

BOOK REVIEW**The 'Island' of *Hoovina Kolli*; *Hoovina Kolli* by Abdul Rasheed.
Publisher: Kannada Sahitya Parishattu 2014****Review by Prof Ramprasad B V,**Department of Post graduate Studies and Research in English, Jnanasahyadri, Kuvempu
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Hoovina Kolli, the first novel by the well-known Kannada short story writer, poet and translator Abdul Rasheed, who coincidentally is now settled in the island of Lakshadweep, is set in a coffee estate called Hoovina Kolli, which is like an island in the sense that it seems to be a place unconcerned with anything outside it. The novel was first serialized in the online journal 'Kendasampige' and was published in 2011 in the book form by Kendasampige Prakashana. One of the lines in the very beginning of the novel can be roughly translated as 'why is everything so beautiful today'. In fact 'Beautiful' is the word that often comes to mind when one reads the novel.

To this self-contained ostensibly idyllic coffee estate, things do come from outside. We have the Persian cat in the calendar in the house of the 'writer' Usman, but that calendar has remained unchanged for seven or eight years. Even the calendar seems to have remained unaffected by the changes in time as it just anachronistically hangs on the wall. Most of the characters of the novel come from different places, some even from Assam and some nostalgically remember their roots in Syria. But they make this their home and live and die in this estate.

The novel seems not to be interested in giving any kind of 'exposition' to the place and time. Whatever specifics we derive about the setting have to be gleaned by the incidental references in the novel. There are references to Bangla war, references to Indira Gandhi, and references to communism. But the way the characters react to these events is interesting. When a pamphlet by communists is given to Nambiar, he merely takes it and talks about the eternal sufferings of life. Moid, who is known as 'samstha Moid' is against congress not because he likes the 'samstha congress', but because his car which was obstructing the road during Indira Gandhi's travel is thrown into the gutter by the police. Usman 'writer' does talk about the war with Pakistan related to Bangladesh liberation, but only to give mundane information to others. When Yahya Khan's effigy is being burnt, (not in Hoovina Kolli, but in a town nearby), children watch it laughing and talking among themselves, and the Sahukar Khan smiles to his acquaintance and just watches it. The people of Hoovina Kolli are more worried about 'whether the rice has boiled and the meet cooked' than about global events.

The novel itself hardly seems too bother about these events taking place in the world that are of immense consequence to histories of nations. During the burning of Yahya Khan's effigy, the novel draws our attention to the beauty of the oiled hair of the girls shining in the sun when they are watching the burning effigy. When the May Day procession comes to the gate of the estate Hoovina Kolli, the watchman says, taking the pamphlets distributed by the

communists, 'You have no permission to step inside the gates of the estate'. Probably the writer has denied permission to anything not directly connected with the immense suffering and the small everyday pleasures of the people to step inside the gates of his fictional world.

And suffering there is a plenty. Nambiar's son, a communist, has been murdered, after which Nambiar has come and settled in this estate. Mariamma's husband, a car driver, has died in an accident. Usman 'writer's first wife has gone missing. There are deaths, separations, diseases and loneliness. Characters do comment on this, if not on communism and Bangladesh liberation. Nambiar keeps asking his goddess (rhetorically) how long suffering will continue. Hajamma asks the creator about why people have to wander away from their places of birth for jobs. Moosa Kaka wants to ask the religious scholar why the creator inflicts suffering in this world on the believers. Usman 'writer' seems to have an answer to this when he says that there is no reason for anything here, we live we die, and we will go crazy if we try to find causes to these things. And immediately afterwards he advises Moosa Kaka, who is mourning the death of his second wife, to marry again. Then we have Patumma who is complaining to the 'creator' about jaggery that has not yet dissolved in her boiling coffee!

I am well aware that this short review has not done justice to the complex beauty of the novel. I will end my review with two very hesitant questions. One is about the connection of this novel with other Kannada novels. As no man is an island, perhaps, no novel is an island. The novel reminds us of Kuvempu, Tejaswi and Devanuru Mahadeva's Kusumabale. But are these influences merely the occasional boats lost in the ocean that inadvertently visit this island of *Hoovina Kolli* or are they like trading ships whose visits have a regularity, purpose and a pattern? This is an issue which needs to be explored. The second question is more general. How can something that has so much suffering- as this novel (or this our life) - be so beautiful? Perhaps the answer is to be found in the notes of the flute that Mudara's son Sanna plays.