

Moorty: A Gandhian Model in Raja Rao's Kanthapura

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Abstract

Thinking about Gandhian Ideology and Indian Writing in English inevitably the name of the renowned Indian English writer Raja Rao comes in our mind. He is the person who has dealt with the Gandhian Ideology in a great way in his novel Kanthapura. In the novel Kanthapura he has made a lot of effort to convey Gandhian message to the rest of the society by depicting vivid picture of Indian English Society of the time in the village Kanthapura and by portraying the characteristics of Mahatma Gandhi in the protagonist of the novel Moorty. In several of the instances in the novel Kanthapura the character of Moorty reminds us of Gandhian Ideology and the freedom movement of that time. The character is not only a follower of the Gandhian Ideology but also a carrier of it so that it may be spread among all other citizens of the nation. The present paper is an attempt to study the character of Moorty as a Gandhian model in the novel Kanthapura. To make the novel a torch bearer for the Gandhian Ideologies the time frame in which the author has fixed the scene also resembles with several of Gandhian Movements. Raja Rao has fixed the novel between 1919-1922 and 1930-1931 where Gandhian movements were at its perfect pace.

Key Words

Three threads, (political, religious, and socio-economic), Gandhi's Ideology, Influence of Gandhi's philosophy

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Introduction:

Tracing the history of the Indian English we find that the Author, Raja Rao has born and brought up in an orthodox South Indian Family. As his father was a professor in Hyderabad, he had received his early education in Hyderabad and after matriculation he went to Aligarh for higher education. Raja Rao the author of the works like '*Serpent and the Rope*', '*Kanthapura*' and a collection of short stories '*The Cow of the Barricades*' has left deep impression over the minds of the readers by the vivid projection of variety in his writings like inclusion of Gandhian Ideology, love to the French society and French language etc. Raja Rao's work '*Kanthapura*' is full of Gandhian Ideology as the storyline has been located during a specific period of time of the Gandhian movements for the freedom of the India.

Impact of Gandhian Ideology over Indian English Writing:

Raja Rao has made efforts to bring influence of Gandhian Ideology over his works and has focused on the fact that the charismatic leadership of Gandhiji had the ability to motivate people to find steps on the directions as shown by him. Gandhiji had made efforts to build up nationalist movement by understanding deep religious and spiritual resources of people living in the remotest part of the country. Under his able leadership a lot of work had been done to integrate the various castes into the mainstream of the society in the nation. Nehru J. (1946) notes, He was like a powerful current of fresh air, beam of light that helps in overcoming darkness, like a whirl-wind that upsets many things.

Indian English Writing hasn't remained calm towards Gandhian Ideology. Several of Indian English authors like Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan has dealt with the theme of Gandhian Ideology in their works. R. K. Narayan's '*Waiting for Mahatma*' and Raja Rao's '*Kanthapura*' are the profound examples of Gandhian Ideology in Indian English Writing. The works suggest the impact of the ideology over common people and Indian Society.

Several works like Mulk Raj Anand's '*Untouchable*' (1935) and Cooli (1936) and Raja Rao's '*Kanthapura*' (1938) have depicted Gandhian Ideology in Indian English Writing. Besides Mulk Raj Anand Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan, the three foremost Indian writers of fiction in English, there are also, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, Balachandra Rajan, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai' All these novelist, and many more, have considerably enriched Indo-Anglian fiction by adding ideas of Gandhiji and the freedom movement of India.

The Novel *Kanthapura*:

The central theme of the novel *Kanthapura* is the impact of Gandhi's movement in a remote village of southern India. Around the central theme of political movement, the religious and socio-economic reality of those times along with the changes has been woven in a vivid and realistic manner.

The novel reveals the events impartially and objectively. The author Raja Rao wrote the novel while he had been in France, thousands of miles away from the land where the action had taken place. The ideas and ideals of Gandhi are seen objectively at certain points of criticism in this novel. Even the characters are shown with both their positive and negative qualities. Even though Moorthy plays an important heroic role, his weakness and hesitation in entering a 'parihas' hut and a tasting the drink offered to him are also revealed. Along with the noble cause of freedom struggle the petty jealousies and trivialities of village life are also depicted.

The novel gives a graphic description of India's rural society. It deals with the specific period of Indian A.D. 1919 to A.D. 1931 when Gandhian movements had been in their full pace. The society of the time has been reflected as uneducated and superstitious as well as cast ridden. However a change is evident with the beginning of nationalist struggle in the case of women and untouchables too. Participate in the 'Satyagraha' during the toddy picketing the labourers of the coffee estate, men and women of *Kanthapura* unite together. The spinning of charkhas and no-tax campaign in which the men, women and children participate, shows the breaking of old social hierarchy. The spearheading of the campaign by Rangamma in Moorthy's absence shows the rise of women in the political domain. *Kanthapura* is just one such place where we could see the changes in society during the freedom struggle but it signifies the changes at the national level.

Influence of Gandhian Philosophy on the Character of Moorthy:

Moorthy or Moorthappa is an educated young man of the village of Kanthapura. He is loved by all. He is considerate and respectful. He is affectionately called "our Moorthy". His simple and noble life is understood in the line "Like a noble cow, quite, generous, defferent, brahminic, a very prince". He is considered honest like an elephant and is called "our Gandhi" and "The saint of our village." He is referred to as "small mountain" while Gandhiji as "big mountain".

It is Moorty, who like several young men of the times leaves his studies and plunges into the nationalistic campaign. He is the youngest and only son of his widowed mother. She has great dreams for him. She wishes him to return to the village after acquiring good education. However, he is inspired by a vision and in the vision he sees Ganghiji addressing a public meeting and he himself pushing through crowd and joining the band of volunteers, receives inspiration by a touch of Gandhi's hand.

This transforms him from a common villager into a man of action. From beginning the action of unearthing of the half sunken linga and its consecration shows his spirit. The boys organize a grand feast to celebrate the consecration. The villagers respond spontaneously and various festivities like Sankara Jayanti, Sankara Vijaya etc. are observed. When he conveys an idea about someone offering a dinner for each day of the month, the villagers cooperate willingly. "let the first be mine" said Bhatta; "the second mine" said Agent Nanjudhiah, "Third must be mine", insisted Pandit Venkateshiah. This suggest people's cooperation towards the Gandhian Idea of integrity and enthusiasm to be a part of the team first. Same way it also throws some light over the issue of social prestige in a small community.

It is Moorty who invites Jayaramchar, the harikatha man. "The Gandhian struggle for independence had three strands- political ,religious and socio-economic" all these strands meet in Moorty. He works on all these three levels religion is an important aspect for the people of Kanthapura to drive Gandhi's view, the harikatha propagates the political ideas using religion. The harikatha man is arrested.

This does not put an end to Moorty's plans who then goes around the village and distributes spinning wheels. Moorty convinces Rangamma, and her house becomes a congress office. Meanwhile, people in the village try to get him married. He does not succumb to these pressures instead Moorty explains to the women to use their afternoon free time to spin the yarn so that they could get the piece of bodice cloth they wanted.

He also explains to them the economics of khadi. He persuades the village women of all communities even those in pariah quarters to take part in the spinning of charkha in spite of opposition. He tells them that during the first month the cotton is given to them free of cost.

When his mother dies out of shock of his excommunication, he does not back out of the cause instead he goes to another town to complete the funeral rites and comes back in Kanthapura, he continues with his Gandhian Movement. He even tries to meet the coolies of Skeffington Esttoate. Here the policeman Bade Khan tries to attack Moorty. The coolies protest against this. This action leaves Moorty sad. He undergoes a fast for three days to put to practice the Gandhian principle of non-violence.

After the penance he starts to preach the 'Don't-touch-the-government-campaign'. He goes to Patel Range Gowda and convinces him about starting a congress group in the village. Once Range Gowda agrees he then goes to the weavers, potters and then to Pariah quarters to enlist them.

At the pariah quarters Moorty first hesitates to step in. When he enters the hut he feels uncomfortable and this is shown by the action "his hands steal mechanically to the holy thread and holding it, he feels he would like to say "Hari om, Hari om." He feels awkward when the pariah lady Rachanna's wife offers him milk. In these instances Moorty's character shows he is as creature of flesh and blood with ordinary human weakness.

Moorty has also been imprisoned for his such type of activities but when Moorty returns from jail he tells the villagers of the Gandhiji's 'Salt Satyagraha'. He then begins to organize toddy picketing and no-tax campaign. Moorthy along with the villagers picket the toddy booths and Boranna's toddy grove. The police beat all of them mercilessly. They all put up a brave front and bear the pain.

Later the villagers refuse to pay tax as Moorty tells them about Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement. He is once again arrested. When Moorty is released after the Gandhi-Irwin pact he feels a little disillusioned. He does not return to his native village. He writes a letter to Ratna that he has decided to devote his life to Nehru's vision. He starts to believe in socialistic opinion of 'equal distribution'.

Conclusion:

In the novel *Kanthapura* the character of Moorty has successfully been portrayed as a Gandhian Model. To a certain extent, this might have been said that by the fact, he is based on certain aspects of Raja Rao's own character. However, this very fact involves the danger of over-idealization which is in any case inherent in a good and noble character like Moorty. It may strongly be said, however, that Raja Rao has not succumbed to the temptation of making Moorty perfect or over-

idealized. There are explicit as well as implicit human weaknesses in him. In the first place, he is hesitant to enter the house of a pariah, and more to eat food there, even after he had been excommunicated. Secondly, in spite of his vow of celibacy, we have a hint that his heart is not devoid of the human feeling of love. It is Ratna whom he loves. The qualities of the character lead us to admit the fact that Gandhian ideals lie in this character. We have an admission of this from Moorthy himself. During his fast, his heart becomes so purified that he wonders how he could have looked at Ratna with different point of view as of a sister. This means clearly that he was sexually attracted towards her; but that he overcame the attraction through self-control. This all the discussion clearly signifies that Moorthy is a dynamic Gandhian Model and not just the noble cow, which the narrator calls him early in the novel.

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