

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

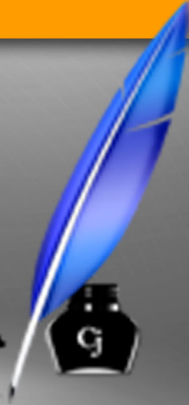
An International Journal in English

Since 2010

Vol. 5, Issue-I

February 2014

The Criterion



5th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

Bi-monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

The Politics of Liberation in *Kanthapura* and its Upshot in *Train to Pakistan*: A Fanonean Critique

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Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) is a renowned postcolonial thinker known for his two seminal works *Black Skin and White Masks* (1986) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1991). The latter is a paean on the cult of vociferous revolution and it unravels how anticolonial sentiments may address the venture of decolonization. Fanon delves at length how ill equipped are the former colonies to function as independent nations and proffers an excoriating criticism on present day bourgeois nationalism in third world nations. Though written in the second half of the 20th century, and despite its avowed African commitment, it seems to be a prophecy on the plight of our nation too. The present article attempts a Fanonean appraisal on the twin literary jewels of Indian English literature namely Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956). While Rao muses over the pre-colonial India and her struggles, Singh reflects on the nascent independent India. Together they corroborate Fanon's prophecies in *The Wretched of the Earth* on the nature of anticolonial struggle and the ramifications of autonomy in newly independent third world countries. *Kanthapura* portrays anticolonial struggle apropos of national insurgency in a typical south Indian village, Kanthapura and *Train to Pakistan* depicts the trauma of Partition in a border village, Mano Majra with clinical intensity.

Fanon views decolonization as a violent phenomenon replacing a set of men by another. It executes the strategy in which, "The last shall be the first and first last" (Fanon 28). The settler inaugurates and perpetuates his illicit statute on the colony with violence; police and army are the two wings to ascertain it. It is to be noted that the famous Battle of Plassey (1757) laid the foundation stone of British dominion in India. Like the initial encounter the whole of Indian colonial era is marked by bloodshed; numerous local rebellions like the Maratha war, the Chauri-chaura incident are part and parcel of the Indian independence movement. Hence, the violent trait of decolonization is a natural corollary of its predecessor, imperialism. In his essay "Flawed Gandhism or Hindu Fundamentalism? No Cheers for Kanthapura," T. J. Abraham concludes "... Kanthapura stresses that Gandhism is ineffectual as a programme for anticolonial nationalist movement" (167). Reading beneath the lines one can decipher the discreet traces of Fanonism in the novel. The struggle in Kanthapura is obviously a de-colonial one and its violent nature often tears away the bogus of the Gandhian shroud. Kanthapura is an emblematic Indian village noted for its unity in diversity among its various quarters of Brahmins, pariahs, weavers, potters and sudras. The intrusion of Bade Khan, the policeman into the village sets in the conflict of the plot. As customary of an agent of the colonial government, he speaks "the language of pure force" (Fanon 29). His illicit relation with the coolie woman, who provides him accommodation in her house, is suggestive of the arch parasitism of colonialism. Even the Portuguese, the first imperial power came to India, landed on Calicut in Kerala approached Zamorin, the then ruler there, first as a visitor-trader of spices like black pepper and then, made many efforts to usurp his power. Beneath the veneer of the utopian cloak of Kanthapura, an unconscious religious contention is clear in depicting a Muslim as the agent of the White government. To quote Priyamvada Gopal, "The sole Muslim character in the novel, Khan is depicted in

unremittingly negative terms, bordering on caricature, somewhat surprisingly given Gandhi's own fostering of multi-faith tolerance" (48).

Fanon accentuates native intellectuals as the aficionados of decolonization. Despite his western education, the native intellectual will sympathize as well as empathize with his countrymen and slowly but surely he will lead the mass mobilization against the colonial regime. In *Kanthapura* Moorthy is the native intellectual who succeeds in that endeavour. He is the educated Brahmin youth who joins the hands of men and women, Brahmins and pariahs, and potters and coolies of the village against the British dominion. He intimates all the village men on the deterioration of the native economy and exhorts them to foster indigenous goods. The other educated youth like Seenu, the son of Achakka reads Gandhiji's *Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) to his illiterate village men and Ratna transcends the abhorred thralldom of her widowhood to enlighten the women folk. Kanthapurites begin to realize insurgency as the need of the hour and despite their differences they fight for the common cause of freedom. Indeed, "The national unity is first the unity of a group, the disappearance of old quarrels and final liquidation of unspoken grievances" (Fanon 105). All the Brahmins, pariahs, and even the lumpen proletariat of the Skeffington Coffee estate come under a single flag. The break-up of the colonial government is their one and only target to accomplish. According to Fanon, the myths, tribal dances and occult practices of the natives abet their spirits and contribute to their cohesion for a common cause. The faith in Kenchamma, the presiding deity of the village is one such conviction joining the Kanthapurites. In the place of tribal dances, the harikathas of Jayaramachar enliven their fight. He jumbles up Indian mythology with contemporary politics as swaraj is, like Lord Siva three-eyed; khaddar, self purification and Hindu-Muslim unity. The camphor ceremonies and bhajans held during the Sankara Jayanthi, the Ganesh festival and the Krishnashtami are the Indian equivalents of Fanonean tribal affairs.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon elucidates decolonization as a positive or a creative struggle which bind the natives together and inculcate in every native mind the vibrant ideas of national destiny and collective history. If colonialism is a divide and rule policy, decolonization is a mass armed movement eradicating parochialism in every form. The native believes a renewed and invigorating life will arise from the ashes of the colonizer's corpse. On individual level, the struggle will purge of the native's inferiority complex and reclaim his self respect. In each moment of 'don't touch the government campaign,' reluctance to pay taxes and toddy picketing in Kanthapura one can perceive the self esteem and vigour of the Kanthapurites. As said by Fanon, these debunking attempts of the natives entail aggressive measures from the settler's part. Subsequently there is a deliberate wave of arrests and police parade to engender panic among the innocent people. Quite the contrary, as Fanon prophesied it has fanned their anticolonial flames. At the zenith of the anticolonial struggle, "On every hill a government in miniature is formed and takes over power. Everywhere in the valleys and in the forests, in the jungles and in the villages—we find a national authority. Each man and woman brings the nation to life by his or her action and is pledged to ensure its triumph in their locality" (Fanon 105). Kanthapurites too are tenacious in this pledge. The most vociferous event in the novel, the Satyanarayan procession underscores its Fanonean thread. The initial slogan of 'Satyanarayan ki Jai' later becomes 'Inquilab Zindabad and they shout:

"Lift the flag high

O, Lift the flag high

Brothers, sisters, friends and mothers

This is the flag of Revolution.” (Rao 168)

The volunteers and the police began to wrestle each other. Some have brought gas cylinders, sickles and lathis to fight the police. “... Violence touched all sides (places, areas, et cetera) at all times, and all violence was equal, and the police and the soldiers were all equally violent, and the people were all equally victimized, but especially some of the girls” (Ray 197). Rachi’s act of blazing the village transforms the serene hamlet into a bloody pandemonium. Leaving their birth place the fortunate ones flee and settle at Kashipura. Viewing through the Fanonian lens one can trace the root cause for the failure of their anticolonial struggle in the lack of proper guidance and adept organization. The procession is only an inchoate affair executed in a hasty manner. When the British government intensifies its iron hand measures like confiscating their land, their spirit is dampen. Weary of the long drawn hardships they are dubious about the efficacy of Moorthy and his Gandhian ideology. When they are finally driven out of their household, the only means is a violent retort. In the absence of good governance it amounts to zilch. What is left out? A haunted Kanthapura devoid of men and mosquitoes. Towards the end of the novel, Moorthy expresses his disapproval of Gandhism and steps towards Nehruvian socialism in his letter to Ratna. Thus, Fanon’s words, “Non-violence is an attempt to settle the colonial system around a green baize table, before any regrettable act has been performed or irreparably gesture made, before any blood has been shed” hold true for the Kanthapuran crusade also (Fanon 48). In fact decolonization in its avid attempts to re-territorialize the colonial cartography in essence “is obviously a programme of complete disorder” (Fanon 28).

Decolonization and the emergence of nation are simultaneous processes. The chapter three of *The Wretched of the Earth* entitled “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” describes the imminent dangers of independence in nascent nation states. All the parochial considerations began to reappear and eclipse the national consciousness. “The nation is passed over for the race and the tribe is preferred to the state” (Fanon 118). The spiritual penury of the native bourgeoisie accounts for the catastrophe. If *Kanthapura* unveils the decolonial struggle, *Train to Pakistan* delineates the horrid picture of the imminent hazards. It expounds the wounds created by the Manichean structure of the foregone colonial barbarism, manifested in the exodus of Hindus and Muslims, to and from India and Pakistan concomitant of their independence from the British rule. The middle class of the new nation state is a paltry ersatz of the colonial bourgeoisie. Their pseudo nationalism ceases on the moment they avail the designations held by the colonial predecessors. Thereby the new country passes from nationalism “to ultra nationalism, to chauvinism and finally to racism” (Fanon 125). There along with racism religious animosity triumphs in its most exacerbated form. The novel *Train to Pakistan* is the fictional representation of Hindu-Muslim-Sikh contention. A post colonial darkness pervades throughout the whole novel. In the words of Bhai Meet Singh, the bhai of the temple of Mano Majra, “this is Kalyug—the dark age” (Singh 50). Gomathi Narayanan identifies the “disenchantment with the freedom movement and its leaders” as “the common denominator” of *Train to Pakistan* (211).

Fanon forewarns on the danger of social consciousness precedes national consciousness. It will generate fierce demands on social justice, “which is paradoxically allied with primitive tribalism” (Fanon 164). Thus, the reason for the communal violence at the dawn of Indian independence is obvious. Through confining a demarcating frame of internationally accepted borders, Partition becomes the critical juncture of India’s ferocious and eternal transition into postcoloniality. Independence and its laurels hardly affect the Mano Majra life. When Iqbal, the young comrade tries to politically educate the village men, Imam Baksha, the mullah of the mosque makes a classic statement; “Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were the slaves of the English, now we will be slaves

of educated Indians—or Pakistanis” (Singh 59). After the popular decolonial feat, lay men will be estranged from the main stream politics of their nation. They will be uncertain on the new native government and even cogitates that “We were better off under the British. At least there was security” (Singh 61). In the preface of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean Paul-Sartre comments on the western ideological indoctrination of the native intellectuals. He remarks, “The European elite undertook to manufacture native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them as with red-hot iron, with the principles of western culture; they stuffed their mouths with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home white washed” (Fanon 7). Iqbal is such an intellectual manufactured by the west and he is the epitome of the fallaciousness of the post colonial bourgeoisie. His power craziness is evident when he advises Mano Majrans to get rid of the congress government so that they can have “more land, more buffaloes, no debts” (Singh 60). He is an arm chair revolutionary, who repents his own plight in Mano Majra. He wishes his party may sent someone else here for he is unable to direct the party policy and clear the doubts of the village folk. When he broods, “In a state of chaos self-preservation is the supreme duty” the hollowness of his principles is crystal clear (Singh 191).

Fanon devises the colonizer-colonized relation as of reciprocal exclusivity, in which the settler relishes in umpteen amenities and the native thrives in wretched cosmos. The settler pictures the native as the quintessence of evil or rather as malignity incarnate. On the other hand the native is envious of the settler. The elite native, who imbibed the Oriental discourse of the west, often sneers at his fellow countrymen. That is why Iqbal accuses Indians on sexual obsession. He expects nothing creative from India, “the land of Kama sutra, the home of phallic worship and the son cult” (Singh 55). While in the cell of Chudunnugger police station with Jugga, the protagonist, he is irritated over Jugga’s fascination for white ladies. It will be erroneous to assume the west, and third world elites like Iqbal never share the fascination, and further they are persistently attributing sexual mania on the natives. As a matter of fact there is not any qualitative difference in sexual crimes in the west and east of our globe.

In Fanonean parlance independence from colonialism meant the swapping of the black colonized bourgeoisie for the colonial white bourgeoisie. In practice the national liberation movement seems to be “more concerned with the consolidation of elite power than with the empowering of the powerless, with the extension of privilege than with its overthrow...” (Lazarus 161-2). The leaders in the capital city cannot tackle the issue of Partition and attendant fratricidal violence. “What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly! Loud speakers magnifying their egos...” (Singh 198). All the agents like the policemen and civil servants of the current government are hypocrites. They dwindle to inert, ravenous and inane caricatures of their European counterpart. The magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district, Hukum Chand is a pitiable replica of his former English sahibs. “He started as a foot-constable... He always kept the sahibs pleased and they give him one promotion after another. The last one gave him his own place and made him Deputy” (Singh 53). He parrot fashions the sexual tactics of his previous English sahibs and enjoys the tender body of a singer girl, Haseena of the same age of his daughter. His stay at the rest house has all the colonial paraphernalia like exquisite drinks, orderlies for menial jobs and night music banquets. The policemen have a mechanical existence and have to execute the orders from above without any reasoning. Jugga condemns them as “they were not human like any other human beings. They had no affections, no loyalties or enmities. They were just men in uniform you tried to avoid” (Singh 70).

Some are more equal in Chudunnugger police station. English education provides Iqbal unlike Jugga, some amenities like a chair, a table, and a charpoy, though they are both the suspects for the murder of Lala Ram Lal, the moneylender. The setting of the reporting room in the police station highlights the postcolonial travesty of the situation. There “just above the table was an old framed picture of King George VI with a placard stating in Urdu, *bribery is a crime*. On another wall was pasted a coloured portrait of Gandhi torn from a calendar. Beneath it was a motto written in English, *honesty is the best policy*. Other portraits in the room were those of absconders, bad characters, and missing persons” (Singh 83). Jugga is the envoy of those thousand groundlings, who should be subjugated eternally to maintain the master slave dialectics bequeathed by colonialism. He is more sinned than against sinning: he often says, “but I was not murdering anyone. I was being murdered” (Singh 123). Jugga’s sacrifice of his life at the end of the novel does not have any patriotic feelings. He dies to save the life of his pregnant lady love Nooran. Pure conjugal love triumphs there. Absolutely there is no room for any kind of nationalistic spirit or commitment.

The narration of horrible murders and rapes altogether makes the novel a trauma narrative. Literally, xenophobia is the root cause for the holocaust happening there. After achieving independence Fanon finds that, “inside a nation, religion splits up the people into different spiritual communities, all of them kept up and stiffened by colonialism and its instruments” (129). The vertical solidarity between the peasantry, the proletariat, the capitalists, feudal landlords and the native elite soon dies out in the hurricane of religious rivalry. It is here the Indian myth of *palazhimanthan* (churning of the milk sea) becomes all the more pertinent. To attain the *amruth* of independence all the natives toiled irrespective of their creed as gods or demons and the moment the fruit turned up all the elapsed squabbles flood back. The indelible repercussions of Partition still linger on our subcontinent in the garb of terrorism. Contemporary communal pogroms are redolent of the trope of Partition. As Urvashi Butalia observes, “it was like partition again, we thought we had seen the worst of it during partition, yet . . .” (qtd. in Gopal 69).

The question of historicity is significant in the twin novels. Rao fictionalizes the pre-independent India in the light of *sthalapurana*, and Singh warps and wefts independent India in her swaddling clothes with an event culled from his personal life. In both novels arch colonial white personages are absent and they deal with the issues of mutual encounters of the natives in the backdrop of colonialism. Both of them select village as their setting, for there resides the true self of our nation. Kanthapura is situated in the province of Kara on the Western Ghats, within India, and Mano Majra is in the border line. The former is like the Garden of Eden having a cornucopia of cardamom, rice, sugarcane jack fruit trees, teak, and sandal wood and latter is a farmland of wheat and buffaloes. When the river Himavathy waters Kanthapura, Sutlej nourishes the fields of Mano Majra. The movement of bullock carts in Kanthapura and the trains in Mano Majra are suggestive of the dynamic nature of the two hamlets. It is safe to say that the miasma from the putrid centre, Kanthapura soon wafts to the periphery, Mano Majra. The Brahmin money lender Bhatta of Kanthapura seems to be the ancestor of the deceased Hindu money lender, Lala Ram Lal of Mano Majra. Moorthy, the disillusioned Gandhian is eager to be a socialist, and if time allows he may anchor in the left-wing politics. Hence, Iqbal of Mano Majra can be seen as the avatar of the volatile Moorthy of Kanthapura. While the Brahmin Moorthy in his mission to constitute the anticolonial campaign reluctantly sips the milk by the pariah Rachanna’s wife, Iqbal, the educated urbanite drains away the precious milk offered by Banta Singh. At heart both are postcolonial bourgeoisie always craving for power at the cost of popular welfare.

Fanon evinces profound distrust on the political parties in the former colonies, for their thematic claims on fundamental rights to everyone are only in the paper, and essentially

they are power crazy. The rank and file of all these parties is urban elite, who yearns to elicit the unfair advantages, which the colonizer used to enjoy in the heydays of his regime. Most probably the national bourgeoisie opts for a single party which amounts to the dictatorial leadership of the party either by a man or a group of men. Members of a family may adorn the key positions of the party, and the government led by this party. In order to disguise its faults the party will project one charismatic leader as the guardian angel of the future nation, conduct pompous parades of soldiers and erect grandiloquent monuments. Gradually opportunism becomes the order of the day, morality declines, privileges multiply, and corruption triumphs. In nutshell the party will become the puppet of some men, rather than an operative tool of the public. Through the neo-colonial agendas like establishing assembly plants of western products in former colonies, the metropolis still exerts her covert control over the new nation. The ruling elite of the new nation smoothens the visit of their former sahibs for exotic big game hunting and casinos. The Indian context of nationalism holds all these Fanonian formulations true. If Indian problems and history of nationalism are akin to the African nations, then Fanonian remedies for the African maladies are viable to her too.

Fanon exhorts, "Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry" of the Europeans for "look at them swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration" (251). The concept of modern nation-state is solely a western idea and appropriating it in third world context necessitates many hiccups. The modern India is built upon the cartography of the English man, and transferring an occidental craft to amateur natives created certain inevitable problems as evident in *Train to Pakistan*. Of course nationhood is the predestined end of decolonization and it is the principle antidote for any colonized culture to surmount the damages of imperial hegemony. The blind aping of western models of development and technology and the dearth of ample visionaries hampers the progress of our nation. In every nook and cranny of our economic planning, pedagogy, infrastructure development and the like still the colonial legacy endures. Certainly we can absorb the best of the west, but never compromise for the worst. A harmonious model of national development catering for the welfare of Indian citizens devoid of a minute loop hole for direct/indirect exploitation is the need of the hour. Let all the roads of our thinking and praxis lead to a self sufficient nation, and ultimately to a humane world. Indeed, Fanon recommends that nationalism shall surely show its way to humanism.

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