



India's freedom struggle echoes in Raja Rao's Novel Kanthapura

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Abstract: Political, religious, social background and freedom movement are the hallmark of Raja Rao's novel Kanthapura. The novel Kanthapura basically depicts the impact of Gandhi Movement and freedom struggle on a village in the southern part of India, called Kanthapura. This paper aims to describe a graphic description of Indian rural society and vividly describes the Indian customs and tradition. It deals with a specific period of the history of India and the impact of the non-violent, non-co-operative movements. It reflects all aspects of Indian village life and the division of the society on the basis of caste, ignorance and superstition.

Keywords: Freedom Struggle, Religion, Cast-ridden, Nationality, Superstition

Narration: Raja Rao's novel Kanthapura was published in 1938. It is Raja Rao's first novel which has been written by him in France. It is considered his most perfect and important work. The novel Kanthapura has also been termed as the historical novel which presents an authentic and interesting account of the history of Indian freedom Struggle. It creates the spirit of the time not only objectively but also subjectively.

The novel begins with a graphic description of the village such as freedom movement, religious movement, cast-ridden, superstition and impact of Gandhi movement. The narrator of the story in novel is an old man Achakka. People of the village worshiped Goddess kenchamma. They were superstitious and religious. Their major occupation was agriculture. The village is divided into four quarter, paria quarter, and Brahmin quarter. Potter quarter and weaver quarter based on caste and communities. Timmaya and Siddawer well known person in the

Pariah quarter. The story is about the lives of the people of kanthapura and their participation in the freedom struggle. Gandhian consciousness as it manifested in Kanthapura village.

We find puranas, bhajans, sankirtans, temple worship, Brahmanism, chastism, Radhakrishna, Rama Sita cult and above all the cult of Kenchamma, the presiding deity of the village. There is postmaster Suryanarayana with his double storeyed house, patwari Nunjundia, the thotti house of pock-marked Sidda, Sidda's wife who went mad, Shopkeeper Subba Chetty, waterfall Venkamma who roared day and night and Zamindar Bhatta, the young idealistic among men and women of Kanthapura. In the manner of Geoffrey Chaucer of the Canterbury Tales, Raja Rao has given a realistic picture of a cross section of the society as he saw in the village.

The main protagonist of the novel is Moorthy who brings the Gandhi movement in Kanthapura. Moorthy was Brahmin. But he was not orthodox Brahmin. In spite of being Brahmin, he



did not distinguish among casts. He never took it seriously. He was very meditative about the people of kanthapura cast-ridden and domination of British government. He motivated them to get freedom from British government and went door to door for distributing charkhas. He distributed charkhas free of cast but he found it difficult to convince the villagers to accept the charkha and to start spinning cloth. When Moorthy worked for the upliftment of the pariah, Swami who was the religious man in Kanthapura. He opposed Moorthy for the supporting of Pariah and excommunicated from the Brahmin. When Moorthy's mother heard about Moorthy's excommunication, she became very upset and she tried to stop her son from working for the upliftment of the Pariah but Moorthy did not listen to her. He continued to work for the Pariahas. Swami is an orthodox Brahmin who believed in cast distinction which Hinduism rests. Swami says to Bhatta that the movement for removal of untouchability should be curbed at this stage. Otherwise it will go out of hand. He was an agent of the British government and the supporter of British. Though his only objection was to the movement for removal of untouchability but Moorthy removed totally untouchability among the people of Kanthapura and he united them on one platform. The novel conveys the message to the most of the Brahmins that Gandhi's anti-untouchable movement is more harmful than British rule. The novel also reflects the attitude of Brahmins towards the lower cast people in the society. It also focuses on the cruelty and rigorous acts of the British rulers.

Moorthy went to Patel Gowda and sought his sympathy and active support for starting a congress group (congress committee) in kanthapura. Range Gowda urged others to do what "this learned boy says." And he himself proposed the name of Moorthy for presidentship of the village congress committee. Seenu was enlisted as a member and also Rachana because he was a Harijan. Rangamma joined as a woman representative. They all decided that they will follow the teaching of Gandhi and practice ahinca. Moorthy conducted a women's meeting wherein they talked about Rani Laxmi Bai, Kama Devi, Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant. Moorthy made them aware of their social and practical obligation

Moorthy led the people of Kanthapura to play an active part in Gandhi's non-violent struggle for freedom. Moorthy being educated knew well that religious is main factor and it is the basis for the mindset of the people. So he wanted to instill Gandhian principles of non-violent and satyagrah. He thought that the traditional harikatha will be useful to spread Gandhian ideology among the orthodox people. It was Moorthy's suggestion that religious festivals and Harikathas should be held regularly. Ramakrishnayya explained the vedantic texts to the people.

The Harikathaman, Jayarmacher was invited from the city. He used the Hrikathas to tell the people of kanthapura about Gandhi and about the activities of the freedom fighters. His basic purpose was to tell the people about the principle and ideals of the Mahatma. His Harikathas were very



unique and interesting and the villagers listened with rapt attention.

The novel deals the Skeffington Coffee Estate is situated in Kanthapura. The present owner of the estate is the nephew of the earlier owner who was referred to as Hunter Sahib by the people. In the novel, there is a very vivid description of the setting of the Estate:

“ The skeffington coffee Estate rises beyond the Bebbur Mound over the Bera’s Hill, and hanging over Tippur and Subbur and Kantur, it swings round the Elephant valley, and rising to shoulder the snow mountains and the Beda Ghats, it dips sheer into the Himawathy, and follows on.....Nobody knows how large it is or when it was founded; but they all say it is at least ten thousand acres wide, and some people in Kanthapura can still remember having heard of Hunter Sahib who used his hunter and his hand to reap the first fruits of his plantation; and then it began to grow from the Bear’s Hill to Kantur Hill ,and more and more coolies came from beneath the Ghats, and from the Bear’s Hill and Kantur it touched the snow mountains, and more and more coolies came; and then it became bigger and bigger.....”

The above vivid description of the setting of the Estate is an example of economic exploitation of the Indians by the British .Through the condition of the workers in the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the novelist Raja Rao gives us a glimpse of the atrocities of the Britishers. In fact, it won’t be right to describe it as a glimpse because a very detailed and vivid description of the Estate is mentioned above. The novelist also

depicts the condition of the coolies to the Estate very vividly:

“armies of coolies marched past the Kenchamma Temple, half-naked, starving, spitting, weeping, vomiting, coughing, shivering, squeaking, shouting, moaning coolies- coolie after coolies passed by the Kenchamma Temple, the maistri before them, while the children clung to their mother’s breasts, the old men to their son’s arms, and bundles hung over shoulder and arm and arm shoulder and shoulder; and they marched on past the Kenchamma Temple and up to the Skeffington Coffee Estate –coolies from below the Ghats, coolies, young men. old men, old women, children, baskets, bundles, pots, coolies passed on and winding through the twists of the Estate path-by the Buxcom-pipal bend, over the Devil’s Ravine Bridge, by the Parwatiwell corner-they marched up, the maistri before them, the maistris.....”

The coolies living in the Estate were exploited and ill-treated. They had to go through all kinds of physical torture and humiliation. They had to get up at five o’clock in the morning and work the whole day without any break. The maistri did not allow them to rest even for a single second. They were beaten mercilessly. The men had to dig pits and to hew woods and the women were made to pluck weeds and to kill vermin. The weather was very hot and there were many snakes in the Coffee Estate. They had to work in the scorching heat with perspiration flowing down their bodies. They were given small huts to live in and no wages were paid. They were exploited and treated like animals.



They were given just ragi and rice water.

Moorthy wanted to educate the coolies of the Estate and do something for their upliftment. But when he went to the coffee Estate through through this mind, he was not allowed to enter. He was stopped at the gate by Bade Khan. Many people gathered at the gate and among them there were supporters of Moorthy. There was a scuffle between Bade Khan and the maistri on one side and supporters of Moorthy on the other side. Moorthy considered himself responsible for the violence that took place and kept fast. He felt that he had not lived up to the teaching of Mahatma. He started the 'Do not touch the government complain under his leadership the people of Kanthapura. He picketed toddy booths and Borana's toddy grove. He followed the path of non-violence like a true follower of Gandhi. He was arrested by police many times because of his antigovernment activities. The Karwar congress committee supported Moorthy by providing lawyer. He said that he did not need an advocate to defend himself. Sankar, Rangama and Ratna who also followed the Gandhian thought with Moorthy. Rangamma actively participated in the work of the congress. Her house became the office of the congress in Kanthapura. The freedom fighters used to assemble at her house and discuss their plan of action. She took active part in organizing the women of Kanthapura and forming the Savika Sangh. She motivated the women to fight and tried to prepare them mentally to bear the atrocities of the police. Ratna was also a follower of Gandhi. She was a widow. She became the leader of the freedom fighters in

Kanthapura. Advocate Sanker followed the principles of Gandhi. He refused to go to any marriage party in which the people were dressed in Khadi. He believed that fasting was good things and even made his family members fast on several occasions which were important dates in Indian's Freedom Struggle.

The barbarism of the police during the freedom struggle in the way appears which cannot be described. The police handled and tortured the women at the time when the people of Kanthapura went for picketing the toddy grove and the toddy booths. They behaved very cruelly. Raja Rao depicts a graphic description of the atrocities of the police on the people of Kanthapura after they refused to pay taxes. Many people were arrested. The whole village was full of policemen. The police arrested Rangamma and Moorthy. Many men and women had been taken away during the night. Women were whipped and Kicked by the police. They rushed here and there frantically to save themselves. On the occasion of Satnarayana puja, many people came to Kanthapura from the city. Among them, there were soldiers, coolies and also some were looking sahib. They all cried out Satyanarayan ki jai. When the police saw the procession coming forward, they stopped it. They all shouted vande Mataram. Then suddenly from the darkened Brahamin Street, Pariah Street, Weaver Street came back crying Mahatma Gandhi Ki jai. Among them, there were soldiers, peasants, Mahammadans and also city boys. Then someone suddenly poises the tri coloured flag from the top of a papal tree and signs out loudly.



"Lift the flag high

O lift the flag high

Brothers, sisters, friends, and mothers

This the flag of the Revolution"

These words reveal the enthusiasm of Indian for freedom and portays true patriortic spirit of villagers.

Conclusion: we can see and analyze that the story of Kanthapur is very enticing story. Raja Rao reveals history of freedom movement, Gandhi achievement and struggle for liberation of India. Moorthy who is the main character. He struggled hard and encountered his enemies. British beaurocoracy was very forceful and powerfull. Moorthy cowed down the british officials.

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