

DYNAMICS OF PATRIOTIC IDENTITY IN THE LIGHT OF RAJA RAO'S *KANTHAPURA*

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Indo –Anglian literature of the pre-independence era is influenced by the principles of Mahatma Gandhi. Indian writers have reflected the incidents and activities of Mahatma Gandhi and the contemporary social, economic and political turmoil. Raja Rao is a representative of the Gandhian Age and reveals in his novels and short stories an awareness of the forces let loose by the Gandhian Revolution and pull of the past tradition. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) deals with the theme of influence of Gandhi on contemporary freedom movement. Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* is absolutely influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Rao presents a realistic picture of the Indian freedom movement. Mahatma emerges as a Champion of Indian society. *Kanthapura* is one of the most significant Indian novels in Indian literature. It gives a graphic and moving description of the National movement. Indians accepted and supported Gandhi's leadership and his movement.

Kanthapura has been described as the most satisfying of Modern Indian novel. It is the story of how Gandhiji's struggle for independence from the British came to a typical village, Kanthapur, in southern India. The dramatic tale narrated by the old woman, Rangamma evokes the spirit of India's traditional folk epic, puranas. The technique adopted by Rao is a flash-back technique. The story is narrated by an old grandmother to a new comer to the village. She gives to the new comer in retrospect the history of her village narrating the actual events in which the grand old lady herself had participated. Rao depicts the development of Swaraj and Satyagraha movement of Gandhian idealism in the village of Kanthapura. K.R.S. Iyengar as rightly observes:

The hum-drum becomes the unique, the trivial becomes the heroic and the hectic excitement of a day becomes a permanent communal possession...the heroes and heroines of epics jostle with historic personalities and time past and time present are both projected into time future.¹

The novel is a landmark in the history of Indian fiction of English, as it points to a definite stage in the formation of an Indian style of writing in English. *Kanthapura* is the village of south India legend: Kenchamma Goddess. People are poor, simple, superstitious, religious. All are farmers. Agriculture is the main occupation. The land owners are rich and poor also. Novel portraits closed social structure of Indian village. Physical structure of village of such that there is a separate colony is demarcated for the people belonging to specific caste and communities. So much so that a person address helps to identify the caste and class status of the individual

concerned. The village of Kanthapura has twenty –four houses and is divided into three quarters. Brahmin quarters, potters’ quarters and pariah (untouchable) quarters. Brahmin, potters, shudras, pariahs lived in a separate distinct locality. Bade Khan, the policeman is the symbol of oppression. Then Bhatt is the symbol of false orthodoxy and cunning. There is Range Gowda, symbol of sense, a sort of Sardar Patel to Moorthy, the village Mahatma. Beyond the village is the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the symbol of the impact of industrialization on the traditional community life at Kanthapura, the symbol of British and capitalist oppression. The novel is a faithful portrayal of the social fabric of Indian villages in the pre-independence period. M.K.Naik rightly reviews the novel, he remarks:

Kanthapura is, thus a brilliant attempt to probe the depths to which the nationalistic urge penetrated, showing how, even in the remote villages, the new upsurge fused completely with traditional religious faith, thus rediscovering the Indian soul.²

The novel begins with a very detailed physical description of the location and appearance of village Kanthapura. This is followed by introduction to the various people and their position and level of influence among the villagers. Moorthy is introduced much later. Moorthy returns from the city with the ideas of the Mahatma Gandhi and works to establish the congress committee in Kanthapura. However, he would not have been able to work successfully, if he has not got the support and blessing of the various people in the village. If the people had decided to turn to the back after the first place of suffering there would no political agitation or change in Kanthapura society. If these or change would not have happened in way in which they did. The village might have continued remained insignificant and unchanged. In this scene, therefore the different people who were believed to influence and make the necessary sacrifices as their contribution to the freedom struggle can be considered the real hero of the novel. Young people from the village have inspired by the ideas and the ideals of Gandhiji and even started implementing some of these in their day to day interaction. One of them was Moorthy, son of Brahmin, the way in which he behaved and conducted himself were almost like he was a representative of Gandhi himself.

The narrative technique that has been used in the novel is very Indian in nature. It follows the oral tradition of *Harikatha* where an old grandmother who speaks nonstop is the narrator of this story. Since the novel follows the oral traditions of narration. We have one continuous flow of narration without any kind of chapterisation. Chapterisation is part of the western tradition of novel writing. The chapter is like a division in the novel indicates typographically longer spaces between one episode of narration. The style of narration is oral tradition with lot of details involving a mixture of memory, fact and fantasy. Certain customs and traditions, social interaction and marriages within the same community. Harish Raizada comments:

Kanthapura is one of the most remarkable Indian novels in English because of its distinctive treatment thought content and form and expression.³

In 1930s when Gandhi’s Dandi march to break salt laws had made Indians listen to the call for passive resistance to the British government. The remote village of Kanthapura under the leadership of Moorthy took an active part in Gandhi’s non-violent struggle for freedom. Moorthy knows that the master key to the Indian mind is religion. He therefore preaches Gandhian principles of satyagraha and non-violence through traditional harikatha. Moorthy has to fight against the forces of orthodoxy and conservatism to make his villagers accept Gandhian

ideology. Mahatma Gandhi was portrayed as an avatar and compared with Rama and Krishna in the folk, ballads and bhajans. The Harikatha man in one of his recitals compares Mahatma Gandhi with Krishna who killed the serpent Kali. He says:

You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country. (12)

In the novel the grand mother narrates the story and describes Mahatma Gandhi as Rama. She narrates:

They say the Mahatma will go to the Red man's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be happy. And Rama will come back from exile ... (189)

Moorthy very practical person distributes free Charakhas to people taught them to make Khadi and thus become economically independent giving this the poor people the ideas, they could feel secure in society through their own efforts because Moorthy had shown this people a new possibility in life. He had large followers in the village. Swami does not accept of his mixing with the low caste people and immediately excommunicates him. Now Bhatta charges interest up to twenty percent from Congress members. Bhatta returns village and starting spread the ex-communication suggested by the swami and also spread the words that Moorthy had been excommunicated because of his activities. When Narsamma heard this, she becomes sorrowful and she is also thought that he has brought disrespect and dishonored with family. Narsamma was thin, tall, old, 65 years of age Moorthy's mother. She wants to make him a sub-collector and commissioner.

The grandmother glorifies the way in which Moorthy gave up his college education because of the vision that he wants to join the movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Moorthy and work for pariahs is continuing in spite of his communication. This may Narsamma with angry her some sorrow of son's excommunication affected her health badly ill finally, she passed away even then Moorthy carried on his work of distributing book to the Parihas teaching them to read and write. He also put in efforts to distribute Charakhas and teach the people to make Khadi. He carried this khadi to town to sell. Thus making those of the deprived class become economically independent.

Skeffington Coffee Estate and the life of coolie working they represent the plight of millions of deprived under privileged people across the country. This under privilege landless labors were always dominated over by the upper class landlord people who belonging to the high caste in society. They had some amount of freedom once they entered of choice and movement but Skeffington Coffee Estate they loss even this freedom. There was no possibility of escape the coolies to work on the basis of false promises from the owner. Hunter sahib was the owner of the plantation and he got his name from the hunter i.e. whip that he carried around by his hand and he uses quite freely on workers who were idling exploits them financially and sexually.

Moorthy was to visit the Coffee Estate to teach the people. Gangadhar and Vasudev, the Brahmin client of the Estate had joined. Moorthy was interested to bringing the freedom struggle to the people of Estate and white sahib and Badekhan would not allow to this happen. So there was clash between the eager people on the plantation and enforce law and order. Moorthy was arrested because of his anti-government activities and the people protests at nearest of their

leader. Several after other men who were also arrested and taken away making the women feel very fearful. Most of the other men who had been arrested. They were released the next morning but Moorthy was taken away at Captain prison. The Karwar Congress Committee try to give every support to Moorthy in the form of lawyer to defend him but Moorthy was against idea for someone else fighting his case for him. He strongly believes that he had done nothing wrong, truth was on his side and that would help him in this case. People in the village continue with the Bhajan and Prayers that Moorthy had started. Each day hoping that the Gods would intervene and free Moorthy from prison and send him back to them. People arrested and take away the children and women returning from a very painful experience. Property of Kanthapura people were confiscated. As a punishment for not paying their revenue and Ratana did her best to provide leadership for the people of village.

The people have a lot of respect, love and trust for Moorthy. They feel loss and helpless in the absence of their leader and therefore make such promises to the Gods. The faith in leadership of Moorthy and ability to guide them, make the villagers confident in his presence therefore they eagerly waiting for his return and eager to go with their training for the day of action against the Redman's Government. This reflects the growing awareness among the villagers about the need to work for overthrow of the Red man's government. They say:

Well, we shall fight the police for Kenchamma's sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as asilken thread, and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma. (111)

Rangamma's leadership in the absence of Moorthy bringing the women together informing them about women volunteers in the city tolerates the police lathi charge in a nonviolent manner. She spoke to the women about the brave and courageous and preparing themselves mentally for accepting the lathi blows from policemen, when they participate in the action for freedom movement. Rangamma believes in the dynamic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Rangamma says:

Oh no, the Mahatma need not go as far as the sea. Like Harishchandra before he finished his vow and the Britishers will leave India and we shall be free and we shall pay less taxes and there will be no policemen (124)

Rangamma visits her cousin in Karwar to get more information about the progress of Moorthy's case. Living with Sankar at Karwar is the learning experience for Rangamma. She comes to know a lot about the freedom movement activities in the big cities from the story Sankar narrates to the children. Sankar makes an efforts to teach Hindi to the people saying that it becomes the National language after successful the Red man's government away from country.

Home coming of Moorthy unnoticed by the waiting people because the anti-congress Badekhan had been instructed to bring home. Moorthy quietly so his well come would not distract Venkamma's daughter farewell from the material home. The waiting people were quite disappointed. They could not implement the grand welcome that they had organized. They were only happy that Moorthy was back amongst them to make the congress work again strength in Kanthapura.

The farewell of Venkamma's daughter was symbolically like the farewell of anti congress people an attitude in the village. The freedom struggle gained momentum people waited

for their call for action. While they waited news about the progress of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha. Patel Range Gowda accepts Moorthy as his son and listens carefully to Moorthy's action plan. Leadership and organization ability approaching Range Gowda for establishing Congress Party teaches method of a Ahimsa. Moorthy's efforts towards the freedom struggle make him entered in the house of Pariahs for the first time .He is doing something against tradition and he feels something feared and new but still exercises control willpower to put into practice what he has started preaching. This act of bravery sets an example for others and wins trust and support of all people in Pariahs quarters.

The most important aspect of the life of the villagers is their staunch faith in Kanchamma devi and Moorthy .Moorthy is a symbol of dedication and sacrifice for the cause of Bharatmata. Kanthapura is not only a village but the reflection of unity in diversity of Indian society. Raja Rao has used the evocative style of narration and bring together myth with fiction, illusion with reality, and past with present. Mulk Raj Anand writes about the artistic career and significance of novel form of Raja Rao. He comments:

Raja Rao growingly defies the novel form and uses it for philosophical essay, thus seeking to revive the *Yog Vasistha* method, with its pale cast of thought, obviously brooding on human destiny and exhorting men and women to seek salvation.⁴

Thus this novel tries to show that Mahatma Gandhi is not only recognized in history but also in literature. He gave a new way of expression to the common people, new energy and inspiration to masses. His dominant impact on the socio-political scene is substantial.

References

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