



A CRITICAL REVIEW OF 'EK HOTA CARVER' BY VEENA GAVANKAR

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at to point out the difficult journey of a small Negro boy named George Carver, his hardships and sufferings described by Veena Gavankar in her work of art "Ek Hota Carver". Her writing reminds us that she is different from the accepted norms of literary form. Her curiosity about a Negro scientist compelled her to write this novel cum biography in Marathi literature. Her whole family helped her to complete this book. As a housewife, with the help of her husband and children she successfully completed this literary journey. She feels emotional attachment with this orphan black boy from the bottom of her heart. We feel this sympathy for him throughout the book. It is the power of narrative writing of Gavankar that we become curious to know about what is going to happen in the next chapter of the book. And this, I think, is the best reward for any literary writer for his work. The book remains one of the most inspirational books for today's youths. In today's materialistic world everyone wants success in less time and in less effort. Today's young generation doesn't know how to get success without necessary basic things and support and this is the thing that Carver teaches us. His lab contains nothing but waste material thrown by the people supposing them as waste things, and he experimented with them as a skilled workman. And doing wonders with the help of his knowledge about nature, his faith in god, and with his commitment for his backward society. Up to last moment of his life he did his duty to educate poor farmers about new techniques of farming. He always neglected the treatment given by the white society to him as a Negro. Hard work, perseverance, optimism and never give up are basics of his nature. And Gavankar very nicely depicts it with the help of her refined writing.

Keywords: African, American, Negro, black, slavery, slave, garden, farmers, knowledge, driving force.

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INTRODUCTION

“Veena Gavankar” is a renowned name in the world of Marathi Literature, who is famous for her simplistic, clear and precise writing style. As a former Librarian and an avid reader, she wrote ‘Ek Hota Carver’, a novel and biography of American agriculturist George Washington Carver in the year 1979.

‘Ek Hota Carver’, which is actually a heart and mind gripping story of a Black boy, his determination, hardships and will power for success. Actually it was begun as a result of a mother’s search for bedtime stories for her children. She developed the story of this small black boy in a very interesting and curious way. As per the response of her children she made improvements and changes in her writing style. Short, simple and neatly written, Gavankar has touched every aspects of the life and struggle of Carver, his achievements and his many talents.

Dilip Mazganokar says that,

‘Students, academicians, farmers, bankers and writers, have enjoyed the book. The principal success of Ek Hota Carver is its emphasis on the positive aspects of life. Common people of Maharashtra particularly from rural areas seem to have drawn sustenance from Dr. Carver’s epic struggle to improve the lot of the mankind. His determination to rise above all odds mesmerizes the readers.’²

Realizing the quota of bedtime stories for her two children, she mentioned in an interview to Sahyadri channel of Mumbai Doordarshan on the occasion of 18th edition of ‘Ek Hota Carver’ that,

‘I began to jot down the details of Dr. Carver’s life in my note for the benefit of my son who would often go off to sleep in the middle of reading sessions, while my daughter lapped up every detail. Of course, the following morning Anup (son) would grab the note-book for a quick update.’²

Soon, close friends and relatives, who had read Gavankar’s notebook, were persuading her to flesh out the sketchy account. The characterization in the novel is very descriptive. It gives every life details of the characters. The dialogues of the character provide the readers every details of mindset and thinking of the characters. This style of Gavankar makes us in to keep in curiosity about further happening in the novel. After the ending of each chapter readers



became eager to know about the further proceedings. As this is a true life story of a scientist, it has happened on various places. And Gavankar stitches all these patches in a very decorative manner in order to make the plot compact. It is nothing but the narrative technique of Gavankar, which keeps us enthusiastic from start to end of the novel. The plot of the novel tells us a casual sequence of events, and draws the readers into the characters' lives and helps the reader understand the choices that the characters make. This biography starts with the White family in the State Diamond Grove, Missouri, America. The period was during about close of the great Civil War. The protagonist of our novel cum biography 'George Washington' was born on a farm near Diamond, Missouri, in Newton County about 1865, the exact birthdate is unknown because he was born as a slave on the farm, of Moses Carver. His mother, Mary, was owned by the White family named Moses and Susan Carver. His father, a slave on a neighboring farm, died before George was born. When George was just a few months old, he and his mother were kidnapped from the Carver's farm by a gang of men who roamed Missouri during the Civil War era. They hoped to sell George and his mother as a slave to elsewhere. But because of the constant efforts and follow up the childless Carver family young George was recovered by a neighbor and returned to the Carvers, but his mother was not. George and his older brother, Jim, were raised by Moses and Susan Carver. While Jim helped Moses Carver with farm work, George who was weak and sickly spend much of his time helping Susan Carver with garden around the cabin. He learned how to perform many domestic tasks such as cooking, mending and doing laundry. As George was not strong child and was not able to work in the fields, Susan taught the boy to help her in the kitchen, garden and to make simple herbal medicines. George was fascinated by plants and was soon experimenting with natural pesticides, fungicides and soil conditioners. Local farmers began to call George 'the plant doctor' as he was able to tell them how to improve the health of their garden plants. The childless Carver's raised him and his brother as their own children. Susan taught George to read and write at home. But he was not allowed to attend the neighborhood school because of his color. The search for knowledge would remain a driving force for the rest of George's life. At the age of eleven he left the Carver home to travel to a school for black children ten miles away. It was this point that the boy who has always identified himself as 'Carver's George' first time came to be known as 'George Carver'. Carver attended a series of schools before receiving his diploma at Minneapolis High School in Minneapolis, Kansas. Gavankar described all these events and descriptions very interestingly and a reader remains always curious to know about what will happen in the next session while reading the book.

He supported himself by cooking, doing laundry and several domestics before finally enrolling at Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa, in 1890. While interested in science, Carver was also interested in arts. He began studying arts and music at Simpson College in Iowa, developing his painting and drawing skills through sketches of botanical samples, but teacher convinced him to transfer to Iowa State College to study agriculture and Botany. Carver

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moved to Ames and began his Botanical studies as the first black student at Iowa State. Carver excelled in his studies. By the time he completed his master's degree in agriculture in 1896.

Gavankar has touched each and every aspect of life and struggle of Carver, his achievements and his many talents. All descriptions are short, simple and neatly written in the form of compact segments. There are logical sequences of descriptions and these descriptions contains the truth of events and life experiences of this small Negro boy which was later renowned as a Peanut Man of America, and all around the world. We can feel the simplicity of language when she provides details about the further life account of Carver. As Carver obtained his masters of agriculture he immediately received a number of offers. He was asked to join the faculty of Alcorn Agricultural and Mississippi. The faculty of Iowa state wanted him to stay and teach. But in April 1896, Carver received a letter from Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute, one of the first African American colleges in the United States. The description of the letter contains following emotional and sentimental appeal to our black hero:

*'I cannot offer you money, position or fame. The first two you have. From the position you now occupy you will no doubt achieve these things. I now ask you to give up. I offer you in their place: Work-hard work, the task of bringing people from degradation, poverty and waste to full manhood. Your department exists only on paper and your laboratory will have to be in your head.'*¹

Washington's offer was \$125.00 per month (a substantial cut from Carver's Iowa State salary) and the luxury of two rooms for living quarters (most Tuskegee faculty members had just one). Carver was at first hesitant to go to Tuskegee, but Washington was persuasive and on April 12, 1896 Carver accepted writing that,

*'It has always been the one great idea of my life to be of the greatest good to the greatest number of 'my people' possible and to this end I have been preparing myself these many years; feeling as I do that this line of education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom to our people.'*¹

Carver left Iowa to take a job with Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee institute Alabama. There he conducted agricultural research and taught students until his death. Carver's research and instructions helped poor Southern farmers, both white and black, change their farming practices and improve their diets. He believed he had a God given mission to use his training as an agricultural chemist to improve the lot of poor black and white Southern farmers. He did this by teaching farmers about fertilization and crop rotation and by developing hundreds of new products from common agricultural products. He stressed the



importance of planting peanuts to upgrade the quality of the soil, which had been depleted, from years of planting cotton. Carver invented many practical useful for peanuts, sweet potatoes, and other agricultural products. He also created and tested many recipes in his lab. Carver's ideas and discoveries helped farmers improve their lives. His work also helped to revitalize the depressed southern economy.

As Carver worked tirelessly in his laboratory from 1900 to 1920, his fame grew. He became widely known for his agricultural experiments. He also became as a promoter of racial equality. People who wanted to improve race relations in America asked for Carver's help. Carver was a deeply religious man and agreed to share his belief in racial equality. During the 1920s and 1930s, he traveled throughout the South delivering his message of racial harmony.

Carver's research and innovative educational extension programs were aimed at to teach farmers to utilize available resources to replace expensive commodities. He published bulletins and gave demonstrations on such topics as using native soil for paints, increasing soil fertility without commercial fertilizers and growing alternative crops along with the cotton. To enhance the attractiveness of such crops as cow peas, sweet potatoes and peanuts. Carver developed a variety of uses for each. Peanuts specially appealed him as an inexpensive source of protein that did not deplete the soil as much as cotton did. Carver changed the agricultural and economic life of many poor farmers. From ordinary peanuts he made hundreds of useful products including milk, cheese, soap, plastic, sugar, veg fat, greese, cosmetics, shampoo, instant coffee, wood colour, shoe polish, color and fertilizers. Carver's this work with peanuts drew the attention of the National Growers' Association, which invited him to testify at congressional tariff hearings in 1921. That testimony as well as several owners brought national publicity to the 'Peanut Man.' Carver's fame increased and laid to numerous speaking engagements, taking him away from campus frequently. For nearly twenty years (1896-1915) Carver adored in the shadow of Washington. Carver's scientific discoveries and his transformation of Southern agriculture can truly be described as legendary. Carver drew more public attention during the mid-1930s when the polio virus struck in America. Carver offered a treatment of peanut-oil massages that he believed helped many people, especially children, gain relief from the painful and paralyzing effects of polio. As word of Carver's treatment spread, people renowned to the Tuskegee campus for Carver's "cure". Carver's reputation also grew larger during the 1930's because of the Great Depression. This was a period of great economic decline caused partly from generations of poor farming practices and years of drought. People from all over the world asked carver for agricultural advice because he was able to show farmers how to maximize plant production and improve the soil at every little cost.

By the late 1920's Carver had abandoned both teaching and agricultural plot work. He continued to advice peanut producers and others, always refusing to accept compensation. Much of his time was devoted to lecture hours of white college campuses, sponsored by the

commission on International Corporation. With his warm personality he cultivated close personal relationship with dozens of young whites, opening their eyes to racial injustice and continued to serve as a mentor and a father figure to the black students. Carver never made a significant contribution to scientific theory, and he refused to develop commercially feasible new products.

Gavankar described all these events in a very simple, clear and precise writing style. His message about persevering in the face of adversity and making something out of whatever one has in life-is simply but clearly depicted. This biography has served as an inspiration to hundreds of Indians all over the country. Carver's urge for finding out something new and innovative in the available sources has very nicely described by Gavankar. There are suitable titles given by her for every segments/chapters of the biography. The language used for this novel cum biography is very lucid and just like a story telling. She avoids giving monotonous references and examples in order to attract her reader from start to end.

Carver lived a simple and industrious life. A skilled artist and musicians who never married, lived out his in a dormitory and Tuskegee Institute. He became friend with many people, some of whom were quite rich and famous. One of his closest friends was the automobile manufacturer Henry Ford. Ford made sure that an elevator was installed in Carver's dormitory so that Carver would get to his laboratory more easily in his later years.

Carver died on January 5, 1943 at Tuskegee Institute. He was buried on that campus near the grave of Booker T. Washington. The George Washington Carver national monument in Diamond was created soon after his death. Established by legislation sponsored by Senator Harry S. Truman, it was the first national memorial to an African American. It stands on the farm where Carver was born.

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