

## DELINEATING HISTORY IN LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

*Literature has played an important role in History. On many occasions, it became a medium of propaganda. However, it has always been of pivotal importance in History. The American Revolution was highly influenced by pamphleteers like Tom Paine and John Dickinson. As they were widely read, they are believed to have triggered the Declaration of Independence by America. India too has followed the same example. Literature in the form of a poem was brought out by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who composed 'Bande Mataram' in the 1870's. Gandhi brought out his newspaper 'Harijan' in 1932, seeking to spread socio-political awareness amongst Indians and to foster unity for a common cause. The protagonists of pre-independence literature were ordinary men and women who rose to a heroic stature after joining the freedom struggle. Far from being educated or intellectuals, they hailed from different castes and classes. Though they came from all over India, speaking different languages, they were united by one ideology – the quest for a better quality of life and freedom. The first step in this direction was freedom from the British. Hence, literature then served to unite people for a common cause.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Freedom Struggle, Educated or Intellectuals, Oriented Civilization*

### INTRODUCTION

The present paper serves to highlight this historic epoch and its representation in literature. For this purpose, I have taken up two eminent works – Anandmath by Bankim Chandra and Kanthapura by Raja Rao. The former demonstrated the most powerful example in the modern history of how art could influence real life to such a tremendous extent, especially in an artistically oriented civilization like that of the Hindus. The second novel depicts the village as mentioned in the title, which organizes passive resistance against the British as preached by Gandhi. The winds of change start blowing against the backdrop of the freedom struggle.

Kanthapura is a bold attempt at the assimilation of contemporary history into the freedom struggle. It takes up the impact of Gandhi on the Indian masses. Through Moorthy, the novel introduces almost all the major events in our freedom movement. Gandhi's voice is used to lead the plot onwards. The Civil Disobedience Movement including the Dandi March, Satyagraha, Non-Cooperation Movement, the campaign against untouchability using the 'charkha' or spinning wheel and the adoption of 'khadi' by the people, find vivid mention in the narrative. The novelist renders Gandhi's influence on people with skill and understanding. Kanthapura becomes India in microcosm and the narrative is the story of rural India, responding to the call of the Mahatma for liberty. Rao has made conscious use of myth as part of his narrative technique to delineate the impact of Gandhi on the illiterate rustics of an obscure village. By virtue of his legend-oriented genius, Rao's treatment

of the freedom movement satisfies the aesthetic instinct and demand for relevance. He harmonizes the Puranic myths and popular rites and rituals to transform a local legend into an artistic creation. 'Kanthapura' is not simply a political novel just as Gandhi's struggle was not exclusively a political movement.

The novel portrays India's resurgence under Babu's leadership through the intermingling of myths and facts, legends and history. Though Gandhi is not directly presented as one of the characters in the novel, the entire action is sustained by his spirit. Moorthy is an ardent 'Gandhiman'. He abandons his studies at college along with his western clothes. This action is an illustration of numerous youths in India who renounced their education and comforts in their zeal to free the country. Moorthy's transformation aptly fits into the Puranic structural pattern of the novel, at the same time bringing out Gandhi's greatness who produced thousands of Gandhis throughout the country. All major activities of this time like Nehru's progressivism, Gandhi's round table conferences, picketing of toddy booths, fasts by Gandhi's followers and police atrocities on demonstrators, are integrated into the fabric of the novel. Thus, at one level, the novel functions as a real narrative grounded in historical facts. At another level, it transcends the historical and temporal limitations to raise itself to the level of timeless, eternal myth.

Gandhi is presented as an incarnation of Lord Krishna who has come to uplift the Indians. He would kill the snake of the foreign rule as Krishna had overpowered the serpent, 'Kaliya'. The Gandhian movement is elevated to a mythological plan. Mother India is the Goddess of well-being who is shown as the enslaved daughter of Brahma. So, Seva incarnates itself as Gandhi to free the Mother from the clutches of foreigners. Rao illustrates a fine analogy of Ram and Ravana, the former standing for the Mahatma and the latter, for the British Government. Mother India or freedom is also compared to Sita. Gandhi is presented as Ram and Jawaharlal as Bharata, Ram's brother. Like Ram, Gandhi leads an exiled existence to free the motherland. He abandons his home to traverse the length and breadth of the country. Like Ram, he goes to Lanka i.e., Britain, to get freedom for Sita i.e. India. In this way, the freedom movement is depicted as a struggle between divinity and the devil.

The next work in question is 'Anandmath' or The Abbey of Bliss by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (also called Bankim Chandra Chatterji). Published in 1882, it was inspired by and even incorporated various patriotic acts of the Marathi revolutionary and freedom fighter, Vasudev Balwant Phadke. The Sanyasi Rebellion of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century forms the background to this Bengali novel. Because of its nationalist fervor, the book was banned by the British authorities throughout their rule. In the book, Vaishnavism is the strongest element that lays the foundation of a Bengali Hindu nation. Indians feel that the Hindu identity is threatened because of the Nawab's indifference and inaction. The Bengali Hindus unite to assert their identity collectively and to secure national space. The writer obscures the lines between religion and regime to portray Hindu nationalism.

Inspired by the devastating Bengal famine of 1770, the novel constructs the sentiment of Hindu nationalism among the Sanyasis in Bengal. The story begins by introducing the couple Mahendra and Kalyani who are facing starvation in their village due to the famine. It creates a 'Dharmic' code which justifies violence in the service of the Motherland, to shape up militant nationalism. The idea of the nation in the book is strictly confined to Bengali Vaishnavas. The land is personified as Mother and the Vaishnavas, her Children. The writer has used the song 'Vande Matram' i.e. I bow to thee, Mother to arouse

patriotism in the Children who feel a sense of unity through the idea of 'collective' Mother. The first two stanzas of this song became the national song of India after independence. 'Archetypal' patterns of anti-colonial discourse are used to construct the idea of nation and nationalism. A personification of the land as Mother, focus on lawlessness in foreign rule, national dissent and remonstrance led by a committed hero and the use of religious imagery recur in the novel under study. The idea of land as Mother acts as an integrative force in the book.

It can well be called the first political novel is written in India. It was important for many extra-literary reasons, especially for the tremendous impact it had on the subsequent national movement in Bengal and other parts of India. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it got translated into major regional languages of the country. Commenting on the appeal of this work, a Tamil critic recognized a national purpose in Bankim, which transcended regional loyalty. The writer was attempting regeneration of the Hindu ethos, particularly of the Bengali people and recovering their lost glory. Despite this, the book had an all-India appeal partly as for the first time, a revived Hindu religious fervor was fused with a new found nationalistic zeal. 'Bande Mataram' gradually attained the status of an unofficial national anthem. The emotive, highly charged language of its narrative, motivated generations of freedom fighters. For the first time, the Hindu concept of the mother goddess with its connotation of Shakti was linked with the idea of the country as a political unit. The symbolic power of this fusion was far-reaching.

'Mother' is not an embodiment of India but of Bengal which was a province of the Indian subcontinent. Notably, the clear concept of Bharatvarsha as a whole becomes clear in *Kanthapura*. It alludes to the fact that nationalism in India was more provincial in the beginning. Later on, it spread its wings with the rise of British power in the country. The protagonists in both the novels rise above the common man's comfort and leisure for a national cause. They are not keen to be released from jail as they adhere to a specific ideology. Satyananda, the founder and main Guru of Anandmath, refuses to come out of prison as "the santans must face a test today" (Chatterjee 160). Moorthy in '*Kanthapura*' refuses a defense counsel as "between Truth and me none shall come" (Rao 92). Each hero is expected to follow a code of principles to fulfill nationalist aims during the freedom struggle. In '*Anandmath*', the aim is "to chastise the wicked" and "to protect the good" (151). In '*Kanthapura*', the aim is to "slay the serpent of foreign rule" (18). The Muslim characters are given minimum space in the nationalist discourse. Bankim portrays them as foes of the Mother. Raja Rao portrays them as the archetypes of 'good' eg. Imam Khan and 'bad' eg. Bade Khan. Major women characters are depicted as three dimensional. Through Shanti, Bankim shows that women are partners of men in virtues and great deeds. In *Kanthapura*, women are encouraged to participate in the freedom struggle within set boundaries.

Nation, a psycho-spiritual concept, is based on the collective self-consciousness of a people. In creative space, Indian fiction presents a number of strains of Indian national movement. Both the books are chosen, politically represent different periods of time and construct the history of our movement for independence. The novelists have not purely relied upon what is mentioned in the academic discourse of history. Rather, they have constructed meta-narratives to develop their versions of Indian nationalism on the canvas of fiction. They have artistically created their own settings, characters, and sentiments to focus on specific aspects of nation and nationalism. In the narratives under study, religion-cum-Dharma emerges as the chief characteristic that psychologically differentiates 'us' from 'them' ie. the British. Religion plays a significant role in national integration. It is a potent identity marker, deeply rooted in myths and traditions. The works under study entwine

religion cum Dharma and nationalism in one discourse. Deviations from historical facts are found in 'Anandmath'. However, as Bankim himself admitted, a novel was a novel and not history. The novel was not meant to be docufiction ie. a factual account dressed up in the garb of a novel. The novel is important for the successful creation of the atmosphere of a particular period of history, suffused with national sentiment. Tagore also acknowledged the work as a legend of our freedom struggle while its unmistakable passion testified Bankim's vision of a free India.

## CONCLUSIONS

At first glance, Mahendra, the hero, who is a wealthy zamindar, finds the sanyasis to be robbers. By portraying this story of violence in the colors of nationalism, the novelist has given a new shape to the historical rebellion cum war of independence in the backdrop of Vaishnavism. He has artistically brushed away the basic materialistic motives of the real ascetics mentioned in academic history. In fact, the novelist has replaced the historical sanyasis with the nationalist santans, an outcome of his imagination and about whom, there is no reference in the history of Bengal. It is the novelist's construction of truth on the literary canvas which is otherwise missing in academic history. Through this revolutionary masterpiece, Bankim definitely created the fuel and fire for the Indian national movement. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, he gave us the religion of patriotism. 'Bande Mataram' was banned like the novel, Anandmath. Yet, the worship of Mother India or Bharat Mata once instituted, was here to stay. Across the Indian political spectrum, regardless of ideological differences, the idea of the sacredness of the Motherland was widely accepted.

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