

## Gandhian Ideology: A study of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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### Abstract

Indian Writing in English is influenced by Gandhian ideology. Gandhi emphasized more on social, political, and religious problems of the oppressed and down trodden lower caste in Hindu society. His aim was to abolish poverty, caste system, untouchability from society. The present study reveals prominently the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on the village of *Kanthapura*. *Kanthapura* is the microcosm of the Indian traditional society and what happened in *Kanthapura* was also happened in India during 1919-1930. It is not only a political novel, but also a novel which concerns with socio-religious and economic transformation during the struggle for independence. *Kanthapura* follows Gandhi's doctrine and ideology of non-violence, Satyagraha, their views on untouchability and casteism etc. The novel can be considered Gandhi-epic. Gandhi aroused national awakening in Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom movement which was strengthened by noncooperation and civil disobedience movement in *Kanthapura* village. Gandhi's influential personality and his ideology is felt everywhere in the novel. Indeed, Gandhi doesn't appear in this novel personally, but the plot of the novels revolves around his ideology. This research article, '*Gandhi's Ideology: A Study of Raja Rao's Kanthapura*' aims at how the Gandhi's ideology influenced Raja Rao which resulted in the creation of the character of Moorthy. It also focuses on how Moorthy, under the influence of Gandhi, tries to inspire the people towards the freedom struggle. Gandhi is the way, the truth, life to Raja Rao. Similarly, Gandhi's ideology is the way, the truth, and the life to Moorthy in the novel *Kanthapura*. The present paper emphasises the impact of Gandhism on Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*.

**Keyword:** gandhi, ideology, raja rao, kanthapura

### Introduction

Gandhi was the first Indian national leader to realize that it was not possible to revolutionize people without drawing upon the resources of their religion. He was the leader of India and abroad, not only for his struggle for Indian independence, but also for his immaculate character. Education, politics economics, religion, social life, language and literature were influenced by Gandhian philosophy and ideology. The Gandhian impact on contemporary literature is intimate purposive and variegated. Raja Rao belongs to Gandhian era and his novel *Kanthapura* (1938) depicts the impact of Gandhi who launched the Freedom Movement in the 1920s to liberate India from the slavery of the Britishers. M.K. Naik rightly opines that the novel is predominately political in inspiration and does not reveal the author's characteristic metaphysical preoccupations, except in a general way <sup>[1]</sup>. The novelist assiduously explores the Gandhian ideas of loving one's enemies, non-violence and abolition of untouchability. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and K.A. Abbas do not ignore the impact of Gandhian ideology. Raja Rao was greatly influenced by the ideology of Gandhi. Rao spent a few days at Gandhi's ashram at Sevagram. At the time of Quite India Movement Raja Rao was "associated with the underground activities of the young socialist leaders <sup>[2]</sup>.

Raja Rao's confidence in Gandhian thought led him to idealize Mahatma Gandhi as a true saint. In this novel, Rao depicts Mahatma Gandhi as an emblem of divine power. Gandhi is presented as an incarnation of Krishna who will assuage the distress of the Indians. Gandhi would kill the snake of foreign rule as Krishna had killed the snake Kalia.

As a leader, Gandhi gives advice to spin yarn to the people of India in that if they do it, the money that goes to Britain will be retained in India to feed the hungry and cloth the nude. The novelist elevates the Gandhian movement to a mythological plan. Rao illustrates a fine analogy of Ram and Ravana- Ram for Mahatma Gandhi and Ravana for the British Government. In this novel, Mother India or freedom is compared with Sita, Gandhi is presented as Ram and Jawaharlal Nehru is considered to his brother Bharta.

The novelist alludes to Gandhi's exiled existence. To liberate India Gandhi leaves his home, roams the length and breadth of India and passes his banished life. Rao says Gandhi, like Ram, will go to Britain, Lanka, and he will get us freedom, Sita. It is a struggle between the divine and devil K.R.S. Iyenger rightly says, "The reign of the Red-Man is as Asuric rule, and it is raised by the Devas, the Satyagrahis. The characters sharply divide into two camps: The Rulers (and their supporters) on the one hand and the Satyagrahis (and their sympathisers) on the other <sup>[3]</sup>.

As an apologist to Gandhian ideology, Rao believes that "the future of the world is in Gandhism <sup>[4]</sup>. Moorthy obtains spiritual power in his very first meeting with Gandhi, who primarily gives instruction to him in his political ideology. Moorthy says: "There is in it something of the silent communion of the ancient books" (52). He is spiritually influenced and states: "There is but one force in life and that is truth, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all" (52-53). In essence Moorthy explicates his faith in Gandhism and acquires self-realization after catching a glimpse of the Mahatma. Inspired and influenced by the ideology of Gandhi, Moorthy starts preaching Gandhian

philosophy of non-violence, love of mankind and abolition of untouchability.

Moorthy sees Seetharamu's willing acceptance of the torture by the British Government and it strengthens his belief in the Gandhian ontology of non-violence. The term non-violence indicates the extirpation of ill-will from one's heart, for it causes enmity and violence. When Ranga Gowda wants to teach a lesson to Puttayya for unjustly drawing all the canal-water to his fields, Moorthy preaches him the Gandhian principle of non-violence and love for the enemy. Once Ranga Gowda wishes to settle scores with Bade Khan, the policeman appointed by the British Government to watch over the political activities of the freedom fighters in *Kanthapura*, Moorthy dissuades him from indulging in any violence.

Gandhi's axiom of non-violence presents an astonishing paradigm for the whole world as it is a "war without violence and battle without hatred" [5]. Moorthy holds the Gandhian view that "good ends can be achieved only by good means" [6]. Each individual observes the same abiding awareness underlying all jives, whether friends or friends or foes, hates none. In this novel Jayaramachar articulates the ideology of Gandhi: "Fight, says he, but harms so soul. Love all says he, Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God. Don't be attached to riches, says he, for riches create passions, and passions create attachment and attachment hides the face of the truth. Truth must you tell, he says, for Truth is God, and verily, it is the only God I know" (22).

Jayaramachar continues by saying that truth is God and, therefore, the countrymen should speak the truth. It has the tone of Bhagavad Gita, which emphasises truthfulness as a part of human behavior. Moorthy's opinion that he is just "a pebble among the pebbles of the river, and when the floods come, rock by rock may lay buried under" (100) implies that he is without arrogance. Moorthy's recitation of "Sivoham, Sivoham is vedantic in spirit. Rangamma inspires the Satyagrahis to face the oppression of the police boldly and preaches that no one can hurt the immortal soul: "No, sister, the sword can split asunder the body, but never the soul" (153). C.D. Narasimhaiah observes that the novel delineates the dynamic power of a living religious convention. He states that "religion seems to sustain the spirits of the people of *Kanthapura*." [7] The inhabitants of *Kanthapura* willingly pledge to spin yarn, maintain non-violence (Ahinsa) and speak truth. When Moorthy is arrested the villagers implore goddess Kenchamma to set him free: "The Goddess will never fail us- she will free him from the clutches of the Red-man" (134). The inhabitants of *Kanthapura* go to Kenchamma Hill and invoke goddess Kenchamma to protect them from the savage assault of the British Government. Men and women are assaulted and arrested by the police. Most of the male freedom fighters are taken to prison but Moorthy is left out: "But Moorthy they would not take, and God left him still with us" (200). A large number of freedom fighters from other corners of the country come and join the movement in *Kanthapura*. The Satyagrahis, knowing that the soul is immortal and indestructible, come and jump into the ocean of death sans fear.

During his early years, Rao was influenced by the ideology of Gandhi which is one of the most challenging ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Jawaharlal Nehru Gandhi is

"like a powerful current of fresh air... like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds." [8] Gandhi gave the great weapon of non-violence to the people of India and strengthened it subsequently by the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements in the thirties. Gandhi, through this movement, not only sought political freedom but also aimed at economic liberty and spiritual regeneration. Gandhi wanted all the people, the opulent and the indigent, to lead a dignified life sans exploitation of any sort.

Rao's faith in Gandhian thought led him to idealize Gandhi as a true God. In *Kanthapura* Mahatma Gandhi is depicted as an emblem of divine power as well as great reality. The theme of the novel, "Gandhi and Our Village" has a mythical significance in that the past blends with the present. The age-old faith of the villagers that gods walk by lighted streets of *Kanthapura* during the month of Kartik indicates that the myth co-exists with the contemporary reality. As the gods pass by the potters' street and the weavers' street, lights are lit to see them pass by. This reference affirms the peasants' perpetual faith in gods- a faith which is shared by the author with his characters. Rao lays stress on the role of religion in the struggle for independence. That is why religion and politics are interwoven in the novel. The importance of independence is delineated in a religious metaphor. The political activity of the inhabitants of *Kanthapura* gains power from their religious faith. Rao adroitly deals with the conventional mythology which is interlaced with contemporary reality. The recurrent reference to myth adds new dimensions to the struggle for freedom, for the "exaggeration of reality by myth is the necessary way of achieving the eternity in space." [9]

Thus, Raja Rao's maiden novel *Kanthapura* presents the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and the abolition of untouchability. The great importance given to caste, the mythical presentation of Gandhi and mother India and the spiritualization of the freedom movement within the parameters of Indian cultural convention imply the tremendous impact of Gandhian ideology in *Kanthapura*.

## References

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