



Kanthapura: A Study

DR. MANISH R. RAVAL
Dept. of English
G. D. Modi College of Arts, Palanpur.
Gujarat (India)

Abstract:

Indo-Anglian Literature comprises the work of Indian writers in English. The contribution of Indian writers in English is known as 'Indo-Anglian Literature. There is also the literature created by English men making India the theme of their subjects and it is known as Anglo-Indian Literature. The Gandhian age(1920-1947) is one of the important periods in the History of Indian Writing in English. The Indian English Fiction of the 1930s is influenced by the Gandhian age. During this time, we see the appearance of the three great novelists- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Raja Rao's Kanthapura is a famous political novel describing the impact of Gandhian satyagraha movement and ideals on the simple villagers of Kanthapura. Moorthy is the protagonist of the novel.

Keywords: Gandhian age, Gandhian ideals, Indo-Anglian Literature, Raja Rao, Kanthapura, Socialism

V. K. Gokak in his book 'English in India: It's present and future' (1964) interprets the term Indo-Anglian literature as comprising the work of Indian writers in English. There is also the literature created by English men who have made India the theme of their writing. This literature is called 'Anglo-Indian Literature.' There is the literature created by Indians in English and this unique contribution to English is known as 'Indo-Anglian Literature.' Like Bengali, or Marathi or Kannad or Tamil literatures, Indo-Anglian literature too is an Indian literature with a many folded achievement. Indo-Anglian literature is written in English and therefore appeals to the English reading people world-wide in addition to the Indian readers.

The entire period of near three decades (1920-1947) of the Gandhina age is one of the important periods in the History of Indian Writing in English. It brought for reaching – changes in political as well as in all areas of Indian life. Gandhiji fresh from his styagraha triumph in South Africa returned to India in 1915. He launched the first country-wide Non-co-operation movement in 1920 which awakened nationalistic feelings among all and inspired them with a new confidence in their power to fight for freedom. He launched the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930 and his march from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi to break the salt law created a great impact on the entire world. He launched the last Satyagraha campaign in 1940 and 'Quit India' took place in 1942. In the end India got independence on 15th August, 1947.

In the political field we see the great mass awakening. In the social sphere, women responded whole heartedly to Gandhi's call. They showed a great enthusiasm in taking part in political mass movement. Along with these, we also see the rise of a strong youth movement, awakening among the depressed classes, the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj plea for equal right to the untouchables. The congress, under Gandhi made the upliftment of the untouchables; an important part of its programme. The Indian English novel of the period was deeply influenced by the Gandhian movement and ideals. In Raja Rao's novel 'Kanthapura', we see the influence of Gandhian ideals and movements.

During the Indian English fiction in the 1930s, we see the appearance on the scene the great three novelists: Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Raj Rao (1908-2006) was a path-breaker, a powerful and a profound writer of Indian writing in English. He wrote four novels, beginning with 'Kanthapura' which was published in 1938. It is a political novel describing the impact of Gandhian Satyagrahs on the life of simple, ignorant but well-behaved villagers of Kanthapura. It gives a depiction of a life-like representation of an important stage in the political movement in India. His second novel is 'The Serpent and the Rope' (1960) and it won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963. His third novel is 'The Cat and Shakespeare' (1965) and the fourth is 'The Cow of the Barricades'.

The novel 'Kanthapura' one of the morvellous and the finest novels of mid-twentieth century is the story a small village Kanthapura with just 24 houses. It is divided into Brahmin quarters, artisan quarters and beyond these lie pariah quarters for the untouchable class. The people are all Hindus mostly of the orthodox traditional kind and are simple and straightforward living in a calm and quiet traditional life which has continued for thousands of years in such villages. The title of the novel is an appropriate because it gives the picture of village of Kanthapura. Social life revolves round the festivals and the religious celebration and worship of the temple of Goddess Kenchamma, the patron Goddess of the village.

The peaceful and routine life of the villagers was suddenly disturbed when Moorthy-a young man of the village who had gone out for higher education came back with new ideas and problems. Moorthy is the chief protagonist of the novel. He had been attracted towards political movement of Gandhiji. He came back to the village and began to carry on propaganda for the congress movement, the programme laid down by Gandhiji. Hence forward, all his life belonged to the service of the country. Gandhiji told him to bring political consciousness to the people. He distributed the charkhas among the people, enrolled members for the congress and worked for the removal of untouchability. The whole village became a follower of the non-violent Satyagraha movement of Gandhiji.

The people of the village began to gather around him and the village became a follower of non-violent Satyagraha movement. He was such a firm believer in non-violence that he undertook a fast for three days and there was some violence at the Skeffigton Coffee Estate which was managed by English. He tried to put into practice the Gandhian principles of truth, non-violence and even the love of the enemy. All his activities were based on these Gandhian principles. Moorthy is Gandhi's man, the satyagrahi, the leader of the non-violent movement in Kanthapura. There is at the other extreme, Bade Khan the policeman who the symbol of oppression, the soulless bureaucracy is made visibly repulsive. But the villagers are unafraid. Range Gowda Said, "You are our Gandhi." The woman called Mahatma "the big mountain" and Moothy "the small mountain." Moorthy's movement attracted the attention of the authorities, he was arrested and was sent to prison for three months. In his absence, Range Gowda and a lady named Rangamma handled the situation.

After his release, the movement gathered speed Gandhiji launched the salt-satyagraha and Moorthy undertook a fast for three days in the temple of Kenchamma. After the arrest of Gandhiji, Moorthy actively started the Satyagraha against toddy shops and trees. The villagers proceeded to cut down the Toddy trees and policemen mercilessly beat them. Gandhiji advocated the non-payment of land-revenue and the villagers declared that they would not pay the taxes. The villagers were violently attacked but they remained peaceful and non-violent. The fields of the villagers were auctioned by the Government. The whole village was burnt down and many men and women were arrested. After these incidents, the villagers who were left behind migrated into the Mysore state and settled down in a place known as Kashipura.

It is here after one year and two months, the whole story is related by an old woman of Kanthapura to her neighbours at Kashipura. The name of this old woman is Acchakka also called Timmama. By this

time, the satyagraha movement was suspended as there was a treaty of peace between Gandhiji and the viceroy lord Irwin in 1931.

Range Gowda was released from the prison. He visited Kanthapura and brought news that the whole village was broken down and mostly abandoned. But rich men from Bombay had built fine bungalows on the slopes of the hills. He concluded, 'there is neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura, for the men from Bombay have built houses on the Bebbur mound' The last part of the novel gives a description of the deserted village Kanthapura.

Moorthy was also released from the jail but he did not return to the Village. He had become dissatisfied even with the movement started by Gandhiji with the idea of getting swaraj His views in politics had undergone a change. He says "And yet, what is the goal? Independence? Swaraj? Is there not Swaraj in our States, and is there not misery and corruption and cruelty there? Oh no, Ratna, it is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, and bit by bit, when I was in prison, that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and city cars that can roll up the Bebbur mound, and gaslights and coolie cars, there will always be Pariahs and poverty. Ratna things must change. Jawaharlal will change it...he, too, is for non-violence and he, too, is a Satyagrahi, but he says in Swaraj there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an "equal-distributionist", and I am with him and his men." Raja Rao making Moorthy posit his faith in political philosophy of socialism. He had become a follower of young Jawaharlal Nehru who advocated equal distribution of wealth and power in the country. He held that even independence would be of little use so long as there were rich coffee estate owners or other exploiters of the labour. There must be a society in which the distinction between the rich and the poor would be wiped out. In such a state, there would be no masters exploiting and ruling over the servants as the masters of the Coffee Estate did in the case of the servants. All people would have the equal rights and advantages in life. Moorthy had decided to devote his life to the pursuit of this ideal. This is the last we see and read about Moorthy. Moorthy went to Bombay to take part in the youth league movement of which Jawaharlal Nehru was the leader.

Kanthapuar describes the influence of Gandhian ideals on a remote South Indian village during the years of Indian Independence movement. It shows impact of Gandhi's ideals on Indian population. Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel, is the spokesman of Gandhi and one of the young persons inspired by Gandhi to fight for the independence movement. There is an influence of Gandhi's ideals on him and he became Gandhi's man in the beginning. He wore homespun khadi, discarded foreign clothes, follows passive resistance and non-violence and fought against untouchability. He is a mouthpiece and practitioner of Gandhian ideologies and spread the Gandhian values of non-violence, elimination of untouchability and love for all into his village. But in the end, Moorthy left Gandhi and join Jawaharlal Nehru.

Raja Rao explains certain ideas which he had in his mind while writing this novel and describes the incidents which happened in it during the early years of Satyagraha movement started by Gandhiji in 1930. Raja Rao's involvement in the nationalistic movement is reflected in this novel. The novel gives the picture of the barbarism of the British rules in dealing with the non-violent agitation of the freedom fighters. Raja Rao has given the time of action in the novel around Gandhi's Dandi March and it ends with Gandhi's truce with the then British viceroy of India. He did not give the complete picture of Gandhi's struggle for freedom.

The theme of Kanthapura may be summed up as 'Gandhi and our Village'. Though the narrative style makes the book more a Gandhi Purana than a piece of mere fiction. Kanthapura follows the oral tradition of Indian Sthala-Purana. The story is narrated in flashback by Achakka. The style of Raja Rao in Kanthapura combines the flexible expression of English languages with the fast tempo of

Indian speech in a very pleasant manner. It provides delight to the Indian readers because those of simple yet beautiful English prose.

References

1. Naik, M. K. A History of Indian English Literature, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, P. 115, 116
2. Raja Rao, (2014). 'Kanthapura' Penguin Books India, 2014.P.211,212
3. Srinivasa, K. R. (1989). Iyengar, Indian Writing in English. Revised & Updated Edition. Sterling Publisher Private Limited. Reprint 1989.P.391, 392.