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NATIONALISM AND SPIRITUALITY IN RAJA RAO'S "KANTHAPURA"

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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao is one of the most widely acclaimed not only at the national but also at the international level. One of pioneer novelists in Indian English literature, he has marked the footprint in Indian English literature. He has only three novels to his credit, but much influential as far as literary values are concern. His most popular novel 'Kanthapura' (1938) deals with village of Kanthapura encompassing the socio-political, cultural and religious situations of the pre-independence period. Like other novels of the contemporary period, Kanthapura too highlights the very notion of nation. And it was the only novelists who took efforts to awaken the masses and became responsible for the people to imagine itself a nation. The novelist also tried to highlight various issues of social, cultural, economical, religious, educational etc. of the country at the time of colonial rule. The novelist reveals his intense knowledge and understanding of Indian village life. He strongly displays deep and firmly rooted passion for India's struggle for freedom and spiritualism. His nationalistic and patriotic zeal and spiritual concerns begin with this novel.

Keywords: zeal, anti-colonialism, socio-political, inextricably, mythicized

Raja Rao has delineated the microscopically Indian scenario as far as political, social, cultural realities are concern. Being an active participant in political movement and highly educated, Raja Rao has analysed the socio-political situations of India, spiritual tradition and religions of the nation; and used to breathe the patriotic and spiritualistic politics zeal among the masses by bringing spirituality in practical life through his novels. His most popular novel 'Kanthapura' (1938) deals with village of Kanthapura encompassing the socio-political, cultural and religious situations of the pre-independence period. Like other novels of the contemporary period, Kanthapura too highlights the very notion of nation. And it was the only novelists who took efforts to awaken the masses and became responsible for the people to imagine itself a nation.

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Kanthapura, known as an epic of freedom struggle is elaborately mirrors the Indian nationalism and spirituality. The novelist has spiritualized the socio-politics in India. The novelist remarkably delineated the social and political scenario of India during the period from 1919 to 1930 when Gandhian movement was at the highest peak and has created charismatic influence of Gandhian

political ideology over the country. India was marching towards independence with full of nationalistic movements and national pride.

Unlike other novels of Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* is full of Indian themes, Indian characters, Indian life, manners, etc. which makes the novel unmistakably national. *Kanthapura* a village of south Kerala is microscopically pictured in the novel. Though the novel is restricted to the village, villagers and happenings of it only, but in fact the same grand events take place all over the country. And hence *Kanthapura* seems the representative of all the villages of India.

Kanthapura and the happening of it is the national situation. *Kanthapura's* identity is the identity of the nation *Kanthapura*, the little village, forms the microcosm of the Indian subcontinent is shown to come to life where movement for national freedom during twenties and thirties worked on successfully. The village is located in the province of Kara, situated high on the Ghats and the steep mountains facing the Arabian Sea. Like *Kanthapura*, thousands of villages of India had woken up to fight the alien rulers. The remote village is caught in the maelstrom of the freedom struggle of the 1930s and is transformed into living symbol of Gandhism. The novel may be considered anti-colonialism due its agitation against British Empire.

Kanthapura is the follower of Gandhi and Gandhian political ideology. The novelist has elaborately delineated the village and the rich historical culture, Moorthy, the major character known as little Gandhi of *Kanthapura* and his fast, the flood and poverty due to the British Rule, and nationalist struggle, minorities awareness and their involvement in freedom struggle, the acceptance of non-violence and Swadeshi movement laid by Gandhi. The novelist also narrated many myths, legends, Vedantic texts and Puranas and tried to show the relation between an individual and nation to boost nationalistic enthusiasm among the villagers. For example, in a *harikatha*, Jayaramachar brings in an allegory between Siva, Parvati and the nation. The three eyed Siva stands for Swaraj. Later Rangamma standing in as the commentator of Vedanta after the death of her father reads the

Puranas allegorically, interpreting hell as the foreign rule, soul as India and so on. Comparison between Gandhi-British rule and Rama-Ravana intentionally made by the novelist to show the spiritualistic nationalism which was stimulated in the community. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, widely-known fables, legends, and religious stories of god, demons, Mahatma Gandhi and his movements, narration of old woman, the happenings of the village directly deal with political awareness and the national identity.

Rao brings out the fact about Gandhi's belief that politics and religion are inextricably mated together *Kanthapura* evinces this divine truth that man's status in the society is spiritual as much as it is political. *Kanthapura* appears to be a laboratory of the Gandhian thought and theory. Rao's spiritual and philosophical ideals, knowledge of ancient India and its traditional impact on the emotional and psychological make-up of the inhabitants of this South Indian Village during the period of independence movement under the leadership of Gandhi flashes through the novel.

The community formation leads the ideology of nationhood, a tendency of nationalism. A nation is a community of people, who have a common language, religion and custom, but in the context of India, nationalism has vast inclusiveness due to its multi linguistic, geographical differences, various religious communities etc. but they dream the same nationality. Thus in *Kanthapura*, Congressmen and Moorthy follow the model of the nation-state. Villagers insistence on speaking Hindi instead of the local language Kannada, resistance to the use of English, the narrator visualizes Moorthy wearing kurta pyjama instead of dhoti in the prison are the symptoms of nationalism among them. Another one of the causes to raise nationhood among the masses is making the nation which resulted due to the British Administration. Indian nationalism is the result of colonial administration.

Kanthapura opposes the British administration. Not only British Empire but also Brahmanism is opposed by the villagers to form their own administration and to establish equality and freedom in the village. To enrich the Indian

nationalism the novelist intentionally used the names of rural India and their familiar identity or nicknames to call each other. The village community is one and all and is together for their motto to fight for their identity and freedom. For example: Comer-House Moorthy, Front-House Akamma, Nose-scratching Nan gamma, left-handed Madamma, Pork-marked Sidda, shop-keeper Chetti, Post-master Surya Narayan, water-fall Venkamma, Coffeepant Ramayya, Street-comer BeedleTimayya, Kicc-pounding Rajamma, Trumpet-Lingayya, Jack-tree Tippa, One-veil Lingayya, Snuff-Shastri, Gap-toothed Siddayya, Corn-distributing Barber Venkatamd etc.

The corner-House Moorthy, known as Gandhi of the village is prominent figure of the novel. Moorthy is a young student and has great impact of Gandhi, and ready to walk on the path laid by Mahatama Gandhi for the independence movement. Not only Moorthy but the whole village is influenced by Gandhian thoughts of political movement. Moorthy forms the Panchayat Congress Committee to aware and teach the villagers about the nation and national movements. Like Gandhi, Moorthy is full of inner inexhaustible energy, patience and perseverance. Even like the Gandhi, women and minorities to join the movement. He is being recognized the Gandhi of Kanthapura and respected by the villagers for his selfless service and patriotic zeal.

The novel also deals with common villagers to glorify the nationalism and Indian psyche at the time of pre-independence. The coolies become hopeful about their future salvation due to the appearance of Moorthy. The novelist has deliberately delineated the worse condition of the villagers, which happened due to the British Empire in the colonial period. The novel touches the heart by the description of Cold poverty, all kinds of humiliations and physical torture, Guns and pistol holder police men, girls are being used for the sexual gratification by the rulers and masters. Another point of view Raja Rao has used to define the Indian nationalism is the use of history. History is the meta-narrative that construct, rebuild and forms society. History becomes the guide the modern society for the future appropriate path. In Kanthapura, the narrative in the beginning reflects an historical

consciousness. The description of ancient glorified history of the village at the very beginning of the novel in the form of Sthalapurana makes villagers conscious about their present condition.

The novelist renders Harikatha, myths to make national figures mythical and ultimately stands for an ideal to follow. Gandhi was considered as Ram of Ramayana who rescues Sita from the clutches of Ravana and British recognized as Ravan Empire. Many complications and violence during the period of colonial rule are mythicized by the novelist by using various myths from Upanishad, Vedanta and others.

Further the novelist has remarkably highlights Brahmanism and attempts to show the local colonizers. Due to the Brahmanism, the untouchables and others begin to feel nationalistic to have their own space. Though the novel put forth the confrontation between Colonialism and Brahmanism, but in reality both are one and same. One rules politically and other culturally. Moorthy's outcaste, his campaign against untouchability indicates the tension between Brahmanism and nationalism. Brahmanism thinks Gandhi's anti-untouchable movement is an enemy. The collusion between Brahmanism and colonialism is suggested through the alliance between Bhatta, Bade Khan and the Sahib of the Estate. Moorthy motivates the villagers of all castes for the struggle against colonisers. Moorthy promotes his sociality by visiting the untouchable quarters, and having milk by them. Moorthy being the follower of Gandhi assimilates the lower castes into the nationalist movement. In Indian nationalism religious-politics plays an important role. Like Gandhi he synthesizes religion and spirituality with nationalism. In Indian nationalism religious politics has always remain prominent and influential from the very beginning of civilization. Raja Rao took the efforts to delineate the role of religion in the politics very emphatically. In Kanthapura, the nationalists the religious discourse and customs and symbols for nationalist purposes. Religious customs, rituals and symbols, arthi, puja, conches, bells, Vedanta, bhajan etc become tools of nationalistic mobility.

Gandhian political thoughts and teachings come in the guise of traditional religious terms and it stirs the village folk. Gandhian secularism and spiritual nationalism intends to end the rigid social caste based structure and unite all the masses under a common religion, which should be full of Truth and Love. The novelist delineates Gandhian impact on Indian villages presenting the Kanthapura. Gandhian political thoughts and teachings come in the guise of traditional religious terms and it stirs the village folk. Gandhian secularism and spiritual nationalism intends to end the rigid social caste based structure and unite all the masses under a common religion, which should be full of Truth and Love. The novelist delineates Gandhian impact on Indian villages presenting the Kanthapura.

To conclude, Raja Rao one of the prominent Indian English writer, philosopher and the worldly experienced person remain successful in delineating the various facets of nationalism and spiritualism in the Indian context comparing with the West directly or 156 indirectly. We may strongly claim that the themes of Nationalism and spirituality form the base of his novels .nearly all his novels are deeply rooted in Indian philosophical tradition and culture. Realistically he has delineated the fusion of nationalism and spiritualism of India.

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