

GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RAJA RAO'S *KANTHAPURA*

GULSHAN KUMAR

Assistant Professor of English, Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt

ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi was a great and outstanding personality of India who is still inspiring the people in the country as well as outside of the country through his legacy of greatness, idealness and noble life. Mahatma Gandhi was a great freedom fighter who spent his whole life in struggle for the independence of India. This paper shows a realistic and vivid description of the Gandhi movement during the 1930's and its impact on the masses of India. The novel tells us about a small village called Kanthapura. What was happening in Kanthapura was happening in thousands of villages all over the country at that time. This village is a typical Indian village. The people are uneducated and superstitious. The society is caste-ridden and the village is divided into four quarters called the Brahmin quarter, the Potter's quarter, the Weavers' quarter and the Sudra quarter. By describing the life in Kanthapura, Raja Rao in fact describes- how life is in all Indian villages, in general Kanthapura is the microcosm of the Indian traditional society but theme is universal. Hence, it becomes a microcosm of the macrocosm. Kanthapura follows Gandhi's doctrine and ideology of non-violence, Satyagraha, their view on untouchability and casteism etc. This novel can be called as Gandhi epic. Gandhi aroused national awaking in Indians with his ideology in Kanthapura village. Indeed, Gandhi does not appear in this novel personally, but the story of the novel revolves around his ideology. This research paper, *Gandhi Ideology: A Critical Analysis of Raja Rao's Kanthapura* shows at how Raja Rao is influenced by Gandhian Ideology.

Key words: Gandhi, Ideology, Raja Rao, Kanthapura.

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi was a great freedom fighter who spent his whole life in struggle for the independence of India. He is real father of our nation who really used his all power to make us free from the British rule. He truly understood the power of unity in people (from different castes, religions, community, race, age or gender) and he used all through his independence movement. Education, religion, social life, language and literature were influenced by Gandhian philosophy and we can easily find the Gandhian impact on contemporary literature. In the case of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Manohar Malgonkar, the use of myth is casual and isolated. However, in case of Raja Rao, his mythical design cannot be ignored. M.K. Naik has rightly said about myth characters, "... so vitally at the center of the novel that any criticism which ignores this is bound to appear peripheral." (22) Kanthapura is a distinguished novel in Indo-Anglican literature. It reflects the deepest and profoundest urges and problems of Indian life. The theme is Indian. This novel is

thoroughly Indian style and form. The expression is thoroughly Indians although it is written in English. Meenakshi Mukherjee has rightly pointed out in *The Twice Born Fiction*: “Kanthapura is narrated by an old woman to a hypothetical listener...Raj Rao's choice of this narrator serves several purposes at once. Making this old woman the narrator enables Raja Rao to mingle facts and myths in an effective manner. For the old woman, Jawaharlal is a Bharat to Mahatma who, she believes, will slay Ravana so that Sita may be freed. For her, Gandhi has attained the statue of God and Moorthy is regarded as avatar in Kanthapura. The Characteristically concrete imagination of the uneducated mind pictures the Mahatma as large and blue like the Sahyadri Mountains on whose slopes the pilgrim climb to the top, while Moorthy is seen a small mountain. To her, the Satyagraha becomes a religious ceremony to which she devotes her sacred ardour”(89).

Almost every Indo-Anglican novelist has tried to create Indian atmosphere to give his novel that solidity which makes fiction seen authentic. But Raja Rao has been hailed as the most Indian of Indian novelists writing in English. Raja Rao's contribution to the language of Indo-Anglican writing is tremendous. While reading his English, foreigners find it almost normal but the Indian can hear the eco of regional phrases and typical Indian expressions. Raja Rao depicts very beautiful scenario of the Indian environment: “Trees begin suddenly to tremble and his... The drops fall, as big as a thumb and the thunder goes clashing like a temple cymbal through the heavens, the earth itself seems to heave up and cheap in the monsoon rains. It churns and splashes beat against the tree-tops, reckless and willful, and suddenly floating forwards it buck and spits forward”... (13).

There are many progresses in the novel like that one quoted above. Raja Rao has used Indian Imagery in this passage and language is exceptionally beautiful. And this novel shows that phase of Indian's freedom struggle in which the Civil Disobedience movement was at its height. This was an early phase in India's struggle for Independence when Gandhi had not become that popular. With time the number of his followers increased in numbers. Some actual events which took place in the 1930's have been depicted in the novel. In the novel Raja Rao has depicted the impact of the Gandhi movement on the people of a village called Kanthapura. The brutalities and atrocities suffered by the Indians under the British Rule which has been depicted in the novel. An eminent critic K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar calls a particular period between two world wars as the "Gandhian age."

The Indians were ill-treated and exploited by the British. The condition of the coolies working in the Skeffington coffee estate has been graphically described by Raja Rao. They were treated like animals and were forced to live under inhuman conditions. K.R.S Iyenger rightly says, “The reign of the Red-Man is as Asuric Rule, and it is raised by the Devas, the Satyagrahis. The characters sharply divided into camps: The Ruler (and their supporters) and on the hand the Satyagrah his (and their sympathizers) on the other” (58).

It was Moorthy who told the villagers about Gandhi and about his views and ideas. With time more and more people joined the Congress. The Congress-Committee was formed in Kanthapura. Though Moorthy was young and inexperienced he becomes the leader of the freedom fighters in Kanthapura. The villagers called him Small Mountain and referred to him as the Gandhi

of Kanthapura. He is spirituality influenced and states: "There is but one force in life and that in truth, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all."(52-53) The Gandhian principles and ideas have been discussed in the novel. Gandhi's philosophy and ideas have been discussed in the novel. Gandhi's philosophy and his ideas and view are talked about. A reader who does not know anything about Gandhi or the freedom struggle will get a very fair idea about it if he reads the novel.

The freedom struggle has been depicted realistically and objectively in the novel. Both positive and negative things have been depicted. As depicted in Kanthapura for someone, there actually was something like a parallel government in some parts of India. Thousands of people were put into jails. The various things depicted in the novel are based on actual facts. The phase of Indian freedom struggle that is depicted in the novel ends with Gandhi - Irwin pact.

Many Social abuses like untouchability, ignorance, superstition, child marriage etc. which existed in India in pre-independence era have been highlighted by Raja Rao in the novel. The fact that most people belonging to the upper castes were against Gandhi's movement for removal of untouchability or the upliftment of the people belonging to lower castes has been shown. Just like majority of Indian villages the society of Kanthapura is caste-ridden. The people are illiterate and superstitious. The village is divided into the quarters. Thus, there is a very clear division of society on the basis of caste. The narrator is a Brahmin woman and she tells the reader that being a Brahmin she naturally has never visited the pariah quarter. In spite of opposition Morathy continues to work for the up-liftment of pariahs. He does not stop mixing with the pariahs. Moorthy and Gandhi men go around distributing free spinning wheels to them. The Paria are happy to see the Brahmin Moorthy in their midst but they hesitate to join him. Once they are convinced that Gandhi means it all for their economic good, "They would spin and spin, if that Brahmin boy was to be believed, they would have clothes to wear, blankets and shirts and loin clothes. They said it was all of Mahatma."(26) Raja Rao brings in the issues of the opening of the temples to pariahs who Gandhi called 'Harijans'. Indeed, untouchability, being one the major issues on the agenda of Gandhian social programmer, and serious problem for caste Hindus.

The villagers are religious people and religion forms a very important part of the lives of these people. This love of religion is dominant feeling in Kanthapura because to a certain extent all other feeling arise from it. C.D. Narasimhaiah observes that the novel delineates the dynamic power of a living religiously convention. He states that "religion seems to sustain the spirits of the people of Kanthapura".

In the Ramayana, Rama is presented as a man who has all the good qualities that one may expect in any human being. He is presented as an ideal man. Rama is the reincarnation of god who was born for destruction of evil. The battle between Rama and Ravana was a battle between good and evil. Ravana was a very powerful king and as evil man. A very powerful man with super human powers was needed to defeat him. Only someone as powerful as Rama could do this. So, God sent Rama for the destruction of Ravana. The situation was similar during the British rule. India was under the British rule and Indian were exploited and ill-treated by the British. When Gandhi appeared on the scene, the people looked at him as Rama. They looked at him as someone who will free them from British rule.

The weapons of Gandhi were truth, non-violence and self-control. Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his book *The Discovery of India* that “like a powerful current of fresh air... like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things but most of all the working of people's mind.”(358) Mahatma Gandhi's visit to England to attend the Round Table conference in 1931 was like the visit of Rama to Lanka after defeating Ravana to bring back wise wife. The people of India waited anxiously for the return of Mahatma Gandhi. In a similar manner, the people of Ayodhya waited anxiously for the return of Rama and Sita. Gandhi, through this movement, not only sought political freedom but also aimed at economy liberty and spiritual regeneration. One great critic Northrop Fry States, “Some of the chief characters are gods, other being larger in power than humanity” (149). Raju Rao's faith in Gandhian thought led him to idealize Gandhi as a true God. In *Kanthapura* Mahatma Gandhi is depicted as an emblem of divine power as well as great reality.

The portrayal of Gandhi during the peak period of India's struggle for freedom, in the novels *Kanthapura* and *Waiting for The Mahatma* portray the mahatma Ghandhi as hero and novels have different views of Gandhian principles and his approach to social reforms. But Gandhi had no intention to evolve and formulate any formal system or philosophy. Nor did he want to leave any 'ism' behind. Moreover, he believed in practicing what he preached. He himself said: “he who would go in for novel experiments must begin with himself. That lead to a quicker discovery of truth and God always protects the honest experimenter.” (SME 230-31) By giving a new perspective to national freedom, he wanted his countrymen to be free not only from the foreign yoke but also from fear, cowardice, ignorance, ill-will and Intolerance. He preached that there should truth in thought, in speech and in action. He was a lover and follower of Jesus and Mohammed because they are 'Symbol of Truth'. Gandhi honestly opens his mind about Jesus and Mohammad on Truth as: “Truth is the first thing to be sought for and beauty and goodness will then be added into you. Jesus was to my mind, a supreme artist because he saw and expressed truth, and so was Mohmmmed... (WJM 5)

There are other myths is the novel which are used not only to diversity the Harikathas and thereby to hold the interest of the inhabitants of *Kanthapura*, but also to draw the attention of the readers of the novel towards them. A comparison was drawn between Mahatma Gandhi and lord Krishna. At the time of Mahatma Gandhiji's birth, he was named by his parents as Mohandas, which is another name for Krishna. He was born to destroy the serpent of foreign rule like Lord Krishna who killed the serpent name Kaliya. Moorthy had seen a vision in childhood like child Krishna, that he was sleeping safe on the leaf of the Pipal tree when the holy flood had spread in the whole area in his imagination. He had also seen in imagination how he was thrown like child Parhlad from the hill and was saved by God, the omnipotent. He also saw another vision of the Mahatma and left as if he was filled with primordial radiance. Swarajya is compared with lord Shiva thus: “Shiva is the three-eyed and Swarajya is also three-eyed: Self- purification, Hindu-Muslim Unity and Khaddar”(158).

Even Mahatma Gandhi is three-eyed i.e., endowed with the wonderful gift of foresight. “Gandhi is Shiva himself in human shape”. Under his influence even persons like Moorthy become three-eyed and shared in his vision. *Kanthapura* depicts reality but if merely reality had been

depicted the novel would have become really dull and uninteresting. So in the novel, reality is heightened in various ways. Reality is mixed with mythical fantasy. Then there is also the meaning of the past, the present and future. For instance the Mahatma is compared with Lord Krishna:

You remember how Krishna, when he was a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and killed the serpent Kaliya. So too our Mahandas began to fight against the enemies of the country. And as he grew up, and after he was duly shaven for the hair ceremony, he began to go out into the villages and assemble people and talk to them, and his voice was so pure, his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him, more and more men followed him as they did Krishna the flute-player; and so he goes from village to village to slay he serpent of the foreign rule...

This novel is a beautiful piece of art and it is beautiful because of blending of these elements of poetry, fantasy, myth and imagination. So in a work of art there is always realism and some degree of imagination. In this novel fact and fiction, science and fantasy get mixed up. The past and present is juxtaposed:

She told us too, about the stars that are so far that some have poured their light into the blue space long before you were born, long before you were born or your father was born or your grand-father was born; and just as a day of Brahma is a million-million years of ours, the day of stars is a million-million times our day, and each star has a sun and each sun has a moon, and each moon has on earth, and some there are that have two moons, and some three, and out of there between the folds of the milky way, she told us, out there, there is just a chink, and you put your eyes to a great tube and see another world with sun and moon and stars all bright and floating in the diamond dust of God.

Rangamma told the villagers what she read in the newspapers. Facts of astronomy are blended with fictitious things.

When we think of manifestation of Gandhi thought, we instantly think of Martin Luther King Jr. Young King was greatly influenced by Gandhiji's thoughts on Satyagraha. He used this tool effectively to remove racism in his own country. He was attached when he led when he led peaceful procession to raise his voice against racism, but he stood fast. Non-violence was a life style and non-corporation a method of fighting for injustice. And greatness of Gandhiji and that is the message of Gandhi for whole humanity in modern era. In the past century many places in the world have been drastically changed through the use of brute force, by the power of gun- the Soviet Union, China, Tibet, Burma, many communist countries in Africa and South Africa. But eventually the power of gun will have to be changed by will of the ordinary people. As Dalai Lama said, "We have big war going on today between world peace and world war, between the force of mind and force of materialism, between democracy and totalitarianism". To fight these wars the common ordinary people in this modern age need Gandhism. Barack Obama, the former US president, sees Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration and has a portrait of the apostle of peace in his

office. He commented - In my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things.

If we try to analyze the secrets of Gandhi's success, we would probably find faith and Action and populism, three most important aspect of his life. Gandhi's extra ordinary communication with the masses of ordinary people was another of his secrets. In contrast to many of our preset day leader of this highly democratic world, Gandhi was a true leader and friend of the people. Nobel Laureate Aung San Sun Kyi in 1991, after reading the autobiography of Gandhi, was influenced by his though and inspired to fight for democracy in her country, Myaumar Kyi who went to school in Delhi when she was in this country in 1961 for her mother's treatment learnt about Gandhiji method of fighting against all kind of injustice and evil. Twenty-five year later, use to weapon of cooperation and non-violence helped her to establish democracy in her country.

No one can match Srimiti Kamala for promoting Gandhian values outside India. Her original name is Sally Slack, but after being totally captivated by Gandhian thought, she changed her name to Kamala and dedicated her life to the interpretation of the spiritual heritage of India, and the life of Mahatma Gandhi memorial center in Washington D.C., USA. She guides over 50 volunteers of which 30 are ashramites who run the centers. Kamala started with launching a message. From 1976 onwards, every eye, New York's Bharatvaani Radio broadcast her lecture given on Gandhiji's birth and death anniversary. Her speech given at the Gandhi center on the occasion of Gandhi's death anniversary is recorded by the voice of America to be broadcast in India. She has written several books on Gandhi's thoughts and publishes a quarterly called Gandhi message. In recognition of her outstanding contribution in presenting India's spiritual heritage, the Association of Indians in America (Washington, 1980) felicitated her with the title of Ambassador of Indian Philosophy and the ideal of Mahatma Gandhi in the U.S.A.

Whenever human kind has found the need to express its inner voice of soul, they have to go to Mahatma Gandhi because the Mahatma's life is a struggle to find the Almighty. He said, "My life is My Message". A great truth is hidden behind this message and that is a unity or oneness between theory and practice; practicing what one is preaching. In his search for truth Gandhi travelled from knowing his own soul to finding the almighty. His life is a manifestation of how an individual, by walking on the path of truth, can achieve a state of completeness. The world is in the grip of destruction violence today. Only the power of Gandhi's weapons of peace and non-violence is capable of shaking the soul of human beings to bring about a transformation cutting through international broader, space and time. If we say that the twenty first century is the century of the common man, then we see that *Gandhism* has even more relevance in this age, and Gandhi will inspire generations of individuals fighting for goodness of the society. If today we find that Gandhism is in severe test in countries like India, it is not because there is certain inherent weakness in Gandhism, but it is because we have not seen in India strong leader with the required courage and conviction to fight the evils in society. We may borrow Gandhi's own words on Ahinsa and say that Gandhism is only for the courage people. in the end, I would like to go with Albert Einstein's notion about great Gandhi ji: "Generations to come, it may will be, will scarce believe

that such a man as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

WORKS CITED

- Gandhi, M. K. *The Study of My Experiments with Truth*. Navajivan (P), 1976.
- Gandhi, M. K. *What Jesus Means to Me*. Navajivan (P), 1961.
- Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. Sterling (P), 1984.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction*. Heinemann (P), 1971.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. Navajivan (P), 1972.
- Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*. Oxford University (P), 2005.
- Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. Sahitya Akademi (P), (2009)
- Fry, Northrop. "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths.", *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton University (P) 1971.
- Lama, Dalai. "The Reality of War", <https://www.dalailama.com>the-reality-of-war>.

PURVA MIMAANSA