BOOK REVIEW

Jayanthi Sankar, *Misplaced Heads,* **Zero Degree Publishers, 2020, pp. 489.**

Novel Attempts to Reclaim and Restore an Important Legacy

Revathy Sivasubramaniam
Independent Researcher
Chennai

An expansive postmodernist novel, *Misplaced Heads* spans generations, different ages, and varying milieus. Alternating between the real and the virtual worlds, Jayanthi Sankar skilfully crafts love stories that run the gamut of associated themes such as infidelity, love, loss, and longing. At the same time, the novel chronicles the downfall of devadasis and their rich culture and heritage with the advent of the colonial rule. It is a reader's delight with Nataraja, the Hindu God of dance breathing life and rhythm into the narrative.

A zesty novel peopled with over a dozen main characters, the narrative zigzags over the lives of various other characters, eloquently and sometimes painfully capturing their lives. The novel plumbs the depths of the psyche of a single woman named Poorna, an accomplished classical dancer. A divorcee in her mid-fifties who has never had a fruitful relationship, Poorna falls madly in love with Raghu, a married man, and a home husband. The virtual relationship takes the couple on a rollercoaster ride experiencing a whirlwind of emotions. As the novel progresses, the reader's sympathies swing in favour of Poorna but Raghu's actions do not seem entirely indefensible. That is where the strength of the novel lies. Without being melodramatic, the novel teases out the implications of long-distance, virtual relationships, gender roles, societal expectations, and social conditioning, among various other issues.

Thirty years old Tanya can be considered as the foil for Poorna. Like Poorna, she is also a dancer, but of the contemporary form, who comes from a broken family. She is beautiful, strong-willed, and independent. Her relationship with a much younger Rishi reveals her vulnerable side and raises several issues to ponder upon.

Misplaced Heads successfully trashes away several misconceptions regarding the devadasi culture in India and attempts to correct the distorted picture of the system. The author does not romanticize the devadasis; she depicts them simply as human beings with their strengths and flaws. In doing so, she sincerely seeks to reclaim and restore an important legacy of Indian culture.

Using various novelistic techniques such as flashback mode, non-linear style of narration, integration of WhatsApp chats, self-reflections, dreams, and myths, the author has skillfully portrayed the often-constant tussle between the intellect and the emotions.

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