



# Gandhian Thought in Rajarao's Kanthapura

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**Abstract**— *Rajarao was one of the most significant Indian novelists in English during the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His novel 'Kanthapura' explores the facts of the freedom struggle in India. The novel basically deals with how Gandhi's thought influenced the minds of the Indians. This article also explores how the people of Kanthapura were influenced by Gandhi's thought.*

**Keywords**— *Kanthapura, Gandhi, Truth, Untouchables, Moorthy.*



## I. INTRODUCTION

The novel *Kanthapura*, written in 1938 by Rajarao, shows the influence of Gandhian ideals on the Indian freedom struggle. It is the story of a small village in South India in which the people struggle against the British government. The novel opens with the narrator Achakka's lengthy sentence, "Our village—I don't think you have ever heard of it—Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara." The novelist Rajarao gives a vivid and beautiful picture of rural India. By setting the story in a village, *Kanthapura*, Rajarao shows that the Indian freedom movement spread to the villages, and the people of rural India have rigorously participated in the fight against the British. Generally, history records the significant people from cities who are well-educated and highly learned and who participate in the struggles. By taking a village as the backdrop of his novel, Rajarao emphasises the invaluable contribution of the unsung heroes during the freedom struggle.

## II. MOORTHY AS A CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE NOVEL

Though the novel contains many characters, I would like to focus on the central figure of the novel, Moorthy. Moorthy is a young man, a university graduate. He comes from a Brahmin family. He lost his father and mother when he was still young. His two sisters are married and have gone to their in-laws houses. Having been left alone in the village, he used to say that he would go to the city to

study at the university. Though he doesn't get through even intermediate, he learns all city manners, changes his lifestyle, reads city books, and even calls himself a Gandhian man. He preaches the Gandhian philosophy of truth, non-violence, and equality among various castes and communities. He transforms the simple, innocent, and illiterate villagers. Moorthy formed the local congress committee and inspired the women of the village to support the freedom movement. They supported Moorthy by forming the *Sevika Sangh*.

"Of course, he never got through inter even- but he had city ways, read city books, and even called himself a Gandhi man. Some two years ago, he had come back from Poona, he has given up his boots and hat and suit and had taken to dhoti and Khadi. And it was said that he had even Given up his city habit of smoking."  
(K 13)<sup>1</sup>

He has always been a braggart. The people of *Kanthapura* never liked him. He is not like Corner Moorthy, as people call him, who has gone through life like a noble cow, quiet, generous, and serene. He is completely changed under the influence of Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi launched the Non-Cooperation Movement, which was an expression of deep anguish and resentment. It had the backing and support of the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the country. *Kanthapura* covers the history of the whole decade of the

1920s and ends with the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931. Though the novel ends without completing the history of the freedom struggle, it shows the change of mood that the country has experienced.

Gandhi realized that unity among the Indians was the only weapon he could use to fight against the social evils in Indian society, like the purdah system. He believed that unity among the Hindus and Muslims was essential if they wanted to fight against the British rulers. Mahatma Gandhi stressed the boycott of foreign goods.

Moorthy, having been influenced by Gandhian ideology, comes to Kanthapura to unify all the communities in the village of Kanthapura. It has been the tradition of Indian culture to have Burrakathas and Harikathas during festivals in villages. People from all communities gather in one place, usually at temple corners, to listen to the Kathas. The general subjects of these kathas are from the Mahabharata, Ramayana, or Puranas. The character called Sastry in Kanthapura is well known as Harikatha Man. He received rewards and awards, even from the Maharaja of Mysore.

Moorthy, when he comes back to Kanthapura from Poona, utilizes the opportunity of the celebration of festivals in the village to unite the people. In fact, religion is one of the forcing factors that acts as an impetus to unite the people of the country. He proposes to celebrate the Rama festival, the Krishna festival, and the Ganesh festival every month in the village. For that, he chooses to collect money from all sections of the people in their village. Collecting money from all quarters of the village, even the Sudhras and Pariahs, to meet the expenses of the festivals is a strategy for Moorthy to bring a sense of unity to the public.

“So Moorthy goes from house to house and from younger brother to elder brother, and from elder brother to grandfather himself – and what do you think, he even goes to Potters’ quarter, Weavers’ quarter and Sudhra quarter ... Pariah quarter.” (K 20)<sup>2</sup>

When the people of Kanthapura looked at Moorthy going to all quarters and gathering money in an ascetic bowl, they thought that he was one of the Gandhi-men “who say there is neither caste, nor clan, nor family, and yet they pray like us and they live like us.” Gandhi initiated widow marriages and inert caste marriages. So, Moorthy and other followers of Gandhi say that a Pariah can marry a Brahmin, and a Brahmin can marry a Pariah.

“And what a grand festival we had the following Ganesh- jayanthi. There were reading parties, and camphor ceremonies every evening, and our

young men even performed a drum and sitar bhajan”. (K-21)<sup>3</sup>

In one of his speeches at the reception at Mayavaram on May 1, 1915, Gandhi was received by the untouchables. He said in the address gathering that “it was quite by accident that I had the great pleasure of receiving an address from my brethren, and there they said that they were without convenience for drinking water, they were without convenience for living supplies, and they could not hold or buy land. He asks the congregation:

“Do we propose to perpetuate this state of things ? Is it part of Hinduism? In so far as I have learned ...it is no part of real Hinduism to have in its hold a mass of people whom I would call “untouchables”... but who is responsible for this class of untouchables? I have been told that where ever there are Brahmins , it is they who are enjoying supremacy as a matter of right , but today are they enjoying the supremacy? If they are , then the sin will fall upon their shoulders... the true Brahmin is he who is equi-minded towards a pundit and a paraiah”.(69-70)<sup>4</sup>

On one of the evenings, they invited Jayaramachar, the famous Harikatha man. It is believed that he did harikatha before Mahatma Gandhi. Jayaramachar, while telling the story of Parvathi and Siva, draws an analogy between Shiva and the struggle for freedom. As Siva has three eyes, Swaraj has three eyes. Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, and Khaddar—he talks of Damayanthi, Sakuntala, and Yasodha—and everywhere there is something about our country and something about Swaraj.

People were astonished to listen to the narration of Jayaramachar. “He can keep us rapt in tears for four hours together.” He spoke of Gandhiji. People will never forget the story. “It is neither about Rama nor about Krishna, but a Mahatma, a saint, a holy man.”

In the harikatha done by Jaryaramachar, he says Siva himself incarnated as Mohandas in Gujarat to free his people from darkness and slavery. Gandhi is compared to Krishna in his wisdom. He goes to every village and starts saying, “Fight, but harm no soul. Love all—Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian, or Pariah—for all are equal before God. Don’t be attached to riches, for riches create passions, and passions create attachments, and attachment

hides the face of truth. Truth must you tell, he says, for truth is God." (K-22)<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi's idea of Swadeshi goods encouraged the people of India. He said to spin and weave every day, for our mothers are tattered weeds, and a poor mother needs clothes to cover her sores. If you spin the money that goes into the red man's hands, it will stay within the country, and the mother can feed the foodless, the milkless, and the clothless. (K-23)<sup>6</sup>

Under Gandhi's charismatic leadership, people felt so inspired that they were ready to make any sacrifice to break the chains of slavery. The police kicked thousands of them; they were wounded, and many of them were killed in the police firing. It was inspiration from Gandhi that kept them fired with patriotism. The villagers were forced to flee the village. They burned their houses and crops before leaving the village. The great Mahatma himself never appears on the scene. But the fire of patriotism ignited by him in the hearts of the Indians across villages and cities keeps blazing till India achieves freedom. Ultimately, the British rulers had to quit India in 1947.

### III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' stands as an exceptional portrayal of India's freedom struggle and the pervasive impact of Gandhian philosophy beyond urban intellectuals to the very heart of rural India. The novel deeply entrenches itself in the theme of grassroots revolution, where ordinary villagers embrace resistance against colonial power, highlighting the widespread influence Gandhi had across all strata of Indian society. Through vivid narratives and a distinctly rural setting, Rao immortalizes the oft-overlooked contributions of village dwellers to India's path to independence. 'Kanthapura' is thus a tribute not just to a pivotal era in Indian history but also a celebration of its unsung heroes who rallied behind Gandhi's vision for a liberated nation.

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