



Social

GANDHI'S IDEOLOGY-RAJA RAO-MOORTHY IN KANTHAPURA

Dr. R. Prabhakar *¹

*¹ Asst. Professor, In-Charge Dept. of English, Vikrama Simhapuri University, Nellore, AP.
INDIA



ABSTRACT

Kanthapura is considered the magnum opus of Raja Rao which portrays the considerable influence of Gandhi's ideology on the sleepy and remote village. Raja Rao is very successful in carving out the real picture of Indian village in pre-independence era. 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. Though his novels stray far afield, his heart is clanged to his sublime ancient Hindu tradition. The novel can be considered Gandhi-epic. It depicts impact of Gandhi's Ideology on the paralytic Indian masses. 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-Raja Rao-Moorthy in 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 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.

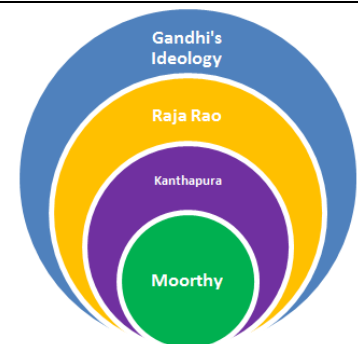
Keywords:

Gandhi's Ideology; portrayal of social situation; Sthalapurana; non-cooperation; Influence of Gandhi's philosophy.

Cite This Article: Dr. R. Prabhakar, "GANDHI'S IDEOLOGY-RAJA RAO-MOORTHY IN KANTHAPURA" International Journal of Research – Granthaalayah, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2016): 87-94.

1. INTRODUCTION

When verse was a dominant genre than fiction in India, the familiar poets like Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, and Sri Arabindo were far outshone before the advent of the trio of novelists – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao. Raja Rao carved out a niche for himself in Indo-English fiction after publishing his



magnum opus '*Kanthapura*' His popularity mushroomed rampantly with the publication of his second novel, 'The Serpent and the Rope', which received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963, and which got appreciation of critics in India and abroad. He showed his passion and enthusiasm to rural India. Against the constant overgrowth of the cosmopolitan nihilistic attitude, Raja Rao attempts to glorify the rural India, as an idyllic location, and its ethos.

In sublimity of wisdom and adroit dexterity in the realm of art in portraying the Indian rural atmosphere, Raj Rao has no equal and superior in the whole Indo-Anglican fiction. Raja Rao is a child of the Gandhian age. He is very much influenced by the Gandhian ideology. Gandhiji is the respectable leader in India and abroad due to not only for his constant struggle for Indian independence, but also for his immaculate character. His age had experienced two dire world wars. Every effort to gain freedom proved to be futile. Indians were frustrated as they were unable to realize their hope of gaining independence. All the echelons woke up from the curled up situation by the call given by Gandhiji. Education, politics, economics, religion, social life, language and literature were, more or less, influenced by Gandhian philosophy and ideology. Gandhiji had very strongly influenced language and literature by his writings in English and by his revolutionary ideas, ideals, and practice in the freedom movement through his weapons of non-violence, passive resistance, non-cooperation, and truthfulness which had permeated deep into all the echelons and caused a sea change in the minds of Indians. Many writers got influenced by the ideology and philosophy of Gandhi, but Gandhiji's life, ideology, and philosophy got influence from the writings of Henry David Thoreau, John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy and a few others. Gandhi appealed strongly for decentralization and village is the safe unit of human association.

Broad social outlook, love, forgiveness, and cooperation are the Indians' ideals in day-to-day life. There are about a dozen Indian novels in English in which Gandhiji appears either as a character or as a pervasive influence on the social and political scene. Gandhiji's intention is to remove the social inequalities, untouchability, caste arrogance, occupational prejudices. He also tried to give new life to language and literature. *Satyagraha* was to be the ultimate weapon that that would lead us to political freedom which again would lead us to other freedoms such as social, economical, religious freedoms as well. He supported the village industries which would avoid wicked forms of exploitation and misery inherent in large-scale industries.

Raja Rao's magnum opus *Kanthapura* is also one of them, which portray the dexterous tour de force of the novelist. It is his first major Indian novel in English, depicting in microcosm the Gandhiji's struggle for independence, which deals with Civil Disobedience under the influence of Gandhiji. The novel helped acquire maturity to Raja Rao in his later novels such as *The Serpent and the Rope*, and *The Cat and Shakespeare*. Gandhian movement gave special force to some of the great novelists. Among the novelists, K.S. Venkatramani's *Murugan the Tiller*, followed by *Kandan the Patriot*, which was dedicated to anonymous Indian freedom fighter, portray the ideal politics of the day. Later, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, and *Coolie*, and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* were influenced by the theme of Gandhian philosophy. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Ananda, and Raja Rao are considered 'Big Three'.

By reading the novel *Kanthapura*, we can find the parallels between the protagonist Moorthy and the novelist Raja Rao. It can be assumed that Moorthy is the replica of Raja Rao. Delving deep

into the details of family background, intelligence and caste-affiliation of Rao and Moorthy in the novel are similar. Rao hails from a Brahman family and he was brought up as a Hindu. Like Raja Rao, Moorthy also belongs to the Brahmin caste. Moorthy owns many acres of fallow land and enjoys a high standard of living akin to the other Brahmins. As Rao was known with the region in South India, the novel also takes place in a village in Southern India. Both, the protagonist of *Kanthapura* and Raja Rao are intellectually gifted. Rao had learned the French and English language at different universities of his country. Both are attracted towards the Gandhi's ideology. In many aspects, there is similarity between Moorthy and Raja Rao. Therefore, we can consider Moorthy Raja Rao.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is the offshoot of Gandhian ideology, and the novel *Kanthapura* considered *Gandhi and our Village*, but the narrative technique makes the novel more a *Gandhi Purana* than a piece of mere fiction. Gandhiji's influence is seen as God, friend, and mentor, guide, and philosopher, and Moorthy as Avatar. He is considered the village Gandhi. He is the replica of thousands of Indian young men who got inspiration from Gandhi, and gave up their studies for the right cause; to free their motherland from the brutal shackles of British. It is resistance of the Satyagrahis against the rulers. Meenakshi Mukerjee opines,

“The characteristically concrete imagination of the uneducated mind pictures the Mahatma as large and blue like the Sahyadri Mountain on whose slopes the pilgrims climb to the top, while Moorthy is seen as Small Mountain. To her the Satyagraha becomes a religious ceremony to which she devotes her sacred ardour.”¹

There are other divisions also. Orthodoxy is pitted against reforms, exploitation against sufferance, and the planter against the coolies. The corrupt officials confront the self-respecting villages.

Kanthapura, situated in a providence of Kara, gives a clear picture of struggle of Indians for independence in a remote village of India wherein the inhabitants are very poor, illiterate, backward, and caste-ridden. Kenchamma is the deity of the village. Raja Rao begins the novel with the portrayal of the social situation which is divided between the two predominant castes; the Brahmins and the Pariahs. As *Kanthapura* is an Indian traditional village, it is the symbol of the rural situation throughout India. With the division of castes, the narrow and dusty roads, and with crops like cardamom, coffee, rice, and sugarcane, with ghats, and with the surroundings which face the cool Arabian seas, *Kanthapura* is a microcosm of rural India and what happened there was happening everywhere in India in those days of freedom struggle. Raja Rao has taken every detail into consideration in depicting the imaginary traditional Indian village, which consists of Brahmin quarters, pariah quarters, potter's street with their own ethos and psyche.

On the one hand, *Kanthapura* deals with Gandhian movement in India, but on the other hand, Raja Rao achieves a focus by treating the great political upheaval as a phase of sthalapurana. Therefore, the village symbolizes the whole country. Touching on the artistic validity of sthalapurana, Raja Rao points out in his foreword to *Kanthapura*:

“There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich Sthala-purana or legendary history of its own. Some God or God-like hero has passed the village. Ram

might have rested under this papal tree. Sita might have dried up her clothes after her bath on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present and the Gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of village I have tried to tell.”²

It is very vivid from the above foreword that Rao’s portrayal of contemporary India derived from his Vedantic approach to life. The edge over classical Sanskrit literature and modern European literature made his mind a living encyclopedia of philosophy, and cultural currents, and cross cultural currents. His spiritual-metaphysical way of thinking might have led to him to Gandhian thought.

The surge towards revolution surround this small bucolic village, Kanthapura, and its villagers, under their inspirer, Moorthy, who forged towards the passive resistance acting upon the call given by Gandhi. KR Srinivas Iyengar writes about the theory of passive resistance in his ‘Indian Writing in English,’

Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering: it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When if refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience I use a soul force . . . If I do not obey the law, and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul force. It involves sacrifice of self . . .”³

Kanthapura is, caught in the maelstrom of the freedom struggle of the 1930 and transformed so completely in the end that “there is neither man nor mosquito is left in it.”⁴ The time of action in novel is confined to the period around Gandhi’s Dhandi March ending with Gandhiji’s pact with the then British Viceroy of India.

There overwhelming religious rituals before introduction of Gandhi of Swaraj starting from the invocation to the village Goddess Kanchamma, to the end of the novel. Religion sustains the spirit of the people of *Kanthapura*. Raja Rao makes use of the Hindu religious practices to the advantage of yoking the different kinds of people together under one umbrella of Gnadhi’s ideology. The village has Kanthapurishwari’s temple. Moorthy found a half-sunk linga and it is due to this the temple got built. The other villagers contributed to build the temple. Rangemma’s old father used to read out the Sankara Vijaya there. The villagers discuss Vedanta with him. Bhajanas and other things are organized in the temple. Sastri tells Harikathas, stories of Hari (God), a traditional way of delineating the Hindu mythologies. Jayaramachar, Harikatha man and the narrator of Harikathas, narrates the stories every evening based on Gandhi and his ideals. Villagers celebrate Rama, Krishna and Ganesh festivals and give remuneration or dakshina to the man who tells the kathas. The villagers celebrate the occasion by organizing a feast. One thing leads to another. The Gandhian movement comes to the village after the Harikatha man arrested. However, Moorthy does know very well that the religion is the master key to the rustic Indian minds. Hence, he instills new Gandhian mind into the age old minds of the villages through Harikatha. This theme is treated authentically for the first time in Indo-Anglian fiction. In the words of Iyengar, the novel is "a veritable grammar of the Gandhian myth-the myth that is but a poetic translation of the reality." ⁵

Moorthy, who inspires the villages and wins the respect of the villages, has an immeasurable influence of Gandhiji. He is elevated from a common boy to a young boy with leadership qualities by the Gandhi's personality. Like Gandhi who dedicated himself to the progress of the nation, he also has self-sacrificial nature and he is also dedicated himself to the progress of the village. Of course, he never met Gandhi. Feeling the impact of Gandhi, he leaves the college for noble cause of nation. He is one among the thousands of young men who give up their studies and get arrested. Inspired by the vision of Gandhi, Moorthy addresses a public.

Gandhi is the way, the truth, and life to Raja Rao. Like Raja Rao, Moorthy also gets inspiration by Gandhi's charismatic personality. Therefore, Raja Rao sees himself in Moorthy and gifts him with a many number of good qualities of head and heart. Gandhi inspired the people with admirable personality. Like Gandhi, Moorthy also worked for the progress of outcaste people. Moorthy inspired the villagers under the influence of Gandhi's philosophy, as Raja Rao's inspired the people towards the freedom struggle through *Kanthapura* after he himself got inspired by Gandhi and his philosophy. The three layers of Gandhian struggle for Independence – political, social, and religious – are visible in Moorthy. In fact, the three folded ideas are germinated in Rao even before the creation of Moorthy's character. As such it is clear that Rao got inspired by the ideology of Gandhi which paved him the way to create a fictional character called Moorthy. *Kanthapura* also focuses on the political, social, and religious aspects. C. D. Narasimha rightly observes,

“There are at least three strands of experience in the novel: the political, the religious and social, and all there are woven inextricably into the one complex story of *Kanthapura*.”⁶

Moorthy implements the Gandhian thought and work in the village. He shows a rare devotion and insight for the village youth. He takes toils and moils in teaching the ideology of Gandhi to the arrogant, and superstitious women in the village, and in carrying the message of Gandhi door to door and briefs to the villagers about the economy of khadi and the the importance of charakha. He encourages them to take to spinning despite strong opposition from all quarters. He sees that the Congress Committee in the village is formed and gets elected unanimously as the president. With a great confidence in Moorthy, even Range Gowda, the Patel, the Tiger of the village is deferential to him, calls him 'Learned Master'. He extends his hale and hearty support, authority, and prestige in Moorthy's favour. He permits him to have his way in everything. Moorthy encourages and pleases the women and organizes them. A Women Volunteer Corps is formed in the village. Ratna occupies the headship of the organization of swyam sevikas.

Like Gandhiji, Moorthy also observes fast, organizes picketing and satyagrahas, undergoes punishments and gets arrested and sent to jail. Throughout the novel he is shown as the ideal Gandhian. Like Gandhi, Moorthy tries to eradicate the inhuman untouchability. He goes in the pariah quarter from one village to another inspiring the women to take to spinning in their time. The Swami excommunicates him for his mission still Moorthy persists in his mission. Both Gandhi and Moorthy being humans, they have their own weaknesses. Pariah business is too much ever for him. He hesitates and wavers and thus shows that he is made of the same common clay. Moorthy performs the Gandhi work in the village. The Congress Committee in the village is formed by Moorthy. He strives a lot to see the people to be in constant touch with national

events through newspapers and other publicity materials. He invites Harikatha man, mixes religion with politics.

In the Freedom Struggle, women also play a pivotal role. The novelist considers the women shakti. Shakti symbolizes women. At the end of the novel, Ratna leads the Satyagrahis in lieu of Moorthy. Shakti's invincible spirit in the women in their satyagraha against the British government in very much found in *Kanthapura*. The most touching example of woman's edifying faith is the narrator's musing on the relics of *Kanthapura*. He dreams as the modern Ramayana ends happily where Rama (Gandhi) returns from his exile (visit to England) with Sita (India who had been abducted by Ravana (the British) as Gandhi returns to Ayodhya (Delhi). Bharata (Nehru) who reigns as regent welcomes Rama (Gandhi) and there is celestial flowers showered upon his aerial chariot. He supports and propagates Swadeshi Movement. During his epic attempt, he boldly faces opposition from ignorant and the conservative people. He awakens the people from stupidity, and ignorance. The villagers get elated after they hear the news of the Dandi March reaches the village *Kanthapura*. There are dharanas, picketings and satyagraha.

Children and old men with high spirit are included in the struggle and injured and wounded in a large numbers. Women like Ratna, are beaten up and humiliated but their spirit is not waned up. 'Gandhi Ki Jai', 'Vande Mataram' and 'Inquilab Zindabad' are the slogans reverberated in the air and boosted the morale of the people. When Moorthy is arrested, Ratna continues his work so the movement continues. With the influence of Gandhi, many chaotic situations happened in *Kanthapura*. There is the no tax and people refuse to pay the revenue, and lands are barren and they are forced to leave the village. The villagers of all castes and professions and the labourers of the Coffee Estate are ready to face the brutal assault of the police and government. Satyagrahis are maimed; broken and scattered. Many people left for Kashipura. With the influence of Gandhi, Rangemma, Ratna, Moorthy etc. spend many days in jail but the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the political reality release the Satyagrahis.

The novel can be considered a Gandhi-epic. It portrays Gandhi's influence on the minds of Indians. Gandhi's fascinating personality, though Gandhi did not appear in the novel, is felt. He remains in the background. Raja Rao tried to present Gandhian ideology and Movement very impartially. There is no idealization. *Kanthapura* is the magnum opus of Raja Rao which proved his art and which presents the impact of the Gandhian movement on the rusty minded Indians. It is a great classic during the period of the India's Freedom Struggle. It is very clear that it is a book which depicted the Gandhi's ideology and Gandhian period. Gandhi says satyagraha is for the sake of all (sarvodaya).

“As Gandhi states in his autobiography: To see the universal all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet with all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”⁷

Moorthy in *Kanthapura* is the embodiment of the spirit of Gandhi and his constant moderate freedom struggle, and his truth and non-violence as well. This is a quintessence wherein we can see Gandhian ideology in Moorthy.

And when Moorthy heard of all this, he said, 'That is not for me. Between Truth and me one shall come,' and Advocate Ranganna went and saw him and said, 'Moorthy! The Red-man's judges, they are not your uncle's grandsons,' and Moorthy simply said, 'If Truth is one, all men are one before It,' and Ranganna said, 'Judges are not for brown skin but for the white, and the Government is not with the people but with the police'. And Moorthy listened to all this and said, 'If that is so, it will have to change. Truth will have to change it. I shall speak that which Truth prompteth, and Truth needeth no defence,' and Ranganna, spoke this of corruption and that about prejudice but Truth, Truth, and Truth was all that Moorthy said, and old Ranganna, who had grown grey with law on his tongue, got so wild that he banged the prison door behind him and muttered to himself, 'To the mire with you!' P. 90

Gandhi's influence on the mind of Raja Rao is very much in 1930s which determined his writings. Therefore, Raja Rao carved out his own replica in the form of Moorthy in *Kanthapura* under the influence of Gandhi's ideology.

2. CONCLUSION

This research article aimed at delving deep into how the Gandhian ideology influenced Raja Rao, who created his own replica, Moorthy, in the novel *Kanthapura*. Psychologically, there is a parallelism between Raja Rao and Gandhi with regard to making India free from the foreign control. Both are patriots. As a result, Raja Rao is able to create the character of Moorthy, who is the replica of both Gandhian ideology and his own self. Raja Rao is patriotic like Gandhi. Thus, Raja Rao deals with the theme of patriotism in many ways in his works to create national consciousness by emphasizing the significance of their countries' history, culture and religion, particularly on the basis of Gandhian ideology in *Kanthapura*. Raja Rao, who wrote the novel in English language, is a committed novelist to the task of educating their peoples and the Europeans, about the rich cultural heritage and great history, mythology of India. And also he educated the people of non-violence, passive resistance, non-cooperation, and truthfulness, the weapons of Gandhi. Each writer faced colonialism in his own way. Raja Rao depicted the impact of Gandhi on the Indian masses and how his teachings motivated them to stand up to injustices and exploitation of British.

3. REFERENCES

- [1] Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*. Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974. Print. P.141.
- [2] Raja, Rao, *Kanthapura* : New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 24th Printing, 2008. Foreword by Raja Rao. (All the further references referred to the text are from this edition.)
- [3] Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasan. "Indian Writing in English", Revised ed. Sterling Publishers Private Limited., New Delhi, 2005. P.253.
- [4] Naik M.M. Raja Rao. New York: Twayne Publishers. 1972. P. 60.

- [5] *Iyenger, Srinivasa. Indian Writing In English. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers. 1962. P. 396.*
- [6] *C. D. Narsimhaiah. (1968). Raja Rao's Kanthapura: An Analysis, Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, Ed. M.K. Naik, S.K.Desai, G.S. Amur. Dharwar: Karnataka University, p- 246.*
- [7] *Gandhi, the Mahatma, 2002 [1927], An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. p. 420.*