

LITERATURE AND GANDHISM: A STUDY OF *THE NARAYANPUR INCIDENT*

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Abstract

Literature is the most powerful weapon that mirrors not only history, but historical events of a society. Shashi Deshpande is viewed as one of the most creative and talented writers of Indian writings in English. Set at the time of Quit India Movement of 1942, her short story The Narayanpur Incident (1982) is full of Gandhian weapons as Satyagraha, non-violence and cooperation. Therefore heroism or bravery is the root of the story and writer has showed the feeling of self-sacrifice, struggle and surviving sensibility of young as well as old generation of India. This paper is an attempt to discuss Gandhian ideology from the realistic and contemporary points of view. Basically Gandhism, heroism, bravery and courage are the keywords of this research paper.

Keywords: *mirrors, Quit India Movement, self-sacrifice.....*

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Literature is supposed to be a mirror, which includes history of human life, actions, historical movements and whole society or we can say, Literature is that mirror, in which we can see various aspects of society. These are writers, who try to inspire us by showing the good aspects of a society on the one hand, and bad aspects of society on the other. In this way, they try to bring a big change in society. Where there is a question regarding gandian thoughts, to which extant these perception of Gandhi and other great leaders have presented till now among us, must be evaluated. Writers have not only showed Gandhi as a hero of India through their writings, but tried to inspire the whole society by challenging the people towards the duties for their own country. Writers like R. K. Narayan Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand have used gandhian thoughts and philosophy as an inspiration and motivation for the people of all generation and through their writings, they have tried to erase evils like untouchability, injustice and violent from society, as people can gain an appropriate position in their own society.

The term Gandhism stands for values of Gandhi's ideas, words and inspiration for people. Truth and Non-violence are supposed to be the major aspects of Gandhism.

In her short story "*The Narayanpur Incident*" (1995) Shashi Deshpande has tried to resemble the events before independence of India from the perspectives of human beings of different-different generations. In 1631, British came to India for the purpose of trade. After a great revolt, British crown took over from the East India Company in 1858, India got freedom and Englishmen had to leave India unintentionally. This gap of 90 years (from 1858 to 1947) was full of struggle and Indians had to survive, no doubt. In all these the contributions of Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders, who had tried to bring freedom by using tricks as well as organizing various movements, are unparallel. The movements like Satyagraha, Non-violence and Non-cooperation have brought a kind of wave among the human beings of India.

Basically 1942 Quit India Movement forms the background of this short story. Heroes and heroines are not some extra-ordinary persons, but they are ordinary people, including adults, olds and women. Though nobody is born extraordinary, but it is by one's duty, one is supposed to be great. Great leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose have become memorable because of their sacrifice towards country.

The story starts very usually Appa, who is a schoolmaster, being an inspiration for his family as well as other citizens of Narayanpur, Mohan is eighteen years, Babu is a teenager of 14 years and Manju is two years younger than Babu. Appa, Amma, Mohan, Babu and Manju are the believers of Gandhi, Swaraj and Congress and getting excited for the news of the AICC Session, which is held in Mumbai. The news of AICC resolution comes that they have asked to British to quit India. As Appa explains that there is going to be held a mass civil disobedience movement and asks to Babu: 'Do you know what that means?'(Deshpande 3) Babu answers promptly: 'Fighting the British, but no guns.' (Deshpande 3)

The paper, which is the words of Gandhiji:

"Here is a mantra ...a short one I give you. We shall do or die. We shall either free India or die the attempt. We shall not live to see the perpetration of slavery." (Deshpande 5) read by Dinkar-kaka, inspires the members of Appa's family.

Manju, Babu and Mohan go to attend procession, which is organized by college students from their college to collector's office. Now the leaders of procession, Suman is one of them, filled with excitement and reach the barred gate. There happens some conversation between students and a police-officer, who is the DSP. Though police-officer smiles, but students are serious and one of them shouts 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai'. There begins rains and as Manju and Babu see towards Mohan in white pyjamas and cream coloured shirt, it seems that he carries the picture of Mahatma Gandhi with other boys.

Amma, the mother of Mohan, Babu and Manju involves herself in spinning in absence of her husband, Appa. Mohan does not wear hand-made cloths, but unlike Amma and Appa, wears cloths made out of mill and says: 'What has independence to do with wearing hand-spun clothes and all that rot?'(Deshpande 34) Yet Amma regards that spinning program is more important because it provides work and employment of human beings of country. Appa always explains: 'Unless we can provide work for

ourselves, what use is independence?' (Deshpande 35) On this, Mohan says: 'Okay Amma, it is a deal. You spin enough for shirt and I'll wear it.' (Deshpande 35)

Therefore Amma is an honest woman of open-minded thoughts and she works with Suman in paper publication of Gandhi's speech through cyclostyling machine. The sub-inspector Patil comes for inquiry of cyclostyling machine, Amma allows him to take away the machine, and behaves as nothing is happened. When Amma goes to police station, faces the questions of police-officer bravely as well.

Often, Appa is arrested, Mohan, has to hide because of the behaviours of British government and Amma has to face questionings of police. When amma returns, she moves to Narayanpur, a sleepy little village, with Manju and Babu. The study of children starts again there, by Arvind not in school, but through tuition.

It has always been an argument between Vasant, grandson of Annukaka and Manju that Narayanpur is a village or a town, but Amma compares it to a village as well as town. As she explains: 'Well if you compare Narayanpur to Bombay, Calcutta, London, New-York- I suppose, it is a village. But if you compare it to Sannur, it is a town.' (Deshpande 70)

It does not matter that Narayanpur is a village or town, but it is more important and must be noted that it is a place of entertainment, especially for children like Manju, Vasant, Shanti and Babu. Though Manju always seems to be happy in Annukaka's house, Shanti goes to Narayanpur School and Vasant goes to the government school in the next town.

For compelling British to quit India, citizens of Narayanpur begin to establish a kind of unity, which is supposed to be a powerful instrument for getting freedom from British.

When Babu goes to principle's office for lecture with his friend Murali, there is a conversation about traitors of country, on which Suman speaks: 'They are those who think of themselves, their jobs, their comforts, instead of their country.' (Deshpande 52)

Thus Quit India speech, which is made by Mahatma Gandhi on 8 august 1942 for helping Indian to gain freedom, becomes the speech of crowd, which were collected there.

After that the feeling of patriotism, love and respect for their country have awoken in the heart of people and they announces:

“Join us, let us unite and drive out these foreigners. Wake up, all of you. Swaraj is not so far. Swaraj is near, if we all are unite. What can even the whole British Empire do against a country determined to throw them out.’ (Deshpande 52)

Hartals, meetings processions and demonstrations have started; people have given resign from government jobs and burnt foreign cloths. Behind all these major intention has been to compel British to leave India and getting freedom. It is assumed that people can not bear rule and tyranny of British anymore as they shout: ‘We are free. We will not be ruled by you anymore.’(Deshpande 55)

Gandhi’s Satyagraha aims at truth or Satya and polite insistence and citizens of Narayanpur are supposed to be practitioners of Satyagraha, especially the characters like Appa, Mahadevappa, Annukaka and Amma. In context of Satyagraha, Truth involves reality in speech against the falsehood of British and truths are glimpsed in speech of men well as women of Narayanpur.

Therefore Gandhiji has adopted Indian clothing system in 20th century, whose major aim was to challenge the discrimination between poor and rich. Mahadevappa, who has been a Gandhian and taken part in Salt Satyagraha is being arrested and injured by police lathi. When he comes back in Narayanpur, participates in Gandhiji’s favourite programmes like spinning and khadi among poor villagers and helps Harijans.

There is going on a search for Sadanand in some mentioned houses of Narayanpur. However search is being over, nothing can be found by the police in Narayanpur or in any other villages. Only a few days later government announces a collective fine of 7000 on the people of Narayanpur and if they are unable to pay money, their property will be confiscated. These things are not less than game for children, as Manju says to Babu: ‘Do you remember Amma saying once – it is as if a sleeping tiger has been awakened?’ (Deshpande 120)

Now anti – government fever seems to be at its heights, people, who try to raise their voice against British, become a hatred figure. So they decide to throw out all the things, which have been giving of British government. Rao Bahahur, who has been a rich landlord, gives up his title, which is given him by British government. Even Appa and Amma have refused to call a market by the name ‘Wilson Squire’ earlier, which was

called before British government 'Market Squire'. Overnight Gandhi's cap has been put on the head of everyone. Even women also feel proud that besides domestic works, they can be of any use, especially for their country.

Appa has always been inspiration for his family. Besides Appa, there are other figures like Annukaka, who has changed himself with the time and begins to believe in Gandhian perceptions and thoughts.

When India has got independence on 15 August 1947, all the citizens of Narayanpur, including Amma, Appa, Mohan, Babu, Manju and Suman have collected together. As the flag has been hoisted, there is glimpse of tears as well as pride in their eyes.

Probably whole characters play their own role, what they deserve. Manju becomes a doctor instead of Jhansi ki Rani, Shanti ironically said by Vasant 'Go and write a poem' becomes a good poet. The same way Arvind becomes a research scientist and Babu is his student. Mohan also completes his M.A. and goes on to become a journalist. In this way all major characters are shifted in their own way.

Basically novelist has pointed out one thing, on which human lives are supposed to be continue, is hope. At the end of story we see that the letter of Appa fulfills a kind of encouragement in heart of young as well as old generation. Written in a very unique and exquisite way from the points of view of old as well as contemporary generation, Deshpande has chosen national theme for her short story, which inspires adults as well as readers.

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