of a flower and revive him by applying what they call 'lakhlakha'.

The beauty of the novel lies in the element of romance, magic and suspense. A number of episodes are so interlocked that the reader is kept in suspense for a long time until the truth reveals itself. *Chandrakanta* reads like a detective novel, a fantasy as well as a realistic romance. It is based on the love story of Kunwar Virendra Singh and princess Chandrakanta. There is a villain Krur Singh who plots against their meeting with the help of aiyars. When the novel was written, those were the days of fairytales, magic, mystery, sorcery and superstition. People would read the magical and improbable stories from *The Arabian Nights*. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published in 1865 and *Through the Looking Glass* in 1871. But they are children's books. *Chandrakanta* is romance written in the detective mode. The love story of a prince and a princess is fully realistic and down-to earth. The novel also reflects the contemporary culture in that generally it was free from sexual depravity as of now. The villain Krur Singh does not try to harm or molest Chandrakanta whom he loves and longs for though his love is one-way traffic. Even the aiyars maintain reservation not to kill a fellow aiyar. They may etherise one but do not kill him.

The narration of the story is exciting with exuberant details of forests and caves and improbable incidents. The description of battles, ingenious tricks and conspiracy with sustained suspense make it the virtual mother of Harry Potter.

The translation of *Chandrakanta* has been done successfully in simple language. It is virtually literal translation except for certain words like aiyar, tilism, lakhlakha, ramal which

have no equivalent for them in English, have been retained. They have been explained in the Glossary. The attempt to rewrite this monumental work is appreciable in unequivocal terms. The credit goes to the translators as well as to the publisher for resurrecting a Hindi classic for rightful recognition beyond the Hindi belt.

Bio

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