



RESEARCH PAPER



GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY AND VISION IN RAJA RAO'S *KANTHAPURA*

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ABSTRACT



Indian English writing is intensely influenced by Gandhian Philosophy. Gandhi created a fervour in India in all domains— social, political, cultural. He was a grand and magnificent personality who toiled hard to bring equality, fraternity with simplicity in India. He himself was an epitome of simplicity and high thinking. If we talk about his contribution in the reformation of India, he was the vital emblem of truth and non-violence. He not only influenced Indian freedom fighters, thinkers but also the philosophers in America. Ralph Waldo Emerson was highly influenced by Gandhian philosophy, Indian scriptures and Upanishads. His Guide and mentor, Henry David Thoreau also got highly influenced by Gandhi and his ideals. Under the influence of Gandhi, he simplified his life by minimising his basic needs and started living in Walden, making a natural place for his habitat.

Keywords: *Freedom, Gandhian Philosophy*

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Raja Rao, one of the holy trinitaries in Indian English Literature, was also influenced by Gandhian philosophy which he beautifully represents in his novel *Kanthapura* published in 1938. The novel can best be termed as 'Gandhian Novel' as it represents the Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence through its protagonist, Moorthy. The novel is set in a southern Indian village, Kanthapura where the whole action takes place. In 1930s, Gandhi's impact in Indian politics was immense. Raja Rao represents Moorthy as a micro-cosmic image of macro-cosmic identity of Gandhi. Kanthapura becomes the centre of freedom revolution following the pivotal revolution taking place in Delhi in 1930s. Gandhi made *Bhagvadgita* base for his ideals and principles of 'karmyoga' which influenced the society to fight for their freedom making it their 'dharmayoga'.

Raja Rao adopts an old lady named Achakka as the narrator of his novel through whom we receive a very objective and unbiased depiction of the events and incidents taken place in Kanthapura. The villagers of Kanthapura are simple, innocent, rustic people who believe in worshipping nature. For them, river, Kenchamma is as pious as the holy river Ganga. They believe in traditions and myths and relish the harikatha tradition in the village. The villagers of Kanthapura are firm believers in caste system. There is a separate section of pariah quarter in the village who are considered to be untouchables. The people of higher class practise not to accept water from pariah quarter of society. Moorthy, the protagonist belongs to the Brahmin section of society who does not believe in any kind of segregation or separation in the name of caste politics. He is a firm believer in the ethos of equality following the higher ideals of Gandhi who devoted his life to abolish untouchability from Indian society.

In 'Harikatha' Gandhi becomes the epitome of Ram and the British colonists become the epitome of Ravana, the evil. As Ram annihilated the evil from earth, Gandhi becomes the saviour and messiah for Indian society to purge it from all evils of oppression, caste politics, violence, riots, etc. The novel covers the period between Gandhi's Dandi March in 1930 to Gandhi-Irwin pact in 1931. The impact of Gandhi on the village Kanthapura is so immense that Kanthapura turns out to be a Gandhian village. The

novel explores Gandhian ideals of non-violence, truth, loving one's enemies and abolition of untouchability.

Raja Rao was a sensitive young writer who also came under the influence of Gandhian ideals which moved him to write this novel about an unknown village as Kanthapura and the wave of patriotism how it united men and women, Hindus and Muslims, Brahmins and Pariahs for freedom movement. After getting inspired by Gandhian movement, the villagers started seeing Moorthy as their Gandhi due to his higher ideals. Moorthy created the same fervour and vigour in Kanthapura following the footprints of Gandhi. Though victimized himself after receiving water from pariah quarter, he was excommunicated by villagers but still he did not give up. When Moorthy observes the willing acceptance of torture perpetrated on Seetharamu, his belief in Gandhian ideal of non-violence gets more strengthened. Non-violence removes the ill feeling of hatred and enmity from your heart. When Ranga Gowda wants to teach a lesson to Puttaya for unjustly drawing the canal water to his fields, Moorthy appears as a saint and preaches Ranga Gowda about the Gandhian principle of non-violence and love for one's enemy. In another instance also, Moorthy says: "Good ends can be achieved only by good means." (Kanthapura 6)

Jayaramachar also speaks about Gandhian philosophy: "Fight, says he, but harms so soul. Love all says he, Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God. Don't be attached to riches, says he, for riches create passions, and passions create attachment and attachment hides the faces of the truth. Truth must you tell, he says, for Truth is God, and verily, it is the only God I know." (22)

The villagers of Kanthapura take vow to spin yarn and practise non-violence and truth. They are very religious in their day to day activities and behaviour. When Moorthy is arrested by British government, the inhabitants of Kanthapura implore Goddess Kenchamma to set him free. They have firm faith in nature goddess who can never betray them and one day Moorthy will be free from the cruel clutches of Red man. They also plead to Kenchamma



to save them from the savage assault of the British Government.

Gandhian philosophy transformed Moorthy from a common young villager to a great leader who emancipated the ethos of self-sacrifice and devotion through the path of patriotism. In those times, hundreds and thousands of young men left their studies and devoted their lives for freedom struggle they were also arrested in their difficult path but the spirit in them never made them slow down in their journey to the mission of accomplishment of freedom. Moorthy was also one of them, having first-hand experience with Gandhi when he was addressing a gathering, with a hand touch of Gandhi, he found a great spark in himself after this incident. Moorthy also organizes the work of Congress in the village and he becomes the central figure in the freedom struggle in Kanthapura.

Raja Roy uses the mythological story of Siva and Parvati to depict the parallel affinity and relationship between Hindu idols and "Swaraj". Like Siva, Swaraj is also three-eyed- self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity and khaddar. The Kanthapurians believe that Gandhi is born to kill "the serpent of the foreign rule" (18)

Moorthy's friends throw away their foreign clothes and finally become Gandhi's men. The villagers move around the village and distribute free spinning wheel. The pariahs feel good to see Brahmins close to their quarters. Thus the gap between upper caste and lower caste has been annihilated by Moorthy's efforts. On seeing the persecution and torment of poor villagers, Moorthy wept from inside. The Europeans were maltreating the poor villagers as there were not basic facilities for them. Bade Khan also resists the entry of Moorthy into the Estate and he also hits Moorthy with his lathi. At this Rachanna and Madanna fall on Bade Khan tearing away lathi but still Moorthy pleads for Gandhian ethics of non-violence and utters: "No beating, sisters, No beating in the name of Mahatma." (65). In order to fight with the imperial force, Moorthy observes three days fast as Gandhi has done in similar situation. The fast helps him in sublimating his feelings and strengthening him for further task to launch non-cooperation and non-violent movement. Moorthy also visits the pariah

quarter and eats with them like Gandhi. He also preaches about religious tolerance acting as a true 'Satyagrahi'. To Satyagrahis, soul is immortal and everlasting, it never dies and there is a life even after death as the soul is indestructible, this belief is deeply rooted in Indian philosophy which makes Satyagrahis not afraid of death. Gandhi also tried to transform the role and stature of Indian women by awakening them to participate in Indian freedom struggle. He also runs many social programmes like Harijan upliftment, women emancipation and removal of illiteracy. Ratna brings the women volunteers to such an extent that any disparity between caste or clan disappears. They finally realize that they belong to one nation, one country, one village, one nature, one Himalayan. To Gandhi, widow-re-marriage is not sin, if it be, it is as much a sin as the marriage of a widower. In the beginning of the novel, widows are considered underprivileged people in comparison to those who get married which is reflected in Venkamma's attitude towards Rangamma.

In *Kanthapura*, Rao represents the distinction between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins. There is a huge gulf between communities which is widening the gap between their economic positions as well. Moorthy also comes back to the village with the lesson of Gandhi saying that one should not marry early and widows should be allowed to re-marry and a Brahmin may marry a pariah and pariahs can marry a Brahmin. Moorthy ignites all villagers with Gandhian philosophy. Range Gowda leaves his Patelship, Shankar, the advocate starts practising law in Gandhian way. Ranga and Rangamma also get motivated from their savage self. Rachanna and Madanna come down to work in coffee estate from the catchment area near Godavari in Andhra Pradesh. Night school for pariahs also starts under the condensed vision of Moorthy to disseminate Gandhian ideas. He also visits the coffee estate to teach the coolies the art of weaving. He also teaches them alphabets, grammar, arithmetic and Hindi.

According to Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi was "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 minds." (Discovery of India 358)

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