

## Reflection of Gandhian thoughts in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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### Abstract

*Kanthapura* is a very famous and much praised novel by Raja Rao. It deals with the freedom struggle in general and the impact of Mahatma Gandhi on the freedom struggle in particular. It reflects the scene of struggle for freedom or independence in India with all the faults of political, social and economic life. It records how people fought for a noble cause. It also seeks reforms that Indian people needs to undertake in order to make India a great nation.

R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao are three leading figures of early Indian English literature. These three novelists are considered as the pioneers of the Indian Novels in English. These three were highly influenced by Gandhian Ideology that almost in their all novels themes were on it. The novels of these novelists are best for analyzing how Gandhian Philosophy influenced the Indian writing in English. Gandhi's aim was to eliminate poverty, Castism, Untouchability and superstitions which were prominent that time along with India's freedom struggle. *Kanthapura* follow Gandhian ideology and his principles of Non-violence, Truth, Brotherhood, Satyagraha and his views on untouchability. The novel shows influence of Gandhi's struggle for India's Independence and its impact on the people of a small village.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* was published in 1938. It deals with the Gandhian impact on a small village called *Kanthapura*. The novel begins with the description of the village by a woman Achakka. Rao uses the oral story-telling method to steep in Indian history in order to relate the past and the impact of change. Achakka highlights the importance of the deities, especially Kenchamma which shows the importance of tradition and culture and at the same time welcoming the change. *Kanthapura* is a traditional caste ridden village which is far away from all modern ways of living and development taking place in the cities. It is believed that the village is protected by the blessings of the deity Kenchamma. Moorthy is the protagonist of the novel who is a Brahmin. He discovers a half buried linga from the village and installs it. He goes to city where he gets familiar with Gandhian philosophy. He follows Gandhi in high spirit. He wears Khadi clothes and fights against untouchability. After passing away of his mother he started living with an educated widow Rangamma, who takes part in Indian's struggle for freedom. His believes in Gandhain philosophy can be seen when Bade Khan hits him. He does not react on it and follow the principle of non-violence. He continues his fight against injustice and inequality by following Gandhism. He leads the villagers as the representative of Gandhian philosophy. He gets arrested because of his participation and when Rangamma tries to release him on bail he refuses. When he was in prison, the women of *Kanthapura* take the charge of the struggle for freedom. Rangamma is a true Gandhian who is not only courageous but also becomes an inspiration for other women. She tells the village women about Rani Lakshmi Bai, Rajput princess, Sarojini Naidu etc. and encourages them to follow the principles of 'Truth', 'Non-violence', 'Swadeshi' etc. The people begin to have strong faith in Gandhian movement in *Kanthapura*. Gandhi is not presented as person anywhere, but he lives in the hearts of the villagers. His speeches and teachings are the words of god for them. Moorthy comes out as a Mahatma for this small village as Mahatma Gandhi for the whole nation. He becomes the

symbol of change. People of *Kanthapura* are filled with the spirit of Satyagraha and want to take part in Dandi March. But Gandhi ji gets arrested by the British government and all the responsibilities of the movement come on the local leaders. Moorthy plans to start a non-cooperation movement in the village. But soon the village gets deserted because of taking part in the satyagraha movement. Moorthy gets more influenced by the principles of Nehru at the end of the novel.

The novel minutely depicts how the freedom struggle movement affected the people of a remote village, *Kanthapura* in particular and the whole of India in general. *Kanthapura* represents a microcosm of a whole country. The main character around whom the whole action of the novel revolves is Moorthy. Moorthy embodies the gist of Gandhian thoughts. Moorthy is a mini Gandhi, who has internalized the principles of truth and non-violence. Infact we find many Moorthy's in the villages at that time across India. Actually the novel tried to tap the experimentation of all political social and economic thoughts of Gandhiji in order to uplift the common people. On the political level it undertakes non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements. On the social level it seeks the eradication of untouchability whereas on economic level it talks of liviation poverty. The novel underlines the importance of educating the massed. Moorthy always appeals the people to rise above the mean boundaries of caste, creed, sex etc.

Leader is one who motivates and engenders the trust in hearts of even the weakest. The idea of inclusion and active participation destitute and hapless untouchables to dispel the centuries old imperial rule is central to the Gandhian thoughts so that every individual will feel free in a free nation. Moorthy is alter ego of Gandhian self of Raja Rao. Murthy endeavours hard to achieve self-governance (Swaraj) for village of *Kanthapura*. Burning of foreign goods and emphasis on indigenious ways of production such as khaadi clothes exert retrograde force on colonial power. Every household in *Kanthapura* embarks on holding spinning wheel. Charkha was not only a means of spinning for economic growth, it also had a spiritual benefits. It's soothing effect drains out all types of mental ills by purifying heart and mind which is source of true happiness. "Self-purification, therefore, must mean purification in all walks of life. And purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification one's surroundings"(Gandhi 447). Moorthy is alter ego of Gandhian self of Raja Rao as leadership requires self-denial and sacrificing mundane through penance.

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