

## **The Proliferation of Gandhian Impact on the Deep Interiors of South India in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura***

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### **Abstract**

Gandhian ideology is rooted in the everlasting human values handed down to us over centuries such as truth, non-violence, righteousness, tolerance and love. Gandhi only reiterated these values taught by Upanishads, the Buddha and the Gita. Gandhian ideology also corresponds a number of contemporary issues like rural poverty, untouchability, plight of women and communal violence. Gandhian thought engineered a mass-based social and political revolution in India. Gandhian movements made an extraordinarily deep impact on literacy writers of Indian writing in English. It provided the writers, for the first time, a vision of a society on the move towards socio-economic reconstruction and political independence. Spiritually and intellectually, it instigated them to seek a new identity: a sensitive blend of the traditional and the modern. This revealed itself in the emergence of a number of Indian Novelist in English.

**Keywords-** Gandhian ideology, Movement, Violence, Destruction, Freedom

### **Introduction**

The sense in which Gandhian ideology is manifested here is inseparable from Gandhi, the person, religious reformer and public leader. Gandhi was not a thinker in the abstract. His thought is the result of his inner need to operate ethically in calling to account political and social situations. The present study examines the impact of Gandhi on Raja Rao, eminent contemporary novelist and winner of prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. It focuses on Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) Gandhian thought acted as a catalytic agent in the development of Indo-Anglian Novel during the thirties and forties. It is Gandhi's thought which gave a powerful moral stimulus to the creative writings which has already begun from romanticism to realism. Major writers and their writings like K.S. Venkataramani's

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*Kandan the Patriot* (1934), Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935) *Bachelor of Arts* (1936) and *The English Teacher* (1945) Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1935) and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947) have given expression to Gandhian Thought and Philosophy.

Raja Rao has reported Gandhi Dandi March In the novel Moorthy describes to his followers in the words;

...they go with the Mahatma to the  
Dandi beach to manufacture salt (Rao 169)

Raja Rao does not describe the entire course of Indian struggle for independence through Gandhian movement but to this brief period. The impact of Gandhian ideology on the Village. *Kanthapura* is the theme of the novel. KR. Srinivas Iyengar, the renowned critic concludes the theme of the novel as:

Gandhi and Our village.  
(Iyengar 390)

The theme of Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* is the liberation of Indian spirit by Gandhian thought. For the villagers, Gandhi could perform miracles, is nothing short of an incarnation. The villagers, imagination cannot understand the phenomenon that Gandhi was in any other but religious terms. This justifies Rao's deep intelligence of the people's mind and also of the kind of impact Gandhi left that mind. Legends and myths merged with political fact. The identification of Gandhi with characters from the Ramayana foreshadows the mingling of mythical similes from the Ramayana in *Kanthapura*.

*Kanthapura* microscopically deals with Gandhian Revolution during the 1930. The narrator Achakka is providing a running statement on the socio-political scenario, as she relives her past along with Gandhi's Satyagraha movement. The inhabitants are the villagers of *Kanthapura* of all castes and different economic backgrounds. Villagers have one thing in common and that is their slumbering spirit which is revitalized by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi did it by arousing the positive features of the already existent tradition religious civilization of *Kanthapurians*. The locale of the Village designed by Raja Rao that gives the immediate colonial context:

High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains  
that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar  
coast is it, up Mangalore and Putter and  
many a centre of cardamom and coffee.  
Rice and sugarcane... There, in the blue waters  
they say, our carted cardamoms and coffee

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get into the ships the Redmen bring,  
and so they say, they go across the  
seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live. (Rao 7)

Nostalgia for the glorious history of the past and the helpless wrath against the British are juxtaposed, And Moorthy, a local Gandhi fought this battle against an evil symbolized by British rule in India. Gandhian principles reach the villagers by Harikathas recited by Jayaramachar. Gandhi's campaign for the eradication of untouchability, more than any other activity, snakes the religious sensibility of the villagers.

Recalling the mythological story of Shiva and Paravati they are made conscious of Gandhian thoughts and social development:

Siva is the three eyes:  
he says, and Swaraj too is three eyed  
Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar.

(Rao 20)

According to one of the Harikathas the narrator describes the birth of Gandhiji where Jayaramachar mingles myth with contemporary politics. Gandhi's birth is presented as an incarnation of Lord Krishna.

And lo! when the sage was still partaking  
of the pleasures Brahma offered him in hospitality,  
there was born in a family in Gujrat a son such as  
the world has never beheld... you remember  
how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four,  
has begun to fight against demons and had  
killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas  
began to fight against the enemies of the country.

(Rao 22)

Moorthy and his friends went around distributing free spinning wheels to villagers. The pariahs love to see the Brahmin Moorthy in their midst but they hesitate to participate with them. Gandhi was against the very foundation of Hindu social structure especially caste system. Brahmin Bhatta went against Gandhi Bhajans and other social activities because he felt it was under British Government only that he could make more money by attaching land of the poor in lieu of debt, he gave them. So he does his best to confuse the innocent people saying that Gandhi's business;

...is nothing but wearing coarse hand- made cloth,  
not fit for a mop and bellowing out

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bhajans and bhajans and mixing with the pariahs.

(Rao 42)

Like Mulk Raj Anand, Rao too shows the issues of the opening of the temples to lower castes people. Untouchability is one of the major issues on the memoranda of Gandhian Social Programmes. It is ironical that Brahmin lad, Moorthy himself becomes the great agent of Gandhian views in the novel *Kanthapura*.

It is important that Moorthy's conversion to Gandhian ideas starts with, mystical in nature: "One day" as the narrator describes:

he had seen a vision, a vision of the Mahatma,  
mighty and God-beaming... and beneath  
the fan came a voice deep and stirring that  
went out to the hearts of those men women  
and came streaming back through the  
thrumming air, and went through the fan  
and the hair and the nails of Moorthy  
into the very limbs, and Moorthy shivered,...

(Rao 52)

Economic and Racial domination presented in the novel at Skeffington Coffee Estate, Moorthy starts 'Don't touch the Government campaign and in this direction he forms the Congress Group in *Kanthapura*. The concomitant needs of joining the Congress Group are observance of ahimsa, spinning cotton and speaking Truth.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, gives us a vivid glimpse of the Indian struggle for independence and faithful account of the impact of Gandhi on a rural part of India. In this novel, Raja Rao presents the image of Gandhi as an exemplary image because to many people in *Kanthapura*. Gandhi is invisible God and Moorthy is visible incarnation. Under the leadership of Moorthy, a local Gandhian follower, there is an effort to make the villagers free from casteism and inspire them to spin, weave and wear hand- spun cloth meet with some resistance.

To many people in *Kanthapura* Gandhi is the  
Invisible God and Moorthy is the visible avatar.  
Moorthy efforts to eradicate untouchability  
and make the villagers spin, weave and  
wear hand-spun cloth meet with some resistance.

(Rayudu 21)

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Police investigation of Moorthy's belonging and his arrest brings the conflict, Moorthy asks the people in the name of Mahatma not to be scared of going to jail. The whole area of the village resounds with "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai" as the Satyagrahis are attacked by Police-lathis. Moorthy's belief in altering the relationship between the exploiter and exploited or calls one of Gandhi's defenses of his own position in the law court in the name of truth. All the aspects of Gandhian ideology like charakha, Ahimsa, untouchability and Hindu- Muslim unity are described.

Rangamma assists spreading the idea of India's remote history and informs the village women about Indian women participation in movements like Sepoy's Mutiny of 1857. She recalls names like Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi and Annie Besant to enlist the women's co-operation to form a Sevika Sangh. After his release from the Jail, Moorthy provides a call for action. He calls India as Mother India for whom they have to create a temple. It is important that the religious myth of the mother-goddess is implored again and again to enthruse villagers to action this is the one and only language by which the political thought of India's freedom can be transmitted to the villagers.

It is clear from the analysis of the novel, *Kanthapura* that Raja Rao is totally committed to the larger political, social, economic and spiritual importance of the Gandhian masse upsurge during 1930s. Nehru all his life remained faithful to Gandhian ethics. Moorthy delineates Nehru as Bharta to Gandhi, Gandhi as Lord Rama in the Ramayana.

Moorthy was a young man who felt  
disillusioned after he suffered a defeat.  
His faith in Gandhi is shaken for a moment.  
But the novel projects the Mahatma as the  
chief inspiration. At one time Nehru was  
also dissatisfied with Gandhi's way of struggle.  
But if Nehru had not been a true  
Gandhian India should not have been  
in the state we are today.

(Niranjan 23)

As the British government uses brute force against the villagers of Kanthapura, some of them die and others depart Kanthapura and settle in a new village Moorthy is drawn towards the Congress Movements led by Jawaharlal Nehru. Though, Kanthapura is destroyed by the British government but the spirit of villagers remains undaunted and be live that:

"He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma.  
And we shall be happy.

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(Rao 258)

Gandhi always aspired India to be a nation of peace with unwavering belief and faith in ahimsa and affection for every one like a female parent with boundless compassion.

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