

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

[www.thecreativelaucher.com](http://www.thecreativelaucher.com)

### Social and Political background in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

**Pramod Kumar**

Research Scholar

D.A-V. College, CSJM University,

Kanpur, India

**DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.4.4.11**

#### Abstract

The present paper seeks to outline Social and Political background in *Kanthapura*. It aims a better understanding of how social and political acts in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. This article begins by offering general introduction to Raja Rao and *Kanthapura*. Subsequently, it is a classic of the Gandhian movement, a work in which the Gandhian struggle for independence and its impact on the Indian masses finds, its best and fullest expression. This pre-eminence is surprising when we remember that the bulk of his published work is small. His famous works are *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947), *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965).

**Keywords-** Social, Movement, Struggle, Indian masses, Metaphysical

Raja Rao is one of the greatest of Indian novelists writing in the English language. Only two others – Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan come anywhere near him. But Raja Rao is entirely different from them in his art prose style. Raja Rao's work divides itself easily into two parts or categories- First, The Early Phase and second, The Later phase. Range of life as well as the levels of consciousness he has brought into the novel form, along with the creation of a suitable medium for his concerns which are at once timeless and temporal, metaphysical and social, immediately local but also international, so as to enlarge the frontiers of the fictional form itself and justify the name of an innovator. In modern Indian fiction which, thanks largely to him, more than any other single writer, has been ushered into the mainstream of twentieth century literature.

#### **Kanthapura**

*Kanthapura* is his first novel, it is a classic of the Gandhian movement, a work in which the Gandhian struggle for independence and its impact on the Indian masses finds; its best and fullest novel, a novel with, "the various facets of the village life, with its socioeconomic divisions, superstitions, religious and caste-prejudices, blind faith in Gods and Goddesses, Poverty, petty, jealousies, dirty lanes, shady gardens, snake-infested forests, dirty pools, hills, rivers and changing seasons. "Kanthapura is a microcosm of the macrocosm; it is Indian makes it a Gandhi Puran or a Gandhi epic. The novelist does not write, "Babu English" but Indian English, English eminently suited for the expression of Indian sensibility. He has

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

[www.thecreativelaucher.com](http://www.thecreativelaucher.com)

tried to adapt his English style to the movement of a Sanskrit, a language which is the source of Indian languages. This evolution of a suitable style for the expression of Indian Sensibility is Raja Rao's most significant contribution to the Indo-Asian fiction.

Another of his important contributions is the fusion of a Western art form with an Indian theme and the Indian way of treating it. He has followed the oral Indian tradition of story-telling and so the narration is digressive and episodic. As the old narrator's stream of reminiscence proceeds, there is a free mingling of fact and fiction, poetry and reality, the perennial and the present, and "This makes '*Kanthapura*' a distinctive novel, almost a new species of fiction." The use of the Eliotian mythical-technique enables the novelist to exalt Gandhi as Rama, to see Bharat Mata as Sita and the Redman as Ratan. This mingling of Gods and men, of myth and legend tradition of story-telling. This makes *Kanthapura* a Gandhian epic, "a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian epic, "a veritable Grammar of the Gandhi myth – the myth that is but a translation of reality. It will always have a central place in Gandhian Literature." (Iyengar)

### **A Political As well as Social Background of novel**

*Kanthapura* is not only a fine work of art but it also aims at rousing the conscience of the country and even of the world at large, at the ills and injustices which plagued Indian life in 1930. Though the novel depicts the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi as the main theme, it also aims at social reform. It is so because the Gandhian movement didn't aim at Swaraj itself could be attained after certain social reforms and social awakening. These social reforms included freedom from boycotting foreign goods and by spinning yarn and wearing Khadi made from it, also eradication of untouchability and the rigidities of caste system and removal of illiteracy and ignorance and superstition. At the end of the novel there is also a mention that Raja Rao through his hero Moorthy, doesn't regard Gandhism as the last word and that he believes that the basic ill in India was something more fundamental than conceived by Gandhiji. i.e. inequality. The Freedom movement, British Rule, The Caste system and Social Awakening are some concerns in his fictional works.

### **The Freedom Movement**

In *Kanthapura*, we have more than glimpses of the Freedom movement in India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. No other book of this scope and size on this theme pictures so vividly, truthfully and touchingly the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership. We see how the name of Gandhi acts like a charm in every part of India, and how the people in remote and observe a fast in order to show their solidarity with Mahatma Gandhi as he sets out on his historic Dandi March. In cities as well as villages there are volunteers group which organise the people, distribute charkhas and yarn, and even form an ambulance corps to take care of those who are wounded in the firing and lathi charges on satyagrahis. Moorthy is a typical example of the thousands of young man who were fired with patriotic zeal by Gandhi's inspiration and who, under his programme, left schools, colleges, universities or resigned from their jobs and made a bonfire of their costly imported clothes.

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

[www.thecreativelaucher.com](http://www.thecreativelaucher.com)

Rangamma and Ratna represent the women's side of the movement, while Range Gowda and Rachanna show how even the people of the lower castes picked up courage, or curbed their natural instinct for realisation and accepted the voluntary restraint of non-violence. Peasants refused to pay revenue and other taxes to the Government, with the result that many of them were evicted from their lands and lost all means of earning a livelihood. There are injured and wounded in large numbers. Women, like Ratna, are beaten up and dishonoured, but their spirit isn't crushed. Shouts of Gandhiji Ki Jai and Inquilab Zindabad resound in the air and boost the morale of the people. Large numbers are arrested his place is taken by Ratna, and so the movement continues.

The ideals of patriotism and national integration are depicted through one of the minor characters, Advocate Sankar. He is a Khadi-clad advocate who has been named as 'Walking Advocate' because of his simple ways. His professional attitude reflects that of Mahatma Gandhi of the days when he worked as a lawyer in South Africa. Sankar never took up a false case, and would either give up a case, or make the client confess his crime, if he later found out that his case was false. He didn't charge a fee from the poor and even paid their court fees and stamp charges himself. In spite of this, he got many cases and soon became very rich. But still he kept up his austere ways. In his spare time he went to a school where Hindi was taught and helped the teacher with the work. In spite of being a south-Indian, Sankar had a firm belief that Hindi would one day become the national language of India. It was not just a theoretical belief with him but something that he actually practiced, for he used the North Indian way of greeting when he met anyone, spoke in Hindi to his old mother who couldn't understand a word of it, and spoke nothing but Hindi when he talked to his daughter. He didn't like people to use English words in conversation, and when anyone did so inadvertently he had to drop small coin into a box kept for this purpose, the collections from which were contributed to the Congress funds.

In the case of Khadi, he was a fanatic. He would never attend a wedding party if anyone didn't exclusively wear Khadi. He wouldn't even make an exception in the case of the bride, telling them that the showy sarees they wore only enriched Italian yarn-markers and German dye manufacturers. Sankar was no doubt a fanatic, but he admitted this fact and claimed that a few fanatics were necessary in every field. His fanaticism was revealed in the matter of fasting, for he observed a fast, and made the members of his family also observe a fast, on most of the days connected with Mahatma Gandhi or other patriotic leaders, or days of national importance, e.g. the anniversary of the massacre at Jallianwalla Bagh. Such people may be eccentric and extremists but their example doesn't fail to impress and inspire others.

### **British Rule**

British Government in India, its laws and ways are also depicted vividly in the novel. The white man who owns the Skeffington Coffee Estate is a symbol of the imperialist rulers of India who exploited Indians in various ways. They employed paid agents like Bhatta and the Swami to oppose the freedom movement. They send policemen like Bade Khan to harass

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

[www.thecreativelaucher.com](http://www.thecreativelaucher.com)

the patriots and cook up false cases against them. Their treatment of peaceful satyagrahis is extremely inhuman. They don't spare even women and children. Inside the jails people are treated with great cruelty and forced to salute the Union Jack. Even such movements as prohibition are opposed because these would loosen the hold of the foreigners upon the poor masses. Many of their laws, for example, those relating to the ban on the making of salt, are extremely discriminatory against the poor people. Moreover, there are references to the atrocities committed by the authorities in other parts of India, e.g., the massacre at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar. The British policy of divide and rule is also seen in operation, for the loyal Swami is given a gift of twelve hundred acres of land, so that there is no chance of his joining the patriotic movement.

### **The Caste system**

One of the most important evils in Hinduism is the caste system. In *Kanthapura* there is much implied criticism of it. It is described through Bhatta, and later through Swami. Both are conservative, orthodox Brahmins, are the agents of British government and work together to frustrate and defeat the Gandhi-movement. Since the Swami's power rests on the superiority of the Brahmins over other castes, he takes the view that the caste system is the very foundation of Hinduism. He maintains that no Brahmin should have contact with the pariahs, and threatens to excommunicate Moorthy because he does so. Later this threat is actually carried out. People of the lower castes aren't admitted inside temples outside. Though the pariahs don't seem to mind this much, there is a movement that the doors of the temples should be thrown open to all classes. One of the followers of Gandhi in Karwar has already done that. He is Advocate Ranganna who describes his meeting with the Swami. The Swami had sent a message to the advocate that he described to see him. The Swami told him that for some time there had been too much of this pariah business. According to him it was polluting for a Brahmin to mingle with a pariah. He maintained that the pariahs couldn't be uplifted through the efforts of others.

### **Social Awakening**

The boycott of foreign goods was meant to cripple the efforts of foreign manufacturers to exploit and impoverish India, and the insistence on spinning taught people the dignity of labour as well as self reliance. In a poor country like India simple living must be practiced. Moreover, spinning could provide a regular income to the common masses, especially to women who have no other means of earning available to them. Gandhi's emphasis on education and avoiding alcoholic drinks had both a moral and an economic aim. If the poor coolies who are grossly exploited by the owners of plantations learn to read and write, they would become better acquainted with their rights and wouldn't be cheated so easily. Drink is the greatest enemy of the poor because it never allows a person to spend his income on essential items or make a saving for a rainy day. The picketing of the toddy grove and the toddy both has the immediate effect of making the coolies realize how evil toddy-drinking is,

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

[www.thecreativelaucher.com](http://www.thecreativelaucher.com)

so that some of them even take a pledge that they would never touch the poisonous drink again.

### Conclusion

Literature is a medium of political, social and religious awakening in a country and it is natural that during India's own part. Most of the creative writing which influenced India's national movement had taken into account the personality and achievements of Mahatma Gandhi who dominated the Indian political scene from 1916 till his death in 1948. For thousands of India's illiterate peasants Gandhi came to stand for a religious avatar or incarnation of a god and even many of the more sophisticated city-dwellers looked upon him as a prophet as well as saviour.

### Works Cited

- Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*. Oxford University Press, 1974.  
Rao, K.R. *The Fiction of Raja Rao*. Aurangabad, 1980.