

Reflection of Gandhian Thoughts and Ideals through Moorthy in Raja Rao's Kanthapura

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ABSTRACT

Indian English writing is intensely influenced by Gandhian Philosophy. Gandhi created a fervor in India in all domains-social, political, cultural. Raja Rao's novel Kanthapura (1938) is about the Indian freedom struggle initiated by Mahatma Gandhi in the early 20th century. The story of the novel is about Gandhian struggle for independence of the country against British rule reached to a characteristic South Indian village Kanthapura. The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of Gandhian thoughts and ideals during the British rule in accordance with peace and non-violence. The Gandhian ideology to represent the principles of truth and non-violence in the novel represented by its protagonist, Moorthy. Gandhiji is not directly present in the novel but his identity is represented by the protagonist as the centre of the freedom revolution. The independence movement is based on the ideals of Bhagavadgita. Moorthy promotes the practice of non-violence and the truth among the villagers. The praying, reading of Harikatha, use of Khadi dress are the instances of inculcating the Gandhian ideals among the villagers. The elements of non-violence and peace are explored to reveal the influence of Gandhian ideas in the novel.

Keywords: Freedom Struggle, Gandhian Ideals, Independence, British, Peace, Revolution and Non-violence.

INTRODUCTION

Kanthapura published in (1938) is one of the earliest and most powerful works of Raja Rao in Indian English literature, weaving Gandhian ideals into the social, cultural, and political life of a South Indian village. It is not just a novel, but narrative experiment which mixes myth, tradition, and history to show India's struggle for independence. The reflection of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy— truth, non-violence, satyagraha, swadeshi, self-reliance, and the moral awakening of the masses can be seen in the novel. Important historical events showed in the novel, such as Gandhi's Dandi March. However, Gandhiji himself never appears directly as a character in the novel, but his influence is felt through the protagonist, Moorthy, who is a young, educated man spreads the Mahatma's message of satyagraha (non-violent resistance), swadeshi (self-reliance through hand-spun cloth or khadi), and the eradication of untouchability in the village Kanthapura.

The whole action of the novel takes place in a southern Indian village, Kanthapura. Gandhi's impact in Indian politics was immense in 1930s. Raja Rao represents the protagonist, Moorthy as a micro-cosmic image of macro-cosmic identity of Gandhiji. He is the symbol of Gandhiji. He is the Avtar of Gandhi for the town individuals. He is introduced as a Little Gandhi who motivated huge number of everyday citizens to leave their investigation and entertained themselves into opportunity development. Gandhi's philosophy affected them to battle and liberate their country from the weight of British rule. Achakka an old lady is the narrator of the novel through whom we come to know all the events and incidents occurred in Kanthapura.

As Meenakshi Mukherjee says;

“... making the old woman the narrator enables Raja Rao to mingle fact and myth in the effective manner. For the old woman, Jawaharlal is a Bharata to Mahatma – the Mahatma, who she believes, will slay Ravana so that Sita may be freed. The characteristically concrete imagination of the uneducated mind pictures the Mahatma as large and blue like the Sahyadri Mountain on whose slopes the pilgrims climb to the top, while Moorthy is seen as Small Mountain. To her the Satyagraha becomes a religious ceremony to which she devotes her sacred ardour.” (PP 38-39)

The influence of Gandhiji on the village Kanthapura is so immense that Kanthapura turns out to be a Gandhian village. The novel analyses Gandhian ideals of non-violence, satyagraha, truth, and untouchability. Raja Rao himself also came under the influence of Gandhian ideals which made him to write this novel about an unknown village as Kanthapura.

Gandhian Thoughts and Ideals through Moorthy

Moorthy, the protagonist in the novel is an educated Youngman of Kanthapura. He is introduced as a Little Gandhi as the impact of Gandhiji's personality has transformed him from a common village boy into a young man, having the quality of leadership and the self-sacrifice and devotion. During freedom struggle movement against British rule, hundreds and thousands of young men all over the country gave up their studies and courted arrest and Moorthy is one of them. Gandhi's vision of life finds an outlet in Kanthapura. He is considerate and respectful is obvious from the affectionate way in which he is referred to by the people of Kanthapura. He is called "Corner - House Moorthy", "our Moorthy". Moorthy who has gone through life "like a noble cow, quiet, generous, deferent, Brahminic and is a very prince." He is considered to be honest like an elephant and is spoken of as "our Gandhi", "the Saint of our Village". Moorthy organises the work of Congress in the village Kanthapura and hence he is the central figure in the novel. He forms the Panchayat Congress Committee of five members i.e. Moorthy, Patel Rangegowda, Rangamma, Rachanna and Seenu in the village and keeps in touch with the City Congress Committee. No doubt there is Rangamma a woman and Rachanna an outcaste. The villagers praised the efforts of Moorthy. Even women of the village inspired by Moorthy and form a body of female volunteers and call it as Sevika Sangha. Thus, the enthused woman of the village sing:

There is one Government, sister,
There is one Government, sister,

And that is the Government of the Mahatma (Kanthapura 207).

One of the most important evils in Hinduism is the caste system. In Kanthapura there is much implied criticism of it. It is described through Bhatta, and later through Swami. Both are conservative, orthodox Brahmins, are the agents of British government and work together to frustrate and defeat the Gandhi-movement. Since the Swami's power rests on the superiority of the Brahmins over other castes, he takes the view that the caste system is the very foundation of Hinduism. He maintains that no Brahmin should have contact with the pariahs, and threatens to excommunicate. Moorthy belongs to the Brahmin community and does not believe in caste system in the novel.

He is inspired by Gandhiji's teachings to abolish caste-based discrimination. He works against untouchability which is deep-rooted social evil in society. Moorthy wants to remove this social evil from his village Kanthapura and the surrounding areas. The other character Bhatta, for Moorthy, is the symbol of Brahminic structural violence who attempts to mute the subjugated untouchables of Kanthapura. The Brahmins looked down upon the Gandhian movement:

"What is this Gandhi business? Nothing but weaving coarse, handmade cloth, not fit for a mop, and bellowing out bhajans and bhajans and mixing with the pariahs?" (Kanthapura 28).

But Moorthy wants to finish this caste system from the village and went from door to door to make villagers to understand that he did not believe in caste system and other types of narrow thinking. He even went to Pariah quarters breaks the superfluous boundaries of caste in the village. The Swami is another character who does not want that Moorthy should mix with these Pariah and he wants to finish it in its seed, before its cactus roots have spread far and wide. So, he says to Bhatta:

You are a Bhatta and your voice is not a sparrow voice in your village, and you should speak to your people and organize a Brahman party. Otherwise, Brahmanism is as good as kitchen ashes. The Mahatma is good man and a simple man. But he is making too much of these carcasses eating Pariah (Kanthapura 44).

The female narrator Achakka also 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 and live like us" (Kanthapura 15- 16)

Though Moorthy is a devoted follower of Gandhi, he has never met Gandhi personally. It is a vision of Gandhi that has transformed him completely. He works wholeheartedly for the freedom movement. Moorthy organizes the Gandhi - work in the village and he shows a rare devotion and insight for a village youth. He goes from door-to-door spreading the message of Mahatma Gandhi. Moorthy explains the importance of khadi and charkha to the ignorant and superstitious village women and persuades them to take to spinning and give up foreign cloths. Moorthy implements this programme and goes in the Pariah quarter from door to door exhorting the women to take to spinning in their spare time. He also distributes charkhas among them free of cost.

Thus, Moorthy enshrines Gandhi in spirit and in action He eradicates untouchability from the village. He keeps fast and organizes the picketing of toddy shops and Satyagraha. He organises a non-tax campaign and goes to jail. Throughout the novel, Moorthy is shown as an ideal Gnathite and spreads the message of Gandhi among villagers.

CONCLUSION

To conclusion, Raja Rao's novel Kanthapura is a powerful critique of British colonialism in India, describing its impact on the South India village Kanthapura. The novel depicts a vivid portrayal of Indian society during the 1930s and describes the struggle of the village against the British rules and their efforts to control the land, resources, and people of Kanthapura. Through the character of Moorthy and the villagers' resistance against the British, the novel highlights the role of Gandhian movement and its impact on the struggle of village for independence. The research argues that the novel offers a deep insight into the complex historical and social contexts of colonialism in India and emphasizes the importance of studying literary works such as Kanthapura in understanding the ongoing legacy of colonialism. Overall, the novel remains a significant contribution to the canon of Indian literature, and its relevance to contemporary times underscores the need for continued efforts towards decolonization and social justice.

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