

Impact of Gandhian Thought in Raja Rao's Kanthapura

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M. K. Gandhi brought revolution in Indian politics and social life and its impact could be seen on Indian literature also. By the impact of revolution in Indian politics and social life there was revolution in Indian English literature also. M. K. Gandhi was a great scholar; he left never lasting impact on the Indian English language and Indian English literature. In fact we can say that by the impact of M. K. Gandhi the style of the Indian English literature ushered.

The Gandhian impact on contemporary Indian literature has brought about results at various levels, and in various directions. As regards the writer's choice of language, we have seen that one result of the Gandhian influence has been a general preference for the mother tongue or the regional language, and occasionally a purposeful bilingualism, the same writer handling with mastery his own mother tongue as well as English.

Many writers of pre-independence and post-independence era adapted the ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi. They became the volunteers to spread his ideologies through their writings. It helped to popularize Gandhian philosophy not only in India but abroad too. Mahatma Gandhi was not only the political leader or the prominent freedom fighter who lead the freedom movement of India but he became such a personality which touched every field of each Indian individually and personally. People are attracted to him and his simplicity.

In almost all the contemporary novels, Gandhi works and inspires not merely as a man rather as an idea and institution. The entire tapestry of the novel written by the contemporary writers appears to be a grammar of the Gandhian myth and mystery.

The style of Indian English literature written in the Gandhian Age is remarkable for its directness, simplicity and clarity. Sudarshan Sharma writes;

Being a highly educated person, an Indo-Anglian novelist is understandably likely to appear sophisticated, artificial and ornamental in his approach. However, under the impact of Gandhian insistence on simplicity, proximity to nature and clarity, these writers have adopted a simple, direct and coherent rather than bombastic and pompous style of writing. (Das, Sisir Kumar, 64)

As regards the choice of theme, the portrayal of characters, language etc. the Gandhian influence has been realized. The writers of the Gandhian age have given a shift of emphasis from city life to village life through their writing, while some writers have dealt with the problems of downtrodden people. The theme of freedom struggle was the most common theme of the contemporary novels. The struggle for independence left a deep impact on the Indian people and writers. The contemporary writers have presented the freedom struggle minutely through their writings. In the Indian freedom struggle, the Indians used different ways of fighting under the leadership of M. K. Gandhi. They used the path of Satyagraha and non-violence in the freedom struggle. The contemporary writers have presented civil disobedience, non-violent fight, Satyagraha, education, caste problem as subjects of their writings. These subjects are teachings of M. K. Gandhi which he had applied in practice successfully. Not only contemporary Indian English literature but contemporary Indian literature written in different languages Bengali literature, Marathi literature, Hindi literature etc.-reflect these subjects. In this way M. K. Gandhi and his independence movement has provided many subjects to contemporary Indian literature.

Raja Rao is one of the greatest Indian novel writers in English language *Kanthapura* is the first novel of Raja Rao published in 1938, in which he has shown the Gandhian struggle for independence and impact of Gandhian thought on Indian masses. In *Kanthapura* Raja Rao has narrated the evils of British Government and the strength of Gandhian thought against the tyranny of British rulers.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a Gandhian novel. It is picture of a small slumbering village under the impact of Gandhi. The village is seen as a living entity more vigorous than man in relation to Gandhi's freedom movement.

Moorthy the protagonist is impressed by the vision of Gandhi and turns into a Gandhian a Satyagrahi whose mission is to stir the sleeping people of *Kanthapura*. He taps religion in order to build up a mass movement. *Kanthapura* is the first novel of Raja Rao. As J.M. Purohit says:

"Raja Rao started his career as a novelist with *Kanthapura*. The significant approach to Gandhian politics-half poetical, half- whimsical sets the tone of Raja Rao's first novel".

The plot of the novel concentrates on the impact of the Mahatma on a small quiet and obscure village through school or college going youths who arouse the simple village folk to unite to develop the native economy, to get rid of social foibles and to emancipate the country from the foreign rule. J.M. Purohit, quotes,

Kanthapura is remarkable in many ways: The theme is the impact of Gandhi's name and ideas on obscure Indian villages.

Kanthapura is a great Indian novel situated in Indian rural setting, but it is greater still as a novel depicting the impact of Gandhian freedom struggle in the bite of a remote and obscure Indian village and what happens in *Kanthapura* under the impact of Gandhian thought, non-violence, non-cooperation movement, was happening all over India in the lakhs and lakhs of Indian villages. During those stirring years from 1919-1930 when Gandhi transformed the whole nation in a single lifetime into an army of disciplined and non-violent freedom fighters. There were at least three strands in the Gandhian

movement-the political, the religious and the social and the three have been woven inextricably into the complex story of the regeneration of Kanthapura as a result of the freedom struggle.

Kanthapura is not only a political novel, but a novel related with social, religious and economic transformation of society.

In the early days of his life, Raja Rao was deeply influenced by Gandhian thought which was one of the most interesting issues of that time. He was attracted by the Gandhian way of life. He has passed many days in Gandhi's ashram at Sevagram. Raja Rao, who evolved a great love for his country after the first trip to France in his twenties. He engaged himself with the political activities that were making the future of India before the independence. "In 1942 when the Quit India movement' was begun by Gandhiji, Raja Rao was engaged with the hidden activities of the youth leaders of the Country"

Mahatma Gandhi was a figure on that time who was the pioneer of the Indian masses. He had a deep impact on the mind and heart of Indians. In Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru's view Kanthapura is an obscure, out of the way, slumbering south Indian village. This obscure village slumbering for centuries, suddenly comes to life thanks to the non-violent, non-co-operation movement of Mahatma Gandhi in the twenties. It is in the handling of this theme that the Raja Rao's quickness into activity and thus gives us an insight into appealing social conditions of our villages as also into the values that have saved our people against flood, fire, famine and exploitation from within and from without and more that all. That incomparable manner in which Gandhi tapped the deeply religious and spiritual resources of our people living in remote parts of India and built up a national movement in the life time. "Remember Nehru's description of the impact of the Indian scene in the Discovery of India: He was like a powerful current of fresh air, a beam of light that pierces the darkness, like a whirl wind that upset many things but most of all the working of men's mind". The whole action come out as an artist's enactment of Nehru's image of the impact of Gandhi on the Indian scene, with a hundred particulars that illumine many hidden spots in the life of the country during that period.

Mahatma Gandhi wished all the people, the rich and the poor, to lead honourable life without exploitation of any kind. It was the deep thought of Mahatma Gandhi to give equal rights to all the Indians. Kanthapura is the novel, full of Gandhian thought. There is no other book of this scope and size on this theme- pictures so vividly, truthfully and touchingly the story of resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership: Its religious character, its economic and social concerns, its political ideals, precisely sacrifice our people in response to the call of one like Gandhi-not the spectacular sacrifice of the few chosen one's who later became India's rulers-but the officially unchronicled little nameless, unremembered acts of courage and sacrifice of peasants and farm hands, students and lawyers, women and old men, thanks to whom Gandhi's unique experiment gathered momentum and grew into a national movement.

Raja Rao's Kanthapura is, however, a remarkable novel of India's struggle for independence which affected the entire country. In Kanthapura Raja Rao elevates the Gandhian movement on the mythological plane. Since he is attracted by the Indian metaphysical tradition which is devoted to myths, he exalts the freedom movement by the use of myths and fables drawn from Indian culture. "Mother India, which is the goddess of wisdom and well-being" represents 6 the enslaved daughter of Lord Brahma and so, the gods must incarnate themselves on earth to work for the freedom. At Brahma's command, Lord Shiva incarnates as Mahatma Gandhi to make India free from the hands of British rulers. The novelist uses the

mythical ideology of the clash between Rama and Ravana to describe the struggle between the Gandhi and the British rulers.

In Kanthapura India is compared with Mata Sita and Gandhi is supposed to be Rama. The novelist says that Gandhi will go to Britain and he will get us freedom. Rama represented by Gandhi will come back from his banishment and the freedom will be with us for British rulers will be defeated and India will be freed.

In Kanthapura Mahatma Gandhi is the symbol of divine power, truthfulness and integrity. He is an incarnated personality for Indians who remove the suffering of Indians. It was the trust of Indians that Gandhi would slay the serpent of the British rule as Lord Krishna had killed the serpent Kaliya. Gandhi was the personality who preaches the spinning of yarn to his countrymen for if they spin, the money that goes to the foreign country will be retained in our country to feed the poor and cloth the nude. Mahatma Gandhi had the divine power of defeating the enemy of freedom.

"In Kanthapura Moorthy the Gandhian hero has been idealised as an extraordinary personality. And he is described by Rangamma as Moorthy the good, Moorthy the religious and Moorthy the noble." The women of Kanthapura regards him as the sage of Kanthapura who always perform pious deeds. Range Gowda, the patel of Kanthapura considers Moorthy as a young Gandhi of Kanthapura. Moorthy organises the Gandhi work in the village. The entire novel bristles with action. All the action is centred round Moorthy. He forms the Congress committee in the village, maintains constant touch with the city Congress committee, and through newspaper and other publicity materials keeps the people constantly in touch with events in other parts of the country. "It is Moorthy who calls the Harikatha man, mixes religion with politics and likens Gandhi to Ram and Red man to Ravana and calls Swaraj, the three eyed". Moorthy is deeply influenced by Gandhian thought. He gives a practical form to the Gandhian programme of Swadeshi and eradication of untouchability by going from door to door, even in the pariah quarters, and explaining to the people the economics of charkha and swadeshi.

Moorthy enthuses the women of the villages to take a charkha spinning and later on organises the women voluntary crops. There is conservative, and vested interests, but the opposition of influential people like Range Gowda is enlisted. There is general awakening and the atmosphere grows charged with emotion and enthusiasm as the news of the Dandi March of the enthusiastic people in support of the miracle that Gandhi was performing reaches Kanthapura. Moorthy who is fully coloured in Gandhian ideology begins the idea of celebrating the Rama festival, the Krishna festival and the Ganesha festival, of having bhajans and harikathas every month.

Raja Rao advocates Gandhian thought and believes that Gandhism is the future of the world." Moorthy's belief in the divine power of Gandhism points to Raja Rao's great interest in the Gandhian philosophy. Moorthy gains spiritual strength when first time he met Mahatma Gandhi. His meeting with the God like Mahatma, who primarily preaches to him his political thought, provides him with divine relations. When he meets Gandhi, "Moorthy states: He feels spiritually. elevated as he remarks: There is but one force in the life and that is truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind and there is but one God in life that is the God of all." Since Moorthy weeps softly and acquires perfect peace and equanimity after meeting with Gandhi. The fact that Moorthy seeks self-realisation after a meeting with the god, like Mahatma evinces his belief in Gandhism.

Raja Rao's interest in Gandhism is related to his affirmation of Gandhian values in the novel Kanthapura. "Moorthy spreads the Gandhian principles of non-violent, love of mankind and abolition of

untouchability. Gandhi's non-violent revolution was a wonderful incident for the whole world. It was like a battle without violence and hatred". it is the Gandhian thought that "good end can be only achieved by good means".

Thus Kanthapura remains primarily a novel about the freedom movement. But it has rightly been called a Gandhian epic for it conveys the very spirit of those stirring days when a single individual in a single life time could so enthuse the people and so transform the entire nation. The readers feel the charisma of his personality. The great Mahatma himself does never appear in the scene. He remains in the background but his presence is always felt through the transformation he is causing in Kanthapura and in every other villages of India. The novel expounds the Gandhian values of non-violence and abolition of untouchability. Raja Rao has skilfully made the presence of Mahatma Gandhi felt, without actually introducing him on the stage.

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