

Raja Rao's Knathapura : A Dynamo of Gandhian Thought

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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao (1909 and 2006), a path-breaker of Indian writing in English, was born in an orthodox South Indian Brahmin family in Hasan, Mysore. After graduating from Madras University, he went on to the University of Montpellier in France on a scholarship. He moved to the United States in 1966, where he taught at the university of Texas at Austin until 1981, when he retired as an emeritus professor. As a powerful and profound writer, Rao was honoured with India's second higher civilian award, the Padma Vibhushan, in 2007, the Shitya Akademi Award in 1964 and the Neustadt International Prize for literature in 1988. Raja Rao's Trilogy- "Kanthapura, The Serpent and The Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare" are the most philosophical and ontological in quest. Among the three Kanthapura (1938) is a monumental work which describes the Gandhian movement against the British Rule in India and how it reaches a South Indian village-Kanthapura. This movement quickens the process of social change in Indian villages from which starts the action of the novel. As a whole it can be said that "Kanthapura is a dominantly Ideational Document of India in Microcosm and carries the Gandhian thought in total.

Keywords: Divine order, Hindu Hierarchy, Divine rescuer, Obscure village, Asuric rule, Political Ideology.

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Introduction:

"Kanthapura" is an exploration of the Gandhian values of loving one enemies, non-violence and abolition of untouchability. The novel shows the deepest respect for religious and spiritual values through its rituals, worship of gods and goddesses. Harikatha, observance of festivals and the lightning of Kartic lamp is one of the many symbolic acts by which the Kanthapurians reassures themselves to the enduring presence of the Eternal light which through avatars and incarnations would save them from the dark and sinister forces that surround them. It is this unflinching faith in the divine order which gives the Kanthapurians the necessary strength to put with all odds and it is to this faith that Murti appeals when he refers to the advent but as an avtar in the Hindu tradition.

The action of the novel begins as a narration of how life in a remote Kannada village "Kanthapura" protected in its static existence by the timeless figure of Kanchamma, the presiding deity, revolves in peace and piety within the traditional rigid Hindu hierarchy of caste. Moorthy,

who takes a prominent part in the religious activities which seem to constitute the very life of the village, is a Gandhiman that is a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, who organizes Gandhi business, in the form of teaching the untouchables and popularizing spinning as a means to economic independence.

In the novel Moorthy is a devotee to Gandhi and carries on his work with missionary zeal among the coolies of the neighbouring coffee estate, establishes the Congress Committee of Kanthapura and courts imprisonment seditions activities, on the release, he leads the people of Kanthapura to join the mainstream of the Indian National Movement which at this stage, takes the form of Civil Dis-bedience Moorthy's life and deeds, as portrayed by the village band, approximate to those of Lord Krishna, the archetype of the divine rescuer : "You remember how Krishna when he was but a babe of four had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kalia, so too, our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies

of the country..... And his voice was so pure, his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him as they did Krishna, the flute player".

Kanthapura evinces the divine truth of Gandhian views that politics and religion are inextricably mated together. The ontological framework of the theme of Kanthapura is the liberation of Indian spirit by Gandhian ideas while Brahma Dutta Sharma pinpoints that "Here Gnadhisim and Nehruian socialism have been presented as two alternatives and there comes a stage when the protagonist and his followers resolve to embrace the political philosophy of the Nehruian socialism."

The novel has a religious fervor blended with social realism in such a way that the ideas of Gandhiji are easily comprehended by the Kanthapurians. The impact of Hari katha is ennobling and innovating and even the old women cannot remain detached. Gandhiji had been a divine phenomenon. He is a saint the Mahatma, a wise man and a soft man and a saint. It is worthwhile to suggest that Dandi March has been portrayed as a pilgrimage. This is Moorthy, the Gandhian who keeps the village people with day to day activities of the Mahatma while he was on the Dandi March.

In the novel, all the plans and programmes of Gandhiji have been taken into account, such as non-violence, untouchability prohibition and the way in which the women of Kanthapura under the leadership of Moorthy, Rangamma and Ratna came forward in the wake of the struggle.

Gandhi aroused national awakening in Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom which was strengthened subsequently by the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements in the thirties. The Gandhian Movement not only sought political freedom but also aimed at economic independence and spiritual regeneration. Gandhi wanted all the people, the rich and the poor, to lead a dignified life without any kind of exploitation.

Kanthapura carries Gandhi's ideals of being self-denial. According to Gandhi our civilization, our culture, our swaraj depend upon being self-

denial. According to Gandhi our civilization, our culture, our swaraj depend upon being selfless and restricting our wants. Gandhi's ideology is not of hatred but of love. The Kanthapurians make a revolt against the British Government to save the whole of Bharat. Their revolt starts from the small village Kanthapura in the shelter of Mahatma Gandhi who was the axis of the whole India. The Kanthapurians believe that their quest will bring a real change in the system of the whole country because Gandhi's hands are upon them. They think Gandhi as an avatar. In course of their movement, the Kanthapurians make a slogan-"Gandhi- Mahatma Ki Jay" and march ahead to face the British military with boldness.

Truly Mahatma Gandhi had a great influence on the Indian masses. In the opinion of Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi Ji 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 whirl-wind that upset many things, but most of all the Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom which was strengthened subsequently by the non-co-operation and civil disobedience movements. The Gandhian movement not only sought political freedom also aimed at economic independence and spiritual regeneration. Gandhi had respect for all the people, the rich and the poor.

Being influenced by the Gandhian thought of non-violence, the Kanthapurians, too, revolted against the British on the high plane of dignity and discipline. They had no hatred and ill-will towards the opponents. Their movement was quite non-violent. They considered Gandhi as a beam of light that should show them path in the darkness. They fought against the British Rule in the symbolic shadow of Gandhiji being totally Gandhian. They avoided the chains of untouchability and respected both the rich and the poor. They had completely broken the fetters of narrowness and broadly thought a radical change in society both politically and economically.

Kanthapura is the story of an Indian village. There is no central character other than the village. Village life is certainly more closely at the

heart of the novel. Raja Rao describes the movement of the village from solidarity to complete and utter annihilation. Achakka informs of the villager's geographical location:

"Our village- I do not think you have ever heard about it. Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara. High on the Ghats is it. High up the steep-mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast in it, up Manglore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane. Roads narrow, dusty, rut-covered roads wind through the forest of teak and of jack of Sandal and of Sal, and hanging over bellowing gorges and leaping over elephant- haunted valleys, they turn now to the left and now to the right and being you through the Alambi and Champa and Meena and Kola passes into the great granaries of trade."

Kanthapura is a village in India. Through Gandhian Movement, it is Indian in microcosm. The novel presents the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and abolition of untouchability. The mythical presentation of Gandhi and mother India and the spiritualization of the Freedom Movement within the parameters of Indian cultural convention imply the various impact of Gandhian concept in Kanthapura. All the characters in Kanthapura follow the ideological path of Gandhi in course of their struggle against the British Rule. In Kanthapura, Raja Rao refers to the ideas enshrined in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. He coats Vedantic and non-Vedantic doctrines, Nagarjun's theory of emptiness of self and the Buddhist and Hindu Tantric thought with great authority.

The novel describes Gandhi's impact on the common people of Kanthapura. The people of Kanthapura are quite ready to follow the urge of Gandhi in the Freedom Movement. The influence of Gandhi's national movement is seen everywhere on this obscure village. The villagers meet the British physical force with soul force. They are beaten and cuffed by the brutal police Force but they do not take a stick in their hands against them as Gandhi appealed. The theme of the novel is

"Gandhi and our village." The villagers have faith that Gandhian ideology shall give them freedom one day.

In Kanthapura, Raja Rao employs the mythical analogy of the battle between Rama and Ravana to describe the struggle between the Mahatma and the British Government. In the novel India is compared with Sita, the Mahatma is regarded as Rama and Jawaharlal is considered to be his brother, Bharata. The narrator says that the Mahatma will go to Britain and will get us freedom. She adds that Rama represented by Gandhi will come back from his exile and Sita will be with him for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed. The brother Bharata will receive them and as they enter Ayodhya, there will be a rain of flowers. Here Freedom Movement is a symbolic of the Devas' struggle against the Asuric rule represented by the British.

The novel describes Raja Rao's faith in Gandhian thought which leads him to idealize Mahatma Gandhi as a veritable god. Gandhi's release from the prison is equated with Sita's release from Lanka. In this way Mahatma Gandhi is portrayed as a symbol of divine power as well as a tangible reality. He is explained as an incarnation (avatar) of Krishna and therefore, he will remove the sufferings of the Indians as Krishna had done. As a true faith, Gandhi would slay the serpent of the foreign rule as Krishna had killed the serpent Kaliya. As a statesman Gandhi preaches the spinning of yarn to his countrymen for the purpose of stopping the money going to Britain. The Indians will be saved from hunger and nakedness. As Gandhi was a spiritual leader, spiritualism, too, is coated in the novel. The novelist maintains the rule of religion in the struggle for freedom as a treasure of Gandhi's ideology. The political activity of the Kanthapuriyans gathers strength from their religious faith taken from Gandhi Mahatma.

Following Gandhian philosophy Raja Rao believes that "the future of the world is in Gandhism and Gandhi's faith in non-violence." Moorthy's belief in the divine efficaciousness of Gandhism points to Raja Rao's great interest in Gandhian

philosophy of non-violent resistance. Moorthy gets spiritual strength in his very first meeting with Gandhi. This meeting of his with the "God beaming Mahatma who preaches to him his political ideology, provides him with divine revelation. After meeting Mahatma he feels spiritually elevated as he remarks, " There is but one force in 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 and that is the God of all." The fact that Moorthy seeks self-realization after a glimpse of the godly Mahatma avinches his faith in Gandhism.

Kanthapura is a true example of Gandhian philosophy of Non-violence. Gandhi's non-violence revolution in the world was a war without violence and battle without hatred. In Kanthapura. Moorthy's assertion that 'the Purer we are, the greater will be our victory' is an acceptance of the Gandhian perception that "good ends can be achieved only by good means." In the novel Moorthy says, "send love where there is hatred."

In Kanthapura, the villagers live together, and each in a way is related to others. For instance, when the non-violent revolutionaries try to enter the toddy booth, there are seen "the scattered crowd of children rushing here, rushing there, and mothers, sisters, aunts, grand mothers, rushing behind them.

Kanthapura is completely an ancient village of India, totally tied together on a social ground. Here Himavanthy is a holy river. Many hills and fields are specifically named- for example; Bear's Hill, Bebbur field, Big Bund field, Devil's field, plantation field, Serpent-field, Tank field, Triangular field. All these names are related to our past village. From this far-off remote village the sparkle of Gandhian Movement arose and its flame and

smoke spread slowly and gradually, far and wide all over the country. The Movement is made in the symbolic shadow of the spiritual discipline of Mahatma Gandhi. Means to say is that the whole village "Kanthapura" is coloured in the thoughts of Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence.

Conclusion:

Thus Kanthapura is primarily a novel about the Freedom Movement. It propounds the political beliefs of Mahatma Gandhi, as Gandhism forms the basis of the novel. The novel expounds the Gandhian values of non-violence and abolition of untouchability. The tremendous religious activity, the mythicising of Gandhi and mother India and the spiritualization of the Freedom movement within the framework of Indian cultural tradition suggest Raja Rao's zeal for Indian philosophy. As a whole Kanthapura appears to be a dynamo of the Gandhian thought and theory. The chief motif of Raja Rao in the novel is his acute awareness of the spiritual ideals and values of ancient India and its place and impact on the emotional make up of the inhabitants of Kanthapura during the period when Gandhi's personality and thought was force to be reckoned with.

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