



Theme of Nationalism and Gandhian Ideology in Kanthapura

Dr. Rashmi Rekha Saikia

Associate Professor, Department of English

Gargaon College

Simaluguri, Sivasagar, Assam

email – rrsaikia@yahoo.in

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Abstract

A prolific writer of the pre independence period, Raja Rao has carved a place of eminence by his significant outputs. *Kanthapura*, recognized as a major landmark in Indian fiction, narrates the story of how the Gandhian struggle is brought to a remote village of South India. The novel centers around the mythicized figure of Gandhi and his transmutation into the saintly hero, Moorthy. The novel is predominantly political in inspiration and explores the Gandhian ideals of truth and non-violence. The person behind bringing the freedom struggle to the far-flung village is Moorthy. Moorthy an apologist to Gandhi, starts spreading the teachings of Gandhi as he returns from the town. Moorthy tries to unite the people of the village as Gandhi did through his principles of truth and non-violence. Gandhian philosophy is thus introduced into the novel through Moorthy. Though the novelist, Raja Rao has focused his attention on one remote Indian village, the implications become symbolic of the struggle of all colonial countries.

Keywords: Gandhian, ideology, non-violence, colonial, freedom, movement

The Gandhian era, from 1920 to 1947 left an abiding imprint on the writings of Indian English literature. Not only the pre-independence writers the post-independence writers too favorably responded to the era which was mostly influenced by the Gandhian ideology and the powerful impact of the national movement. Whatever his influence may have been on political and economic spheres of the country, the legendary figure has equally left a deep impression in our literature too. Indian English writing is intensely influenced by Gandhian philosophy. The world of fiction got significant position by hand of the three trio, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. A prolific writer of the pre independence period, Raja Rao has carved a place of eminence by his significant outputs. Called as a child of Gandhian age, Raja Rao was greatly influenced by Gandhiji's ethos and ideology.

Kanthapura, Raja Rao's maiden novel is one of the finest descriptions of the Indian freedom struggle wherein Gandhian ideology is manifested in varied forms. The novel is predominantly political in inspiration and explores the ideals of Gandhiji of loving one's enemies through non-violence, abolishing social disparity and untouchability, casteism etc. Set during 1920 and 1930s, the captures and depicts those stirring periods when Gandhi had turned the entire nation into freedom fighters. Kanthapura, recognized as a major landmark in Indian English fiction, illustrates the story of how the Gandhian struggle for independence against the British was brought to a remote South Indian village, Kanthapura. M.K.Naik remarks that the novel is predominantly political in inspiration and does not reveal the author's characteristic metaphysical preoccupations, except in a general way. (quo in M.K.Naik) Being an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and his confidence in Gandhian ideology and thought led him to idealize Gandhi an emblem of divine power.

The present paper emphasizes the impact of Gandhiji's ideology and thought on the people of Kanthapura. Nationalism becomes the major thematic motif in the oeuvre of Raja Rao's novels. Kanthapura too has focused on political, social, religion and freedom movement. The novel provides a geographical representation of the remote village which is guided by superstitious beliefs, caste ridden regardless of the impact of freedom movement. The narrative revolves around the life of the people of the village and their active participation in Indian freedom struggle. Moorthy, the central character of the novel who is considered as the Mahatma Man or the Avatar of Gandhi is the man who is behind bringing the mass movement to the village by instilling the spirit of Gandhi and his teachings to the innocent people of the village, Kanthapura. The setting of the novels was during 1920 and 1930s when Mahatma Gandhi had become the pivotal figure in India's freedom struggle. The novel, Kanthapura captures those stirring period from 1919-31 when Gandhi's non-cooperation movement was launched. Mahatma Gandhi, the leading political figure of that time had influenced millions of Indian people in India in varying degrees. He had turned the entire nation into freedom fighters. The exploitation of the millions of Indians by the colonist and the hardships they encountered during the colonial rule had led to the formation of the Gandhian movement. The novel is told in a flashback technique from the perspective of an old woman, Achakka, bringing along years of life experiences and social happenings with her.

Raja Rao, the novelist was greatly influenced by the ideology of Gandhi during his days at Gandhi's Ashram at Sevagram. Raja Rao who belongs to the Gandhian period presents a realistic account of how the majority of Indian people responded to the ideals of nationalism of India. Though the greater part of the novel is concentrated on the freedom struggle, the major focus was laid on Moorthy, the central character and his action through whom the wave of patriotism swept among the people of the remote village. The impact of Gandhian thought and ideology on the village, Kanthapura itself is the theme of the novel which he manifested in varied forms in the novel. Raja Rao who idealizes Mahatma Gandhi as a true saint, epitomizes in his novel as an emblem of divine power. Being an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Rao believes that the future of the world is in Gandhism. The novel can truly be called as 'Gandhian novel' as the Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence are well projected through its central character, Moorthy. Moorthy who went to the town got the opportunity to catch the glimpse of Mahatma. In his very first meeting, he obtains spiritual power and explicates his faith on Gandhism. Being moved by his political ideology, he started preaching Gandhian

philosophy of non-violence, love of mankind and abolition of untouchability to the people. Moorthy returns from the city as 'Mahatma Man'. After his return from the city, he starts spreading the message of Gandhi, and explains the significance of Gandhi's struggle for freedom to the villagers. Moorthy visits every house in the village to mobilize people against the atrocities of the colonists and through the spreading the message of Gandhi, he taught them to liberate themselves from the British colonial rule. In his noble cause, he receives the support from a very progressive lady of the village, Ratna. A Close reading of the novel establishes that, Moorthy is an apologist to Mahatma Gandhi and he adheres to the Gandhian principles and ideology. To the village people, he is the 'Avatar' of Gandhi'. The central character of the novel who holds the reader's interest becomes the replica of Gandhi who initiates every action of Gandhi in his village that Gandhi carried in the freedom struggle to gain independence. Moorthy holds the Gandhian view that "good ends can be achieved only by good means". (Rao 6) Inspired and influenced by the ideology of Gandhiji, Moorthy starts preaching Gandhian philosophy and places the very Gandhian program of action in Kanthapura. The novel explicates the explicit allowance of Gandhi where the principles of truth and non-violence inhaled the wounds of the innocent people.

Moorthy gives a practical form to the Gandhian programme of Swadeshi, non-violence and truth. Moorthy says;

"There is but one force in life and that is truth, and there is but one love on life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the god of all". (52-53)

His social vision gets manifested in his effort to bring about unity, equality and individual identity. Like Gandhi, Moorthy too works for the upliftment of the socially backward class. In Kanthapura, the villagers maintain caste hierarchy. The class division is so prominent that the upper class people do not associate with the people of lower strata like the Sudras and the Pariahs. With the aim of eradicating untouchability, Moorthy continuously works for the betterment of the Pariah community. He goes door to door of the pariahs spreading the message of Gandhi. For this act, Moorthy was excommunicated by his caste. Moorthy's mother feels annoyed when she comes to know Moorthy's act of visiting the Pariah community. He persuades the villagers to wear khadi clothes and to discard the clothes produced by the British. In the wake of khadi spread, Moorthy urges that all people should ply the Charkha and wear only hand-woven clothes. The Gandhian campaign also covers the agenda of the idea of equality of women. Through the active participation of the female characters like Ratna and Rangama, the novelist upheld the equal position of women in the novel.

The novelist presents how religion and politics are interwoven in the novel throwing much light on the role of religion in the struggle movement. Every political action undertaken by the inhabitants of the village gains power from their religious faith. The Gandhian philosophy reach the common villagers through Harikathas.

Kanthapura bears a realistic account of how the great majority of people have favourably responded to the ideals of nationalism in India. Imbued with the spirit of Gandhian principles, the innocent and illiterate people of the village have thrown themselves into the freedom struggle with great enthusiasm. Gandhi's vision of life

finds a way in Kanthapura. The villagers form an image of Gandhi as someone endowed with immense spiritual power who could drive the colonists through his capabilities. The villagers make supreme sacrifices for the great cause of the nation. Being waved by the doctrines of Gandhi, they remain non-violent even at the atrocities inflicted on them by the British colonists. Moorthy exhibits all the traits of a martyr and adheres to the path shown by Gandhiji. The success of the illustrious novel Kanthapura lies in the successful assimilation of Swaraj, women's upliftment, eradication of untouchability, communal harmony into the fabric of the novel.

The novel becomes more a Gandhian purana than a mere piece of fiction. Though Moorthy was arrested later, the struggle continues under the leadership of Ratna. The people's resolve remains the same throughout the novel. The leadership provided by Moorthy and the teachings on Gandhian philosophy keeps the unity and the strength of the villagers intact. Moorthy is the replica of Gandhi in Kanthapura. Though Gandhi never appears in the novel, his influence and ideology is felt throughout the novel.

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