

PEACE AND NON-VIOLENCE: WEAPONS OF COLONIAL TRANSFORMATION IN RAJA RAO'S *KANTHAPURA*

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Abstract

Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938) reflects the elements of peace and non-violence as the weapons of colonial transformation in India. It deals with the Civil Disobedience Movement of the 1930s. The Swaraj movement was initiated by Gandhi on the twin ideals such as peace and Non-Violence to set Indians free from the clutches of colonial power.. In the novel Kanthapura, Moorthy considers himself a staunch Satyagrahi, spin charkha regularly, and equates himself by following the path of Gandhi and the principles of Gandhi. He faces a lot of beating and harassing by the police. He too goes on fasting. He gives Spinning Wheel to everyone to spin Khadi and giving them cotton free by the help of the Congress league. He gathered people for preaching, singing bhajans and listening the effect of Satyagraha in the whole Nation and the influence of Gandhi. It is evident that the Gandhism in Kanthapura is embodied through the character of Moorthy, He fights orthodoxy at the social level and the British at the political level. As a result, the transformation occurs through a complex dynamism negotiated through tradition and change.

Keywords: *Peace, Non-violence, Struggle, Inequality, Ideology*

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The present paper aims at studying the 'Reflection *Peace and Non-Violence as the Weapons of Colonial Transformation in Raja Rao's Kanthapura*'. It refers the elements of peace and non-violence as the weapons of colonial transformation in India which reflected in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). The *Swaraj* (Independence) movement was initiated by Gandhi on the twin ideals such as peace and Non-Violence to set Indians free from the clutches of colonial power. In the novel *Kanthapura*, Moorthy considers himself a staunch Satyagrahi, spin charkha regularly, and equates himself by following the path of Gandhi and the principles of Gandhi. He faces a lot of beating and harassing by the police. He too goes on fasting. He gives Spinning Wheel to everyone to spin Khadi and giving them cotton free by the help of the Congress league. He gathered people for preaching, singing *bhajans* and listening the effect of Satyagraha in the whole Nation and the influence of Gandhi. It is evident that the Gandhism in *Kanthapura* is embodied through the character of Moorthy, He fights orthodoxy at the social level and the British at the political level. As a result, the transformation occurs through a complex dynamism negotiated through tradition and change.

M. K. Naik points out that the Gandhian ideals are projected in the novel as an urge to rediscover the Indian soul. He says;

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is easily the finest evocation of the Gandhian age in Indian English fiction. This story of a small south Indian village caught in the maelstrom of the Gandhian movement successfully probes the depths to which the nationalistic urge penetrated, and getting fused with traditional religious faith helped rediscover the Indian soul. (Naik, 1984:105-06)

The idealistic character of Moorthy in *Kanthapura*, is a model of Raja Rao's Gandhian self. Through Moorthy, Raja Rao reflects the Gandhian ideals. Moorthy, a Gandhian, is presented as a prominent figure. He is "a pebble among the pebbles of the river, and when the floods came, rock by rock may lie buried under" (Rao, 2005:180). Rangamma considers him as "Moorthy the good, Moorthy the religious and Moorthy the noble" (Rao, 2005:144). He wins the hearts of all by his versatile personality. Mohit Ray observes in Moorthy as "the confluence of the three strands of experience that make up the action of *Kanthapura*—the political, the social, and the religious" (Ray, 2007:285).

Moorthy's urge for peace and non-violence in the rural area like *Kanthapura* creates the identity as a self-changer. By reading the *Harikatha*, Jayramchar acquaints the people about Gandhiji's ideals and while telling that he addresses Gandhi as the Krishna and Rama who killed the demon just as Mahatma began to fight against the demon called Colonial Power of British Raj. He says about Gandhiji that..... "Love all, says he..... He is a saint, the Mahatma, a wise man and a soft man, and a saint. You know how he fasts and prays. And his enemies fall at his feet." (Rao, 2005:23). Reading of *Harikathas* exerts a conscious process of self-purification which needs to change the mindsets of the people towards unity. The ideals of Gandhiji were executed among the people through the self-purification and spiritual revelations.

The peace and non-violence that occurred in *Kanthapura* is an outcome of the self-purification and the spiritual spellbound of the *Harikathas* and the optimistic energy cultivates them to set the right direction of their campaign against inequality, injustice and rude treatment of the British people. Moorthy is very possessive about the ideals of peace and non-violence. His zeal to spread the Gandhian ideals calmly among the native people of *Kanthapura* reveals the 'silent communion of the ancient books (Rao, 2005:52)'. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes Moorthy as an "idealized character who like Christ takes all the sins of the people upon himself and undergoes a penance for purification, a young man who conquers physical desire and self-interest" (Mukherjee, 1974:141).

The narrator, Achakka plays a pivotal role to deal the Gandhian ideology through the various modes of their responses. She seems firm and optimist to look at the scenario that testifies the patriotic mood of the villagers influenced by the Gandhian thoughts. Among them, Moorthy paves a way to resist the Colonial power as well as the antagonism of the hegemonic power of the Indian brutal people who were associated with the British people for their own

prosperity. The conflict between the young Moorthy and the hierarchically drenched society is an archetype of Indian society that Gandhi attempted to revolutionarily alter. Gandhi, as he, envisages a paradigm of *Gramswaraj*, independent and self-reliant villages, the traditional conviction of the hegemonic elites is fissured between the nation and the caste-identity that prevents an equitable village setting as seen in *Kanthapura*. The village segregated with caste tags, fundamentally, opposes a *Gramswaraj* as envisioned by Gandhi. It denotes an idea about the discourse of the rural society to challenge the materialistic approach of the hegemonic power and the clutches of the colonial power as well through the Gandhian ideals of peace and non-violence. The villagers as the disciples of Gandhian thoughts conquered the steps to set themselves free from the clutches of colonialism. Meenakshi Mukerjee observes;

“The characteristically concrete imagination of the uneducated mind pictures the Mahatma as large and blue like the Sahyadri mountain on whose slopes the pilgrims climb to the top, while Moorthy is seen as small mountain. To her the Satyagraha becomes a religious ceremony to which she devotes her sacred ardour” (Mukherjee, 1974:141).

Bade Khan is a supporter of the English people and considered as an outsider who is an enemy of the people in *Kanthapura*. When the Satyagraha becomes vital, the Rachanna and family were thrown out of the estate because of their role in beating Bade Khan. Meanwhile, Moorthy continues his struggle against injustice and social inequality and became a staunchest helper of Gandhi. The violent actions take place in the Coffee estate and Moorthy goes on a three day long fasting and comes out triumphant and morally elated. Following the ideals of Gandhi, a unit of the congress committee was formed in *Kanthapura*. Gowada, Rangamma, Rachanna and seenu were elected as the office bearers of the committee and they avowed to follow Gandhi's principles. The British people got such blow by the mobility and unity of the people under leadership of Moorthy. They accused him for provoking the people to inflict violent act and arrested him. His imprisonment leads the freedom movement more powerful. The people of *Kanthapura* hold the Dandi march against the brutality of the British people and after his release from the prison house, people throng at his house and disperse peacefully.

Raja Raoupholds Gandhian struggle for freedom offering a mythological way by symbolizing Indian myths. He points out, “The subtlety of the Gandhian thought and the complex political situation of Pre-independence could be explained to the unlettered villagers only through legends and religious stories of gods” (Rao,2005: 104). The struggle between Gandhi and the colonial masters is imagined as the battle between Rama and Ravana symbolizing the encounter between good and evil. Rao says; “It is not for nothing the Mahatma is a Mahatma and he would not be Mahatma if the gods were not with him” (Rao, 2005: 125). The ideals of Gandhiji are executed to eradicate the brutal act of the colonial power. Rao says that the villagers believed;

“Oh, no, the Mahatma need not go as far as the sea, like Harishchandra before has finished his vow, the gods will come down and dissolve his vow, and the Britishers will leave India, and we shall be free, and we shall pay less taxes, and there will be no policemen” (Rao,2005:172).

Moorthy’s journey of self-realization relates the elements of peace and non-violence that forces him into a mode of meditation. He propels Gandhian values of non-violence, elimination of untouchability and love for all into his village. He was determined to face and resist violence only through non-violent means and therefore he goes on to fast. Non-violence envisions purging any form of hatred towards other from one’s heart because it is contempt and derision that causes hostility and violence. Range Gowda aspires to resolve his enmity with Bade Khan, the Government appointed policeman to spy on the political movements of the freedom fighters of Kanthapura, through violent means which was opposed by Moorthy.

Moorthy prevents Range Gowda advocating violent means to counter Bade Khan. He convinces Gandhian principles of non-violence to Range Gowda. The novelist portrays a young unusual Brahmin boy, Moorthy, the mouth piece and practitioner of Gandhian ideologies. Moorthy goes *forkhadi* clothing that is considered one of the means to resist colonialism. He convinces the people in Kanthapura to maintain the national cause by spinning their own clothes as advocated by Gandhi. The narrator points out;

“We should do our duty. If not, it is no use belonging to the Gandhi-group.’ Rangamma says, ‘That is right, sister,’ and we say, ‘We shall not forget our children and our husbands.’ But how can we be like we used to be? Now we hear this story and that story, and we say we too shall organize a foreign-cloth boycott like at Sholapur, we too, shall

go picketing cigarette shops and today ships, and we say our Kanthapura, too, shall fight for the Mother”(Rao,2005: 110).

Moorthy’s intension to follow Gandhian idelas to boycott the British goods is one of the ways to resist their economy in a peaceful way. Range Gowda names Moorthy “our Gandhi.” More like Gandhi, he stimulates the national feeling and the fighting spirit in the villagers that emanates from Gandhian visions like the realization of truth, the significance of love and the presence of God of all. Within these visions, Moorthy situates his purpose in the Indian freedom struggle.

Conclusion:

The novels bring out an idea of the Independence movement initiated in India by Gandhiji which marks the significance of peace and non-violence in India. The Gandhian ideals create harmony and equality. Moorthy breaks the superfluous boundaries of caste-system. The divine truth of Gandhian ideals of peace and non-violence are reflected through the acts of the villagers in Kanthapura. The novelist also believes in the social harmony through peace and non-violence by emphasizing the divine reality. He says about the Gandhian ideals; “Fight says he [Gandhi], but harm no soul. Love all, says he, Hindu, Mahomedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God” (Rao, 2005:22). It makes us to know that the significant aspects of peace and non-violence were the major weapons of colonial transformation during the colonialism in India.

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