



BRUTAL SUPPRESSION IN RAJARAO'S KANTHAPURA

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Abstract: The present paper gives a vivid description of the sufferings of the Satyagrahis during our freedom struggle by Rajarao. The women particularly were beaten, humiliated, molested and even raped. The people refused to pay taxes and suffered in silence when confronted with the full might of the government. Rajarao gives an idea of what was happening in the whole country during the freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The government was determined to crush the freedom movement in Kanthapura. Moorthy, Rangamma and Ratna led the struggle. Truth and Non-violence were the real weapon used by them. Ratna's leadership are brought out very well in the novel. True followers of Gandhian movement can be traced out in the novel.

Index Terms - Sathyagrahis, pariah, coolies, bhajans, lathis, procession, Non-violence, truth

As expected, the police now decided to crush down the people of Kanthapura. A large number of policemen came and settled in the pariah quarter. Early in the morning they caught hold of the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate who had left their work in the Estate and come and settled in the Pariah quarter of Kanthapura. Men, women and children were tied hand to hand and marched by the policemen towards the Skeffington Coffee Estate because the Sahib needed them for work there. They were being constantly whipped. The villagers were aghast. The temple bell did not ring. The people all asked, "Where is Moorthy?" (p-210) But Moorthy had been arrested and taken away earlier. The pariah women tried to stop the march of the coolies by squatting police. The police caught the boys and girls and beat them mercilessly. Rachanna's grand-son was beaten so badly that he died. The women shouted, "Butchers, butchers, dung-eating curs! (p-212) The policemen beat the women. One of them attacked Puttamma with lathis and when she fell down he dragged her beneath the lantana bushes and gagged her mouth and raped her. There were shrieks and lamentations all over the place. All the streets were full of policemen. The villagers were being beaten. They were running from place to place for shelter. They heard a cry from the Post-Office-House and rushed to that place. Ratna was lying on the floor, her legs were tied ankle to ankle and a policeman was intending to rape her but they had come just in time and he had jumped over the wall. When Ratna was feeling better she tried to lead the women to a safer place but she came running and said,

"Bhatta's house is on fire." Ratna led the women to the temple by the back lane.

There were cries all over the place and they prayed, "Siva, Siva, protect us! (p-218)

Each one prayed that her husband or brother or son may remain safe in the prisons. Bhatta's house continued to burn. The granary was burning. The women said that God was punishing Bhatta for taking 20 per cent interest. But Ratna appealed to them to love even the wrong-doers in the spirit of true satyagrahis. They closed the temple gate from inside. Policemen banged the door but could not open it. So they locked the door from outside. The women then lighted the scared flame and started singing bhajans. When they were tried of singing and no one came to rescue them Ratna said that she would tell them stories. She told them about the brave women of Bombay and Sholapur who were beaten but continued to march., flag in hand shouting Vande Mataram. The women of India did not mind any suffering because they were working for the Mahatma and Mother India. She told story after story of the Dandi March and of the brave resistance put up by the women of Chittagong, Lahore and Benares. It was now evening. Some of the women dozed off. Radhamma who had delivered a premature child first got chill and then high fever. The child lay on Timamma's lap, white and quiet. They were all tired and hungry but they continued to sing bhajans. It was now night. They banged the door again and again but no relief came. At last at dawn Pariah Rachanna's wife, Rachi came and she opened the temple door. It was already daylight when they went home. Puttamma whose husband was in prison had been raped and she felt that she had committed a terrible sin but the rest of the women assured her that she had suffered for the cause of the country and God would forgive her.

The government was determined to perpetrate the worst atrocities on the freedom-fighters of Kanthapura. Three days after the events described in the last chapter the women of Kanthapura saw a large number of cars coming from them. Some were Englishmen while others were Indians. They were saluted by the soldiers and police constables. They went towards the paddy fields. They were lifting hands and pointing to the fields. They had come to attach the fields and auction them because in spite of warnings the cultivators had not paid land revenue. The men of the village had mostly gone into the jungles. Moorthy and Rangamma had already been arrested. So the women went to Ratna who was their chief now. The officials had brought coolies with them. Suddenly

they heard a drum-beat. The drummer was standing in the Temple Square with policemen all around him. He named all the fields around the village and said that since taxes had not been paid these would be auctioned and the village should be sacked. Some of the women like Satamma said that they had done nothing at all and all the ministry had been brought to the village by Moorthy. But they were told that they could not go anywhere because there were policemen all around them and all the paths were barricaded. So they all went to Swami's house where Ratna now lived because Rangamma's house had been locked and sealed. There they found many boys who had come from the city. They were Congress volunteers. Many of the men who had gone into the jungle came back and they all assembled there. One volunteer announced that they would hold a Satyanarayana puja in that house and take out a religious procession. His idea was that the lands would not be auctioned because the government was afraid of them. He said that every white officer in India had policemen to protect him. People in all the cities of India went about shouting, "Victory to the Mahatma". (p-228) Brothels and toddy and opium booths were being picked everywhere. Millions of men and women had gone to prison. When he described the atrocities of the people Rachanna's wife cried out, "Monsters! The volunteer replied that they were monsters but they were to be converted by love. They all prayed with closed eyes.

The officers started selling the fields. The people all the Congress would look after them. But they saw that their lands were being sold and their granaries were being looted. They felt that they were mad to follow Moorthy and Ratna. But wisdom soon dawned on them and they said,

"Moorthy forgive us! Kenchamma forgive us! We are prepared for all sacrifices for the motherland." (p-231)

Ratna organized a procession. A picture of Satyanarayana was put in the middle and people marched singing bhajans and blowing the conch. They were doing a field Satyagraha. Then Seethamma came running and told them that many bus-loads of men had come from the city to purchase the lands. It was growing dark. Then information came that many women of the village who had always been opposed to Moorthy were purchasing the lands. A white man was giving orders. The women whose lands were being sold started shrieking. Ratna took them again to the Satyanarayana procession. The men cursed and abused the persons who were purchasing the lands. There were lamentations and the police used lathis to disperse the crowd. Suddenly they saw advocate Sankar and they were filled with joy. But the coolies whom the officers had brought reaped the entire harvest of the fields in gas-lights and the crops were loaded in the lorries.

Ratna now blew the conch and the procession started from Swami's courtyard with the chanting of Satyanarayan Maharaj Ki Jai, and they went through the various quarters of the village. All the men, women and children joined the procession and they sang in chorus, "The road of the city love is hard, brother" When they reached the village gate they saw dozens of policemen with raised lathis but side of the men and women. Then the Police Inspector came and many policemen came with him., lantern in hand. He stopped the procession and asked Ratna, "Where are you going?" She replied, "Where the gods will." He asked, "Where do you gods will?" Ratna replied, "Where evil haunts." The inspector said, "You will get a nice two years, my nice lady." Ratna said, "So be it." (p-235) As they marched further the people shouted Vande Mataram and Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai. The boys from the city joined them and they shouted Inquilab Zindabad. The police started raining lathi blows on them. They marched on towards the Skeffington barricades. Lathi blows fell on them but the only answer they gave was Inquilab Zindabad. Someone lifted the national flag and they all sang.

"O lift the flag high,
Lift it high like in 1857 again,
And the Lakshmi of Jhansi,
And the Moghul of Delhi,
Will be ours again." (p-238)

The police now attacked them like mad people and the men. Women and children were pushed into the canal. The procession moved on but now soldiers with rifles and bayonets attacked them. There were shrieks and yells and people ran in all directions. The soldiers said, "Disperse or we fire." The boys said, "The fields are ours." Ratna said, "Forward, brothers in the name of the Mahatma!" (p-240) A shower of shots burst into the air. The people rushed into Bhatta's sugarcane fields. The coolies now joined the Satyagrahis and they moved towards the barricades. The soldiers started firing and many men, women and children were hit. Vedamma got a bullet in the left leg. Men of the Congress ambulance carried the wounded away. The wounded were shrieking from different fields and yet the people sang:

"And the flame of Jatin,
And the fire of Bhagath,
And the love of the Mahatma in all,
O, lift the flag high,
Lift the flag high,

This is the flag of the Revolution." (p-245)

Many of the coolies were now with the people. The women and children lay flat in the fields and the soldiers were trampling over them and attacking them their bayonets. The soldiers banged their rifles butts on the heads of women and there were moans and groans all round. Many men, women and children were lying dead. A hush fell on the area. Someone opened the gas cylinders of the city lights and that made a big roar. The soldiers made another charge. The fields were now full of wounded persons. The white officer now planted a Union Jack and asked the people to salute it. One boy rushed at it and the officer shot him dead. Someone now hit the officer and he fell down. Ratna warned the people not to become violent. There was a free fight between the coolies and the soldiers. The city boys asked the coolies to remain non-violent but the soldiers thrust their bayonets into their bodies. Shots were fired and men and women fell like empty sacks. The policemen tied up the hands and legs of many men and threw them into the canal. Shrieks and laments were heard all round. Three thousand men, women and children were lying in the fields shrieking, groaning and dying.

The survivors could not to go back to the village because all the houses and fields there had been attached and there were soldiers everywhere. The women were seeing their husbands and children dying in front of them. Rachanna's wife said, "I cannot see this sight any more. I will burn this village." (p-251) A lot of people followed her saying, "To the ashes, you wretch of a village!" (p-251) They set fire to the houses. The others said, "if the rice is to be lost let it be lost to the ashes; and granary and byre and haylofts are lighted." (p-251) As the flames rose high the soldiers rushed at them again and all round one could see the dead and the dying. Many of them were arrested. The wounded helped other wounded men and women and children. The survivors-some thirty of them-waded through the river and walked towards Maddur. They reached Maddur in an hour. At Maddur policemen started banging them

again. But Maddur men, women and children came running and they took them to their houses and gave them food and bandaged their wounds. The wounded were left at Maddur and those who could walk marched up the Kola Pass and the Beda Hills. As morning came they reached the river Cauvery. Across it was the Mysore State. The people there welcomed them as, “ the pilgrims of the Mahatma.” (p-253) They settled down in Kashipura village and at last had some peace and comfort.

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