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Gandhian ideology in *Kanthapura*

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Abstract

Gandhian Ideology has major effect on Indian writing in English . Raja Rao holds a prominent place in the realm of Indo-Anglican fiction. In his works , we find the Gandhian Ideology . *Kanthapura* is widely considered one of the best works of Raja Rao where he has tried depicting the influence that Gandhi and his ideology has on the masses- the mass which were in bound in the rigid shackles of existing evils. The plot of the story is interspersed with the Gandhian Ideology. This novel can be called a tribute to Gandhi and his philosophy. This paper is an attempt to analyse Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* in the light of the Gandhian ideals of non-violence , removal of untouchability and love for humanity.

Key words : *Kanthapura, Gandhi's ideology ,Non-violence,Untouchability*

INTRODUCTION

Kanthapura is considered one of the best novels written by Raja Rao. This novel raises many issues related to the different aspects of society of that time viz. exploitation under the British rule, women's status in the society, caste conflict. the novel, however, also brings forward the solution to many of these evils in the form of Gandhian ideology. Hence, the novel emerges as the literary application of Gandhian ideals to the evils of the society.

Kanthapura depicts the influence that Gandhian freedom struggle had on the life of a remote small Indian village and centres around ideology of Gandhi. It deals with Gandhi movement and its impact on a small village called Kanthapura . It concerns itself with the Gandhian ideology such as Non-Violence, Non – cooperation movements and its impact on the socio- political life of the country. Narasimhaiah (1973) discusses the three strands of experiences that Gandhi's philosophy influences. He says that political ,religious and spiritual are the three areas from where the action is stimulated in this novel.

Illustration of Gandhian ideology in Kanthapura

The Gandhian ideology has been offered in the novel through the actions of the protagonist of the novel, Moorthy. Narasimhaiah(1973) says that Moorthy , the protagonist of the novel *Kanthapura* represents “ the convergence of these three strands” of Gandhi’s philosophy. Moorthy who is an educated young man of *Kanthapura* seems to be transformed from a common village boy into a young man who is capable to lead and sacrifice himself if the need arises. This transformation happens due to the impact of Gandhiji’s personality . Gandhi's work ‘Hind Swaraj ‘ has a deep influence not only him but also many other people in his village.

self government requires transformation of the self, which includes not only the refusal to use violence and coercion but also adopting virtues like temperance , justice , charity, truthfulness , courage , fearlessness and freedom from greed, which would reinforce political ethics. (Bahl 17)

They follow the way of non- violence . They uprooted the toddy booths because these toddy booths gradually consume the poor economically. The coolies and workers cannot sustain that their hard working income can waste like that . During this time they do not break the motto of non-violence even when they were beaten by police.

During India's freedom struggle, students across the country left their studies, and joined the freedom struggle movement even leaving behind their families and villages after listening to Gandhi's speech or address or his call for involvement of each Indian in the freedom struggle in a non-violent ways. Even Moorthy also left his studies. but he never had any personal contact⁵. Moorthy was inspired to take his action based on his dream where he got a vision of Gandhi addressing a public gathering. He himself pushes his way through the huge crowd and joins the volunteers and receives inspiration with a touch of Gandhi's hand . After this dream, Moorthy walks out of the college for good. this particular event in his life pushes him to commit himself to the works in relation to freedom struggle. He organises the work of congress in the village Kanthapura and hence he becomes the central figure in the novel . Literally and metaphorically , Raja Rao represented village of Kanthapura as a resurgent against the exploitation symbolized by the British rule in India . in this process, Moorthy emerges as a local Gandhi .

The action in the novel begins with the celebration of *Shankara Jayanti* . This ceremony marks the villagers' introduction to the Gandhian ideology which finally influences the whole village. Although during the struggle for freedom, the village is fully destroyed physically but its spirit remains intact. it wins . In this novel , Mahatma Gandhi is symbolic of the celestial power. he becomes the incarnation of Krishna who will mitigate the agonies of the Indians . As Krishna had killed the snake Kalia, Gandhi would kill the snake of British rule . In the novel, Gandhian movement is paralleled to a mythological plan . Rao illustrates a fine analogy of Ram and Ravana – Ram for Gandhi and Ravana for the British Government; Mother India or freedom is compared with Sita. Just as in the Ramayana, Rama left his palace so that he could kill Ravana and rescue Sita, Gandhi also leaves his home, roams across the country and finally rescue Mother India from the confinement of British rule. The novelist alludes to Gandhi's exiled existence . It is a struggle between the divine and devil. Iyenger rightly observes,

The reign of the Red-Man is as Asuric rule , and it is raised by the devas , the satyagrahis. The characters sharply divide into two camps : The rulers on the one hand and satyagrahis on the other. (Iyengar, 391).

The novel is not a story of some individuals , it is , in fact , the story of the whole village . What happened in Kanthapura under the Gandhian impact was happening all over India during that period , when Gandhiji transformed the entire nation into an army of disciplined and non violent fighters. The Gandhian programme of swadeshi, abolition of untouchability and the economics of *Charkha* and *Khadi* spread in Kanthapura with enthusiastic men and women who formed voluntary corps. The awakening of rural India is complete when Dandi March gets public support : Dharnas, picketing and *satyagrahas* became a common feature and shout of ‘Gandhiji ki Jai’ resounds the air . The villagers are ready to be arrested and to go to jail and the movement intensifies . Though Gandhi is not a character in the novel , his presence is immensely felt . Hence, it is not hyperbole if this particular novel has been called a Gandhian epic. It conveys the true feelings of an entire nation through the political development in Kanthapura. The novel is a classic of the Gandhian era.

Moorthy , a Brahmin boy, who “had gone through life like a noble cow, quiet ,generous serene, deferent and brahmanic” (Narasimhaiah 47) is the one who orients the *Kanthapurians* into the ideals of Gandhi . To bring political awareness among the villagers who are divided along the caste lines and live in their neatly divided rows of houses meant for different caste, *Harikatha* seems to be an effective strategy. Gandhian principles reach the villagers through *Harikathas* recited by Jayaramachar .

Gandhi’s campaign for the removal of untouchability , more than any programme , shocks the religious sensibility of the villagers. The female narrator Achakka describes how she was shocked when she heard Moorthy had gone to pariah quarters:

I closed my ears when I heard he went to the pariah quarter . we said to ourselves , he is one of these Gandhian , who say there is neither caste nor clan nor family and yet they pray like us” (Kanthapura 15-16).

Initially even Moorthy has to overcome his inborn and deeply ingrained inhibitions when he goes to visit Rachanna in ‘pariah Quarter’. Rachanna’s wife asks him to come in because of the excessive heat outside . The narrator says:

“ Moorthy ...with one foot to the back and one foot to the fore ..he stands trembling and undecided ...and then suddenly hurries up and steps and crosses the threshold and squats on the earthen floor....his hands steal mechanically to the holy thread, and holding it, he feels he would like to say, ‘Hari Om, Hari Om” (Rao 2006: 77)

When Rachanna’s wife comes back with a tumbler of milk and asks him to drink it, Moorthy refuses to comply saying he just had coffee . however on her insistence , he touches the tumbler with his lips for a sip and lays it aside .In the light of Moorthy’s behaviour , the initial ire and resentful reaction of the orthodox Hindu is quite understandable . when even a staunch follower of Gandhi finds it difficult to reconcile himself to his own professed outlook , how can the fanatics accept it blend folded? The initial inner struggle lends an ironical touch of authenticity to the novel.

Moorthy knows that the religion is the only way to reach to people divided along the caste lines. Hence, to ensure that the unorthodox principles of Gandhi reaches to the villagers and they accept it he organises religious functions at the Kanthapurishwary temple which is the epicentre of the village . Jayaramachar is a *harikatha* man, who “ had done Harikatha” even before the Mahatma” (p 16). In his ‘*Harikatha*’ the past and the present are paired and contemporary events and personalities are juxtaposed with *Puranic* Gods and epic –heroes and heroines. Using the different mythological stories , namely Shiva and Parvathi, villagers are made aware of Gandhian ideas and social progress: “Siva is the three eyed”, he

(Jayaramachar) says, “ and Swaraj too is three eyed: self –purification , Hindu-Moselm unity, khaddar”(P 16).

In one of the Harikathas which is titled as “ Birth of Gandhi” Gandhi is said to have born in order to kill “ the serpent of the foreign rule” (p 18) . The Gandhian ideals are offered in terms of a traditional Hindu mind: "Fight , says he, but harm no soul , love all says he, Hindu , Mohamedan , Christian ,or pariah, for all are equal before God. Don't be attached to riches , says he, for riches create passions and passions create attachment and attachment hides the face of Truth. Truth must you tell" (). Through this familiar and effective means of bhajans and “Harikatha Kalashepams “, Moorthy attempts to instil nationalism into the minds of the politically ignorant and uneducated Kanthapurians.

The result of Moorthy's efforts is that this friends throw away their foreign clothes and become Gandhi's men . The narrator refers also to the burning of foreign clothes by Moorthy and his friends who become “Gandhi's men “(p 19) . True to the disciple of Gandhi, they carried forward Gandhi's ideals by visiting the houses of untouchables, and even ate at their houses. Gandhi preached religious tolerance and Moorthy not only sensitised his village folks about this but also practised it. Not only that, he also embraces the social philosophy of Gandhi and abandons riches and remains unmarried. The novel puts forward the idea that Moorthy is a young man, who is born into a traditional Hindu family with his own set of orthodoxy and ideology but after coming under the influence of Gandhi's thoughts and ideas, he totally changes himself and becomes the living example of Gandhi's philosophy of religious tolerance and social bond and becomes a true *Satyagrahi*. Hence, to execute Gandhi's ideas, one doesn't need to be extraordinary, an ordinary person can also become extraordinary by following the ideals set by Gandhi and his philosophy.

Hence, it can be said that this novel portrays Gandhi not as a person but an idea. Because of this reason only Moorthy, even though he never met Gandhi in person, then also he was so much influenced that he changed his way of life and became a participant in unshackling India not only from the chain of British bondage but also from the bondage of orthodoxy and irrational beliefs

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