

KANTHAPURA AND GANDHISM

In the history of India's struggle for Independence, Gandhi and his movement gained an immense value from the public. It is obvious that the non-co-operation of the twenties and the Civil Disobedience of the thirties and Quit India movement of the forties earned a great momentum in the political movement in India, Independence and Gandhi are inseparable, for he is credited with making the Indian National Movement 'a mass struggle'. Literature being an expression of life and society, Indian Literatures have felt the stress of Gandhian spirit.

Gandhi is considered as the 'Builder of the Nation' but he did not work on a virgin land. He is the architect of 'free India'. Only after the arrival of Gandhi, in the Indian political scene, the Indian Independence struggle turned out to be a nation wide strong movement with new ways and means. He was the only man in giving to the people a new weapon of '**Non – Violence**' and a novel technique of '**Satyagraha**' to regain and restore justice to the society. He handled non-violence as an effective technique and used it as a weapon against the British Dictatorship. He experimented with the new weapons of truth, non – violence, love, faith in religion and passive resistance and successfully led protest movements.

Gandhi found that **the Partition of Bengal, the 'Swadeshi' movement of boy cotting English goods, formation of the Muslim League and the Morely –Minto reforms** had surcharged the atmosphere with **violence, hatred and suspicion**. Political movement has given rise to militant nationalism. World War-I had ended, but the national hopes remained unfulfilled. **The 'Montaque-chelmsford Reforms, Rowlatt Act**

and **Jalianwala Bagh Massacre** generated more bitterness, agony and discontent. Bal Gangadhar Tilak has passed away and the responsibility of **'Swaraj'** fell on Gandhi's shoulders.

Gandhi's ideas initiated mass action of a kind that spanned the whole of India across regional and linguistic boundaries. People got interested in regions of India other than their own. This mobility and interest in India among people of different sections of Indian society also worked as a great liberating factor for the creative writers. The three major movements, **Non-cooperation Movement in 1921, Salt Satyagraha in 1931 and the Quit India Movement in 1942** created such an upsurge as had never occurred before in Modern India. The sole objective of Gandhi's mass movements was to arouse an all India consciousness, the first requisite being the growth of national identity. It is this aspect of Gandhian thought that had an immediate appeal for the Indian novelists in English.

Gandhi practised and preached the ideals of truth, non-violence, fearlessness, self-help, equality, simplicity, honesty, voluntary poverty, love for all and hatred for none, religious toleration and self - realization through self-restraint and self – abnegation. He was totally against untouchability, economic oppression and suppression and deep rooted prejudices and superstitions and launched a crusade for their eradication and removal. He is the one who revolutionized the social milieu in still another significant sense, that is, by transforming woman's status in Indian society. For the first time in Indian history, Gandhi's thought and actions gave a new definition to woman as an individual - independent and capable of taking care of herself. His invitation to women to participate in the freedom struggle as equal partners of men brought women out of the conventional mode of behaviour

pattern prescribed. To writer, especially to the writer of novels, the freeing aspect of this change of attitude towards women had a great significance. Thus Gandhi succeeded in creating altogether a new image of India.

By practising his ideas through the above mass movement, Gandhi showed that India was culturally united and possessed one consciousness. Moreover, through these movements that resulted in the mass upsurge of a people, certain aspects of Indian society and culture were revealed to the novelists. Gandhian thought addressed itself to choose English issues of all India relevance and this inspired the Indian novelists in English to choose English as the medium of their expression. The influence of Gandhi on the minds of the Indian writers was profoundly felt and the new branch of Literature in India, that is, Indian writing in English has also felt the stress of Gandhian spirit. **“Gandhi”, as M.K.Naik has put it, “is a colossus who bestrides almost over the entire field of Indian writing in English in several forms either as a character or as a subject or a pervasive influence upon the social and political scene depicted by the writer”** (Naik 370).

The words of Nehru attest to the fact that Gandhi and the political struggle of the memorable period of India’s history were synonymous with each other and Nehru, widely believed to be his political heir, said once as:

“Difficult as it is to write a life of Gandhi it becomes far more so because his life has been an intimate part of India’s life for a half century or more yet, if any attempt to write his life they may succeed in throwing light on some of this unique career and also give people some understanding of this memorable period of past history” (Agnihotri 10).

The impact of Mahatma Gandhi's personality and his programme on this period was so great that it would be proper to call it '**Gandhian Age**'. This period of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle has important mile-stones like the '**Khilafat Movement**' (1920-21), his **Satragraha against Salt Law** (1930-31), the **Quit India Movement** (1942) and others till Independence was achieved in August 1947 which tolled the death knell of colonial imperialism and till the last evening when the bullet of an assassin cut short the life of the '**Good little man**' whose coming to India with a weapon was nothing but a signal for the arrival of the new force in Indian politics.

Gandhi had no intention to evolve and formulate any formal system or philosophy. Nor did he want to leave any '**ism**' behind. When suddenly faced with a problem, he gave it a cool thought, took a firm decision and acted upon it in a natural and spontaneous manner. He never went wrong because of his honesty and inborn sincerity to the cause. Moreover, he believed in practising what he preached. He therefore named his Autobiography, **The Story of My Experiments with Truth**. He was convinced that "he who would go in for novel experiments must begin with himself. That leads to a quicker discovery of truth and God always protects the honest experimenter" (Gandhi 231).

Gandhi was a man of the masses who realized that being uneducated and poor, the average Indian was being exploited, neglected and discriminated against in every walk of life. Gandhi identified himself with the man in the street by adopting a simple dress and a still simpler style of living. He earned their unswerving loyalty because of his sincerity, integrity, whole hearted devotion to the national cause, selflessness and "my passion for self help and simplicity". He gave a new perspective to the national

freedom and he wanted his countrymen to be free not only from the foreign yoke, but also from fear, cowardice, lethargy, ignorance, inertia, bigotry, ill-will and intolerance. Gandhi wished not only for India's prosperity, but also for that of the whole world. He, in fact, constantly laboured for the realization of brotherhood, peace and justice for all mankind. His religion did not advocate stoicism at all. Instead, he insisted that religion should not be segregated from politics. He believed that those who think that religion has nothing to do with politics do not even understand what religion is. Religion and morality were equally essential and felt that in order to be truly moralistic in one's approach to various problems of life, one must associate religion with politics. The real aim of joining politics lies in serving humanity and it is impossible to do so without a consideration for what is right and what is wrong.

His religion advocated **truth, love** and '**ahimsa**' which he felt should govern not only a man's personal, but also public life. For him, truth was all pervading. He preached that there should be "**truth in thought, truth in speech** and **truth in action**". Gandhi very frankly opens his mind about Jesus and Mohammed on Truth:

"Truth is the first thing to be sought for, and beauty and goodness will then be added into you. Jesus was, to my mind, a supreme artist because he saw and expressed truth; and so was Mohammed, the Koran being the most perfect composition in all Arabic Literature - at any rate, that is what scholars say. It is because both of them strove first for truth that the grace of expression naturally came in and yet neither Jesus not

Mohammed wrote an art. That is the truth and beauty I crave for, live for and would die for” (Gandhi 5).

His tolerance of dissent was not confined to political dissent alone. It went deeper despite his strong faith in God, he would embrace an atheist without batting an eyelid. Though he believed in Hinduism, he was of the opinion that a true religion should teach us to love and tolerate all religions. God is one and different religions are only different means of attaining the same God that is why there was no difference between truth and God for him. He writes:

“To me God is truth and love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness; God is the source of light and life; and he is above and beyond all these God is Conscience. He is the personal God to those who need his touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith”.

Because of his faith in God, he loved all human beings and did not develop any hatred for any person. Like Christ, Gandhi considered love to be the strongest force in the world. The path he followed was that of non-violence. He used it not only as a weapon of practical politics, but also because of the conviction that the right thing should be done in the right spirit. He never wanted to have the credit for being the victor and he believed in conquering his enemies not through physical force, but through the force of love. Though he had launched a campaign for the British to quit, there was no trace of hatred for them in his heart. When he was beaten by the British in South Africa, he refused to prosecute them. “Even differences prove helpful, where there are tolerance, Charity and truth” (Gandhi 119).

Gandhian ideology stands for all that is good and noble in life and his life was an endless campaign against foreign rule, the use of foreign goods, untouchability economic suppression and deep - rooted prejudices and superstitions. He wanted the villages to become self - sufficient by learning various handicrafts and advocate **self-help, honesty, simplicity, bramacharya, voluntary poverty and a slow tempo of life.**

Inevitably, in a variety of ways and in a small or large number, the novelists like **R.K.Narayan** and **Raja Rao** were greatly influenced by Gandhian thought and mass action. Inspired by the spirit of patriotism, the novelists of the time have not only justified the cause for India's struggle for freedom, but have also tried to draw the attention of the enlightened West. Gandhi's ideology, the charisma of his personality and his love for mankind are proudly and prominently projected by practically all the novelists writing for this cause, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao being prominent among them. Both the novelists belong to South India. When compared with other novelists, they exhibit the ideology of Gandhiji through their novels **Waiting for the Mahatma** and **Kanthapura** respectively, in a calm and sensitive way with the background of the village atmosphere of South India. Both **Waiting for the Mahatma** and **Kanthapura** deal with a similar theme; the impact of Gandhian thought on the average Indian. In the former, the plot is laid in **Malgudi** where as in the latter, the plot is laid in **Kanthapura**. Both of them deal with the Gandhian thought on **non-violence, tolerance, religion, untouchability, status of Indian women, prohibition and educational system.** Both bring to picture the pattern of the village society during the period from 1938 to 1948. Raja Rao wrote **Kanthapura** in 1938, when India was under the yoke of the British rule.

The portrayal of Gandhi during the peak period of India's struggle for freedom is done very prominently in this novel **Kanthapura**.

Generally speaking, the novelists of the thirties and forties were deeply stirred by the vast upheavals beginning to take place in Indian society. These upheavals leading to India's political independence were the direct results of Gandhian precepts and practices. Therefore, the period of thirties and forties could be seen as one which demonstrates both the astounding successes and also tragic failures of Gandhi. The characteristics of these two decades are reflected truly in the novels of the novelists like Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan. Their novels like **Waiting for the Mahatma** and **Kanthapura** do significantly illustrate the fusion of the personal, the intellectual and the social that the Gandhian thought effected.

Raja Rao's **Kanthapura** (1938) shows the nature of the Gandhian influence on him. The novel depicts how the whirlwind of Gandhian revolution shakes the little village to its very roots. Kanthapura, caught in the tremors of the freedom struggle during the thirties, is transformed completely. Raja Rao shows this change by portraying the type of village that Kanthapura is before Gandhian ideas make their impact on it. It is an old sleepy little village, unaffected by any happening outside. Handicapped by traditional Hindu social system, life in the village goes on as ever, still Gandhi emerges on the national scene. Naik rightly points out that in the novel "The initial reaction to Gandhian thought is however one of rather bored apathy" (Naik 107). But it is mostly because people of the village do not understand what the nationalist movement is once the villagers know that Gandhi is a Mahatma in the tradition of Hindu avatars, they follow him. For them, Moorthy is the Mahatma's spokesman. They risk everything

for the sake of the Mahatma. Even when they have lost everything material, they feel that they have been enriched spiritually. Gandhi invoked the ancient Indian past to awaken the pride of a demoralised nation. Raja Rao's concern also is to focus on the revitalizing function of India's ancient past. It is against the backdrop of this past that Raja Rao examines Indian's contemporary social condition. It is without any reservation that one could agree with C.D.Narasimhaich when he says,

The writer who brings to his task of novel writing an understanding alive with intelligence and an awareness of total complex of Gandhi's impact on a demoralised but not dead India is Raja Rao. From the inscription of a text from the Gita and from the dedication to Kanthapura one gathers Raja Rao knows Gandhi and his India from inside (Narasimhaiah 75).

Basically **Kanthapura** is a novel of village life, a village in the far interior of Mysore in South India, in the valleys of Himavathi. Since the action of the action is set in a village, the novel is also an easily recognizable village, novel and has affinities with those novels that record the changeless, yet ever - shifting spectrum that is Indian village life. The description of the village - its physical features and separate quarters for those belonging to different caste and professions - and the day to day life of the villagers with the monotonous events of planting, harvesting and marrying and the occasional celebrations of festivals allaying the even tenor of their life is quite realistic. But this realism is not of a literal kind. Raja Rao's own emotional attitude to the people, his love and admiration for the Indian tradition and his admirable use of the people's beliefs in the novel, transmute this realism. For instance, the following passage may be considered as proof for this:

Sometimes people say to themselves, the Goddess of the River plays through the night with the Goddess of the Hill. Kenchamma is the mother of Himavathy. May the Goddess bless us!

Even as a village novel showing the troubled, yet stirring reactions of a village to Gandhi's call for action, it gives us an insight into the appalling social conditions of the villagers who fall an easy prey to exploitation from within and without and who nevertheless do not lose hope but cling to their age-old beliefs for succour and relief. However, as C.Paul verghese has put it, "Unlike Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao does not make his novel an instrument of propaganda, but with considerable restraint he makes it a creative work of fiction whose virtues are not casual and accidental and which, therefore, demands concentrated reading. As a careful artist seeking to avoid melodrama and sentimentality, Raja Rao does not make the mistake of introducing Gandhi directly as a character into the character. However, he exploits for the purpose of his novel the Indian people's traditional faith in the charismatic leadership that Gandhi offered them" (Varghese 146).

Kanthapura is a small traditional village with all primitive structure of an Indian society, divided, obsessed and loitering as a handicapped entity cocooned from the rest of the world and etherized as Eliot's modernity. It has a **Brahmin Quarters, Pariah Quarters, Potters Quarters, Weavers' Quarters** and **Sudra Quarters**. The idea behind giving these socio-economic divisions of the village in the very beginning of the novel is only to emphasise the gradual transformation it undergoes through the impact of Gandhian ideology. The villagers who are so conscious of these differences and live in complete segregation unite in response to the call of Gandhi. They rise to the occasion and thus this backward village suddenly comes to

life and becomes the nucleus of activity because of the non-violent, non-cooperation movement, launched by Gandhi in the 'Twenties'. Moorthy gets 'charkas' from the Congress Head office and distributes them to the people free of charge so that they may cultivate the habit of spinning. The very fact that the Mahatma himself spins is sufficient incentive for some of them. On enquiry, Moorthy tells Nanjamma, "The Mahatma sister, why, every morning he spins for two hours immediately after his prayers. He says spinning is as purifying as praying" (Kanthapura 3). She at once agrees to have a 'charka' to spin. Post office Suryanarayana is already a Gandhist and he asks for two charkas. Pandit Venkateshia, Sunff Sastri, Rangamma's widowed sister Seethama, her daughter Ratna and cardamon field Ramachandra also offer to take one each and promise to spin daily. But it is not all smooth sailing. As an intelligent observer, Raja Rao gives the other side of the picture as well. That is what makes him one of the most significant novelists writing in English. The author points out that the political awakening is neither absolutely spontaneous nor simultaneous and occasional intrusions by the orthodox fanatics do lead the people astray:

Bhatta was the only one who would have nothing to do with these Gandhi - bhajans. 'What is all this city chatter about? He would say; we've had enough trouble in the city. And we do not want any such annoyances here.

In fact, initially Bhatta had been quite fond of sitting and singing with the villagers. He even used to make Seenu read the white, khadi-bound **My Experiments with Truth** and explain it himself. But a visit to the town where he happened to meet the Swami, an orthodox, religious leader,

aroused his inborn feeling of caste superiority and he started anti-Moorthy and anti-Mahatma feelings.

‘**Kanthapura**’ is India in its miniature and, in its sweet slumber; awareness creeps in gradually as an alien element with the literacy of a few, frequent visit to the outer world and the spread of the Gandhian philosophy. The introduction of such element creates upheavals of all sorts, one can notice the turmoil at all levels –social, political, religious and ideological, that ultimately subsides giving way to the urge for a free nation. It has happened in every village of India; it is a natural process of change, stagnancy cannot persist for long; resistance is the first sign of development; ignorance cannot rule for long; slavery cannot have its heydays for long; the dawn of freedom is imminent like victorian’s inevitability. Moorthy is the jargon of Kanthapura, no one can understand him in the beginning; subsequently he is simplified and made acceptable. The first step towards freedom is nationistic consciousness, that is generated by Raja Rao and he is aware of this necessity; religion is the earliest weapon, Siva is the three-eyed, and Swaraj too, is three – eyed: self – purification, Hindu – Muslim unity and khadder, thus the consciousness is injected through popular sentiments, as K.R.Srinivas Iyenger clarifies,

“Bhajans and Harikatha mix religion and politics freely and often purposefully, the reading of a newspaper became as serious a discipline as the reverent reading of the Gita and hand spinning is elevated into a daily ritual like puja. The walls of orthodoxy are suddenly breached; revolution comes as a flood, and carries all before it” (Iyengar 393).

It is not a political movement only, it includes social as well as religious waves too. Kanthapura is a village in South India, probably lost in obscurity and Raja Rao makes it alive again, to gain his end, Ragini Ramchandra opines:

“The work which centres around a small, almost anonymous South Indian village most successfully captures its ethos and milieu through the village lingo. Festivals, marriages, funerals, social customs, beliefs and superstitions are all recreated with the uncanny precision of an insider. All aspects of villages life – cultural, social, religious and political, are presented with an amazing degree of intimacy making the whole tale authentic and absorbing” (133).

And this village is afflicted now, assailed by Gandhian philosophy, the haunted party is aggrieved; Bhatt resents this new invasion (and says, “What is this Gandhi business?”); he opposes Moorthy and the Congress. In this story of an Indian village during the period of Gandhi’s political activism, one can have a clever blending of traditional story-telling and modern nationalist propaganda; the narrator vividly evokes the rhythms, characters and beliefs of rural life, colonial and feudal system and the caste system or anything like that is not a bar in this setting. The folk tradition of the village turns to be a combination of internal social revolution and national political rebellion that finally takes the form of mythic status. The Gandhian struggle is towards social reform and independence. **Civil disobedience, don’t touch the government campaign, Non-tax payment campaign, Dandi March-** all these things are anxiety towards freedom and nationhood. Obviously, **Kanthapura** is the urge to be free from the demon of the foreign rule.

Kanthapura as India in microcosm has religion as its backbone that influences its social and political activities, as C.D.Narasimriah says, “... religion became the nucleus of social regeneration in Kanthapura, in the true tradition of India where social reformers have invariably been profoundly religious men” (43). For these religion villagers, Gandhi is an incarnation like Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, who came to establish the righteousness and so the Satyagraha became a religious ritual.

Moorthy exploits the Harikatha tradition to spread the message of freedom struggle of Gandhi. M.K.Naik is of the view that “Kanthapura probes the depths to which the nationalistic upspring penetrated, showing how, even in the remote village, the new patriotic upsurge fused completely with the traditional religious faith thus rediscovering the traditional Indian soul” (64). Meenakshi Mukherjee in her book *The Twice Born fiction* states that,

“The independence movement in India was not merely a political struggle but an all pervasive emotional experience for all Indians in nineteen twenties and thirties. No Indian writer, writing in those decades or writing about them, could avoid reflecting the upsurge in his work. Thus many of the English novels written in India in the twentieth century also deal with national experience, either directly as theme or indirectly as significant background to a personal narrative” (43).

The impact of Gandhi is transmitted by Moorthy that transforms the life of an entire community ‘from the bondage of hidebound orthodoxy to struggle and sacrifice for an ideal’ (49).

Raja Rao's **Kanthapura** published in 1938 mainly portrays the Freedom Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s to liberate India from the imperialistic hegemony of the British. India's struggle for independence, with its powerful impact on Indian sensibility, forms the nucleus of the novel. The novelist sympathetically explores the Gandhian values of loving ones enemies, non-violence and abolition of untouchability. His continuing interest in **Vedanta** is also discernible. Raja Rao has always been concerned with his metaphysical quest for truth – a motif which looms large in his later fiction. Hence it is not surprising if he refers to the impact of Vedanta on some characters in **Kanthapura**. In the early phase of his life, Raja Rao was influenced by the Gandhian thought. Quite fascinated as he was by the Gandhian way of living, he spent a few days at Gandhi's **ashram** at Sevegram. Raja Rao who developed an immense love for India after his first visit to France in his twenties, kept after his first visit to France in his twenties, kept himself abreast with the political happenings that were shaping the destiny of India in the pre – independence period. When the **Quit India Movement** was started by Gandhi in 1942, Raja Rao was “associated with the underground activities of the young socialist leaders” (Dayal 9).

Mahatma Gandhi at that time wielded a great influence on the Indian masses. In the opinion of Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi was “like a powerful current of fresh air like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds”. Gandhi aroused national awakening in Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom which was strengthened subsequently by the non-cooperation and Civil disobedience

movements in the thirties. The Gandhian movement not only sought political freedom but also aimed at economic independence and spiritual regeneration. Gandhiji wanted all the people, the rich and the poor, to lead a dignified life without exploitation of any kind. It is, therefore, natural that Gandhi should have left an indelible mark on India's literary firmament. **Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan** and **Khwaja Ahmed Abbas**, among others could not ignore the impact of Gandhian ideology. Anand alludes to the vast popularity of Gandhi in **Untouchable** (1935) where Gandhi touches the innermost part of Bakha's soul, and the audience at the village gathering feels that the Mahatma has made Hindu and Mussulman '**one**'. R.K.Narayan in **Waiting for the Mahatma** (1955) presents a living portrait of Mahatma Gandhi as a great leader who is so concerned with even the personal problems of ordinary men and women. K.A.Abbas refers to **Jallianwala Bakh tragedy, Salt Satyagraha** and **the Gandhi Irwin Pact** in his novel **Inqilab** (1955). He upholds the significance of the non-violent movement for one of the characters, a tall Pathan, in this novel displays his firm faith in Gandhi's non-violence: "The way of non-violence is the virtuous path the way of God. We are with Gandhiji in this campaign and **In – Sha –Allah**, and by the grace of God, show that the pathan knows how to die for freedom" (Dayal 10).

The afore mentioned fictional works offer a superficial treatment of the movement for freedom which is an "epoch – making period" in the history of India. Raja Rao's **Kanthapura** is, however, a remarkable rendering of India's struggle for independence which affected even the remotest villages in the country. The novelist elevates the Gandhian movement to a mythological plane. Since he is fascinated by the Indian

metaphysical tradition which is devoted to myths, he exalts the Freedom Movement by the use of myths and fables drawn from Indian culture Mother India, “Which is the goddess of wisdom and well-being” represents the enslaved daughter of Brahma and therefore, the gods must incarnate themselves on earth to work for her freedom. At Brahma’s command, Siva incarnates as Gandhi to liberate India from her enforced slavery. Raja Rao’s faith in Gandhian thought leads him to idealize Mahatma Gandhi as a veritable god. The exaltation of Gandhi is apparent even in the short stories. In Rao’s story ‘**Narasiga**’, Mahatma Gandhi possesses the divine attributes of innate innocence and goodness. His release from the prison is equated with Sita’s release from Lanka. In **Kanthapura**, Mahatma Gandhi is portrayed as a symbol of divine power as well as a tangible reality. He is an incarnation of Krishna and, therefore, he will remove the suffering of the Indians. Gandhi would slay the serpent of the foreign rule as Krishna had killed the serpent Kaliya. As a statesman, Gandhi preaches the spinning of yarn to his country men, for if they spin, the money that goes to the Britain will be retained in India to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. As a god, Gandhi possesses the divine power of slaying the enemy of freedom.

The Gandhian hero, Moorthappa, has been idealized as an extraordinary person, Rangamma describes him as “Moorthy, the good, Moorthy the religious and Moorhty the noble”. The village women consider him the saint of Kanthapura and believe that he will always perform holy deeds. Range Gowda, the Patel of the village, describes Moorthy as a legitimate. Gandhi of Kanthapura. Moorhty is a local Mahatma while the real Gandhi is a greater deity. The villagers think that Mahatma Gandhi is the **Sahyadri Mountain** and Moorthy is **a small mountain**. Pariahs

invariably take Moorhty to be a god, for they feel sanctified by his touch. Moorhty is “an idealized character who like Christ takes all the sins for purification, a young man who conquers physical desire and self – interest”.

Since the theme of the novel is **“Gandhi and our village”** and the village has a legendary significance. it is natural that the past blends with the present. The traditional belief of the villagers that the gods walk by lighted streets of kanthapura during the month of karthik suggests that the myth co-exists with the contemporary reality. As the gods pass by the potters ‘street and the weavers’ street lights are lit to see them pass by. This description affirms the peasants’ abiding faith in gods – a belief shared by the author with his characters. Raja Rao emphasises the role of religion in the struggle for freedom and that is why religion and politics are often intermingled in the novel. The significance of independence is expressed in a religious metaphor and the political activity of the citizens of Kanthapura gathers strength from their religious faith. As an advocate of Gandhian philosophy, Raja Rao believes that **the future of the world is in Gandhism’**. Moorhty’s belief in the divine efficaciousness of Gandhism points to Raja Rao’s great interest in this philosophy. Moorhty acquires spiritual strength in his very first meeting with Gandhi. His meeting with the “God-bearing Mahatma” who primarily preaches to him his political ideology provides him with divine revelations. When he sees Gandhi, Moorhty states: “There is in it something of the silent communion of the ancient books” (p 52). He feels spiritually elevated as he remarks: “There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all” (pp 52-53). Since Moorhty weeps softly and acquires perfect peace and equanimity after seeing the Mahatma, it is obvious that his encounter with the saintly

Statesman is more in the nature of a mystical experience than a political meeting. The fact that Moorthy seeks self realization after a glimpse of the godly Mahatma evinces his faith in Gandhism.

The mobilization of the masses achieved by Gandhi was not as ideologically coherent or correct a phenomenon as Marxist theory might expect revolutions to be. By the same token, the power of his influence on the villagers of Kanthapura and the workers of the Skeffington Coffee Estate offers a distinctly non-Marxist model of organizing mass movements, which serves to critique in its turn the Marxist project as the only possible or desirable model for revolution. And yet, for all their devout Gandhism, even the villagers of Kanthapura are shown by Rao to be faced finally not by any triumph but by a crushing defeat and flight. Though the Satyagrahis are still all for the Mahatma, it turns out that their leader Moorthy, their own Gandhi, is so no longer. As he says on coming out of prison:

“Things must change.... Jawaharlal Nehru will change it. You know Jawaharlal is like a Bharatha [younger brother] to the Mahatma [seen as Rama], and he, too, is for non-violence and he, too is a Satyagrahi, but he says in Swaraj there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an ‘equal – distributionist’, and I am with him and his men” (p 189).

Nehru remained the foremost and favourite disciple of Gandhi throughout his life, but he differed from him on economic matters.

The various modes of connection and communication between the little village and the wider world are seen in the novel to be tenuous and yet real. Gandhian influence percolates into the village through interaction with the town and through the ‘Blue newspaper’ that some of the villagers get and

read, and what the villagers do is clearly affected by what people are doing elsewhere:

“and when somebody said in Bombay and Lahore did people gather at dawn to go singing through the streets, women in Rampur said, ‘we, too, shall do it’, and they, too, rose up at dawn and ... went signing through the twilit streets ... o Mahatma, Mahatma, you’re our king” (p 147).

But these developments are all new. There is an impression that before the change described in the novel, nothing in the village had changed for centuries. It had gone on with its traditional ways and customs; with its Brahmin’s quarter set apart from its Pariah quarters and the Potters’, the Weavers’ and the Sudra quarters; with the priest and the Patel and the Harikatha - tellers performing their hallowed functions; and with the mythical deity, Kenchamma, presiding over all. Significantly, when the change comes, it is brought about not by an outsider, but by Moorthy, a member of the village, who has left and then come back, transformed transforming. The village has not been caught up in some external turmoil; it has gradually converted itself from within. When Moorthy crosses caste boundaries to enter a pariah house, it causes offence to the extent of his being excommunicated, and he enlists supporters for Gandhian Satyagraha, not everyone comes forward with equal alacrity. A complex dynamism rather than any simple idealized homogeneity marks the process through which this small isolated community affiliates itself to the nation.

Gandhi saw no dichotomy between religion and politics. Gandhi himself has explained the nature of his involvement with politics:

.... my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means (Radhakrishnan 13-14).

It is interesting to see how Gandhi used religion and justified political and social action on “proper metaphysical ground” (Reincourt 315). He was aware of an average Indian’s reluctance to action but he succeeded in taking him out of the demoralized state by making him draw on his own resources of activity. As a leader of the masses, he knew that only by revitalizing the indigenous resources which lay in India’s traditional culture, Indian milieu could be activated. This explains his emphasis on India’s traditional and legendary past as against the emasculated derivative culture, which he had so strongly denounced in the timeless religious myths which were the only ones they understood, and thereby as Reincourt aptly comments, “...animated, revitalized and re-enacted all the symbolic dramas of the Mahabharata as no intellectual Pandit ever could” (315).

Gandhi made action part of man’s dharma. It is paradoxical that in Gandhi, in spite of his interest in material life’s problems, there is an element of the purely immaterial, the metaphysical idea of the life beyond. But according to Gandhi, man can reach the metaphysical only through his activity in this world. In this context, Schweitzer’s comment on the nature of Gandhi’s spirituality is helpful in understanding Raja Rao’s fictional world also. Schweitzer is of the opinion that for Gandhi:

....it is an established principle that material problems can be solved by the spirit. He is convinced that since all that happens in human affairs is conditioned by mind, things can only be

improved by bringing about a different state of mind.... According to him, the only real forces at our disposal are the spirit of love. He regards the belief that wordly ends must be pursued by wordly methods as the fatal error (230-31).

It is this spirituality of Gandhian thought, which emphasized the conditioning of human mind through control of the negative aspects of one's self, leading to liberation and strength that was a key to Gandhi's appeal to Indian masses. And it is from this perspective that Raja Rao perceives Gandhi and it is in these terms only that his novels register the impact of Gandhian thought. The activist in Rao is obviously influenced by Gandhian emphasis on action. Besides, his faith in **Vedic and Upanishadic values**, his idea of good and evil and the resultant moral outlook on life are clearly evidence of Gandhian influence on Raja Rao. Raja Rao's literary creed brings out Gandhian influence still more clearly. For him, it is a spiritual quest:

For me literature is Sadhana (spiritual discipline).... my writing is mainly the consequence of a metaphysical life, what I mean by Sadhana... And by man I mean the metaphysical entity. So the idea of literature as anything but a spiritual experience.... is outside my perspective (Naik 32).

This statement illustrates that what politics was to Gandhi, literature was to Raja Rao. According to Gandhi's own confession, political activity for him was a means of salvation. By serving humanity through political activity in this world, he was accomplishing a spiritual end, perhaps, that is why he never dissociated politics from religion. For Rao also, literature basically is a means to spiritual discipline and self - realization.

It is the spiritual experience, the individual, or the nation passed through, during the Gandhian movement, for example, that Rao is concerned with in **Kanthapura**. It is the unbending spirit of man, rising higher still and transcending the experience of mundane life of social conflicts, political, economic and cultural exploitation that he focusses on in this novel. It is the same concern with the spirit of man, the liberty of the individual that Gandhian thought values most. Describing his development as a novelist, Rao confirms his commitment to Gandhi: **“In Kanthapura. I was Gandhian”** (Niranjan 22).

There are incredible stories woven around Mahatma Gandhi’s birth and his spiritual life, about his virtues and achievements. One day Valmiki approaches the Great Brahma, the Self-created one, with a complaint that he has forgotten the world too long, so that men have come from across the seas and oceans” to trample on our wisdom and to spit on virtue itself. They have come to bind us and to whip us, to make our women die milkless and our men die ignorant” (Kanthapura 21). Thus, the learned sire entreats Brahma to send one of his gods to incarnate on earth so as to “bring back light and plenty” to the enslaved India. In answer to Valmiki’s prayer, the messenger of the Heaven takes birth in a baniya family in Gujarat. The miracle of the birth of the Mahatma is described like the nativity of any other prophet in the world:

As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in the cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom (22).

The story of Mahatma Gandhi’s birth is compared to the early life of lord Krishna that holds the audience spell-bound. None dare raise any doubt. The

teaching of the Mahatma is explained lucidly without any pedantic touch as all the saints and social reformers in India have taught to capture the mind of the rural people. Since Gandhi's teaching assumes religious fervour and earnestness, people listen to it with rapt attention. The Mahatma moves from village to village on foot, to slay the serpent of the foreign rule. Crowd throng around him; follow him as they did Krishna, the flute player. Gandhi's teaching comes home with spontaneity and ease:

Fight, says he, but harm no soul. Love all, says he, Hindu, Mohomedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God. Don't be attached to riches, says he, for riches create passions, and passions create attachment, and attachment hides the face of Truth. Truth must you tell, he says, for Truth is god, and verily, it is the only God I know (22).

It sounds like the great Buddha's teachings and more so. Gandhi's economic policy comes alive in simple words of incalculable import so as to touch mind of the people on a sensitive subject:

Spin and weave everyday, for our Mother is in tattered weeds and a poor Mother needs to cover her sores. If you spin, he says, the money that goes to the Red-men will stay within your country and the Mother can feed the foodless and the milkless and the cloths (kanthapura 22-23).

The philosophy of home spun clothes is explained so simply that it penetrates the mind of the villagers with forceful conviction and impletuosity. People get inspired by the simple words without understanding much the intricacy of the economic theory with its financial implications. As Moorthy explains to Nanjamma, millions and millions of yards of foreign

clothes come to this country so that our weavers are deprived of their livelihood. Everything foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. The spinning wheel “gives work to the workless and work to the lazy”. Our motherland bleeds at the hands of the foreigners, we have to protect her. Our money and gold should be in our country. Not only cotton but paddy – the harvest agents take away from the villages. These villagers purchase fine rice and fine clothes from the city people on a higher price.

Gandhian revolution and Western education bring radical changes to the society and these changes are not favourably viewed by the tradition – minded people. Bhatta does not like Pariahs coming to the temple door as they might one day enter the temple and replace the brahmins. They may even begin to teach the **Vedas**. Pariahs seeking admission in the Mysore Sanskrit College becomes the topic of hot discussion in the village. Moorthy is very much disliked by Bhatta because of his visit to Pariah’s houses. The Swami takes steps to excommunicate Moorthy and repeatedly warns him to mend his manners. The day Bhatta comes back from the city, he brings the bad news of Moorthy’s excommunication: “he will be debarred from entering a temple or attending an obsequial dinner, hair – cutting ceremony or any marriage party” The news of Moorthy’s excommunication has a fatal impact on his mother, Narasamm, who dies with a broken heart. At one time she expresses her bitter feelings about the Gandhian movement - “Oh, this Gandhi : world he were destroyed”. The threat to out-caste people is in practice even today in our country. Many changes take place in the political life of Kanthapurians who for the first time feel one with the rest of the country as their village Panchayat is affiliated to the All India Congress. Slowly the villages swim into the orbit of national awakening resisting tooth

and nail the police-atrocities on them. Nationalism, unknown to people of our country for centuries gradually enters into the mind of the villagers; thanks to the persistent efforts of young Moorthy. As an advocate of Gandhian idealism, he is mainly responsible for the education of sensibility of the people in the nescient life of our countrymen. Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah has made a brilliant assessment of the novel in the lines that follow:

But what strikes me here is that for the first time in modern times in India the novel in Raja Rao's hands has become a sophisticated medium of enlarging the frontiers of human consciousness (P63)

Moorthy – “a Gandhian Vagabond” as he is derogatively called, even if he is a university dropout, has to his credit imbibed an uncompromising idealism. With a faith in the traditional ways of life, he shows responsiveness to the needs of the times by bringing the villagers to the main stream of national awakening. Nationalism penetrates deep into the rural ground for a new lease of life to come in future as a form of collective bargaining. Not only national consciousness but global consciousness comes to the village through Rangamma's “blue papers and white papers.” **Kanthapura** holds in reserve the rich possibilities and directions for social development which, with the passage of time, become the common features on all of which Gandhian idealism has an impact.

Thematically and technically Raja Rao has pitched the whole of **Kanthapura** against the evil symbolised by the British rule in India and this battle is fought under the leadership of Moorthy whom one may call a **‘local Gandhi’**. Moorthy a brahmin boy (and it is of no small significance that the protagonists of all Rao's novels are brahmins by birth), who “had gone

through life like a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic,” (Kanthapura 12) is the one who will initiate the Knathapurians into the ideas of Gandhi. It is interesting to note that Gandhian principles reach the villages through Harikathas recited by Jayaramachar. Politicisation of the villagers in view of the neatly divided community into Brahmins, Sudras and Pariahs, with their separate quarters in Kanthapura is difficult as everybody is brought together under one banner. So, Moorthy goes from house to house for collection of funds for the Harikathas. It is scandalous for Moorthy, to enter the Pariah quarters at this stage of the novel and the villagers are rather apathetic towards Gandhi’s social programmes. Gandhi’s campaign for the removal of untouchability, more than any other programme, shocks the religious sensibility of the villagers. The female narrator Achakka describes how she was shocked when she heard Moorthy had gone to Pariah quarters:

... and I closed my ears when I heard he went to the pariah quarter, we said to ourselves, he is one of these Gandhimen, who say there is neither caste nor clan nor family, and yet they pray like us and live like us. Only they say, too, one should not marry early, one should allow widows to take husbands and a brahmin might marry a pariah and a pariah a brahmin. well, well let them say it, how does it affect us? we shall be dead before the world is polluted (Kanthapura P19)

It is this sensibility that Gandhi’s ideas were to impregnate and revolutionize. Rao’s acute consciousness of the reality of the peasant sensibility makes him perceive this very fact.

Since Gandhi attacked the very basis of Hindu social structure i.e. the caste system, Brahmins were wary of him because their vested interests were always at stake. Bhatta, for example, went against Gandhi Bhajans and other social programmes because he realised it was in the colonial system only that he could make more money by annexing land of the poor. In lieu of loans he gave them. So he does his best to confuse the ignorant villagers saying that Gandhi business is “Nothing but weaving coarse hand-made cloth, not fit for a mop, and bellowing out bhajans and bhajans, and mixing with the pariahs” (Kanthapura P42). Like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao too brings in the issue of the opening of the temples to pariahs whom Gandhi called Harijans. Factually, untouchability, being one of the major issues on the agenda of Gandhian social programmes, had serious repercussions for caste Hindus. It is ironical that it is the brahmin boy Moorthy himself who becomes the agent of Gandhian ideas in **Kanthapura**. And his excommunication from the folds of the Brahmin community earns him even his mother’s disaffection. It is significant that Moorthy’s conversion to Gandhian views is mystical in nature : “one day,” as the narrator tells,

he had seen a vision, a vision of the Mahatma, mighty and God-bearing ... and beneath the fan came a voice deep and stirring that went out to the hearts of those men and 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...(Kanthapura P.52)

He feels peculiarly electrified when he hears Gandhi :

“There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is Truth, the love of mankind and there is but one God in

life and that is the God of all” (52-53). Overwhelmed by the change taking place within him, Moorthy shivers, weeps softly, and in the end peace dawns on him. Anand, before Raja Rao, had already dealt with the therapeutic effect Gandhi had created on the Indian psyche. In **Untouchable**, Bakha experiences this effect. However in the case of Bakha, a boy belonging to the lowest rung of Hindu social structure and with no intellectual background, it is not a mystical communion as it is with Moorthy. In Moorthy, it is an educated brahmin mind prone to mysticism. He is shown to be experiencing in Gandhi a force that releases him from the age-old shackles of ritualistic brahminism and turns him into a humanist and social reformer of the Gandhian order. Through the Mahatma’s touch “was revealed to him as the day is revealed to the night the sheathless being of his soul” (54). Unlike Anand in **Untouchable** and in **The sword and the Sickle** where Gandhi appears as a character himself, Rao communicates Gandhi’s presence through the narrative without making him physically appear on the scene. Gandhian protest movement in **Kanthapura** would be organised by Moorthy as the local Gandhi. Like Gandhi, Moorthy takes upon himself the responsibility of other people’s failure: Moorthy says, “Were he full of the radiance of ahimsa such things should never have happened” (Kanthapura 90) and that “the fault of others, Rangamma, is the fruit of one’s own disharmony. (Kanthapura 90). This is taken as a pretence of the holy man by his detractors such as **Waterfall Venkamma** and **Rangamma’s** sister **Seethamma**. Moorthy invokes his inner strength by fasting, “I shall love even my enemies” (Kanthapura 92). Like other holy visions, Moorthy’s vision of Mahatma Gandhi too is holy. More and more he talks like Gandhi –

“The great enemy is in us Rangamma; said Moorthy, slowly, ‘hatred is in us. If only we would not hate, if only we would show fearless, calm affection towards our fellow men, we would be stronger, and not only would that enemy yield, but he would be converted (Kanthapura 96).

This Gandhian faith in man’s essential goodness is certainly beyond the comprehension of the people around him. But in spite of this comprehension of the real import of Gandhi’s ideas, women follow Moorthy because everything is in the name of the Mahatma. After the fast is over, they shout, ‘Victory to the Mahatma’ and conduct a bhajan congregation. Next morning Moorthy walks out to preach the **‘Don’t touch the Government campaign’**.

The first step Moorthy takes in this direction is to start the Congress group in Kanthapura. He goes to the indispensable Range Gowda- whose is a voice of authority in the village and persuades him to join the group and convinces him of the concomitant requirements of joining the Congress group, which are observance of ahimsa, spinning cotton and speaking Truth. Traditional hold of the caste system does not give Gowda confidence enough to agree to live equally with the pariahs. But he agrees to join Congress in the name of the Mahatma:

All I know is that what you told me about the Mahatma is very fine, and the Mahatma is a holy man, and if the Mahatma says what you say, let the Mahatma’s word be the word of God (Kanthapura 103).

It is clear that Moorthy succeeds in his mission to enlist the support for the political cause in the name of the basic tenets of Hinduism already familiar

to the villagers. Gandhi's name gave activist intent to the familiar religious principles of Hinduism. The process of politicization in Kanthapura takes place in the name of religion. Moorthy tells his group, "we shall hold a god's procession and then a bhajan, and then we shall elect the committee" (Kanthapura 108). That very evening Moorthy is annointed as the local Mahatma in the temple. Range Gowda says, "you are our Gandhi" (Kanthapura 108). He explains the logic for selecting a local Gandhi in terms of traditional hierarchy as well as in terms of the divinity of kinship, the terms the villagers understand:

"He is our Gandhi. The State of Mysore has a Maharaj, but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London, and that one has another one in heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma, and this Moorthy ... will be our Mahatma" (Kanthapura 109).

After his annointment as a Mahatma, Moorthy talks to the villagers about Gandhian principles and extacts vows from them in the name of God almost in the manner Gandhi used to do. Larson is right when he says that "symbolically Kenchamma's power incarnated in the women of Kanthapura... brings about the great social change that radicalises the village, for Gandhi and Moorthy are only the catalysts, the inspiration for what eventually happens" (Larson 138)

Raja Rao's confidence in Gandhian thought led him to idealize Mahatma Gandhi as a true saint. Rao depicts Mahatma Gandhi as an emblem of divine power. Gandhi is presented as an incarnation of Krisha who will assuage the distress of the Indians. Gandhi's axiom of non-violence presents an astonishing paradigm for the whole world as it is a "war without violence

and battle without hatred” (Ramachandran 33). Moorthy holds the Gandhian view that “good ends can be achieved only by good means” (Ramachandran 34). C.D. Narasimhaiah observes that the novel delineates the dynamic power of a living religious convention. He states that “religion seems to sustain the spirits of the people of Kanthapura”(47). The inhabitants of Kanthapura willingly pledge to spin yarn, maintain non-violence (Ahimsa) and speak truth. When Moorthy is arrested, the villagers implore goddess Kenchamma to set him free : “The Goddess will never fail us- she will free him from the clutches of the Red-man” (134). The inhabitants of Kanthapura go to Kenchamma Hill and invoke goddess Kenchamma to protect them from the savage assault of the British Government. Men and women are assaulted and arrested by the police. Most of the male freedom fighters are taken to prison but Moorthy is left out: “But Moorthy they would not take, and God left him still with us” (200). A large number of freedom fighters from other corners of the country come and join the movement in Kanthapura. The Satyagrahis, knowing that the soul is immortal and indestructible, come and jump into the ocean of death sans fear.

Just because of Raja Rao’s faith in Gandhian thought leading him to idealize him as a true God, in Kanthapura Mahatma Gandhi is depicted not only as an emblem of divine power but also as a great reality. Rao lays stress on the role of religion in the struggle for Independence. That is why religion and politics are often interwoven in the novel. The importance of independence is delineated in a religious metaphor. The political activity of the inhabitants of Kanthapura gains power from their religions faith. Rao adroitly deals with the conventional mythology which is interlaced with contemporary reality. The recurrent reference to myth adds new dimensions

to the struggle for freedom, for the “exaggeration of reality by myth is the necessary way to achieving the eternity in space” (Swami 7). Thus, Raja Rao’s maiden novel *Kanthapura* presents the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and the abolition of untouchability. The great importance given to caste, the mythical presentation of Gandhi and Mother India and the spiritualization of the freedom movement within the parameters of Indian cultural convention imply the tremendous impact of Gandhian ideology in *Kanthapura*. *Kanthapura* (1938) by Raja Rao is a much acclaimed novel and the grounds for its approbation are fairly well laid out. In his “Author’s Foreword”, Raja Rao himself has unfolded his central concern in this novel. He writes :

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich Sthala – Purana or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village – Rama might have rested under this pipal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many 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 repertory of your grand – mother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of a village, I have tried to tell (Kanthapura VII)

Kanthapura thus becomes a story of an Indian village in Mysore State in the context of its linkage with what is described as a rich Sthala – Purana. The words Sthala- Purana in Sanskrit imply the purana of a significant place, the legendary tale of a locale. However, *Kanthapura* is just not one village in the old state of Mysore, it is India in microcosm. *Kanthapura* is thus particular

and general, specific and especial, highly individualistic as well as representative in character, encompassing both the spheres of the regional as well as the universal in the creative writer's cosmos. It is both appropriate and odd, meaningful and indistinct in its connotation and its relation to structure and design.

The theme of **Kanthapura** is the continuity of Indian Tradition in a rural setting as well as the political resurgence of the thirties in rural India. Kanthapura is a village of simple, lovable, affectionate, generous, talkative, patriotic country –folks nourished on age-long Indian tradition and deeply stirred and activated by the movement for gaining India's freedom from foreign rule. It is amazing that 'Tradition' and this quest for freedom should go hand in hand, and infact, be strengthening each other in the social, moral and political contexts of a resurgent India-an India stirred to its roots by the irrepressible spirit and resounding voice of Mahatma Gandhi. The theme of Kanthapura is two-fold : moral-cum-religion, and political. "The inner stream of the novel, though not its whole canvas", writes Ahmed Ali, "concerns Tradition" (Ali 17). Thus, "the legendary history of a representative Indian village is brought in close association with its newly gained political consciousness, its deep stirring caused by Gandhi's defiance of the British Imperial power and the movement of non-violent non-cooperation, an effective tool for gaining political freedom" (Shahane 24)

What is generally held by critics is that the essence, the very soul of **Kanthapura** lies in its pervasive strand of selfless action, a kind of **Nishkama Karma –Yoga** derived from the great classic of Hindu though namely **The Bhagvad Geeta** and that this spirit of patriotic and altruistic action is the guiding star of the characters, the source of their inspiration and

the spur of their self-sacrifice. The composition of **Kanthapura** obviously coincides with the completion of the early enthusiastic phase of the Gandhian revolutionary activism before disenchantment with the Gandhian ideals set in, and therefore, the men and women in **Kanthapura** are overwhelmingly inspired by the rage of conviction, of confronting the Raj with non-violent resistance, civil disobedience, and mass movements inspired by these pure and great moral ideals. Gandhi in **Kanthapura** is an invisible rather than an actual presence, his ideas are manifested through the character and personality of Moorthy, who is indeed at the centre of the novel's human and political world.

Raja Rao succeeds considerably in outlining and highlighting 'the human geography' of Kanthapura. He achieves his effects through his pictorial power and through the evoking process of his art of scene-making. This portrayal of 'human geography' is an aspect of the novelist's art of landscape painting. Evocative landscapes play a major part in the modern novelist's art of fiction and this is perceptively revealed in the novels of **Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, D.H.Lawrence** and **E.M.Forster**. Raja Rao, too, makes a skilful use of his brush to give colour and life to his canvas in **Kanthapura**. Kanthapura is a village in the province of Kara (Karnataka) "high on the Ghats it is", close to the steep mountains facing the Arabian sea, in a fertile land, the valley of the Himavathy, close to the centre of Cardamon and coffee, rice and sugar-cane. These products are exported to England and other foreign lands "into the ships the Red-men bring" which go "across the seven oceans" into the countries where our rulers live"(Kanthapura 1)

In the first chapter, Raja Rao has not merely outlined the locale of Kanthapura but has also voiced the forebodings of the conflict between the redman and the brown –black Indian, the British Imperial power and the patriotically -inspired Moorthy of Kanthapura. The scene- making is precise and vivid and it also unfolds the novel's basic theme, showing clearly that Kanthapura is on the more becoming resurgent under Mahatma Gandhi's magic spell, indirection into the picture the image of Goddess Kanchamma. It also describes the caste structure of Kanthapura – an aspect of an age-old tradition highlighting Moorthy's dynamic movements spurred by his patriotic ideals and staunch idealism to work towards attaining India's freedom. The stories of Gods and Goddesses told by Jagannadha Rao, the village Puranik, are inextricably linked with the coming of Gandhi on the Indian horizon in Kanthapura itself. The induction of the Gandhian spirit in Kanthapura creates a new wave of enthusiasm, self-help, hard-work, the Charkha, the spinning wheel distributed free by the Congress Organisation through the altruistic Moorthy. This new wave of Gandhian renaissance has many adherents, but it also has staunch opponents such as Bhatta. Bhatta is an embodiment of greed and extreme self-interest. He is indifferent to his family and to his wife, Savithramma, because he has a passion for money. Coins and their sounds exercise a magic spell on him. His unhappy wife dies in an accident and Bhatta marries a teenager. He has become a big land-owner, a zamindar, rather than a mere priest. He indulges in litigation due to his money-lending business and substantially adds to his land holdings. However, he has some redeeming features. He is not a totally dark character. He helps a young man from Kanthapura to complete his education and find a good position in life. Thus, his humanity as well as his inhumanity is delineated with consummate skill. Moorthy, the central character in

Kanthapura had been a vision of the Mahatma, “mighty and god-bearing” walking between rows of volunteers (P32) and he stood beside the great soul, Mahatma. Moorthy has seen the Mahatma in his dream : he fell at the great leader’s feet : “I am your slave,” he cried The Mahatma lifted him up and called him “my son”. And then, the Mahatma gave him his message of Swadeshi and freedom from foreign yoke. This emotional adherence of Moorthy to the Mahatma is compared with the devotional intensity of Hanuman for his God, Rama. In this way, the religious and mythological strains are brought in close association with the political thread of the novel’s narratives. A substantial part of Kanthapura, the novel of action and character, the novel of atmosphere and mythical lore, is concerned with portraying the political turmoil that overtakes its inhabitants and the orgy of oppression that is let loose by the police on the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate of the Red-man. The story of the people’s resistance against foreign rule and the police repression in Kanthapura and its adjoining areas is narrated with passion and intensity by Raja Rao from chapter 14 till the end of the novel. More coolies arrive in Kanthapura to swell the ranks of Gandhian non-cooperation and volunteers and the resistance seems to be growing for a while. “The army of the Mahatma is an increasing garland” (P.140)

The movement, especially picketing of toddy shops, grow from strength to strength villagers from neighbouring villages, Ramput and Siddapur, join and strengthen the Gandhian non-violent army, and they launch a no-tax campaign. Raja Rao, however, graphically narrates the humiliation to which the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate are subjected –they are made to march ‘**bend-headed**’ through the streets to

publicly demonstrate their slavery and servitude. While they march blinking in the streets, “even the voice of God seemed to have died out of their tongues”. The police let loose a reign of terror and Rachanna, Seethamma and other women become victims of the zoolum. The villagers, especially women, try to seek shelter in the temple compound, but in vain. Moorthy has been arrested and Ratna takes his place as the chief of the resistance movement. The men and women perform **Satyanarayana Puja** and shout “**Congress, Congress and the Mahatma**”. Ratna blows the conch and the followers shout with zeal **Vanda Mataram** and **Inquilab Zindabad**. They sing patriotic songs and the coolies of the Estate join their ranks.

The crowd of resisters swells and then the police shower bullets on the people. Men are kicked and beaten up and many fall victims to the bullets. More police men arrive from Maddur and intensify the repression on the people. Moorthy is in jail and the police burn and destroy houses in Kanthapura. Roofs and ceilings of houses are pulled down in the melee and Kanthapura, once a village of prosperity, wears the look of desolation and destruction. Kanthapura, its various quarters, its ponds, its streets- all lie in ruins. The people from Bombay arrive, buy land and build houses but the original Kanthapurians have been displaced and have left for other places for survival. Range Gowda describes the desolate scene of Kanthapura which is really pathetic. He says:

I drank three handfuls of Himavathy water and I said, ‘Protect us, mother!’ to Kanchamma and I said, “protect us, father’ to the Siva of the promontory and I spat three times to the West and three times to the South, and I threw a palmful of dust at the

**sunken wretch, and I turned away. But to tell you the truth,
mother, my heart it beat like a drum** (Kanthapura 182)

In the end, it truly becomes a mass movement, the villagers comprising men and women of all the castes and professions and the labourers of the Coffee Estate readily meeting the onslaught of the bureaucracy. An unequal fight it inevitably proves to be, for the Satyagrahis are maimed and broken and scattered, and a remnant reaches-after sore trials and vicissitudes – another village, Kashipura, beyond the border, where they settle down. Some of the Satyagrahis – Rangamma, Ratna, Moorthy – spend an allotted span in jail, but the Gandhi – Irwin Pact and the political truce that comes in its wake hasten the release of the Satyagrahis. Young men like Moorthy doubt the wisdom of the truce, and would rather follow the lead of Jawaharlal Nehru, “the equal –distributionist”; for the mass of the people, however, Gandhi can do no wrong, he can be quality of no miscalculation and they accept the truce contentedly and await further developments patiently. **Kanthapura** has rightly been called a Gandhi-epic, for it conveys the very spirit of those stirring days when a single individual in a single life-time could so enthuse the people and so transform the entire nation. The readers feel the Charisma of his personality, but the great Mahatma himself does never appear on the scene. He remains in the background but his presence is felt through the transformation he is causing in Kanthapura and in every other village of India, for Kanthapura is nothing but a microcosm of the macrocosm. Mulk Raj Anand has introduced the great Mahatma in his novel **Untouchable** and the effect is melodramatic and sensational. Raja Rao has skilfully avoided this mistake for he has made the presence of Gandhi felt, without actually introducing him on the stage.

It should also be noted that Raja Rao's presentation of the Gandhian movement is impartial and objective. There is no idealization; both the dark and the bright sides of the picture have been presented. The depiction of the Gandhi movement goes along with the depiction of the petty jealousies, and trivialities of village life. If there are **Ratna**, **Rengamma** and **Patel Range Gowda**, three are also **Bhatta**, **Waterfall Venkamma** and **Bade Khan**. Even the character of Moorthy has not been idealized, even he displays the necessary human weakness and hesitation in entering Pariah's hut and tasting the drink offered by him. Throughout the novel, idealization is accompanied by constant disapprovals of this Gandhi-business and Gandhi vagabondage, the cynicism of friends, and hostilities –veiled and open –from neighbours-all making for constant vigilance against the dangers of the thesis novel. In short, **Kanthapura** is a great work of art presenting realistically, impartially and artistically the impact of the Gandhi movement on the masses of India. It is not a propaganda piece or thesis novel but a work of art characterised by the necessary artistic detachment and impartiality. It is a great classic of the Indian freedom struggle; it gives us more essential truth about the Gandhian era than any official records or books of history. It is a valuable social document of abiding interest and significance. It is not a mere political novel, but one concerned with the total regeneration and resurgence of the masses of India. So, **Kanthapura** is not a novel dealing with the life and doings of any individual hero. It is certainly not the story of Moorthy but of the masses of the village, of their suffering, of their exile, of their momentary defeat, a defeat which has in it seeds of ultimate victory. It ends with an account of their life in Kashipura and gives us a sense of abiding fulfillment which they have attained. Hence if there is

any hero in the novel, it is Kanthapura itself and its people. The novelist is right in calling it **Kanthapura**.

Raja Rao's fascination for Gandhism is reflected in his affirmation of Gandhian values in the novel. Moorthy invariably preaches the Gandhian principles of non-violence, love of mankind and abolition of untouchability. His resolve to go on fast reflects his belief in non-violence. He feels that such untoward incidents would have never occurred, had he honestly practiced non-violence in his life. Seetharamu's willing submission to the torture by the British Government signifies his belief in the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. The idea of non-violence implies the extirpation of hatred from one's heart, for it is mainly the scorn that causes enmity and violence. As Range Gowda wishes to settle score with Bade Khan, the police man appointed by the Government to watch the political activities of the freedom fighters in Kanthapura, Moorthy dissuades him from resorting to violence. Similarly, when Gowda expresses his desire to teach a lesson to Puttayya for unjustly drawing all the canal-water to his fields, Moorthy tries to convince him with the Gandhian principles of non-violence and love for the enemy. Before the Civil disobedience movement is initiated against the British, the freedom fighters are specifically instructed that their struggle to win freedom must be non-violent. Even an unintentional act of violence should be atoned for by penance and prayer for self-purification.

Moorthy no doubt shares the social philosophy of Gandhi, for riches are abandoned by Moorthy; he even does not marry. For Gandhi, riches are not to be craved for. "Don't be attracted to riches", says he, "**for riches create passions and passions create attachment, and attachment hides the face of Truth.**" Truth is loved by Gandhi, and he seeks it in his own

way. It has been sought by different people in different manners and Truth has been considered highly elusive in life. It may have the glare of the sun which is beyond human endurance to face. But Gandhi peeled the solid facts discovering the glistening truth behind the same. But Who can discover Truth in the right sense of the word. The relative truth may be a possibility, the absolute truth is a fascinating myth. It has been mentioned in the 'Glorious Thoughts of Gandhiji'. that he considered Truth and non-violence as his God. And like God they remain, mythically real. He prescribes humility for the seeker of Truth. "The seeker of Truth should be humbler than the dust", as he says. He believes in the ethical righteousness and his Truth is more akin to it than anything else. Gandhiji associates 'untruth' with non-violence. He calls them 'twin sister'. Moorthy gets carefully hurt when he sees his followers inclined to act in a violent manner. Moorthy is truly Gandhian and is subtly clever like Gandhi. Apart from the social philosophy pertaining to Truth, there is the aesthetic truth also in the opinion of Gandhiji – "whenever men begin to see beauty in truth, then true art will arise" (Mind of Mahatma Gandhi).

For Gandhiji, God and Truth are 'convertible terms'. only God knows what he is, an individual or a set of people or principle but it is certain that truth is the thing. According to the Mahatma, Truth is the first thing which ought to be sought. In **Kanthapura**, Moorthy is no seeker of Truth but believes in the applied- Truth. He is no designer or thinker, he is just the follower of the programme of Gandhi on the political lines. He certainly imbibes the magnificence of the character of Gandhi, his humility and love of the people. He is shown as an embodiment of the Gandhian religion i.e. the Christ – like love of the lowly and the downtrodden people. Moorthy has

been designed by the novelist on the Gandhian sentiments. He also acts with such tenacity of 'faith' which is the part and parcel of the character of Mahatma Gandhi. Even his love for Ratna gets sublimated and he asks her to pray with him. He is against the regime of the Britishers like Gandhi. Moorthy is a righteous crusader against the wrong done to the people. He is for the liberty of the people. The 'dumb millions of villages' responded to the call of Gandhi and so they do in Kanthapura. Moorthy suffers like Gandhi and thus in a way prays to God. "My religion says that only he who is prepared to suffer can pray to God" – (Glorious Thoughts of Gandhi). God is 'truth and love' for Gandhi and so it is with Moorthy. One can find forgiveness in him. He even forgives Bade Khan, the policeman for all his heinous acts and official tyranny. He has the Gandhian forgiveness about him. Mahatma Gandhi too believed in it for he says, '**Forgiveness is the attribute of the Strong**'.

In the sphere of economy of peace, Moorthy in Kanthapura follows Mahatma Gandhi. He associates '**Swadeshi**' with '**love and humanity**'. The village Kanthapura rises against 'an intolerable wrong' which is one's duty according to Gandhi. Moorthy makes the people of the village rise against the people of the government. It is a righteous cause and truly Gandhian in spirit. The patronage of the pariahs on the part of Moorthy is Gandhian in to do. In '**Greet Thoughts**', it is mentioned that untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity and love. He says further 'untouchability poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poison milk'. In '**Kanthapura**', a systematic and long drawn voice has been raised against this evil. The exploiting brahmins like Bhatta have been set in all derision against the simple and good pariahs. Untouchability has been cured at the

hands of Moorthy. The good in the pariahs emerge when they find the good amidst them. The Gandhian view works exceedingly well in Kanthapura. There is a voice against drinking also in the novel. They do picketing at the shop of Boranna where Toddy is sold. According to Gandhi, **‘a drink is more of a disease than a vice’**. He writes: **“Drugs and drinks are the two arms of the devil with which he strikes his helpless slaves into strupecification and intoxication”**. Further he considers the liquor shops as an **“insufferable curse upon society”**. When they picket the toddy shop, they are perhaps goaded to do so at the behest of the Gandhian principle. Moorthy plays the role of a prohibitionist like a true follower of Gandhi.

Moorthy is satisfied with the efforts he puts in the work along with the team of workers drawn from the village of Kanthapura. Gandhi observes that the satisfaction lies in the effort and not in the attainment. The wrong done by Bhatta does not survive. It dies in the ‘sun light’ of Moorthy’s goodness; which is of the Gandhian origin. Ratna as a young widow has been sanctified by the part she plays in the Freedom Movement which comes to Kanthapura. She becomes a sort of Gandhian by virtue of the spirit of service and sacrifice. **“The true beauty after all consists in purity of heart”** says she as she is truly pure at heart. The freedom movement launched by Moorthy in the village Kanthapura makes good converts for the cause. But some of them ridicule the good man. No great task is done in a smooth manner. There are always some detractors who do not relish the radical move or the spirit of revolution. Gandhi himself has observed in this respect as: **“Every good movement passes through five stages; indifference, ridicule,**

abuse, repression and respect". But Moorthy exercises a restraint against the irresponsible talk against his work. He does not care for Bhatta or Waterfall Venkamma. He has the Gandhian fearlessness about him and he takes real pleasure in the service of the people. In the words of Gandhi, "Service can have no meaning unless one takes pleasure in it. When it is done for show or for fear of public opinion, it stands the man and crushes his spirit."

Like Gandhi, Moorthy is a practical idealist. He acts assiduously for the realisation of his goal. He works in the 'wilderness of minority' but he works with an astonishing zeal. His team workers triumph against the brute force. What is Bade Khan before him? "It is discipline", says Mahatma Gandhi, "and restraint that separate us from the brute". The price has been paid for the cause. Moorthy gets a prison sentence, the people are insulted and beaten by the police. Moorthy observes the laws of life as framed by Mahatma Gandhi. Moorthy, the hero in the novel, possesses all the virtues of leadership; self-sacrifice, fearlessness, courage and endurance-all of which are the cherished virtues of Gandhi. According to him, virtue breeds faster and in a noble manner than vice.

The Freedom Movement against the exploitation of the Britishers conceived by Mahatma Gandhi has its origin in his own idea. "The economics that permits one country to prey upon another is immoral." It is why colonialism has been condemned and imperialism too comes under hammering from the wise and the liberal nation. **The idea of the Sweshi, the removal of untouchability, the movement against toddy drinking, the wearing and spinning of Khadi etc.,** stem from **Gandhism,** Kanthapura becomes an ideal microcosm for all this. Moorthy replaces

Mahatma Gandhi in Kanthapura. The life of purity and the real sunshine breaking forth through the clouds sheds its radiance on the people and the place. If the life is magnified, it would become Ramraja of the dream of Mahatma Gandhi ensuring equal rights for the prince and the pauper alike. Moorthy like Gandhi is after social justice. Charkha comes to the village of Kanthapura, “Charkha stands not for the greatest good of the greatest number, but for the greatest good of all”. Moorthy teaches spinning to the people of the village. In spinning lies the seed of Gandhian revolution. Thus, the Gandhian philosophy and the programme of the freedom movement launched by the Mahatma form the spirit of the life of Kanthapura. Towards the end of the novel, Gandhi is seen as the bringer of freedom – “He will bring us swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed”. This was how Gandhi was understood and interpreted by millions of his countrymen, and it is in this return to the golden age that the utopian element in Indian fiction lies. But within the format of this religious structure other problems are considered in their realistic claims – Moorthy’s visiting the houses of the untouchables, sharing food with them, being excommunicated; the women dreaming of their fine silk sarees and bridal jewellery, learning to overcome the confines of sexual roles, aspiring to be like Rani Lakshmi Bai and facing the lathi –charge. This was change, this was internal transformation.

And there are shrieks and shouts and cries and sobs, and the more we are beaten the more we get used to it and we say, “After all it is not bad - after all it is not so bad” (Kanthapura 180).

Gandhi is viewed as a saint and a holy man. This view is upheld and explored, amongst others, in the novels of both Bhabani Bhattacharya and Nayantara Saghul.

Gandhi's love for the downtrodden and his sympathy with the underdogs of the society is highlighted when we come across the pitiable condition of the coolies on the Skeffington Coffee Estate, which arouses Moorthy's interest. He immediately decides to do something for them, too, in the true Gandhian spirit. This situation gives an opportunity to the novelist to describe the appalling conditions under which these coolies had to work in the British coffee plantations. Fearlessness, another important principle of Gandhian ideology is heroically displayed by Moorthy and his followers in braving the grave provocations and even physical injuries with all humility, forbearance, non-violence and above all, love for perpetrators. Moorthy's visit to the Skeffington Coffee Estate brings about a new awakening and self – confidence among the coolies. Bade Khan who has been accommodated within the estate premises finds the supremacy of his domain being threatened. He refuses Moorthy an entry into the estate and abuses him when he insists. Still, Moorthy forces himself up and Bade Khan hits him with his 'lathi' and starts beating him. Some of the coolies, including Rachanna, and Mahatma, launch a counter – attack. Maistri whips them while Moorthy cries out, "No beating in the name of the Mahatma" (Kanthapura 65). Rachanna is ordered to clear out of the Estate the next morning itself and is provided shelter at Beadle Timmayya's house in Kanthapura. Moorthy holds himself responsible for this and grows more sorrowful and calm and decides to begin his "Don't touch the Government campaign in right earnest" (Kanthapura 66).

That same evening Moorthy tells Rangamma that he will fast for three days in the temple because so much of violence has been caused on his account. Being a true follower of Gandhi, he can not bear to be even the cause of violence. Moorthy practises the Gandhian principle of non-violence in its entirety. Not only does he not retaliate when hit by Bade Khan, he even tries to love him in order to conquer his hatred through love. He is completely under the spell of Gandhian ideology,

Though he finds the 'Brahmin' corner practically empty when they sing 'bhajans', he does not get upset. Even the thought of Bhatta who is instrumental in his excommunication, only renews his sense of responsibility and gives him more strength to win him over. "He would send out love where there was hatred and compassion where there was misery. Victory to the Mahatma" (Kanthapura 73). He resolves to practice what Gandhi preaches

Moorthy in consultation with Range Gowda, decides to start a congress group in Kanthapura. Members have to pay four annas or spin two thousand yards of yarn per year. They also have to promise to speak the truth and wear 'Khadi'. When he goes to the 'parich' quarter to ask them to become members of the congress party, he meets with usual excuses from the women folk, though ultimately he is able to convince them. They have a meeting the very next day and Range Gowda talks to them about wearing and 'ahimsa' and the great Congress. All of them stand up when Moorthy comes. Moorthy, in all humility, is embarrassed and says,

'Oh, not this for me! and Range Gowda said, "you are our Gandhi', and when everybody laughed he went on : 'There is nothing to laugh at, brothers. He is our Gandhi... and he has

wisdom in him and he will be, our Mahatma, and they all said, ‘so he is!’ (Kanthapura 80)

All the members thus take the vow and elect Moorthy their president. Moorthy, as a follower of Gandhi believes in equality for all and is determined to raise the status of women and says, “we need a woman in the Committee for the Congress is for the weak and lowly” (Kanthapura 81). Moorthy’s faith in conversion through love is implicit because he expects even the British judges to change under the impact of Truth. He refuses to accept any defence on his behalf, saying “If Truth needs a defence, God himself would need one, for us the Mahatma says, ‘Truth is God’ and I want no soul to come between me and Truth” (Kanthapura 92). Sankar, an advocate by profession and the Secretary of the Karwar Congress committee, at first offers his services to defend Moorthy. Later he subscribes to Moorthy’s views and approves of his decision by referring to the fact that even Gandhi has said that a ‘**Satyagrahi**’ needs no advocates as he is his own advocate.

A meeting is held openly in Gandhi maidan and volunteers come in ‘Khadikurta’ and **Gandhi-caps**. The speakers talk about Moorthy, ‘Charka’, ‘ahimsa’, Hindu-Moslem unity, and the policy of foreign Government to crush all self-respect. Some of them are arrested while others form a procession and go on the streets, shouting ‘Vande Mataram’ and ‘Mahatma Gandhi Kijai’. He wears ‘Khadi’ and follows the principles of the Mahatma. Like Gandhi, he too does not take a single false case and the clients have to swear of being innocent. If the client does not tell him the whole truth, he threatens to withdraw even in the middle of the case. He refuses to accompany marriage parties if everyone is not dressed in ‘**Khadi**’. He even

makes the entire family fast on the anniversary of the day when the Mahatma was imprisoned on the day of the Jallianwala Bag Massacre.

Gandhi preached to the Congress workers to discipline themselves exactly on the lines of a regular army though on non-violent lines. In **Kanthapura**, women are seen physically practising what was being preached all over the country. They learn how not to retaliate even when being beaten by the police and consciously carry out regular exercises to ensure greater endurance against all provocations and physical discomforts. Great emphasis is laid on the fact that Gandhi, a true follower of the **Gita** wants everyone to do his duty. When the husbands protest against being neglected, Rangamma tells the women folk, **“we should do our duty. If not, it is no use belonging to the Gandhi group”** (Kanthapura 111). The villagers invoke Kenchamma, the ruling diety of the village and seek her blessings to fight the police non-violently. **“Well, we shall fight the police for Kenchamma’s sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma”**. (Kan 112)

All the major political activities of the Congress during the time of Gandhi, are given in **Kanthapura**, for example, **the Dandi march of Gandhi and his followers in 1930 to inaugurate the Civil Disobedience Movement; the response of the villagers to the movement by way of launching Sathyagraha, observing non-cooperation by not paying taxes and showing disloyalty to the Government; the formation of the Congress committee in remote villages and their constructive programmes; the decision of Gandhi to attend the Second Round Table Conference and above all, the Mahatma’s all pervading, permeating**

influence on the nation which runs through the entire story. Though **Kanthapura** deals primarily with a political theme, the novel does not fall into the category of pure political novels or drab chronicles of historical facts. With his distinct style and in the true Gandhian spirit, Raja Rao spiritualizes politics. The novel emphasises religious, economic and social ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. It introduces us not only to the spectacular sacrifices of the selected few who later become National leaders, but also those of the unknown, nameless and now completely forgotten peasants, students, lawyers, women and old men. It is these unchronicled acts of sacrifice of simple men and women that give momentum to a movement, but unfortunately they are forgotten soon because everyone worships the rising sun. **Kanthapura** can easily be regarded as a ‘**Sthala-purana**’ depicting the struggle for freedom on Gandhian lines and will always have a central place in Gandhian literature.

Raja Rao’s **Kanthapura**, is perhaps the only novel that goes successfully to the depth of national uprising, the patriotic urge, not to speak of town and cities but in remote villages like Kanthapura. It is fused with religious faith. The storm of Gandhi, with its tremendous influence over the Indians, shakes this little village to its roots. Mahatma Gandhi is placed on the same pedestal as **Lord Christ, Rama, Krishna and the Buddha**. The inscription from the **Gita** on the inner title page of the novel : “**whenever there is misery and ignorance, I come**” radiates Raja Rao’s sentiments about Gandhi. Prof. Harish Raizada remarks :

Though Raja Rao has used the internal point of view of “I” as the narrator in all his four novels, Kanthapura (1938), The Serpent and the Rope (1960), The Cat and Shakespeare (1965) and

Comrade Kirislov (1976), he has introduced several variations in this autobiographical mode of narration to lend verisimilitude to narrative and add intensity to the emotional experience (Raizada 37)

Kanthapura is the microcosm of the Indian subcontinent of the British days. This little village, slumbering for centuries, suddenly comes to life, thanks to the non-violent, non-cooperation movement of Gandhi in twenties and thirties. The description of Kanthapura is based on Raja Rao's own village Harikalli or Hariherapura. Like Kanthapura, thousands of villages of India had worked up to fight the alien rulers. It was because of Gandhi's greatness and inspiration that thousands of little Gandhis had sprung up throughout the country. This remote village is caught in the meelstorm of the freedom struggle of the 1930s and is transformed into a living symbol of Gandhism. The entire village and its inhabitants come under the spell of this movement. Prof. R.S.Singh gives the quintessence of Gandhi's influence thus:

Kanthapura can very easily be placed at centre of Gandhian literature for depicting truthfully and artistically the upsurge of Gandhian movement. Raja Rao has given a large perspective of Gandhian ideology by placing him in the tradition of Rama, Krishna and the Buddha and other great saints who boldly came forward, even risked life, to lead the erring humanity to economic prosperity and spiritual satisfaction (Sharma 11)

Humayun Kabir was right to summarise the quality of Gandhi in the following lines of his poem :

A long figure stands upon the sands of time....

Launches India's resistless carvan

Into adventures new

A perilous path where out of lives substance must be carved

New Values, new direction, order new

Gandhi, Mahatma, India's leader, India's soul. (Singh 55)

It was, no doubt, a challenging task for Raja Rao to portray the power of Gandhi's weapons like **self-reliance, moral-resistance, non-violence, perseverance through the story of a village**. Both Gandhi and Marx held the opinion that the root of permanent happiness and prosperity lay in the improvement of economy. But they advocated different means to achieve this goal. **Marx stood for industrialization and use of machinery**, whereas **Gandhi advocated self-reliance and simple life**. The novel on the whole is a faithful record of the social-political climate of the time when the Civil obedience movement sets in the country, particularly in the rural areas like Kanthapura.