

Report on  
Book Release of

**SULEIMAN CHARITRA by KALYAN MALLA**

Translated from Sanskrit into English  
by **Amb. AND Haksar**

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony organized a well-attended, elegant and stimulating event to release the translated version of 'Suleiman Charitra' authored by Kalyan Malla on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015 at India International Centre (Annexe), New Delhi.

*Suleiman Charitra by Kalyana Malla* is a classic literature text in Sanskrit. It has been translated into English by former diplomat and well known translator of Sanskrit classic works Amb. A.N.D. Haksar. It is a strong reminder of our composite cultural heritage and showcases a fascinating panorama of different cultures that have been synthesized together.

The event started at 6.00 PM and continued up to 8.00 PM. The dais was shared by Prof. Akhtarul Wasey, National Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities as Chief Guest, Amb. AND Haksar, the author of the book; Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar, Secretary, NFCH and Shri Sunit Tandon, Director General, Indian Institute of Mass Communication. The programme was attended by more than 60 participants including academics, senior government officials, social activists, media persons and students. Several former eminent diplomats and ambassadors were present with their spouses. Many of them took active part in discussions that ensued on the theme of social harmony and religious tolerance. Some other distinguished and prominent individuals who were present included Ms. Kapila Vatsayana, leading Indian scholar of Indian culture and heritage; Dr. Sumana Navin, Mohan Foundation; Prof Ashok K. Pandey, Principal, Ahlcon International School; Prince Singhal, Founder President, Community Against Drunken Driving; Prof B.N. Mehrish, Senior Fellow, Indian Council of Social Science Research; Dr. A. K. Merchant, National Trustee, Lotus Temple; Dr. A.M. Numan, Director, American Third World Academic Foundation; Dr. Mufti Mohammad Mushtak Tijarwi, Jamia Millia Islamia; Shri G.L. Agrawal, Founder Trustee, Social Action Foundation; Shri Harish Narula, Chairman, Bharat Shakti and several more.

Welcome address was given by Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar. Thereafter, the Chief Guest Shri Akhtarul Wasey delivered the presidential address, which was followed by a brief description of the book by Amb. AND Haksar. Book-reading of some selected passages of the publication was done by Shri Sunit Tandon in a beautiful and evocative manner. Suleiman Charitra was subsequently launched by the dignitaries on the dais with sustained applause by the audience. Before the conclusion of the session, the floor was opened for discussions and question answer session. All the speakers on the dais responded at length and comprehensively to the queries from the participants.

Some major highlights of points emerged out of presentations of speakers and discussions amongst the participants are given below:

### Amb. AND Haksar

1. *Kalyana Malla* was an esteemed poet at the court of Lodhi prince Lad Khan in eastern Uttar Pradesh at the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> Century. He is known to have composed two still extant works for his princely patron. One of these was *Ananga Ranga*, and the other a story collection *Suleiman Charitra* drawn from Islamic and Biblical stories. This engrossing, first-ever English translation of *Suleiman Charitra* - a delightful Sanskrit rendering of Hebraic and Arabic tales elegantly brings together flavours from the east and the west.

2. Amb. AND Haksar briefed the audience that *Suleiman Charitra* by *Kalyana Malla* was composed in classical Sanskrit about 500 years ago. It comprises a celebrated love story of Judaic and Biblical origin narrated in three chapters, followed by a set of dramatic tales drawn from the *Arabian Nights* in the fourth. These contents, somewhat unusual in the literature of India's ancient language, are presented here with its typical literary flair of idiom and embellishment, setting and style. All this adds special interest to a remarkable work. However, despite having been in existence for half a millennium, it has remained practically unknown to most readers in modern times. Its relative obscurity extends, with some exceptions, even to the academic sphere. Amb. Haksar stated that standard histories of Sanskrit literature make no mention of this compilation, nor has it been previously translated, as far as known, into English or any other language to bring it into the mainstream of general reading today. This is one reason for the present translation. Another is the work's readability and obvious potential of appeal and enjoyment for a modern audience. It is also worthy of further exposure on a few other grounds.

i) It is a fine reminder of how Sanskrit writing continued to flourish in the medieval or Muslim period of Indian history.

ii) It is comparatively a rare work seeking inspiration from texts and tales from the Hebrew and the Arabic world.

iii) The material and the subject matter have been obtained from an external source in a language, and with the ornamentation, particular to the world of Sanskrit literature, especially its *shringara* or erotic aspect.

iv) The book reflects the continuous and significant cross-cultural interaction that deserves greater recollection in present times.

3. Initial chapters of this publication are derived mainly from the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba. Originally found in the Second Book of Samuel in the Old Testament, this story of desire and dilemma had some resonance in Islamic literature and often featured in later European art. It was also the subject of a well-known Hollywood film some six decades ago. The final chapter has drawn from the *Arabian Nights* and renders, perhaps for the first time, into India's 'language of the gods'.

## Prof. Akhtarul Wasey

1. Prof. Akhtarul Wasey briefly enlightened the audience about the background and main attributes of 'Suleiman Charitra'. He emphasized that the manuscript has great linguistic as well as cultural relevance as its roots are embedded in Sanskrit, Hebraic, Arabic, Persian and Urdu.
2. Prof. Wasey stressed that the objective of 'dialogue' is 'communication', not 'controversy' or "conflict" and language has a major role to play in establishing dialogue. However, sometimes 'language' is often wrongly linked with religion, which ultimately leads to controversy and social unrest. He categorically mentioned that language has no linkage with any particular religion. He cited a few examples. The popular song '*Bekas pe karam kijiye Sarkar-e-Madina...*' was sung by Lata Mangeshkar. Naushad Ali, the famous Indian musician gave music to various Bhajans like '*Man tadpat Hari darshan ko Aaj*', '*O duniya ke rakhwale*'. He also referred to various literary works like Shunya Purana, Gita being translated in different Indian languages including Urdu; Qasasul Nabi-een, Majma ul Bahrain, Kitab e Hayat etc. which are most useful in promoting mutual understanding, fraternity and linguistic harmony.
3. Prof. Wasey also stated that the root of all major social evils including incidents of communal disharmony lies in too much focus and concentration on material aspects of education. Originally, the basic objective of education was to develop ethical values among the people. Now, education is more of vocation-oriented rather than inculcating moral values in human beings. We need to give adequate emphasis to nurturing our children and youths with ethical values through our educational systems.

## Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar

1. Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar welcomed the guests and participants. He briefed the participants about the activities and projects being undertaken by the National Foundation for Communal Harmony for the cause of promoting communal harmony and national integration. He mentioned about some significant new initiatives taken by NFCH for this noble cause. He referred to the new programmes and activities of the Foundation being undertaken in collaboration with the universities, Academic Staff Colleges, Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, reputed organizations like All India Women's Conference, India Habitat Centre, India International Centre, Gandhi Peace Foundation to organize Seminars, Conferences, workshops, literary and cultural events etc. He stated that the Foundation has also published several books on the theme, and has launched its periodical Newsletter '*Sadbhavana Sandesh*', which is getting huge response from the audience.
2. Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar stressed the significance of Indian classical literary works, particularly those which have made remarkable contribution towards the promotion of mutual understanding, cultural strengthening and social harmony. He said that the theme of Suleiman Charitra is one of inclusiveness and acceptance and celebration of diverse thoughts, beliefs and ideas which has been the hallmark of Indian culture, heritage and legacy over several millenia. This is the objective that NFCH seeks to

promote and accomplish viz to focus on mutual respect for all religions, faiths and beliefs and to promote the all-embracing, broadminded, civilisational ethos of India which has permeated our thinking for thousands of years. Amb. Sajjanhar stated that economy is the backbone of any country and without education there cannot be economic growth and prosperity. Value education and economic development need to go together to ensure peace and prosperity in the country and the world.

Suleiman Charitra would definitely make people aware and appreciative of our rich cultural legacy and age old civilization and heritage.

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