

## GHANDHIAN IDEOLOGY IN RAJA RAO'S KANTHAPURA

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### Abstract

*Indian Writing in English is influenced by Gandhian ideology. Gandhiji emphasised more on social, political, and religious problems of the oppressed and downtrodden 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 follows Gandhiji's doctrine and ideology of non-violence, satyagraha, their views on untouchability and casteism etc. Raja Rao is celebrated novelist of India and regarded as one of the greatest Indian English novelist. Gandhiji aroused national awakening in Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom movement which was strengthened by non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement in Kanthapura village. Moorthy the central character, sticks to the Gandhian ideas and reforms the position of village including social, political, religious background. Moorthy and other characters are the followers of Gandhiji and use Gandhian ideology in their struggle against the government. They follow the path of non-violence, so throughout the novel we can see the influence of Gandhi on the characters of Kanthapura. Moorthy acts as a local Mahatma and is the follower of Gandhism. The present paper emphasises the impact of Gandhism on Raja Rao's Kanthapura.*

**Keywords-** Gandhiji, Ideology, Raja Rao, Kanthapura

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### Introduction:-

Indian writers in English of the pre and post independence era are highly influenced by Gandhian Ideology. Mahatma Gandhi's emergence on the political arena of India changed the complete outlook of the society and established some values. His struggle for freedom introduced some new trends in Anglo-Indian fiction. Gandhi emphasised on social problems of the oppressed, poor, downtrodden and the low caste of the Hindu society. His aim was to eliminate poverty, superstitions, caste system and untouchability in the Indian society. Mahatma Gandhi had a great influence on the Indian masses. Gandhiji aroused national awakening in Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom which was strengthened by non-co-operation and civil disobedience movements. Gandhi wanted all the people to lead a dignified life without exploitation of any kind. The Gandhian influence was so vast and intense that the great writers of all the Indian languages produced some masterpieces in novel, poetry and other forms of creative writing.

Gandhian ideology is still relevant and universal. 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. Gandhiji 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. Gandhiji had strongly influenced language and literature by his writing in English and by his revolutionary ideas, ideals and practiced it in the freedom movement.

The Gandhian impact on contemporary literature is intimate purposive and variegated. Raja Rao belongs to Gandhian era and his novel *Kanthapura* reveals prominently the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. This novel follows Gandhian ideology &

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doctrine of non-violence, satyagraha and untouchability. Rao speaks of rich cultural traditions and has used the oral story - telling method steeped in history of India to relate the impact of change. There is a conflicting element in the deeply- entrenched and traditional role in men & women which is explored in the novel. Rao is aware of the potential for these cultural conventions to ruin his story and manages to use individual characters to explore the problems. Rao sees Hindu India through this village as having the potential to be restored. He introduces a mythical ideological quality to his writing. *Kanthapura* presents a society which is almost of a uniform type. It is a typical village of India which is backward, illiterate and superstitious, against the constant growth of the cosmopolitan nihilistic attitude. Raja Rao attempts to glorify the rural India, as an idyllic location. Raja Rao is the child of Gandhian age. He is very much influenced by Gandhian Ideology.

*Kanthapura* which was published in 1938 was catapulted into international fame. After some time, the novel came to be recognised as a classic of Indo- Anglian fiction. *Kanthapura* deals with the Gandhian Movement and its impact on small village in India like *Kanthapura*. The novel begins with the description of the village life as depicted very realistically. In *Kanthapura*, the village is divided into the Brahmin quarters, the Pariah quarters, the Potters quarters and Weaver's quarters. It proves that the *Kanthapura* village is divided according to caste-system like other villages in India. In South India coffee is a common beverage and is served in metal cups, but main guests are served in silver cups. Nanjamma gives coffee to Moorthy in a silver cup. Sari, being one piece of cloth, Indian women carry small things tied to their sari fringes. Indian life is presented perfectly through minute description of the people. We come to know about the life style and habits of villagers and the way they judge things. They are ignorant and simple, uneducated, superstitious and deeply religious. *Kanthapura* is dominated by freedom movement and its impact on the villagers of *Kanthapura*. This movement organised by Moorthy failed but there is a national consciousness among the people. It was an intense movement called 'Civil Disobedience Movement'. Foreign clothes were rejected and bonfire every day, colleges and universities were boycotted by students, moreover alcohol also prohibited because poor people used to waste their wages in buying alcohol. Gandhiji himself organised many demonstrations. One of them was the Dandi March, salt laws were violated. All these facts are highlighted in

*Kanthapuraby*Raja Rao. *Kanthapura* is a symbolic world which gives accurate picture of the Indian National Movement. There is reference of the Dandi March and JalliawallaBagh. Moorthy had links with the Congress committee at Karwar. The women's volunteer crops was organised in Kanthapura. It was named the 'SevikaSangha'. It was difficult for Moorthy to convince the villagers of Kanthapura to take charkhas distributed by Congress.

*Kanthapura* pictures truthfully and touchingly the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership, its religion, character, its economic and social concerns, its political ideals precisely in the way Gandhi tried to spiritualise politics. *Kanthapuradeals* with social and economicaltransformation of the people. The people are religious and superstitious, the society is divided into compartments on the basis of caste and religion. There are people like Range Gowda, who are well off in spite of the fact that they belongs to castes.

Like thousands of young men all over the country Moorthy gave up his studies and joined the freedom movement. Moorthy dedicated his life to the struggle for independence as he was influenced by Gandhi. Moorthy tried to follow the principles of Gandhi. He burnt his foreign clothes and started using Indian clothes. He did not marry and devoted his life to the struggle for independence. He sacrificed his personal life and happiness for the sake of his country. He became the leader of the freedom fighters in *Kanthapura* and was loved and respected by the people. Even the people who were much older than him respected him and had full faith in him, he is the most prominent among the followers of Gandhi depicted in the novel.

The Gandhian movement was brought to Kanthapura by Moorthy and the city boys. He went door to door to tell people about Gandhi, his views and principles. He distributed charkhas among the people of Kanthapura village free of cost. In the beginning, he found it difficult to convince the villagers to take the charkhas and start spinning cloth on regular basis. First at last he was able to convince most of them that it was essential for achieving political freedom. The Congress committee was formed in Kanthapura. The villagers regarded Moorthy as the Gandhi of Kanthapura. They called Gandhi as the Big mountain and Moorthy as the small mountain. He did not stop working for the upliftment of the Pariahs even on being asked by his mother to do so. She was shocked to hear when the Swami said that Moorthy will be excommunicated if he does

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not stop working for the Pariahs. Moorthy goes from house to house for collection of funds for the Harikathas. It is scandalous for Moorthy to enter the Pariah quarters. Gandhi's campaign for the removal of untouchability, more than any programme shocked the religious sensibility of the villagers. The female character Achakkadescribeshow shocked she was, when Moorthy had gone to Pariah quarters.

“ I closed my ears when I heard he went to the Pariah quarter. We said to ourselves, he is one of these Gandhian, who says there is neither caste nor clan nor family and yet they pray like us and live like us” 1

Moorthy did not take this seriously. He did not stop mixing with the Pariahs even after the death of his mother. In spite of all this it is worth nothing that he had hesitation in entering Rachanna's house and found it very difficult to sip the milk brought to him by Rachanna's wife. Moorthy kept a fast for 3 days because he had not been able to live up to the ideals of the Mahatma. He held himself responsible for the violence that took place at the skeffington coffee Estate. After the fast he started the 'Don't touch the Government Campaign' under his leadership. The people of Kanthapura picketed non-violence like a true follower of Gandhi. He was arrested by police and during his jail he behaved like a true Gandhian.

Like many young satyagrahis, he also starts feeling that by following Gandhi's methods they may not be able to achieve their aim. He still respected the Mahatma Gandhi but he felt that Britishers were able to fool him. The characters like advocate Sankar, Rangamma and Ratna are followers of Gandhi. Rangamma participated in the work of Congress. Her house became the office of the Congress in Kanthapura village. The freedom fighters were used to assemble at her house and discuss their plan of action. She took active part in organising the women of Kanthapura and forming 'SevikaSangh'. She motivated the women to fight and tried to prepare them mentally to bear the atrocities of the police clamly. She asked the women not to neglect their house hold work. She tells the villagers about the various things going on in the world, which she reads in the daily newspaper. She is able to explain the contents of the religious texts to the villagers in a very convincing manner. Gandhi's power is manifested through a large number mini- Gandhi and main is Moorthy. The followers of Gandhiji have firm faith in Moorthy. But under the blows of lathis and continuous humiliation they lose their

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patience in some cases and make counter attacks. Rachi is a simple Satyagrahi but a time comes when she loses her patience and sets fire to the whole village saying.

“If the rise is to be lost it be lost in the ashes” 2

Ratnais also a follower of Gandhi. She is a widow and only 15 years old. She becomes the leader of the freedom fighters in Kanthapara in absence of Moorthy. Advocate Sankar tries to follow the principles of Gandhi and is a very honest and upright man. He is lawyer like Gandhiji, he does not take up false cases and if at any point he comes to know that his client has lied him and is actually guilty he gives up the case immediately. The novelist has given a very detail and long description of Advocate Sankar and his views and personality but it gives us an idea of what Gandhiji's views and principles were. Sankar leads a simple life and is in favour of khadi being used by all the Gandhians. He knows that the purpose of the khadi movement is to put a halt to the exploitation of India by western industrialists. He believes that Hindi will someday become the National language. He believes that fasting is good thing and even makes his family members fast on several occasions which are important dates in Indian freedom struggle.

There are many people in the village Kanthapura like Rachanna, RangeGawda etc who were followers of Gandhian ideology. Moorthy is the embodiment of the spirit of Gandhi and his constant moderate freedom struggle and his truth and non-violence as well. This is 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 defense,” 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 !”3

Throughout the novel Moorthy acts as a local Gandhi and he follows Gandhian ideals and principles. Here we can compare Gandhi with Moorthy. Mahatma devoted his life to Indians struggle for independence. Moorthy refuses his religious doctrine for the villagers as Gandhi did for our nation. Gandhiji was not interested in monetary gain in worldly things. He converted the whole country into freedom fighters. Moorthy also left his studies and hopes of a glorious future for the sake of Kanthapura. He devoted his life to the struggle for independence after he had a vision of Gandhi and worked for removal of untouchability and upliftment of Pariah. The novel depicts the impact of Gandhi on the village Kanthapura and on the country as a whole. Moorthy is the leader of the freedom fighters in Kanthapura. He is loved and respected by the people of Kanthapura.

Gandhiji is the way, the truth and the life for Raja Rao. In the novel Raja Rao presented Moorthy as a mini Gandhi, who was inspired by Gandhiji's personality. Like Gandhi, Moorthy also worked for upliftment of outcaste people. He inspired the villagers of Kanthapura under influence of Gandhian philosophy towards freedom struggle. The three layers Gandhian struggle for independence political, religious and social 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 Gandhian ideology. Which paved him the way to create a fictional character called Moorthy. *Kanthapura* 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.”<sup>4</sup>

Moorthy implements the Gandhian thought and work in the village. He shows a devotion and insight for the village youth. He teaches the ideology of Gandhi to superstitious women in Kanthapura and carries message of Gandhi door to door of the village about the economy of khadi and importance of charkhas.

#### **Conduction :-**

The novel deals with the impact of the Gandhian movement on a small village called *Kanthapura*. Moorthy inspired the people by telling about the events taking place all over the country and about Gandhi and his ideals, views and philosophy. He told them about important events like the Dandi march and motivated the people to fight for the

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freedom of the nation. Mahatma never appears on the scene but his presence is felt all the time through the novel.

Kanthapura is not only a political novel, but also a novel which deals with socio-religious and economic transformation, during the struggle for independence. The novel can be considered as a Gandhi- epic. It depicts the impact of Gandhian Ideology on the Indian masses specially the village called Kanthapura. Gandhi's personality and his ideology are felt every where in the novel. Gandhijidoesnot appear throughoutthe novel personally but the plot of novel revolves around his ideology. It also focuses on how Moorthy, under the influence of Gandhi, tries to inspire the people towards the freedom struggle. On the whole Kanthapura mirrors the social temper of the age. The village backwardness, bear simple face, simple life, artlessly simple mode of thinking, elasticity of conversion of dogmatism in certain quarters- anger, love, orthodoxy, regeneration, notions of ritualistic religion, superstition, easy human responses have been caught in the net of the socio-political novel. The greatness of Raja Rao as an artist shines with a brilliant note in *Kanthapura*. The history of India is the moral triumph of the Indians under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi against the foreign rule. Kanthapura as such will remain as a very faithful record of the movement for the freedom of the country.

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