

Glimpse of Buddhism in 'Volga se Ganga' Story Collection by Rahul Sankrityayan

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'ත්‍රිපිටකාචාර්ය' සහ 'මහාපණ්ඩිත' යන නම්වලින් ගෞරවයට පාත්‍ර වූ රාහුල් සාංක්‍රිත්යායන්, හින්දී සාහිත්‍යයෙහි නූතන යුගයට අයත් ශ්‍රේෂ්ඨ සාහිත්‍යධරයෙක් ලෙස සැලකෙයි. මෙතුමා 'හින්දී යාත්‍රා සාහිත්‍යයෙහි' පුරෝගාමියා ලෙස හඳුන්වනු ලබන අතර සංචාරකයෙකු, බෞද්ධ භික්ෂුවක, දාර්ශනිකයෙකු, පුරාවිද්‍යාඥයෙකු, ඉතිහාසඥයෙකු සහ දේශපාලඥයෙකු ලෙස ලොව ප්‍රකට වූයේය. බෞද්ධ ධර්මය සහ බෞද්ධ දර්ශනය මෙතුමාගේ ජීවිතය නව මඟකට යොමු කළේය. මෙතුමා විසින් හින්දී සාහිත්‍යය සහ විවිධ ක්ෂේත්‍ර ඔස්සේ ග්‍රන්ථ 150 ක් පමණ රචනා කරනු ලැබ ඇත. ඒ අතුරින් 'සත්ථි කේ බච්චේ' (1935), 'චොල්ගා සේ ගංගා' (1942), 'බහු රංගී මධුපුරී' (1954) සහ 'කනෑලා කී කතා' (1957) මෙතුමා විසින් රචනා කරනු ලැබ ඇති කෙටිකතා සංග්‍රහ වේ. රාහුල් සාංක්‍රිත්යායන් විසින් විරචිත 'චොල්ගා සේ ගංගා' (1942) කෙටිකතා සංග්‍රහයෙහි බුදුදහම චිත්‍රණය වී ඇත්තේ කෙසේද යන්න විශ්ලේෂණය කිරීම මෙම පර්යේෂණ පත්‍රිකාවෙහි මූලික අරමුණයි. මෙහි ප්‍රාථමික මූලාශ්‍රය ලෙස 'චොල්ගා සේ ගංගා' කෙටිකතා සංග්‍රහයද ද්විතීයික මූලාශ්‍රය ලෙස මෙම පර්යේෂණ කාර්යය හා සම්බන්ධයෙන් ලියවී ඇති ප්‍රාමාණික පොත්-පත්, සඟරා සහ අන්තර්ජාලයෙන් ලබා ගන්නා ලද දත්ත ද යොදා ගන්නා ලදී. මෙම පර්යේෂණ කාර්යයට සමාන පර්යේෂණ කාර්යයක් මෙතෙක් සිදු කර නොමැති බැවින් එම උභ්‍යන්තර මෙමගින් සම්පූර්ණ වනු ඇත. එමෙන්ම හින්දී සාහිත්‍ය අධ්‍යයනයෙහි නියැලෙන විද්‍යාර්ථීන්ට සහ විද්වතුන්ට ද රාහුල් සාංක්‍රිත්යායන් පිළිබඳව දැනුවත් වීමට අවස්ථාව උදා වනු ඇත.

ප්‍රමුඛ පද : ත්‍රිපිටකාචාර්ය, රාහුල් සාංක්‍රිත්යායන්, හින්දී යාත්‍රා සාහිත්‍යය,
චොල්ගා සේ ගංගා,

1. Introduction

The story collection 'Volga se Ganga' (Volga to Ganga) is a unique, original, and historically significant work by Rahul Sankrityayan. It provides an account of the development and history of the Indo-European race from 6000 BC to 1942 AD. In this, the author has depicted the complete rise of the primitive human civilization from the banks of the Volga River in Russia to the banks of the Ganges River in India over a gradual span of 8000 years. It was first published in 1943 and is considered one of the greatest Hindi books of modern Indian literature.

Twenty historical stories are included in the 'Volga se Ganga', which are valuable treasures of Hindi's historical story-tradition. These stories are: 'Nisha', 'Diva', 'Amritashva', 'Puruhoor', 'Purudhan', 'Angira', 'Sudas', 'Pravahan', 'Bandhul Malla', 'Nagdatta', 'Prabha', 'Suparna Yaudheya', 'Durmukh', 'Chakrapani', 'Baba Noordin', 'Suraiya', 'Rekha Bhagat', 'Mangal Singh', 'Safdar', and 'Sumer'.

The main objective of this research is to analyze how Buddhism has been portrayed in these short stories written by Rahul Sankrityayan, a devoted Buddhist follower.

2. Literature Review

In 'Kathakar Rahul Sankrityayan' (Khel Chand Ananda, 1973), a comprehensive discussion is presented on Rahul's personality, creative literature, and notable accomplishments in the field of Hindi novel and story writing. The contribution of Rahul to the development of Buddhism has been highlighted in 'Rahul Sankrityayan and Buddhism', written by Dr. Shashikant.

In addition to the aforementioned literary works, some research works have been done on Rahul Sankrityayan by researchers of different universities in India, in the field of Hindi research.

A research work titled 'Sociology and History expressed in the stories of Rahul Sankrityayan: A critical study' by Sikhom Elizabeth Devi from Assam University in 2011 has been submitted.

This research study is focused on all the stories of Rahul. It delves into various aspects of Indian society and culture, changing lifestyles, and the interrelationships between society, history, and art.

In 1999, Sangeeta Srivastav conducted a research titled 'History-Vision and Rahul Sankrityayan's Katha Sahitya'. This thesis explores the historical perspective within the fiction of Rahul Sankrityayan.

In 2011, Priya D.G. submitted her thesis on the topic 'An Analysis of Rahul Sankrityayan's fiction'. In this thesis, Rahul's short stories and novels have been analyzed based on storytelling and craftsmanship. Additionally, an attempt has also been made to identify the imprint of Rahul's personality in the entire fiction.

By studying all these books and research, it becomes evident that Rahul's novels and short stories have been evaluated from different perspectives. However, according to the information of the researcher, no research has been conducted on 'The influence of the Buddhism on the Hindi short story collection 'Volga se Ganga''. Therefore, this research article stands out as a distinct and original contribution compared to the aforementioned research.

3. Methodology

The analytical research method has been employed in this research paper to fulfill the objective of the study. The research involved an examination of authentic texts relevant to the research topic, a review of critical articles, and the use of information obtained from reliable classical journals and internet publications. The short story collection 'Volga se Ganga' is used as the primary source and other books and journals that have been written related to this research are also used as secondary sources.

4. Discussion

When rephrased from the perspective of Buddhism, 'Volga se Ganga' is particularly notable among Rahul's story collections. This is primarily due to the fact that Buddhism-related themes are more prominently depicted in 'Volga se Ganga' than in his other story collections. A glimpse of Buddhism in 'Volga se Ganga' can be analyzed based on the following facts.

1. Faith in Buddhism

Rahul considers religion synonymous with duty. By birth, we are attached to certain duties. We should get involved in those duties. Any religion, which does not help the poor, the weak or does injustice to women, is unacceptable. Rahul states – “Whatever the mind of a healthy man thinks is right, that is religion.”⁹¹

Rahul Sankrityayan, who harbors a deep aversion towards the Brahmin religion, is deeply devoted to Buddhism. Buddhism seems closer to him than communism. He has transformed Buddhism into a liberal religion. In the story ‘Prabha’ Reverend Dharmarakshit describes the philosophy of the Buddha as follows :

“...The religion of Buddha is visible; but Buddha tells him to cross like a raft, not to carry it on his head.”⁹²

The author was very fond of Lord Buddha’s idea about religion. In the story ‘Prabha’, when Ashwaghosh’s mother inquired Prabha the reason for the Yavanas being more biased towards Buddhism, Prabha described the supreme religion as follows-

“Here Buddhism is the most liberal religion. When our ancestors came to India, everyone used to hate us by calling us Mlechha (barbarian) ... but Buddhists did not hate them...”⁹³

This is the speciality of Buddhism. The author’s faith in Buddhism is also reflected in the stories. Its clear form can be seen in the story ‘Bandul Malla’. The story of Jetavana vihar is described in it. Lord Buddha spent a total of twenty-five rains in Jetavana Vihar out of forty-five rains of his life. King Prasenajit’s queen Mallika and her friend Vishaka were also devoted to Buddhism.

Visakha donates her most precious necklace to Lord Buddha by building a beautiful vihara like ‘Purvararama’ as a form of devotion. Bandul Malla’s wife, Mallika, also goes to attend the teachings of Lord Buddha after being inspired by the queen. After some time, she becomes a Buddhist. She displays remarkable devotion towards Buddhism, and she remains patient even after getting information about the death of her husband and sons and listens to Lord Buddha’s sermons with utmost devotion, providing food to the monks.

⁹¹ Volga se Ganga, P.212

⁹² Ibid., P. 201

⁹³ Ibid, P. 195

In the story 'Suparna Yaudheya', Suparna Yaudheya Kumar has immense devotion towards Buddhists because there is no high-low, slave-like attitude in it. All religions are for human welfare. Harshvardhan was such a great emperor who had immense devotion towards Lord Buddha. In the words of Harshvardhan:

"...Not only India, but the world outside India also knows how much devotion to Buddha was in my heart even though I was Shaivite..."⁹⁴

Rahul also demonstrates his devotion to Lord Buddha by worshipping the Bodhi tree. In the story 'Prabha', the heroine Prabha understands the significance and importance behind Ashwagosh's reverence for the Bodhi tree:

"... it was the tree of this caste, sitting under which Siddhartha Gautama, through his efforts and his contemplation, tried to remove the delusions of the mind. After attaining enlightenment and since then he became famous by the name of Buddha. ...Such an icon should be worshipped, dear! The worship of such a symbol is the worship of one's own effort-self-victory."⁹⁵

2. Anatheism and Impermanence

An important principle of Lord Buddha's philosophy is anatheism. It is mentioned in the story 'Prabha'. Reverend Dharmarakshita explains this concept to Ashwagosh –

"Buddha does not believe in any such eternal, pole, eternal element inside and outside the world. That's why his philosophy is called the philosophy of anatheism-impermanence, moment-to-moment creation-destruction."⁹⁶

Ashwagosh is highly influenced by the explanation made by Reverence Dharmrakshit in relation to Lord Buddha and Buddhism. He stated, "...Ashwagosh bows down to the Buddha who declared religion and anathema like a fleet...Today, if the world had properly accepted Buddha's teachings, then the world would have been different."⁹⁷

For the purpose of diverting the fifty-six generations, Pravahan had mentioned the methods of renunciation, meditation and, penance etc., during the Brahma interview.

⁹⁴ Volga se Ganga, P. 233

⁹⁵ Ibid., P. 201

⁹⁶ Ibid., P. 202

⁹⁷ Volga se Ganga, P. 202

Although the propagation of materialism was seen in the contemporary society, most of the Brahmin - Kshatriya feudal princes and wealthy traders embraced in Gautam Buddha's anatheism.

Gautam Buddha believed that, "Soul, God etc. are not eternal things. All things arise and dissolve soon. The world is not a group of things, but a flow of events."⁹⁸ Connected to the concept of reincarnation, it became the favorite religion of the feudal power. The Buddha alleviated the harshness of materialism by connecting it with anatheism. He explained that even if there is no eternal soul, the flow of consciousness keeps on changing from one body to another akin to the heaven or hell. Rahul's logical comment is also:

"If Gautam had preached materialism, surely prominent merchant of Shravasti, Saket, Kaushambi, Bhadrika would not have opened their bags, and neither Brahmins-Kshatriya feudatory princes and Kings would have bowed their heads at his feet."⁹⁹

In his pursuit, Rahul only embraces the form of Buddhism, which fosters the development of human life.

3. Volatility

According to Rahul Sankrityayan, religion, like all other things in the world, religion is also subject to change. It keeps on changing with time and place. Due to this changeability, the Brahmin religion has been referred to as 'Dhoop-Chah' (sunshine and shade). 'Suparna Yaudheya' states, "I

don't know, why this change cycle is being run? In Western Uttarapath Gandhar, veal meat is still given in 'Madhu-festival'. But in Madhya Pradesh, United Provinces and Bihar it is a sin to name as beef. There, cow-brahmin protection is the best religion. I do not understand why there is so much sunshine in religion? Why will it continue to be unrighteous in one place and religion in another."¹⁰⁰

4. Opposition to Brahminism

Rahul considered orthodox religion as a threat to society. This is why he stood against the walls of dogma. Having been born into a Brahmin family, Rahul was acutely aware of the hollowness of the Brahmin religion and held a strong opposition towards it. This sentiment is visible in many stories of the collection 'Volga se Ganga'.

⁹⁸ Ibid., P. 148

⁹⁹ Ibid., P. 149

¹⁰⁰ Volga se Ganga, P. 212

In the story 'Prabha', he states:

"... and these Brahmins go around doing hundreds of marriages, just for gratuity, ..." Further, the vehemently and bitterly criticizes the reprehensible behavior of the Brahmins – "They just want meat of fattened calves and their straw gratuity; they are ready to do any such thing, in which their patrons, kings and feudal lords, are pleased. The priests have taken the shelter of religion to make their rights and that of the kings intact."¹⁰¹

In this manner, Rahul has described the Brahmin religion as a weapon of hypocrisy and exploitation, nurturing a predisposition to be exploited by those in power. Rahul refers to this religion as 'sunshine and shade', which keeps changing its recognition and dignity from time to time. In the words of Ashwaghosh:

"I hate the hypocrisy of Brahmins above all. The whole body burns with hatred."¹⁰²

Ashwaghosh's Brahmin father does not accept the love affair between his son Ashwaghosh and Prema, the daughter of the famous trader Dattamitra of Kosala. He expresses his opposition by stating- "Son, our Brahmin clan is the best of listeners. For fifty generations, only elite.

Brahmin girls used to come to our house. If you accept this relationship today, then we and our future children will be caste corrupt forever, all our dignity will be lost."¹⁰³

In the story 'Durmukh', the author portrays the true condition of the Brahmin religion. Durmukh states that Harshvardhan is well aware of the pretence within religious practices. However, he refrains from addressing it due to the fear of Brahmins. The Brahmin religion is to blame for making people fearful. Durmukh hates the religion of the Brahmins. He expresses his opposition with regard to Brahmins in the following manner –

"The Brahmins have divided the people of our country into small and big castes in such a way that no one is ready to allow those who are below him to meet him. Its religion and knowledge are clearly the shadow of Rahu-Ketu."¹⁰⁴ Durmukh believes that the day this religion vanishes from this country, a profound blemish will be lifted from the face of the earth.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., P. 197

¹⁰² Ibid., P.197

¹⁰³ Volga se Ganga, P. 194

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., P. 248

5. Racial discrimination

Seeing the injustice inflicted upon the people, the faith that the author had in God was shattered. In the story 'Sumer', he has written-

"For thousands of years our caste has been considered worse than animals, untouchable, humiliated and in the name of the same God who kept incarnating on every little thing of the big castes of Hindus, the chariot kept on driving; but for hundreds of generations the respect of our women kept getting spoiled."¹⁰⁵

Rahul has also exposed the issue of untouchability in his stories. In 'Sumer', Rahul made the following statement-

"Hindus needed cheap slaves for thousand years and our caste fulfilled it, earlier we were called slaves, now Gandhi wants to save us by calling us 'Harijans'. Perhaps Hindus Hari has been our biggest enemy since then."¹⁰⁶

There was no place for the poor and low castes in the Brahmin religion. However, Lord Buddha considered all human beings equal. Buddha made extensive efforts hard to remove the divisions of caste and character. This is mentioned in the story 'Suparna Yaudheya'-

"The Brahmins used to hate those who came from outside the country, Yavana, Shak, Gurjar, Abhir; But the union of the Buddha gave them equal rights to humanity."¹⁰⁷

The Buddha did not accept caste and high-low distinction within the Sangha:

"The Sangha does not look at the clan, Prince! He sees the qualities. He is our hero, our father by his knowledge and his qualities. If something is found in their alms bowl, even to the extent of sticking a letter, they do not eat without giving it to their companions. This is the teaching of Buddha..."¹⁰⁸

The Buddha considered his community of monks to be like an ocean. Whoever enters this union, leaving name and form like rivers, becomes an ocean.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., P. P. 329

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., P. 376

¹⁰⁷ Volga se Ganga, P. 230

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., PP. 181-182

6. Slavery

According to Rahul, it was the priests who developed the slave system. In the story 'Nagdatta', Nagdatta has expressed his hatred towards slavery, stating, "I get fever on hearing the name of slavery."¹⁰⁹

The exact description of slavery is clearly manifested in Sophia's statement:

"How much slavery oppresses a man. I saw my slaves in my father's house, they used to laugh and have fun. I never understood that there was so much sadness hidden inside that smile. When I became a slave myself, I realized how hell slavery is."¹¹⁰

The greed of the rich perpetuated slavery. In the story 'Durmukh', the author has criticized slavery. According to Rahul Sankrityayan, the liberation of male and female slaves is a virtuous act. Durmukh had once asked the same question from King Harshwardhan at the fair of Prayag –

"Maharaj! If you were distributing so much money in the big rich temples and Brahmins for the fifth year, if you had used it to free the maids and servants, would it have been a work of less virtue?"¹¹¹

One day, Durmukh expressed his concerns about the hellish torture endured by male and female slaves in front of King Harshvardhan's sister Rajyashri. The impact of these words caused her heart to melt. Durmukh also said to her –

"By giving money these eternal- generation after generation – captives providing salvation to humans is the most virtuous thing.... How did the poor simple-hearted woman know about the great selfishness hidden within the squad..."¹¹²

7. Monarchy

Rahul Sankrityayan is a staunch critic of imperialist tendencies. According to him, monarchy is the ultimate form of exploitation instinct, where rights related to human equality and freedom are crushed. The republic system keeps man free from economic and social exploitation and provides equal facilities to all. Rahul considered the republic system as the ideal form of governance.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., P. 168

¹¹⁰ Ibid., P. 171

¹¹¹ Ibid., P. 245

¹¹² Volga se Ganga, P. 245

That's why Rahul has analyzed the glory of the republic in the state of this story collection. Rahul wanted a state of equality among the people. For this, he considered the governance of the village council to be good. Rahul was in favor of re-establishing the republic and the system of local self-governance (Panchayati Raj) in India.

Rahul has also expressed his thoughts regarding democracy in 'Rekha Bhagat' :

"Democracy is the best state. The country's earnings are spent heavily on kings, Princes, Queens and Princesses. Panchayati Rajya gets more justice than the king., there will be more partiality and empathy."¹¹³

In the story 'Suparna Yaudheya', Suparna is a supporter of the republican system. He introduces the 'Yaudheya Gana-Rajya' in the following manner:

"There was no single king in it, their kingdom was called Gana-Rajya. Gana or Panchayat used to run the whole state. He was a great opponent of the one-man-king-kingdom."¹¹⁴

Suparana states that the monarchy of the Guptas was the promoter of the slave-maid system.

Along with the development of the monarchy of Magadha, the ancient republics of India such as Takshshila, Vaisahali, Kushinara, etc., began to decline. After the Gupta period, the remaining republics also came to an end. In the words of Suparna Yaudheya –

"...What the Nandas, Mauryas, Yavanas, Shakas and Hunas did not do, these Guptas did. They removed the name of republics from Bharat."¹¹⁵

They believe that it is a big injustice to abolish the people's rule in the republic that has been in place since time immemorial. Suparna is well aware of the defects of the monarchy. Therefore, Therefore he takes a pledge to save the Yaudheya's land from monarchy.

'Bandul Malla' is a Buddhist story. In this story, Rahul points out the features of the republic and its destructive weaknesses through one of the republics of the ancient world, Kusinara Mallagana. Bandulmalla, the hero of this story, loves his birthplace Mallagan infinitely. However, he is saddened by the disbelief shown towards him. Leaving the motherland with his beloved Mallika, he becomes the commander-in-chief of his friend Prasenajit's kingdom in Kosala.

¹¹³ Ibid., P. 314

¹¹⁴ Ibid., P. P. 217

¹¹⁵ Volga se Ganga, P. 222

He has a strong faith in the republic, and his dream is to unite all the nine malla gans to establish a strong republic like the Lichchavis. Lord Buddha also viewed the Lichchavi Sangha as an ideal republic.

The traditional system of voting is vividly described in this story. The influence of Buddhism is reflected in the selection of Bandhul Malla to the post of deputy commander. The prosper announces three times-

"The group is giving Ayushman Bandhul the post of deputy commander, the Ayushman who accepts this position should remain silent, the one who does not accept it should speak."¹¹⁶

According to the rules of the republic rules, it is decided to take Bandhul Malla's test. However, Bandhul Malla is cheated, due to which he goes to Prasenajit's place and accepts the post of Senapati.

There is no place for monarchy and priesthood in Buddhism. The aim of Sudas, the protagonist of the story 'Sudas' is to remove the stigma of Panchal and establish a republic that upholds human values. However, he is unable to perform likewise because of monarchy and priesthood. He contemplates-

"Kings are thieves and abductors of public rights. The residence of the kings, the gold-silver-gems of the kings, the maid-servants of the kings, all the pleasures of the kings are not earned by themselves, all this has come from kidnapping."¹¹⁷

In the story 'Nagdatta', the author has presented his philosophy of life through Nagdatta. The story begins with a discussion on pompous religion and monarchy symbolizing exploitation. In this story, opposing views of Naagdatta and Vishnu Gupta Chanakya have been presented. Nagdatt is a supporter of the republic, and Chanakya is a supporter of the monarchy. Nagdatta wants to establish a powerful republic by uniting all the republics of Uttarapath. Opposition to monarchy is a permanent feature of Buddhism.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be stated that Rahul's personal form has been influenced by various elements of Buddha's teachings, such as truth, non-violence, compassion, rejection of caste-distinction, disdain for ostentation, humanity etc. Therefore, it is natural that it is a reflection to be reflected in his short stories.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., P. 140

¹¹⁷ Ibid., P. 113

Rahul aspires to establish such an ideal society by eradicating economic and social disparities where everyone is happy, everyone has equal rights, and everyone works hard. A society free from caste discrimination and liberated from religious vices and superstitions is the goal. Ultimately, it can be observed that there is a clear glimpse of Buddhism in his short story 'Volga se ganga'.

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