

Chapter-4

Kanthapura

Raja Rao, a celebrated and authoritative figure of Indian Writing in English, has won wide appreciation across the world. Although Rao never permanently settled in India after leaving for France in 1929 when he got a scholarship for Montpellier, yet he was an Indian at heart. The Indian sensibility finds a lucid and assertive expression in his literary pieces. K. R. Rao observes:

Raja Rao is conscious; rather overconscious of his orientalism, and his long stay in the West did not diminish his fascination for India, and the Indian values. He is aware of his ancient moorings, the hoary wisdom and the underlying Indian cultural tradition ever opening, to him, fresh vistas. Whenever Raja Rao speaks about India, he speaks of it with a passionate indulgence and youthful buoyancy. India for me is not a country, but an idea, a metaphysics, says his hero in *The Serpent and the Rope* (19).

Kanthapura was written “in a thirteen century castle in the French Alps belonging to the Dauphins of France” (Naik 60), when Raja Rao was twenty-one years old. However, the novel with “artistic detachment and passionate involvement” (Srivastva 46) was not published until 1938 (Naik 23). The piece of art is all about “the Revolution” (Rao, Raja *Kanthapura* 178)¹ of the villagers of Kanthapura, who “seek to be soldier saints” (130) throughout their struggle to attain freedom from the clutches of the foreign rule. The struggle for these Gandhian followers (the Satyagrahis) is a bed of thorns because they have to adhere to the ideology of non-violence and universal love. Gandhi believes, “you must love even your enemies” (75) and “there is but one force in life and that is truth, and there is but one love in life and that is love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all” (40).

¹ Further references to the text will be given as (Rao page no.) in this chapter.

Kanthapura is projected as an ordinary Indian village except for its natural beauties and bounties. In the backdrop, it is the novelist's village- "Harihalli or Hariharapura, near Kenchamma Hoskere Taluk, Hassan district, but nothing like this drama took place at Harihalli" (Naik 62). Kanthapura has a caste and class driven Hindu society. There are Brahmin quarter, Pariah quarter, Potters' quarter, Weavers' quarter and Sudra quarter. Patel Range Gowda is the Tiger of the village and his words are "law" (Rao 12). Religion, the ultimate and unquestionable authority, dominates the village life and structures the basis of integration and disintegration of the people through its norms, values, and traditions. Like the other Indian villages, each of which is known for "a rich sthala-purana, or a legendary history, of its own" (Preface), Kanthapura is special for having witnessed the "confusion" (178) of the freedom struggle of India under the aegis of the Congress Panchayat: "Men grip men and men crush men and men bite men and men tear men, and moans on moans rise and groans and groans die out" (178).

The Idea of Nation and Kanthapura

Kanthapura is an imaginary village. In the purview of space, population, and socio-political divisions, it is inappropriate to call the people of Kanthapura a nation. However, at this point of analyzing *Kanthapura* from the perspective of nation, one has to keep in view the fact that the village Kanthapura is presented as a little part of the bigger picture in the novel. Though suggestively delimited in scope, Rao tries to situate the text, off and on, in the larger whole. Seenu is sent to a "northern jail" (Rao 182); the coolies cry "Punjab, Punjab!" (175); there is reference to "our brothers, the Mohomedans"'s (164) encounter in Peshawar (170); and there is reference to 1857 revolution (121) which took place at different places in India². This picture of the Indian subcontinent is so grand that a small village such as Kanthapura is likely to be overlooked as insignificant. The narrator herself is aware of this fact and makes it clear to the 'listener' in her first sentence of the novel: "Our village-I don't think you have ever heard about it- Kanthapura is its name" (7).

² Bahadur Shah Zafar and Waqt Khan in Delhi, Lakshmi Bai in Jhansi, Kunwar Singh in Bihar, Devi Singh in Mathura, Kadam Singh in Meerut, Maulvi Mohammad Allaha in Faridabad, Begam Hazrat Mahal in Lucknow, Nana Saheb and Azimullah in Kanpur, Liyaquat Ali in Allahabad, Taty Tope in Gwalior, Rao Tularam in Haryana, and Surendra Sai in Sambalpur played significant role in the 'revolution' of 1857.

The motifs such as ‘Gandhi,’ ‘the Satyagraha,’ ‘the Congress,’ and ‘Mother,’ psychologically link the villagers of Kanthapura to the Indian subcontinent and make the basis for the idea of nation in the novel. The idea of land as mother³ is not only confined to Kanthapura; it is common to the Indian nation. Rani Lakshmi Bai belongs to Jhansi (109); Gandhi is from ‘Gujerat’ (17); and Moorthy is from Kanthapura in Karnatka. Irrespective of their different milieus and places, the idea of land as mother is constructed to nationalize all of these in the narrative of the freedom struggle. Lakshmi Bai dies fighting “for her enslaved Mother” (109); Gandhi is all for ‘Mother’ who is “in tattered weeds” (18); and Moorthy is concerned that “we have to protect our Mother” (23). The very discourse of Gandhian nationalism in the novel is for Mother’s cause: “Spin and weave every day for our Mother is in tattered weeds and a poor mother needs clothes to cover her sores” (18). The expressions such as “Vande Matram” (131) and “fight for the Mother” (111) make the freedom struggle a selfless effort to save the absolute mother. Thus, the struggle of the villagers is to be seen in the wider framework of the national struggle for independence and self-rule, which is a nation’s attempt to form a nation-state.

The idea of nation is also constructed through Moorthy’s visualization of the image of “a thousand pillared temple” (123). He says, “India then will live in a temple of our making” (123). Even the villagers of Kanthapura are aware that they are not fighting for their village or for region, but for India.

...we said to ourselves, a day will come, a day when hut after hut will have a light at dusk, and flowers will be put on the idols, and camphors lit, and as the last Red-man leaps into his boat, and the earth pushes him away, through our thatches will a song rise like a thread of gold, and from the lotus navel of India’s earth the Mahatma will speak of love to all men. (170)

³ Born on 8 November 1908, in Mysore, Raja Rao lost his mother when he was four years old. Alterno says, “The resultant psychological trauma of loss will be constantly re-elaborated in his writings, especially in *The Serpent and the Rope* where the mother-figure stands pre-eminently” (1). In *Kanthapura*, Moorthy loses his mother though at a later stage. The loss reminds of the author’s own loss during his childhood. The personification of India as mother in the novel may be viewed as an attempt to fulfil this loss.

Various sections of Indian society are bound by shared values and beliefs; however, diversity is intrinsic to its character. A. K. Ramanujan says, “One way of defining diversity for India is to say what the Irishman is said to have said about trousers. When asked whether trousers were singular or plural, he said, ‘Singular at the top and plural at the bottom’” (qtd. in Guttman 1). In *Kanthapura*, the idea of nation carries the mark of Indian unity in diversity. The idea of India or Indian nation is complex and multi-dimensional. It cannot be correctly expressed through the essentialist view that *Kanthapura* is the microcosm of the macrocosm of India. The novel, which is regional in terms of its setting and characters as graphically represented in figure (A), cannot reflect the ‘microcosm’⁴ of the ‘macrocosm’ of India, a land known for its diversity and regional peculiarities as graphically shown in figure (B). In other words, the phrase ‘microcosm of India’ tries to view India essentially as a homogeneous place and if carefully observed, the village *Kanthapura* is presented as a unique part, with regional flavor and specific socio-political conditions, of the larger entity known as India.

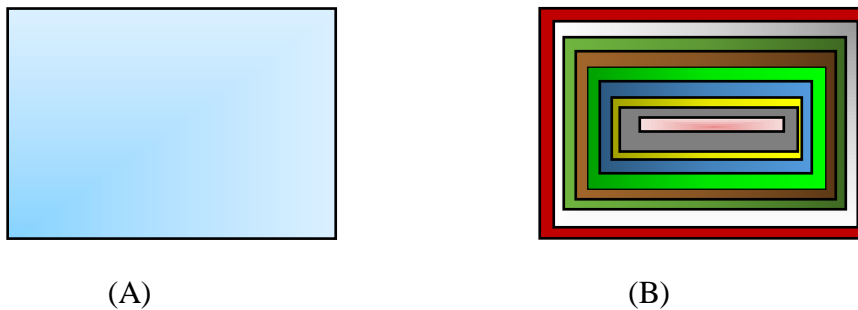


Figure 4.1 Contrasting Images of the Monolithic Microcosm (A) and the Variegated Macrocosm (B) of India

First of all, the Congress Panchayat in *Kanthapura* is only a small unit of “the Panchayat of all India” (Rao 78). A discourse of an all pervasive and absolute Congress is constructed in the novel: “...the Congress...is the same by the Ganges and the Yamuna and the Godaveri, by Indus and by Kaveri, in Agra and Ankola, Lucknow and Manipuri, in Madras, Patna and Lahore, in Calcutta. Peshawar and Puri, in Poona and in Benares-everywhere...the Government is afraid of us” (164). However, the Congress, ironically, is unique in *Kanthapura* where the cause

⁴ ‘Microcosm’ stands for ‘all the features and qualities of something much larger’ (Oxford Dictionary).

championed by it is ambiguous. Notably, the Kanthapurians pledge their support to the Congress when goaded by the village Patel. Patel himself has a third hand experience of Gandhi⁵. He admits before Moorthy, “All I know is that what you told me about the Mahatma is very fine, and the Mahatma is a holy man” (76).

The novel portrays a peculiar village community that is not much aware of the very aims of the Congress. When Range Gowda raises general doubts about the ideology of the Congress, Moorthy carelessly replies, “We shall speak of it another time” (76). This is how the Congress Panchayat Committee of Kanthapura is set up:

Range Gowda says, ‘Mooorthappa will be our president,’ and everybody says, ‘Of course, of course.’ Then Seenu turns towards Range Gowda and says, ‘And Range Gowda our Super-President and Protector,’ and everybody laughs, and Range Gowda says, ‘Protector! Yes, Protector of the village fowl!’ Then Seenu says, ‘Rangamma will be the third member,’ but Rangamma says, ‘No, no’ and Moorthy says, ‘We need a woman in the Committee for the Congress is for the weak and the lowly’; and then everybody says, ‘Rangamma, say yes!’ and Rangamma says ‘Yes’. And Moorthy then turns towards the pariahs and says, ‘One among you!’ and then there is such a silence that a moving ant could be heard.... (81)

In the name of ‘the Congress,’ a group of people is united in Kanthapura to escape the wrath of the village Patel for a cause which is not clear to most of them. This group is forced to connect to ‘the imagined community’ of India through the grand narrative of the Congress Panchayat. Although the Congress in Kanthapura is peculiarly different, yet it acts as an integrative force in the nationalist discourse. Thus, the idea of Indian nation carries heterogeneity under its homogeneity. Even the city boys of the Congress can be easily differentiated in their ways and style from the Congress workers of Kanthapura.

⁵ Range Gowda listens about Gandhi from Moorthy, who himself has seen Gandhi in his vision only.

Kanthapura is a political novel focusing on the selective history of India. It gives us the partial glimpse of Indian nation along with the idea of its diversity through the story of an imaginary village, Kanthapura. Different versions of Hinduism are given in the text. One is symbolized in the innocent faith in Kenchamma and Himavaty. And, the second is the commodification of religion by Bhatta and Swami. Another form is an amalgamation of modern politics and religious mythical beliefs, spread by Harikatha man, Jayaramachar. Religion is also manifested in Kartik, the month of gods. “Kartik is a month of the gods, and as the gods pass by the Potter’s Street and the Weaver’s Street, lights are lit to see them pass by. Kartik is a month of lights” (87). The persona of Gandhi is also presented in two opposite extremes. Thus, Rao delineates the idea of Indian pluralism in the novel. To view Kanthapura as the microcosm of the macrocosm of India is an erroneous essentialist construction; it ignores Indian diversity and its complexity.

C.D. Narasimhaiah was the first critic who hailed *Kanthapura* as “India in microcosm” (43). He said, “What happened there is what happened everywhere in India during those terrible years of our fight for freedom”. This view became so favourite and clichéd afterwards that a number of scholars and critics embraced it without much critical thought. Narsingh Srivastava in his *The Mind and Art of Raja Rao* writes, “The development of events in *Kanthapura* represents all that was happening in every village and every city at that time; thus Kanthapura is not one village but every village; nay, India in microcosm ”(40). Rumina Sethi says, “...Kanthapura is Rao’s India in miniature...” (85). Similarly, Vinita Sharma in her dissertation *Influence of Gandhi on Raja Rao* writes, “...Kanthapura is India in microcosm” (49-50). Kaushal Sharma also thinks along the same lines: “Kanthapura is the microcosm of the Indian subcontinent of the British days” (10). Suman Bala in “Raja Rao’s Kanthapura: An Introduction” notes, “The development of events in Kanthapura represents all that was happening in every village at that time: Kanthapura is thus not one village but every village in microcosm” (16). To boot, Anju Bala Agarwal in “Raja Rao: The Voice of Mother India” says, “It (*Kanthapura*) is rightly called the Gandhian Purana and microcosm of India” (5). Irrespective of the view whether Rao has attempted to portray a mini India in

Kanthapura or not, the critics and scholars have left no stone unturned to declare Kanthapura as an essential representation of India, in an ambiguous manner.

S.A.Narayan is over enthusiastic when he says, “The village is a microcosm of the wide world...” (26). In this exaggerated emphasis on Kanthapura as a microcosm of India, the unique identity and individuality of the novel and the fictional village is wittingly or unwittingly ignored. It also undermines the contribution of other movements and leaders during the freedom struggle which otherwise have not found place in Rao’s fictional work. If *Kanthapura* had been able to represent India successfully, M. K. Naik would have called it a major classic rather than a minor classic. Naik in *Raja Rao* calls the novel “a minor classic” because “its range is limited and the area of East-West confrontation it covers is as narrow as the village which forms its setting (77-8).

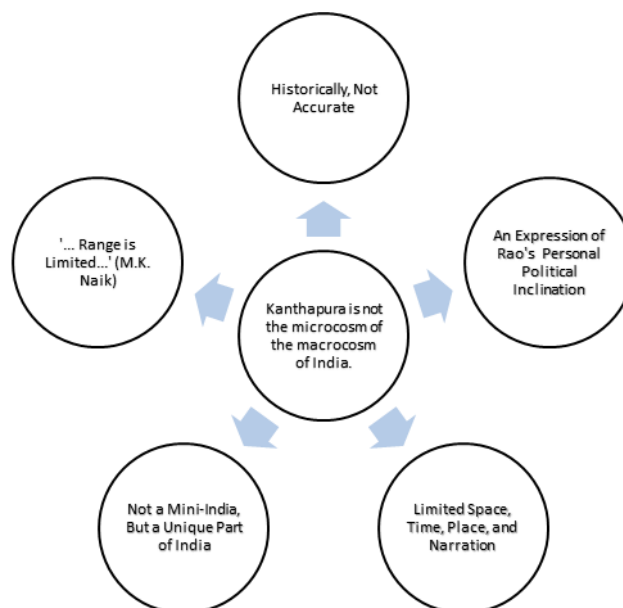


Figure 4.2 Kanthapura is not the microcosm of the macrocosm of India.

Anshuman A. Mondal draws our attention to the fact that the novel is far from being “historically accurate or realistic” and it cannot substitute Indian history. He writes that Kanthapura, which is supposedly situated in Mysore, witnesses the activities of the Civil Disobedience Movement in the novel. But outside the novel, in fact, “there was not a single incidence of Civil Disobedience in Mysore state at that time... it was not until the Quit India agitation of 1942 that Mysore state became

physically involved in the struggle against colonialism even though there was considerable sympathy for the national movement in British India among students and other urban groups in the earlier period” (109). Mondal adds that in the novel, the portrayal of the Congress in the rural interiors of Mysore during Civil Disobedience is also fictional because the Congress, in reality, “was barely existent until 1937 even in urban areas” there. Apart from it, the representation of the Congress as sympathetic to the peasantry is not real as the Congress organizations in South India, in fact, “were vehemently anti-peasant, controlled as they were by urban Brahmins who were in many cases major landholders themselves”.

Kanthapura is not a book of history; it is a political novel inspired by a historical occurrence. As “[t]here is no such thing as genuinely nonpolitical literature (Orwell 373)”, this novel also sticks to a definite ‘political’ ideology. To convey a particular ideology from subjective point of view, the novelist, with artistic license, is free to construct, deconstruct, represent, misrepresent, exaggerate, and understate history in his fictional portrayal. For e.g., the novel is silent on the contribution of the radical groups and leaders such as Bose⁶ and Bhagat Singh in the freedom struggle, whereas Mohan Dharia, an eminent freedom fighter and former deputy chairman of Planning commission, firmly believes that “our independence is a joint creation of both non-violent and violent struggles by our patriotic youth, both men and women” (31). However, the novel portrays only a version of Gandhian nationalism with the strain of Hinduism. To boot, even before the start of the Civil Disobedience Movement, “there were 203 strikes in India involving 505,000 workers” (Chandra, Bipan *Freedom Struggle* 148). And the novel is silent about it. On the contrary, the workers of Skeffington Coffee Estate work like slaves and pocket exploitation without protest even during the movement. The novel gives us a fragmented glimpse of Indian valour during the Civil Disobedience days through an imaginary tale and it does not replace academic history and facts.

⁶ “This is perhaps the most glorious chapter in our war of independence. Nearly 30,000 jawans and officers of the Azad Hind Fouj sacrificed their lives while fighting against the British and bravely accepted martyrdom to free India” (Dharia 31).

The piece of art under study captures only a limited space and time through a narration which is politically motivated. Although the novel was actually published in 1938⁷, the story covers the time span just before the first Round Table Conference (RTC). The novelist's choice of specific time and specific issues is important. Noticeably, Gandhi is shown as the leader of Hindus in the novel. Even the low caste Hindus are shown as his 'devotees'. However, the clash between Ambedkar's views and Gandhian ideology, which itself gained currency during the Round Table Conference, is not covered in the novel. Outside the novel, Ambedkar challenged Gandhi's assertion that the Congress represented all classes and communities in India including untouchables during the RTC. Ambedkar, who himself was a 'victim' of Gandhi's 'technique' of hunger-strike,⁸ significantly opposed Gandhi's claim. Nevertheless, there is no reference to it in the novel in which the pariahs play important role. In other words, the real political conflict regarding the 'true' representation of pariahs is not given voice in the novel. It appears to be a political move. Besides, to develop the idea of nation strategically, the novelist remains silent on the attitude of the Muslims of Peshawar towards the very idea of Vande Mataram in the real world. The writer is mainly concerned to convey the effectiveness of Nehruvian socialism over Gandhian ideology in the novel because he himself was inclined towards socialism in those days.

As a matter of fact, the plethora of diverse shades of the Indian freedom struggle cannot be confined to a fictional work such as *Kanthapura* because of the temporal and spacious restrictions of the genre. The Civil Disobedience was an umbrella term for various activities which took place in the different parts of India.

⁷ Although the novel was written when Rao was twenty-one, yet it was not published upto 1938. The novelist could modify and cover the impact of the RTC in the novel before its publication.

⁸ "Macdonald, the Prime Minister, announced in July the Communal Award creating separate electorates for the depressed classes and other minorities" (Desai 344). "Gandhiji was always opposed to separate constituencies for reserved classes, as he felt that the rift between touchables and untouchables will be further fortified. Dr. Ambedkar disapproved the approach of Gandhiji. He felt that separate electorate constituencies will ensure the right of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes, if their candidates were elected to democratic bodies. He, therefore, opposed the immoral pressure created by Gandhiji's fast. When the condition of Gandhiji was critical, with great reluctance, Dr. Ambedkar gave his consent to joint constituencies where Dalits were fairly in large number. Even the British Rulers had to agree to save the life of Gandhiji against their wishes" (Dharia 37). "It resulted in the Poona Pact which, while maintaining the joint Hindu electorate, reserved seats for the depressed classes" (Desai 344).

These activities, though with common objective, were different in expression. *Kanthapura* is a regional novel constructing specific culture in a village that has its unique character. Notably, the circumstances of the Indian subcontinent were similar during the freedom struggle, but they were not all the same at the same time. Bipan Chandra writes:

In Bombay, riots broke out at Bhendi Bazar and at Wadala, the salt pans, but the procession which marched through the European quarters was entirely non-violent. In Madras, police beating was indiscriminate. Boycott of British cloth was highest in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa; in the UP, the peasants and zamindars were called upon to withhold all payment of revenues and after October, peasants were asked to withhold rent to zamindars. In the Central Provinces Satyagraha was launched against forest taxes. In Karnataka, a successful no-tax campaign was launched. (*Freedom Struggle* 163)

To quote, Rumina Sethi:

With the consolidation of Indian national congress in the late nineteenth century many activists and intellectuals came into mainstream national activity. Save for their affiliation with the Congress which made them ‘nationalist’, they were not identified by a homogeneity of interests or grounded in any common theory of nationalism. On the one hand, the Congress witnessed a nationalism of every kind- of Hindu revivalist, who excluded the minorities while promoting their own regional groups, and who desired a hasty collision based on religious exclusion; of social reformers who saw the national movement as a panacea for their ills; and of anti-imperialist agitators who believed national unity to be the pre-cursor of national liberation signifying the end of imperial rule. (4)

Kanthapura, being unique, is not the microcosm of India. In fact, it is a negligible part of Indian nation. In Indian context, nationalism was the central

force of a number of activities done by different people in different ways in one direction during the freedom struggle. It was the time when the Indian subcontinent was trying to see itself as a whole for social, political, and economic reasons. The small and largely localized Kanthapura community cannot possibly represent the complex national psyche. At best, the novel gives us an oblique sense of Indian nation and represents a selective ideology of the writer rather than comprehensive politics and history of the freedom struggle in India.

Gandhian Nationalism in the Garb of Religion and 'Dharma'

Raja Rao has instilled religious elements in *Kanthapura* by adopting the technique of Indian 'Puras'. The story is not a direct narration, but it is told through an intermediary, a grandmother. Through the long passages in which incident follows incident in a continuous chain, the novelist shapes up the story. In the novel, there are invocations to God, poetic description of nature and natural phenomena, and quite a few digressions. 'Whenever there is misery and ignorance- I come' is central to the 'Puras', most of which describe how and why a certain avatar appeared. Along the same lines, *Kanthapura* portrays the arrival of Gandhi on the political scene as the coming of an avatar for the national cause. "This speaks of Gandhi's birth as a divine visitation on earth to destroy sin and sinners alike in order to re-establish the hold of religion" (Sethi 85).

As for setting, the novelist has captured the rural life in India which is sustained by religion, culture, and tradition. *Bhajans* can keep the villagers of Kanthapura "sitting for hours together" (Rao 14). Most of the Kanthapurians are innocent and rustic, who "shall offer you our first rice and our first fruit, and we shall offer you saris and bodice-cloth for every birth and marriage, we shall wake thinking of you, sleep prostrating before you, Kenchamma..." (9).

Kenchamma, Kenchamma,
Goddess benign and bounteous,
Mother of earth, blood of life,
Harvest-queen, rain-crowned,
Kenchamma, Kenchamma
Goddess benign and bounteous (9)

Kenchamma is believed to be responsible for every experience of pain and pleasure of the villagers. Even after going through the destructive phase of her life, the narrator says, “She has never failed us, I assure you, our Kenchamma” (8). She argues in defense of the goddess if need be. The Indian religious sensibility suitably moulds and accumulates even anti-religious elements. It’s an age of reason; the villagers come to know about new technologies of science through Rangamma’s papers. Nevertheless, they never feel that science and religion are poles apart in a way. On the contrary, they reconstruct the scientific description in religious terms: “She told us, out there, there is just a chink, and you put your eyes to a great tube and see another world with sun and moon and stars, all bright and floating in the diamond dust of God” (35). Although “there seems to be not a beating pulse in all Kanthapura” (177), yet the faith of the narrator in the gods doesn’t shake a bit. It is a compelling testimony that religious faith is intrinsic to the Indian sensibility.

The very beginning of the novel reveals that the Indian sensibility finds emotional support in religion, traditional beliefs, and mythology, even if all of these are constructed in order to serve some specific purpose. Gandhian men with the non-traditional style do not appeal to the rustic villagers, and in the beginning, the people reject them.

Well, well, let them say it, how does it affect us? We shall be dead
before the world is polluted. We shall have closed our eyes (16).

However, when the Mahatma is compared with Shiva and Krishna, the people innocently attach the aura of holiness with Gandhi without any arguments or doubts. “[A]nd so Kittu and Srinivas and Puttu and Ramu and Chandru and Seenu, threw away their foreign clothes and became Gandhi’s men” (18-19) and in Kanthapura fair, “the little pictures of Rama and Krishna and Sankara and the Mahatma” (45) can be seen in one place. Religion emerges as a dominant regulating force that affects social, psychological, economic, political, and cultural spheres of the villagers’ life.

In a rural Indian setting such as Kanthapura, myths have a quintessential value in religious beliefs, to the extent that they begin to be revered as absolute

truths by the religious-minded people. Deeply rooted in faith, they survive the tests of time mainly through the oral traditions of folklores, legends, and fables. They try to answer the unexplored mysteries of life through supernaturalism, mysticism, and romance. They connect man to the natural and social surroundings and define role models, ideal perspectives, norms, and moral values in different cultures. Indeed, the construction of nationalism/imperialism as a discourse of religion and mythology is possibly an easiest way to (de)motivate the villagers to participate in the national struggle. Consequently, in the novel, both the colonial power and Gandhian nationalism are portrayed in religious colours to be tempting. An old man, the spokesman of imperialism, claims, “The British came and they came to protect us, our bones and our dharma. I say dharma and I mean it. For hath not the Lord said in the Gita, Whensoever there is ignorance and corruption I come, for I, says Krishna, am the defender of dharma, and the British came to protect our dharma” (94). However, as a matter of narrative space, this ideology is dealt briefly amid Gandhian ‘ovations’ in the novel. Thus, it is artistically sidelined. On the contrary, the Gandhian supporters compare the arrival of the British with “when the demon came”. The innocent villagers pray, “Goddess, when the demon came to eat our babes and rape our daughters, you came down to destroy him and protect us. Oh, Goddess, destroy this Government!” (99). In this discourse, the Gandhian men become “pilgrims” (136) and their life be “as though your Karma willed it” (147). Rangamma refers to *The Geeta* to inspire women for the national struggle: “Does not the Geeta say, the sword can split asunder the body, but never the soul?” (111). She adds:

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 supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma. (112)

In *Kanthapura*, the crystallization of Gandhian nationalism begins when the political aims are linked with Indian mythology and religion and when, in consequence, the freedom struggle becomes a religious fight between ‘Surs’ and ‘Asurs’ on earth. Harikatha man Jayaramachar presents Gandhi to the village audience as an incarnation of Shiva, sent on earth by Brahma to set free his “beloved

daughter from the enforced slavery” (17). At one point, Shiva is compared to ‘Swaraj’: “‘Shiva is the three eyed’ he says, ‘Swaraj too is three eyed: self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar’” (16). Mythology is modified in the political backdrop and presented as a suitable ‘history’ to the villagers for whom religion is a life-sustaining power. Jayaramachar’s narrative, an epitome of the construction of modern mythology cum ‘history’, takes us back to the history written by Mrityunjay Vidyalankar⁹. “In Mrityunjay’s scheme of history, the rulers on earth are, as it were, appointed by divine will” (Chatterjee, Partha “History and the Nationalisation” 234). It reveals how the mythical past and the contemporary socio-political aims go hand in hand in the novel along the lines of Mrityunjay’s version of historical events. In fact, they are wittingly combined in one discourse of nationalism to generate new meanings to serve the vested interest in *Kanthapura*. For this, the mythical past and the present are not only simply relied upon, but they are also modified, even distorted, to get the desired result.

In the novel, the construction of Gandhi as an incarnation of Shiva is a witting purposeful attempt to seat Gandhi on the high pedestal, at par with gods. It is a deliberate linking of religion and politics, of the spiritual and the worldly, and of the ideal and the real. Therefore, Gandhi, “the Mountain” (Rao 127), appears to the naïve villagers a spiritual figure, an incarnation of god. Rao has suggestively drawn an analogy between the gods and Gandhi. Both the gods and Gandhi are depicted as powerful as well as powerless in this novel. At physical level, the icons of gods “fell” (170) and appear futile at a number of times during the maelstrom of the freedom struggle in the village. They are controlled by the villagers in Kanthapura: “the gods put back in their sanctum” (161). Metaphorically, Gandhian ideology also tumbles down in the novel, and Moorthy restores it by asking the villagers to swear “again to speak truth, to spin their daily one hundred yards, and put aside the idea of the holy Brahmin and the untouchable pariah” (123). Like the gods, Gandhi also remains absent ‘in person’ but present through symbols and icons. However, at the

⁹ In his paper “History and the Nationalisation of Hinduism”, Partha Chatterjee writes about *Rajabali* (1808), a history book by Mrityunjay Vidyalankar. This book was “the first such history in the Bengali language that we have in print” (233).

level of faith and belief, the gods and Gandhi in their own ways reign supreme in the hearts and minds of the villagers. Shahid Amin, a Marxist historian, claims that the rural people, in reality, took Gandhi to be a holy miracle-worker rather than a political leader and were swayed by his religious charisma rather than by his nationalist agenda in the Indian freedom struggle (288-348). Harish Trivedi in “Gandhian Nationalism: *Kanthapura*”, a chapter from *Literature and Nation*, also writes:

The epigraph on the title-page of the first edition, omitted from most subsequent editions, quotes (loosely) Lord Krishna’s assurance from The Bhagvad-Gita: ‘Whenever there is misery and ignorance, I come.’ In a religion, where all creatures are to be reborn endlessly, and in which God is supposed to incarnate himself ten times at various moments of crisis in human history (there have been nine incarnations to date), the supposition that Gandhi is God/ a god (Hinduism is polytheistic and there are no capital letters in the Indian languages) is not as unique and superstitious as it may seem. Outside the novel, Gandhi (Whose first name, Mohandas, means ‘a devotee of Krishna’) was already being represented as Krishna as early as 1921.

(113)

Cyril Morong in “Mythology, Ideology, and Politics” rightly suggests that “[e]very ideology has within it a myth or mythology. This provides it with the necessary emotional foundation, without which no political movement would be successful.”

In the novel, Jayaramachar’s Harikatha has conditioned the rustic Indian mind of the narrator to believe that Gandhi is sent on earth for a religious cause, and the narrator views Gandhi as Lord Rama and the Red man (the Britishers) as Ravana in the ending of the novel. The freedom struggle becomes a fight between the two incarnations of Good and Evil. In *The Ramayana*, Rama is an idealized character known for self-restraint and super-human strength. He fights with Ravana, a representation of evil, for his beloved wife, Sita. In the novel, freedom (Sita) is ‘abducted’/snatched away by Redman (Ravana), and Gandhi (Rama) fights for it.

Gandhi's weapons, like those of Rama, are truth and self-control. In the novel, Gandhi's prospective visit to England for the Round Table Conference in 1931 is compared with Rama's visit to Lanka to bring Sita back:

They say the Mahatma will go to the Redmen's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air. (Rao 183)

Moorthy feels inclined to Gandhi as he probably finds concrete manifestation of his Prahlada-like vision (69) in Gandhi. With regard to it, Meenakshi Mukherjee well observes that "...Raja Rao has attempted to present in *Kanthapura*, the kind of mind in which myth and fact are not clearly distinguishable. Moreover, for such a mind a fact does not become significant until it can be related to a myth" (*Twice Born Fiction* 137). In *Kanthapura*, there is no doubt in the innocent minds of the villagers when the construction of religious idea of "*Vidya and Avidya*" (Rao 107) is modelled on the political ideology of Gandhi. The innocent rustic people, who discuss and reject the *Maya-Vada* (14), are not aware of the fact that *Swaraj* itself is *Maya* in another discourse.

Tagore says, "It (*Swaraj*) is maya, it is like a mist, that will vanish leaving no stain on the radiance of the Eternal. However we may delude ourselves with the phrases learnt from the West, Swaraj is not our objective. (qtd. in Muralidharan 10)

In the novel, the foundation of nationalism is laid on religion and mythology. This is a helpful technique, as Cyril Morong claims, by which nationalism becomes appealing to the masses and effective. The argument is also supported by the well-known incident when Gandhi¹⁰ blamed the 1934 Bihar earthquake as a retribution from god for India- and Bharat- upholding "the sin of untouchability", and this was seriously believed by many (Hazra).

¹⁰ Gandhi believed that "our sins have more force to ruin the structure than any mere physical phenomenon" (Chakrabarty 101).

The thesis argues that the religious myths are revised to generate a feeling of togetherness among the native people, who, otherwise, are divided by the caste system, and they act as a strong antidote to casteism, a divisionary and disintegrative aspect of Hinduism.

Seenu in the sanctum ...blew the conch, people came- men, women, children-and the pariahs and the weavers and the potters all seemed to feel they were of one caste, one breath. (Rao 129)

The villagers who are united for a cause bravely face all the atrocities inflicted by the British officers and leave no stone unturned to “slay the serpent of the foreign rule” (18). In other words, the freedom struggle unites most of the villagers with a religious bond and motivates them to strive for a common cause. It is obliquely conveyed that Hindu beliefs and rituals are not only followed in Kanthapura but also in the other places of the subcontinent. The men from other villages who bring their carts also pay “Salutations to Thee, Kenchamma, goddess Supreme” (45). Even the workers who migrate from far off places readily repose their faith in Kenchamma and in the local myths and traditions (58).

Modern religious mythology is used as a political maneuver to develop the idea of nation and nationalism in the text under study. Ernest Renan in “What is a Nation” argues that it is important for a nation to have glorious past and present-day consent and desire to live together. In the novel, a mythical glorious past is constructed and presented as the historical past of India (Bharat) by Jayaramachar in his narratives. Bharat is portrayed as “the goddess of wisdom and well-being” (17) and the chief daughter of Brahma. This discourse of divinity emerges as a metanarrative and shows its effect on the native people at psychological level. The people are made to believe that they are connected through the holy land and its bright past. The religious sensibility of the people finds succor and also provides a base for the psycho-spiritual feeling of “collective self-consciousness” (Grosby 10). Religion and mythology help the people to feel psycho-spiritual unity, to be a nation; it tries to retort anti-religious forces through nationalism. In the Soldier’s Revolt, the writer says, “...the army rose against

the Red-man, for the Red-man wanted the Hindus to eat cow's flesh and the Mohamedan to eat pig's flesh..." (Rao 109).

In *Kanthapura*, the discourse of Gandhian nationalism is deeply embedded in the ideology of 'Dharma'. Nivedita Nanda in "Major Concepts of the Indian Religious Tradition" writes that 'Dharma' comes from the Sanskrit root *dhri*, which means 'to support or sustain'. 'Dharma' is thus the principle that sustains a thing or person. She adds, "Just as white light shines in different colours when passing through different media, even so *Dharma* manifests variously at different planes. It manifests as law at the cosmic level, as duty at the social plane, as virtue at the moral and religion at the spiritual plane" (Nanda 11).

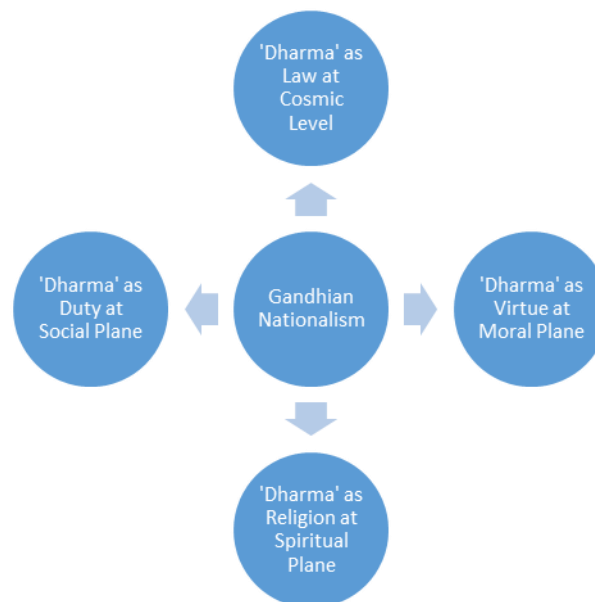


Figure 4.3 Kaleidoscopic Panorama of 'Dharma' in Gandhian Nationalism

'Dharma' as law, according to the Vedic seers, refers to cosmic order or harmony, according to which the Supreme Reality exists within all entities as "the very essence of their being". It regulates all objects from within as the Great Law of their being. It is the ultimate Truth, and to live in harmony with it is the true life. With the help of 'Yajna', which means 'participation' in the life process of the cosmos, Man can harmonize his life with the Universal order. 'Yajna' involves "non-retention, not holding back". *The Bhagvad Geeta* calls it 'Yajna-Chakra' (12). Text 9 of the third chapter of *The Bhagvad Geeta* states:

*Yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma-bandhanah
Tad-artham karma kaunteya mukta-sangah samacara (3.9)*

Work done as a sacrifice for Visnu has to be performed; otherwise work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kunti, perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will always remain free from bondage. (Prabhupada 154)

Text 19 emphasizes that “action without being attached to the fruits of activities” as a matter of duty leads to the attainment of the Supreme. In the words of Nanda, “*Yajna* is, thus, the law of Sacrifice that sustains the cosmos. It is *Dharma* as Law that makes for the integrity and stability of the cosmos. It unites God, man and the universe into one Integral Reality” (Nanda 13).

In *Kanthapura*, the villagers try to conform to the principles of the cosmic order, which is an example of ‘Dharma’ as law. Their participation in the freedom struggle is, in fact, an outcome of their psychological quest to become participants in the cosmic order. The struggle is presented to them as a fight between ‘Surs’ and ‘Asurs’, and the villagers do not “hold back” themselves in this fight. At one stage, momentarily disheartened with the Gandhian freedom struggle and Satyanarayan Puja, the villagers think, “When did Kenchamma ever refuse our three morsels of rice-or the Himavathy the ten handfuls of water?” (Rao 165). Then something unusual happens to them: “But some strange fever rushed up from the feet, it rushed up and with it our hair stood on end and our ears grew hot and something powerful shook us from head to foot...we rushed back home, trembling and gasping with the anger of the gods” (165). The villagers, who have psychologically accepted Gandhi as an incarnation of Shiva, believe their suffering to be inflicted by the Divine for even thinking of “holding back”. They surrender themselves to the divine will: “...Moorthy forgive us! Mahatma forgive us! Kenchamma forgive us! We shall go. Oh, we shall go to the end of the pilgrimage like two hundred and fifty thousand women of Bombay. We will go like them, we will go...!” (166). *The Geeta* also lays emphasis on action without attachment and without any expectation of fruit.

Karmany evadhicaras te ma phalesu kadacana

Ma karma-phala-hetur bhur ma te sango 'stv akarmani (2.47)

You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty. (Prabhupada 121)

The villagers are neither supposed to hold back nor to think of the outcome of their duty. For the innocent villagers, everything is pre-destined: "If our Karma is that, may be so" (Rao 173). With this guideline, they 'participate' in the cosmic order.

'Dharma' as Duty means Man's responsibility towards the society. The Hindu Law-givers have divided the Hindus into four groups ('Varnas') for the orderly sustenance of the society. The 'Varnas' are: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya and Shudra. Whereas 'Varnadharmas' represents a person's duty according to his birth and position in society, 'Ashramadharamas' is his duty according to his stage of life. 'Ashramadharamas' includes four stages: 'Brahmcharya' (celibacy during student life), 'Grihastya ashrama' (householder's life), 'Vanaprastha' (forest dweller's life), and 'Sannyasa' (monastic life).

The concept of duty keeps changing from person to person, nation to nation, and age to age. What is considered a duty in one set of circumstances is not regarded as a duty in another set of circumstances. A person's duty is conditioned, to a large extent, by the milieu in which he functions. The family, the community and the country, in which his lot is cast, all determine his duty. So we have *Varnashrama-dharamas* (duty peculiar to a community), *Kula-dharma* (family-duty), *Rashtra-dharma* (national duty), *Vishwa-dharma* (duty for the entire world) and so on, in an ever-spiralling curve. Each later duty includes and transcends the earlier ones. (Nanda 16)

In *Kanthapura*, ‘Rashtra-dharma’ is the need of the hour as “Brahma’s chief daughter Bharatha” is enslaved (Rao 17). It is a time of crisis. It is believed that “[t]hey (the British) have come to bind us and to whip us, to make our women die milkless and our men die ignorant” (17). To save the beloved daughter of Brahma, according to Jayaramachar, Lord Shiva himself has incarnated as Gandhi on earth.

In Gandhian discourse of nationalism, it is deemed important to strike a balance between the ‘Rashtra-dharma’ and ‘Ashramdharma’. Regarding his wife’s participation in the activities of the Sevika Sangha, Suryanaryan says, “I don’t know, aunt, but I want my wife to look after my comforts” (110). Then Rangamma says, “of course,...If we are to help others, we must begin with our husbands.” And all Sevikas say, “We should do our duty. If not, it is no use belonging to the Gandhi” (110-111).

Division of men on the basis of ‘Varnadharama’ is rejected now, as ‘Rashtra-dharma’, which demands unity, is deemed as the pre-requisite of the society. All men including untouchables are equal in ‘Rashtra-dharma’. Moorthy ignites in the hearts of the villagers an urge to struggle together. According to him, unity is the basic requirement to forge a front against the British. In this crisis, collective effort from the people of all castes and classes is needed to achieve the goal of freedom. Metaphorically, Moorthy proposes to build “a thousand-pillar temple, a temple more firm than any that had yet been builded” (123). Now, even Brahmins are asked to spin, traditionally the work of weavers (23). It is a perfect example of what Nanda says, “Each later duty includes and transcends the earlier ones” (Nanda 16).

‘Dharma’ as Virtue is related to the eternal and universal values of righteousness or ethics. The Indian religious tradition recognizes five principal moral virtues known as ‘Yamas’. “The *Yamas* or ethical disciplines are: non-injury, truthfulness, chastity, non-stealing, and non-receiving of gifts” (17). Gandhi’s autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* incorporates a number of incidents of Gandhi’s life that exemplify these ‘Yamas’. However, the novel under study is mainly focused on the first three ‘Yamas’. Gandhi always spoke in favour of ‘Ahimsa’ (non-injury or non-violence). In the novel also, there are many examples

which testify these principles. Moorthy, a Gandhian at that time, is found appealing to the villagers to be non-violent “in the name of the Mahatma” (Rao 65). So does Ratna during the brutal encounter with the soldiers: “No violence, in the name of the Mahatma” (178). Moorthy’s fast ‘purifies’ him and “the idea that he could ever think of her (Ratna) other than as a sister shocked him and sent a shiver down his spine” (70). Moorthy’s self-chastisement has basis in *Manusmiriti*. Observing a fast also helps the seeker to realize God, according to the Hindu religious tradition. For Moorthy, Gandhi emerges as a god figure, and following the Gandhian path makes him “lighter in limb and lighter in soul” (73). It makes him ready for his journey of freedom struggle. Ramakrishnayya, who is a wise Hindu Brahmin, doesn’t interrupt Moorthy when he observes a three day fast because he sees it as a spiritual process: “If he wants to rise lovingly to God and burn the dross of the flesh through vows, it is not for us sinners to say ‘Nay, nay’”. Moorthy also swears upon his holy thread “I shall keep pure and noble” (41). It refers to Moorthy’s commitment to celibacy and chastity. Gandhi always believed that God existed in Truth. In the novel also, Truth is given supreme importance in the preparation for the freedom struggle. Moorthy, at the time of enrolling members for the Congress Panchayat, “spoke to them of spinning, ahimsa, and truth...he said, ‘stand before the god and vow you will never break the law’” (80-81).

‘Dharma’ as Religion, in this context, includes rites, rituals, dogmas, mythologies, fasts, pilgrimages, customs, austere practices, etc. Being external, these elements are not essential in the sustenance of ‘Dharma’. Nevertheless, “[t]he non-essentials too have a role to play. They preserve the inner spirit as husk preserves the seed” (Nanda 18). In *Kanthapura*, Jayaramachar’s Harikatha is an amalgamation of religion, mythology, and politics. It is in continuation of routine “reading-parties and camphor ceremonies” (Rao 16). This practice reveals how the seeds of Gandhian nationalism are sown through the ritual of ‘Katha’. Apart from it, Moorthy’s observance of fast for purification also carries religious as well as political implications. To mention another incident, Satyanaryana Puja is done by the city boys before facing the soldiers and during the march, and the narrator tells us, “it was not ‘Satyanarayan Maharaj ki jai!’ that came to our throats but ‘Vande

Mataram!’” (169). This religious procession becomes a ceremony of political march, ignited by Gandhian nationalism.

Gandhian Nationalism: A Journey

Meenakshi Mukherjee says, “Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* appears to feel an affinity with the Gandhian movement that sweeps over the village he describes” (*Twice Born Fiction* 45). However, the in-depth study of the novel reveals that the novelist has artistically portrayed the failure of Gandhian movement in terms of its ideology and practical implication. Gandhian nationalism is only a religio-political journey, but not a destination in *Kanthapura*. Although the novel is all about the influence of Gandhian nationalism in *Kanthapura*, yet it does not glorify it. Through the technique of inversion, Rao clearly evinces its failure in the ending, and the novel marks a shift from Gandhian ideology to Nehruvian socialism. Ramakrishnayya, who represents experience, once comments about Moorthy and his Gandhi affair: “young men were always fervent till they touched the bitter leaves of life” (Rao 37). The significance of this statement becomes prominent when Moorthy does not return to *Kanthapura* to sustain his struggle in the ending of the novel. The novel reveals that the doubts regarding the effectiveness of Gandhian philosophy rise in the mind of Moorthy, who is usually referred to as a true Gandhian. He writes to Ratna. “Have faith in your enemy, he (Gandhi) says, have faith in him and correct him. But the world of men is hard to move, and once in motion it is wrong to stop till the goal is reached” (182). Here, the reference is to the suspension of Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Movement in March 1931¹¹.

¹¹ The Civil Disobedience: The Lahore session of the Congress presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1929 declared complete independence of India as the goal of the Congress. On 26th January 1930, the country took the pledge of complete independence. On 12th March 1930, Gandhi ji started with 79 associates on his historic march to the Dandi Beach. He completed 200 miles journey in 24 days and he broke the salt laws on 6th April 1930. The Civil Disobedience Movement was now on. Everywhere there were arrests, lathi-charges, and shootings. When the farmers refused to pay taxes, their lands were confiscated and their houses were burnt. The Civil Disobedience movement, which started with the Dandi March, soon developed into a very strong Movement (Grover, B.L. 318).

On 5th March 1931, a pact (Gandhi-Irwin Pact) was signed between Gandhi and Lord Irwin, Governor General of India. “The civil disobedience movement was provisionally suspended and Gandhi attended the Second Round Table conference to discuss the scheme of constitutional reform for India. He returned home towards the end of 1931 greatly disappointed and talked of resuming Civil Disobedience Movement. In January 1932, the government struck again, arrested Gandhi with other Congress leaders and declared the Congress an illegal organization. However, the CDM gained more popularity and more than one lakh persons courted arrest. In 1933, Gandhi confessed the failure of the movement and resigned his membership of the Congress and confined his work to uplift the Harijans” (318).

In reality, leaders like Subash Bose and Vithalbhai Patel called the suspension of the movement ‘a confession of failure’¹².

Throughout the novel, there is a general indifference to the very philosophy and aims of Gandhi and the Congress. “Nanjamma does not know what all this is about” (23). Even Vasudev, who asks Moorthy to see the pariahs of the Skeffington State, is not shown interfering when his mother rebukes Rachanna: “Can’t you shut your mouth, you pariah!...You always want to pollute the food of brahmins with your evil tongues”(63). When there is a scuffle between Bade Khan and the pariahs, “Moorthy cries out, ‘No beatings, sisters. No beatings, in the name of the Mahatma.’ But the women are fierce and they will tear the beard from Bade Khan’s face” (65). At heart, the villagers also know that total reliance upon Gandhian ideology would not help them in the long run. They finally refuse to go ahead with the Gandhian struggle when Moorthy is arrested. The narrator says:

‘Since the arrest of Moorthy, they are afraid.’ They say, ‘we are not going to sit behind cage-bars like Kraaled elephants,’ and when I say, ‘What does that matter, we are for the Mahatma, they say, ‘yes yes, learned sir, but our lands will go uncultivated, and there will be neither child nor woman to pull the weeds or direct the canal water’.

(112)

When Moorthy is released, he being aware of the fickle-mindedness of the villagers, asks them to swear “again” to speak truth, to spin their daily one hundred yards, and put aside the idea of the holy Brahmin and the untouchable pariah” (123). The narrator says, “Mad we were daughters, mad to follow Moorthy” (165). In addition, Jayaramachar, who constructs the image of Gandhi as an incarnation of Shiva, is called “a funny harikatha-man” (16) by her. With the passage of time, the number of Congress volunteers decreases from “a hundred and thirty nine” (131) to “seventy seven” (139) in the novel.

¹² “The suspension was commented upon by Subhas Bose and Vithalbhai Patel, who were in Europe at that time, in a joint manifesto they issued, thus: ‘The latest action of Mr. Gandhi in suspending Civil Disobedience is a confession of failure.... We are clearly of the opinion that Mr. Gandhi as a political leader has failed. The time has come for a radical reorganization of the Congress on a new principle, with a new method, for which, a new leader is essential’” (qtd. in Desai 344).

The villagers of Kanthapura do not feel that the freedom struggle is for the people; they confine it to Gandhi. "Mahatma will call us to act, we shall have to go out and fight for him" (108). "Fight for him" clearly reveals that the villagers do not take the Gandhian struggle as their own fight. They feel indifferent to social and political implications of Gandhian ideology. They have the illusion that they will have no taxes and there will be no police. When Moorthy observes fast, Rangamma says, "This is all very well for the Mahatma, but not for us poor creatures" (67). Dore also makes Moorthy's fun (71). At Moorthy's mention of Gandhian idea of "love even your enemies", Range Gowda says, "That's for the Mahatma and you, Moorthappa- not for us poor folk!" (75). Even Moorthy himself is not sure about the path shown by Gandhi. He "stands trembling and undecided" (77) when he approaches a pariah's house for the first time. Interestingly, although Moorthy is spreading the word of Gandhi, yet he is not firm and sure about it. The narrator, understandingly, comments, "After all a Brahmin is a Brahmin, sister?" (79). Thus, the very spirit of Gandhism, "we are to convert them" (164) terribly fails. Rao suggests that it is not easy to uproot casteism and traditional beliefs embedded in the rural psyche through the Gandhian discourse of nationalism.

Gandhian ideology turns to dust when the villagers of Kanthapura face the brutality of the police. The narrator says, "We think neither of Puttamma nor Seethamma nor Moorthy nor the Mahatma, but the whole world seems a jungle in battle..." (154). It is total chaos, women have no idea what is to be done: "We asked ourselves, 'Which way shall we go- which way?'" (154). The national spirit based on 'love your enemy' gets defiled when the women feel happy to see Bhatta's house on fire (157).

It is the failure of the Gandhian movement when the villagers realize that the poetic idealism of Gandhi has led to their pains and pangs. The grave situation is almost like a dead-lock for the villagers. It shatters all their hopes: "We knew there was nothing more to do; and we saw sand and water and empty stomachs...and we all had tears in our eyes" (162). And when the villagers start realizing their mistake, it is too late.

She (Satamma) said the drummer was saying the village would be sacked again,...and she said she had done nothing and she was not a Gandhi person, and it was all this Moorthy, this Moorthy who had brought all this misery upon us (162).

However, when the villagers doubt the integrity of Gandhism, they get “some strange fever” and for the superstitious villagers, it is “the anger of gods” and they feel forced to follow Gandhism out of fear. They give assurance to themselves, “Men will come from the city, after all, to protect us! We will go...!” (166). It is clear that the villagers are not mentally prepared to join the Gandhian cause; they are with the Mahatma for religious reasons, and they cannot momentarily imagine that Mahatma Gandhi is not a saint in literal sense. “It is not for nothing the Mahatma is a Mahatma, and he would not be Mahatma if the gods were not with him” (125). There is no mention in the novel of the villagers having been told that ‘the Mahatma’ was a title given to Gandhi by Tagore. Perhaps, the villagers fail to understand that though Gandhi is a noble man but he is not a saint in the traditional sense of the word.

The very Gandhian “revolution” (178) of “three thousand men” (174) aimed at Swaraj fails to achieve its political and social purpose.

The peasants will pay back the revenues, the young will not boycott the toddy shops, and everything they say, will be as before. (182)

The struggle has been portrayed in black colours as it eventuates in “lost this...lost that” (182). Undoubtedly, the narrator admits that there is some internal gain after going through the brutalities and tyrannies of the British government- “...but there is something that has entered our hearts, an abundance like the Himavathy....” (182). The writer, through his mouthpiece Moorthy¹³, doesn’t doubt the integrity of Gandhi who is “a noble person, a saint” (182). However, he finds problem with Gandhian ways in the contemporary era when “the world of men is hard to move”

¹³ In an interview with Shiva Niranjana, Raja Rao frankly admits: “Moorthy is myself.”

(182). The novelist tries to highlight the futility of the Gandhian struggle for independence in terms of its material output.

The tide of Gandhian nationalism recedes in the ending of the novel. The villagers don't have access to the authentic, objective or at least firsthand knowledge of the world outside. Rangamma herself is in jail. Nobody is there to read out newspapers to them or to mould their views. The villagers stand at the same place where they were left by their leader, Moorthy. They still rely on the narratives of the fellow villagers for information. Most importantly, they have not experienced the forbidding pain of long imprisonment. It is said, "Rangamma will come out of prison. They say Rangamma is all for the Mahatma." (183). First of all, the version of 'they' is too general to be authentic here. Rangamma herself is out of the scene as she is in prison. And it is hard to give a final word to Rangamma's would-be reaction to the "lost" (182) out of prison. After all, there is neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura. Like Moorthy, Ratna also does not return to live in the village again; she leaves for Bombay (183).

Kanthapura, a traditional village is finally desolate and dilapidated: "there's neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura" (184). Patel Range Gowda, the Tiger (12), is "lean as an areca-nut tree" (183) in the ending of the novel. Many people lose their lives; others go behind bars; and some others migrate to other places. Bhatta with all his money has gone to Kashi because "[i]n Kashi, for every hymn and hiccup you get a rupee" (184). Concubine Chinna is still in Kanthapura to welcome her new customers, Bombay men. Gandhian movement does not change Bhatta and Chinna. The novel ends on the hope of protection from Kenchamma and Shiva. The anguish of this struggle has left indelible expression on the psyche of Range Gowda, once a Patel, who now admits, "But to tell you the truth, Mother, my heart it beat like a drum" (184). The loss can never be compensated. The Congress activities in the village eventuate in destruction, which was prophesied by Bhatta in the beginning: "There must be an end to this chatter. If not the very walls of Kanthapura will crackle and fall before the year is out" (83). Gandhian nationalism ultimately succumbs to defeat and destruction in the novel. Jana Balađova rightly says that

nationalism is a selfish, deaf, and blind ideology, which sacrifices the lives of those whom it seemingly protects.

Gandhian freedom struggle looks forward to Hindu-Muslim unity. It undoubtedly aspires for a high purpose and goal.

[W]e will build a thousand pillared temple, a temple more firm than any that hath yet been builded, and each one of you be ye pillars in it, and when the temple is built, stone by stone, and man by man, and the bell hung to the roof and the Eagle-tower shaped and planted, we shall invoke the Mother to reside with us in dream and in life. India then will live in a temple of our making (123).

“Thousand pillared temple” symbolically refers to the assimilation of all castes and classes in India. However, from the ending of the novel, it can be inferred that caste and class division could not disappear because Patel Range Gowda’s wife Lakshmi is given place in the house of Patel Chenna because she is one of their “community” (183). Outside the novel also, in the words of Bipan Chandra, “Gandhiji’s major political failure lay on the communal front. Totally committed to secularism in general and Hindu-Muslim unity in particular, he could not successfully oppose those who stood for communal hatred and communal division” (*Essays on Indian Nationalism* 93).

The novelist encapsulates the dark tragedy of the Gandhian struggle towards the end of the novel. However, Narsingh Srivastava views the novel from a different perspective. He says, “We have to bear in mind always that *Kanthapura* is a novel of selfless action, and that is why it ends with action and not with the fruit thereof. This ideal of *The Geeta* can be befitting motto of this novel. Freedom was bound to come after such a great sacrifice, and that was the hope of the people of the thirties and the early forties which ultimately proved true” (46). Srivastava’s approach is narrow and historically defective. Giving all the credit of Indian independence to Gandhian struggle is itself wrong. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly remarks, “[T]he Nationalist movement itself was not a single movement but a combination of many forces sometimes working together and sometimes in contrary directions. The

Gandhian ideology may have been the prime mover, but along with it there were the leftist, the terrorist, and the revolutionary parties, working towards the same end through different means” (43-4 *Twice Born Fiction*). Moreover, Moorthy’s affinity towards Nehru clearly reveals that the novel is not about the glory of the Gandhian struggle. Rumina Sethi in *Myths of the Nation* says, “As the novel draws to a close, we witness the emergence of socialist politics” (98). If *Kanthapura* had been written to praise Gandhian nationalism, Moorthy would have never turned towards Nehruvian ideology. The conclusion of the novel is not about the success of the Gandhian ways, but it is about the discontentment of the educated youth with the path shown by Gandhi. At this crucial juncture, a ray of hope in the form of a new ideology and a new leader appears on the scene. This shift towards Nehruvian ideology is realistic. Rumina Sethi tells us:

In fact, a number of Congress members who had ceased to believe in the efficacy of non-violence and satyagraha saw socialism as a radical alternative to Gandhian politics. These younger men and women had grown impatient with the slow and halting manner in which their elder leaders were conducting the fight for freedom. The formation of a socialist party was initiated in jails during 1930-1 and 1932-4 by a group of Congress volunteers who were disillusioned with Gandhian ideology. The notion that freedom cannot be defined in political terms alone but must have a socio-economic content began increasingly to be associated with Nehru who became the undisputed leader of the younger generation of Congressmen. For Nehru, a commitment to socialism was the only ‘way of ending poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people.’ It was during this period that Nehru’s views came steadily into conflict with those of Gandhi. He became critical of Gandhi’s condemnation of large-scale industrialization, and was cynical of his policy of trusteeship which advocated the humane aspect of authority to which the labourers were unquestioningly to submit. (*Myths of the Nation* 99)

Raja Rao finds fault with the basic aim of Gandhian 'Swaraj', which, according to him, is not an absolute panacea for social and political evils. He is inclined towards the path shown by Nehru, the path that leads to economic reforms through equal distribution. It is expected that Nehruvian socialism will eradicate "pariahs and poverty" (Rao 183). Faith is reposed in Nehru who says, "[I]n Swaraj there shall be neither the rich nor the poor" (183). It brings in the entire debate of the means of production. The Skeffington Coffee Estate symbolizes private ownership and colonization, and "as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee Estate and city cars that can roll up the Bebbur Mound, and gas-lights and Coolie cars, there will always be pariahs and poverty" (154). Moorthy proposes that the means of production should be owned by the whole society or the state rather by an individual or some foreign power. And this is what Jawaharlal Nehru actually stood for. Nehru rejected the Gandhian theory of trusteeship, according to which the rich were allowed to retain their riches with them with the understanding that they were their trustees rather than owners. At last, Moorthy openly declares that he is with Nehru (Not Gandhi!)- "I am with him and his men" (183). The novelist was probably¹⁴ influenced by socialist ideals during the period he wrote this novel. In the novel, the hammer-and-sickle country (147), where there is equality and no casteism, has been presented as an ideal country. The writer overtly gives more weightage to Nehruvian Socialism than Gandhian ideology.

In fact, various scholars have criticized the Gandhian thoughts and plans of action¹⁵ during the freedom struggle of India. M. N. Roy, the Marxist critic of Gandhi's social and political ideas, felt that Gandhi's constructive programme was inadequate for India's "economic salvation" (Chakrabarty 91). He found Gandhi's approach "verbal and couched in sentiment", rather than involving the masses (92). First of all, 'Charkha' was not as popular as conceived. Secondly, 'Khaddar' cost

¹⁴ Rumina Sethi says, "It is possible that Rao was swayed by socialist ideas in the 1930s in view of his later association with young socialists and their underground activities during the Quit India movement of 1942, and the representation of the seductive quality of Kirillov's Marxist philosophy in *Comrade Kirillov*" (98). Footnote

¹⁵ Bidyut Chakrabarty in his book *Social and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* throws light on Gandhi's constructive programme, which was announced by the Congress Working Committee on 12th February, 1922 at Bardoli immediately after the events at Chauri Chaura where violence broke out in the wake of the Non-Cooperation Movement. This programme was centered on 'Charkha' (Spinning-wheel), 'Khaddar' (Home Spun Cotton), removal of untouchability, and fight against alcohol consumption (91-2).

more than mill-cloth and Roy felt that the forcible application of home-spun during the Swadeshi campaign had been responsible for the movement's decline. Apart from it, removal of untouchability and the campaign against alcohol consumption were not "effective" (92). Untouchability, an old age practice, couldn't be affected by Gandhi's "ethical propagandizing". In the same way, "sermons" against alcoholism, which acted as "a handy device" for the poor "to drown their sorrows in the unconsciousness", couldn't "counter" the issue "effectively" (92).

Tagore also felt that "as an archaic tool that had been useful at a particular historical juncture, 'Charkha' appeared to have exhausted its potential to curtail poverty effectively" (98). He delinked Swaraj from 'Charkha'. "It ('Swaraj') was not simply an act of 'spinning thread, weaving khaddar or holding discourses'; it was a plan for action involving the masses with a vision of society, free from exploitation of all kinds" (99). He didn't find spinning creative. "Spinning for Gandhi was therefore a symbolic form of identification with the masses while Tagore, as shown, was suspicious of any such appeal that tended to gloss over the inherent diversity among the Indian people" (101). Gandhian call for withdrawal from the schools and colleges and burning of foreign clothes during the Non-Cooperation Movement also arose criticism from Tagore, who believed that it was "the great injury and injustice which had been done to those boys who were tempted away from their career before any real provision was made, could never be made good to them"¹⁶ (qtd. in Chakrabarty 96).

Mohan Dharia calls the Gandhian path of hunger-strike "controversial". He says, "Even according to some of his (Gandhi's) colleagues the hunger strike was immoral, as it compelled people to act against their desire to save his precious life" (37). Moorthy, in the novel, observes fast strictly for self-purification; he simply believes that much violence has been done because of him and he wants to purify

¹⁶Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Call of Truth', reproduced in Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet: letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore, 1915-1941*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1997.

himself. He does not know that fasting is an “emotional arm twisting”¹⁷ (Sethi 80). He says, “The fault of others is the fruit of one’s own disharmony” (67).

Kanthapura (1938) was not penned to glorify Gandhian ideology even when the novelist claimed in an interview with Shiva Nirajan (1977) that Gandhi was presented as “the chief inspiration” in the novel. He said:

Moorthy was a young man who felt dissatisfied after he suffered a defeat. His faith in Gandhi was shaken for a moment. But the novel does project the Mahatma as the chief inspiration. At one time, Nehru was also dissatisfied with Gandhi’s way of struggle. But if Nehru had not been a true Gandhian, India would not have been in the state we are today. At best you can say that Moorthy was a deviating Gandhian. Nehru too was a deviating Gandhian. (23)

This comment of Raja Rao does not fit to the actual novel. In this comment, the writer claims that Moorthy’s faith in Gandhi was shaken “for a moment”. On the contrary, there is no mention in the novel that Moorthy’s shift is momentary and transient. In fact, most of the people who remain faithful to Gandhian ideology even in the end of the novel are those villagers who can be easily manipulated by people like “the shrewd Moorthy”¹⁸ (Naik 62). Most of the villagers fail to assert their identity and individuality throughout the novel; they are simply followers. Moorthy uses Range Gowda’s pressure and tactfully persuades the naïve villagers to succumb to some obscure cause. Then Bhatta, from the opposite party, appears on the scene. He maneuvers Venkamma into setting “fire” (84) and on the marriage of Venkamma’s daughter, the villagers forget about Moorthy who is left alone to think over his excommunication, when, the narrator

¹⁷ Rumina Sethi in *Myths of the Nation* throws light on the amalgamation of politics and religion by Gandhi in his life. Originally, Gandhi took fasting to support his vow of sexual restraint or brahmacharya. Later, this tradition assumed another dimension, ‘that of penitence for others’ sins’ (79), when Gandhi observed fast because of a ‘moral fall’ of two of his inmates. And Gandhi himself admitted in his autobiography that he observed fasts to make the guilty parties realize his distress. Sethi adds, “It can be inferred that his fasts were, to an extent, forms of emotional arm twisting and, thereby, irresistible. Gandhi used the hunger-strike as a technique of disapproval and protest, broadly as an appeal to the villagers and the lower classes” (80).

¹⁸ M.K. Naik says, “...the shrewd Moorthy knows that the master key to the rustic Indian mind is religion and so he puts the new Gandhian wine into the age-old bottle of ancient “Harikatha” and thus indoctrinates the Kanthapurians” (Naik 62).

tells the reader, “We all said, ‘this Bhatta and Venkamma are not so wicked after all’” (86). The Kanthapurians are innocently open enough to be swayed by any other ideology or thought if one is presented by “shrewd” men such as Moorthy and Bhatta. Gandhian nationalism is a result of manipulation of the rustic mind rather than a matter of choice for the villagers.

Raja Rao believes that “all creation is entirely impersonal”¹⁹ (qtd. in Srivastava, Narsingh 9). According to him, “The great writer sinks...into the depths of impersonality” and “this comes not by contrivance but insight and perception and vibrant experience at the time of writing.”²⁰ Importantly, the expressions- “depths of impersonality” and “vibrant experience at the time of writing”- signal towards that impersonal experience which the writer feels at the particular time of writing. And obviously, the experience of the writer may be different when he is not writing. When the writer tries to correlate himself with his creation later on, he veritably moves away from “the depths of impersonality”. He is not in a position to enjoy “vibrant experience” which he particularly enjoys at the time of writing. At this moment, objectivity turns into subjectivity and a difference of opinion may creep in. The original text attains a position in the timeless galaxy, which in turn bestows eternity and stability upon the text by restricting any addition to or removal from it. The text remains stable forever, irrespective of the author’s views which change with time for various reasons. When a text is created, it becomes an autonomous entity and there is ‘death of the author’ (Roland Barthes). When its writer tries to make a change in the text after its publication, the change is not seen as an extension to the same text but as the birth of another text. As Rao claims that his novel is an outcome of objectivity, his subjective view which he shared after almost four decades after the publication of the novel cannot be accepted without raising eyebrows. To call *Kanthapura* a Gandhian novel seems to be only an afterthought and might be the writer’s attempt to remove ‘confusion’²¹ by delimiting the novel to a confined perspective.

¹⁹ A.P. O’Brien, “Meeting Raja Rao” in *Prajna* Vol. II, No. 2, 1966, P. CLXXXII.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, CLXXXIII

²¹ In an interview published in *The Illustrated Weekly* of India in 1964, Raja Rao admitted, “When I wrote *Kanthapura* I was confused and lost person. And that was why I gave up writing for a long time” (Alterno 5). The writer’s view of India was incomplete before the publication of the novel in 1938.

Apart from it, even if we ignore Rao's concept of 'impersonal creation', the text still refuses to be a Gandhian novel. If the chronological order of composition of Rao's works is juxtaposed with the stages of his development as an artist and philosopher, one can easily trace Rao's change of position from anti-Gandhian to Pro Gandhian. Rao was possibly swayed by socialist ideas in the 1930s (Sethi 98); the point which is also evident in *Kanthapura* (published in 1938) and *Comrade Kirillov* (published in 1965). Both the works don't portray Gandhi as a hero. Alterno says:

...*Comrade Kirillov* however was not published as the writer's second novel as it should have been....Interestingly, Rao has always been keen to point out that *Comrade Kirillov* was an earlier thing (Niranjan, 'An Interview with Raja Rao' : 22)....the novel was conceived some time before 1950, during a period when Rao's existential wavering was not yet over...we might conclude that *Comrade Kirillov* belongs to an earlier phase of Rao's career, which depicts the author as the one who 'did not know what to write anymore,' still in search of a unique literary style. (126-127)

It is clear that the point where Moorthy leaves, Kirillov starts. "Kirillov, however, knew one thing: he was finished with Gandhi and all that" (Rao *Comrade Kirillov* 22). Later on, Raja Rao became more interested in Indian religion and philosophy and became spiritual minded, which also finds reflection in *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960). Rao was, now, in a state of mind to explore and understand the spiritual significance of Gandhian thought, which is testified by his later work, *The Great Indian way: A life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998), an inward biography of Gandhi. In this work, Rao gives high pedestal to Gandhi, a Satyagrahi (Truth-seeker). Thus, the novelist's attitude which was anti-Gandhian at the moment of

Rao admitted that there was 'extreme intellectual confusion' even just after the independence ("Introduction" *Wither India* vii); definitely, he himself was part of it. And, it may be the reason that *Comrade Kirillov* (1965), a clearly Marxist text, "however, was not published as the writer's second work" (Alterno 126) in those days "as it should have been. It went to press much later in 1965", probably when the writer was philosophical and had nothing to do with politics as such. Rao always emphasized that *Comrade Kirillov* was "an earlier thing".

writing *Kanthapura* changed in his later works, and Rao tried to justify the text as Pro-Gandhian after the four decades of its composition.

The novel is inclined towards Nehruvian ideology. Undoubtedly, the novel clearly takes side of Nehru, but it is not out and out Nehruvian novel. There are lacunas that can be challenged. Mondal writes:

In *Kanthapura*, the grandmother's *recit* is retrospective, a narrative of 'becoming' being narrated by a 'self' different to that which is represented in the narrative. In other words, the *recit* represents and imposes meaning on the process of her becoming a Gandhian after the event. Her narrative is thus not a spontaneous representation of events but rather a reconstruction of those events in order to express the 'meaning' of Gandhism for her, and its effect upon her. (110)

The story is the grandma's personal account of specific incidents that occurred at a specific place. Some of her statements which reveal the inner most private thoughts of the other characters and other minute details of incidents make the grandmother unreliable or pseudo-omniscient narrator. For example, when Moorthy visits the untouchables, the narrator tells us about his dilemma: "(He) smells the stench of hide and the stench of pickled pigs, and the roof seems to shake, and all the gods and all the manes of heaven seem to cry out against him, and his hands steal mechanically to the holy thread, the holding it, he feels he would like to say, 'Hari-Om, Hari-Om'" (Rao 77). And, the narrator also knows that Moorthy in Rangamma's house is "thinking, how is one an outcaste?" (86).

The scope of the story is too narrow and personal to be considered as a genuine account of the Indian freedom movement. In Plato's terms, 'reality' of the narrator is a number of times away from 'Reality.' In fact, the narrative is about the impression of a fragment of the Indian freedom struggle on a rustic mind. The novel doesn't try to present what Gandhi actually did and said regarding religion and politics; it is in fact about how and what people perceived of Gandhi in the rural interiors during the freedom struggle; it is about how the wave of Gandhism was constructed and deconstructed among the masses in villages during the freedom

struggle. Here, real Gandhi is not important in the sense that the novel basically deals with the influence of 'secondhand' Gandhian thoughts and image on the rustic mind. The novel doesn't focus on Gandhi, but the people and their participation in the freedom struggle "in the name of the Mahatama" (178). By employing an unreliable narrator, the writer with socialist leanings has ultimately left the novel open ended at the crucial time of its composition when the crystallization of the Indian freedom struggle was taking place. He artistically left the final verdict to Time that would decide the ultimate destiny and socio-political construction of Gandhian thought, Nehruvian socialism, and the images of their proponents.

Anti-Colonial Nationalism

The novel portrays the life of a village community that has no direct interference of colonialism and its ill consequences in day-to-day life. It is only when the seeds of Gandhian nationalism are sown, the real trouble begins for the villagers of Kanthapura. It justifies the imperialist view of the Indian freedom struggle that the elite (Here, Gandhi and his men) for their political interests 'used' the masses. However, the writer also delineates the cruel aspect of colonialism in India through the Skeffington Coffee Estate, a symbol of the British Colonialism in India, which presents a gory tale of silent exploitation. A large number of workers are fetched here through planned migration; they are made to believe that "[t]here is nothing but rice around us" in the Estate (Rao 51). Mothers assure their children that the Estate is a place "where you can have milk like water-just like water" (51). However, as they reach closer to the Estate, the maistri's shows his true colours: "Just like harder became the road and the stiffer the maistri" (52). At the Skeffington Estate, the coolies are emotionally, physically, and economically exploited. This place has its own 'law'- "[E]verybody would get a beating when they deserved one and sweets when they worked well" (52). Workers become slaves in the colonial mode of production. They are oppressed; they are deprived of their mental as well as physical freedom. They are conditioned to be like machines and at the mercy of their master: "They (the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate) would be pushed behind the gates, for the white master wanted them" (151).

The colonialists are presented as the capitalists who always focus on their material gains. In this game of materialism, human values are utterly overlooked by the colonial power. The uneducated and hunger stricken coolies have no other option but to bow down to the British master: “You are a dispenser of good, O Maharaja, we are the lickens of your feet” (52). The lives of the coolies in the Estate are miserable and hard. The old Sahib beats them and makes sure that they continuously work without taking any break. The coolies work in the fields where there are dangerous snakes and where diseases outbreak during rains. A number of workers have lost their lives because of these two reasons here. Rachanna is fired from work for following Gandhi. He is not even paid his dues. Amid this lawlessness, even his friends do not come forward to help him, in fear of losing job. Exploitation has become an inseparable part of the workers’ life (65).

In reality, some of the classes like the peasantry and working class, were the victims of the Great Economic Depression (October 1929) and thus were willing to lend their shoulders for the national struggle (Pradhan 169). Although the novelist does not directly show the influence of the Great Economic Depression on the Indian freedom struggle, yet he successfully portrays the economic instability in the rural interiors of pre-independent India. In the novel, the rich become the richer and the poor the poorer. The novel is set in the period of economic change. Shyamala A. Narayan in *Raja Rao: Man and His Works* writes, “It is not the physical force but economic necessity that keeps the coolies from returning home (34).” Siddayya knows that pariah Rangayya would not be able to save money and go home (Rao 59). Rao, under the influence of socialism, satirizes the capitalist mode of production in the colonial setting.

The drain of wealth theory²² states the economic loss of India during the colonial period. Kanthapura is blessed with the bounties of natural resources. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the setting of the novel as “many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane...forest of teak and of jack, of

²² “The constant flow of wealth from India to England for which India didn’t get an adequate economic, commercial or material return has been described by Indian national leaders and economists as ‘drain’ of wealth from India. The drain of wealth was interpreted as an indirect tribute extracted by imperial Britain from India year after year” (Grover, B.L. 440).

sandal and of sal,,the great granaries of trade” (7). She adds, “Our carted cardamoms and coffee get into the ships the Red-men bring, and, so they say, they go across the seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live”. Through the Skeffington Coffee Estate, Raja Rao hints at the dark side of the colonial era, which is a historical fact. “The Englishman’s mission in India was economic exploitation; the ‘Whiteman’s burden’ was the burden of wealth that the Whiteman carried out of India (Grover, B.L. 467).” V.I. Pavlov in *Economic Freedom versus Imperialism* (1963) estimates that in the 1930s the British colonist squeezed India of 130-140 million pounds in pure tribute alone, “with this amount India could annually construct three plants of the Bhilai type, each of which would exceed in capacity the country’s iron and steel industry in the colonial period” (7).

The novel also portrays Gandhian concern over this drain of wealth by the English. The Gandhian men, as it was in reality, encourage the people to boycott toddy shops and to accept Indian goods in the novel. The distribution of free spinning wheels is a part of this project. Besides, to give it a success, the religious discourse is modified and associated with it. “To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma” (Rao 23). Mahatma says, “[S]pinning is as purifying as praying” (25). “Spinning is an act of self-reliance and independence whereas the use of imported cloth is the acceptance of economic dependence and dominance of the British” (Uniyal 52). Gandhian nationalism is against the loss of India at economic front.

Rao depicts the misuse of power and dehumanization as ill-effects of colonialism. When the Sahib kills a brahim clerk who refuses to give him his daughter, the Red-Man’s court forgives the culprit sahib. The sahib does not pay even a single penny to the victim’s family even after making a promise. In the Estate, Sahib gives shelter to Bade Khan because “a policeman on the spot is always useful” (Rao 61). Bade Khan, the representative of the British government, is a symbol of terror and insecurity among the coolies of the Skeffington Estate: “...for Bade Khan has just to sneeze or cough and everybody will say, ‘I lick your feet’” (61). Vasudev informs, “In the Estate he (Bade Khan) spits and beats everyone” (113).

Colonialism and imperialism bring terror, injustice, discrimination, social insecurity and exploitation. Bade Khan, a representative of the British rule, is evil personified. He does not bother about law though he is a policeman (64). Apart from it, the viciousness of the policemen is shown when they don't spare even children and women in the clash by the Tippur stream bridge: "They catch the children by the hair and by the ear and by the jacket" (132). The novelist writes, "[W]hen Rangamma was made to sit the Police Inspector gave her such a kick in the back that she fell down unconscious" (142). He adds, "Then the Police Inspector rushed at the coolies and whipped them till they began to search their way among us..." (142). At Dandi also, the police show their barbarian face; the violators of the Salt laws are brutally tortured.

The police say, 'you have broken the law,' and the men say, 'But we have broken it long ago, and the Mahatma broke it first,' but the police don't know what to answer, and they drag the men to prison, they drag them and spit on them and would have beaten them... (126)

This description is actually inspired by the actual cruelties and atrocities of the police during the colonial rule. Webb Miller, an American journalist, has written about the actual scene of the exploitation in the following words: "At times, the spectacle of unresisting men being methodically bashed into bloody pulp sickened me so much that I had to turn away...I felt an indefinable sense of helpless rage and loathing..." (qtd. in Chandra, Bipan *Freedom Struggle* 263).

The writer has described the inhuman aspect of the British and their subordinates in the colonial regime; colonialism and imperialism carry the overtones of cruelty in the novel. The examples of Seetharamu who is caned to work until blood comes out of his mouth (Rao 147), the innocent women who are brutally beaten and raped, and Rangappa- the innocent grandson of Rachanna who is brutally killed, present a gloomy picture. Nevertheless, all the Britishers are not bad; Solpur Padre is one of the examples (139). That's why, in the novel, the Gandhain struggle is against the colonial oppression; it is "against the demoniac corruption that has

entered their hearts” (129). Its target is not a race or religion. It simply advocates, “...Send out love where there is hatred, and a smile against brute force..” (129-30).

Subalterns in the Nationalist Discourse

...it (Vision of Independent India) was based upon the understanding that Indian society was to be rebuilt, just as India’s freedom struggle was to be fought, not by the intelligentsia alone, not by the middle classes alone, not by that we would describe as the elite alone, but through a movement which was to be based upon the struggle of, the common people, the struggle of the masses. This also created the notion that what matters in history is the activities of the mass of the people and that it is the mass of the people who make their own history. (Chandra, Bipan *Essays on Indian Nationalism* 32)

Rejecting “the elitism of modern Indian historiography” (Guha 7), *Kanthapura* encapsulates the struggle of the masses; it portrays people from various walks of life. It is a ‘history in fiction’ of those people who are usually overlooked in the conventional histories of kings, queens, and leaders. The novel is not basically about famous political stalwarts, as the stereotypical heroes- Gandhi and Nehru- are placed in the background; it is a tale of the participation of the common masses in the Indian freedom struggle. Letizia Alterno says, “To my view, the most significant contribution of *Kanthapura* to world literature at its time of publication was indeed the representation of a nationalist uprising of Indian subalterns (i.e. not elite) overtly and determinately confronting a still dominant British imperialism in India at the end of the 1930s” (*Introduction* 132). In the realm of Indian politics, the idea of focusing on ‘the masses as makers of history’ was explored by Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Indian National Congress (INC) at a history congress in 1934²³; the novel throws light on the lives of the ordinary people who emerge as ‘makers of history’ in this piece of fiction.

²³ “...in 1934 when Indian historians met for the first time as Indian historians in a History Congress, they received a message from the President of the Indian National Congress and the message said: ‘Do not study the history of kings and political leaders only; study the history of the common people and the masses, because, properly speaking, it is they who develop society, it is they who make history; it is they who are responsible for the right or wrong evolution of the society’” (Chandra *Essays on Nationalism* 32).

The Muslims, women, and pariahs appear to be relatively marginalized groups among common masses in the novel; they draw our attention for their portrayal in the nationalist discourse. The in-depth study of the novel reveals that although Rao presented the subaltern on the literary scene during the period when social inequality was at its zenith, yet his approach was not as focused and explorative as that of M. R. Anand and Munshi Prem Chand, who vehemently presented the plea of the downtrodden as a major theme in their various novels in those days. In *Kanthapura*, Rao has not elaborated on the core subaltern issues in the nationalist discourse; he has mainly confined himself to Hinduism. There are only two Muslim characters in the novel, whereas most of the pariahs are not active and willing participants in the freedom struggle; they are presented as puppets in the hands of the high caste people such as Moorthy. Besides, the novelist delineates the Indian woman mainly as a miserable figure.

The Muslims and Pariahs Vs Brahmins

Rumina Sethi finds the novelist biased towards Brahmanism; she points out that the villain of the novel is a Muslim (72), and “there is an implicit rejection of Muslims” (98). Harish Trivedi refutes Sethi’s objections pertaining to the portrayal of the Brahmanism and the Muslim character in the following words: “But one may ask if Sethi has reached these conclusions as a result of adopting the politically ‘correct’ practice of reading the novel ‘against the grain’—that is, against the evidence of what the text itself seeks or seems to say” (117). Trivedi suggests that “while many of the major characters in the novel are indeed Brahmins, their brahminism is shown as coming seriously into conflict with their newly adopted Gandhism and is not upheld except by a character such as the Swami, the excommunicating priest who is presented satirically”. He adds that Bade Khan is a villain “probably because he is a policeman than because he is a Muslim”. It cannot be ignored that “the novel also features a ‘good’ Muslim, Imam Khan, who ‘gun in hand and fire in his eyes’ escorts the women satyagrahis safely back to Kanthapura after the police have by brute force broken up their march on Boranna’s toddy grove”.

In the novel, the Muslims, the Hindus, and the British are presented in a mixture of colours. Raghavayya, the Revenue Collector, “the one who takes bribes and beats his wife and sends his servants to beat us” (Rao 138) is a Hindu, whereas Bade Khan, a cruel and corrupt police man, is a Muslim. Swami and Moorthy, though both Hindus, represent two extremes; Moorthy is an epitome of selflessness in his fight against the foreign power, whereas Swami is said to be a self-centered materialistic man. Against the cruel Hunter Sahib, there is good Solpur Padre. Among all these good and bad characters, the overall supremacy of the Brahmins undoubtedly emerge. First of all, the hero of the novel is a ‘practicing’ Brahmin (not a Muslim or a pariah!) who has power to decide and thus shape the nationalist discourse in the village. He, a path setter, leads the others and epitomizes selflessness. He reigns from the beginning to the ending and occupies major space in the novel. In “The Making and Unmaking of Gandhian Ideology: Raja Rao’s Kanthapura”, Mondal compares the representation of the Brahmins and the Pariahs and observes, “...pariahs are represented as being unanimously cowardly and without initiative unless a Brahmin leads them” (134). He adds that Seetharam’s resistance, murder, and the planter’s trouble afterwards and consequently his timidity with Brahmins “also postulates that only a Brahmin would resist the planter for the sake of his daughter”. Besides, the pariahs are portrayed as “paradigms of mute passivity”. They are afraid of Bade Khan, who only has to “sneeze or cough and everybody will say ‘I lick your feet!’”. On the other hand, Brahmin clerks Gangadhar and Vasudev “do not care for the beard of Bade Khan”.

The narrator tells us that this fearlessness is because they are city boys (which makes one wonder what they are doing as coolies on a coffee plantation since earlier in the chapter it is made quite clear that the coolies are recruited from villages) but taken together with Seetharam on the previous page, it is certainly as much to do with their caste as with their urban backgrounds. Brahmin agency and dynamism, contrasted with pariah passivity, is then made explicit. (Mondal 135)

Mondal concludes, “Rao’s use of *The Ramayana*²⁴ rather than *The Mahabharata* as the template for his novel may also be register of ‘upper caste-racism’” (135).

A kind of power struggle goes on between the Brahmins and the pariahs in the novel. The Gandhian nationalist discourse records Gandhi’s attempts to bring together the people of all castes under one umbrella during the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the novel, it is told to the pariahs, “‘And there shall be neither brahmin nor pariah?’ and the pariahs shout out, ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai’” (Rao 130). The pariahs get interested in Gandhi affair probably in hope of an opportunity to claim equality with the upper caste people. To join and act like Brahmins in Gandhian nationalism, which is mainly an upper caste business or ‘practice’ and which is presented to the pariahs as a religious discourse, is implicitly seen as a path leading to the socio-religious upliftment by the pariahs. M.N. Srinivas in his *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* (1952) has spoken of ‘Sanskritization’, a social process in which a low caste person follows or rather imitates the practices of a high caste person. Srinivas defines ‘Sanskritization’ as a process by which “a low or middle Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently *twice-born* caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant class by the local community” (Jayapalan 428). In the novel, ‘Sanskritization’ involves Gandhian instead of Brahmin ‘practices’, and its ultimate aim is to establish a system of equality, the one devoid of casteism. These ‘practices’, which are basically imposed upon, are accepted by the low caste people, probably because they find an ostensible prospect to be at par with the high caste people in a targeted ‘casteless’ system.

The pariahs feel happy to see Moorthy in their quarter, whereas Swami, Bhatta and some other Brahmins get uneasy to know about this ‘caste pollution.’ Most of the high caste people find it unpalatable to sacrifice their upper hand in the

²⁴ Tabish Khair points out, “The Ramayana-and not the Mahabharata- is the epitome of upper caste, largely Brahminical value systems in India” (Mondal 135).

society in the name of Gandhi. They are afraid that the pariahs might have access to their status and destabilize their power hierarchy.

Pariahs now come to temple door and tomorrow they would like to be in the heart of it. They will one day put themselves in the place of the Brahmins and begin to teach the Vedas. (Rao 33)

Otherwise, Bhatta and Swami also admit that Gandhi is a good man.

The Mahatma is a good man and a simple man. But he is making too much of these carcass-eating pariahs. (34)

Bhatta complains that “I heard only the other day that in the Mysore Sanskrit College some pariahs sought admission” (33). Even Rangamma, who reads newspapers and tells a lot of things of the world outside to the pariahs, shows her ignorance when pariah Ramakka asks about the “strange country” where pariahs and Brahmins are the same. She responds, “My papers say nothing about that” (35). In this power struggle, the pariahs are portrayed in negative colours. In a way, the novel shows, the pariahs are also responsible for their social exclusion, as they themselves believe that the Brahmins are superior to them. When Moorthy visits the pariahs, Lingamma implores him to touch her glass of milk, so that she will “be sanctified” (77). It reminds of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony which simply means ‘rule by consent’. The novelist portrays most of the pariahs as weak and submissive followers who don’t dare to challenge the oppression of Hinduism. The pariahs, at one level, accept their misfortune submissively: “We cannot hope for Ramarajya in these days; we live in Kaliyuga, learned sir” (112). They simply want a life without more instability. When asked, “So you will not fight for the Mahatma and Moorthy?” they say, “Nay, nay, we shall fight, but we don’t want the prison,...” (112).

Guichard “distances” the idea of nation from “the instrumentalist dimension of some constructive studies that conceptualize the nation as resulting from manipulation by the elite of mobilizing themes with the aim of increasing their own

power” (12). The author says that a person’s (national) identity is formed through self-identification and exo-identification (an identity conferred on us by others) (12-13). For example, to be a member of Hindu nation or Arab nation, it is important that there should be social agreement besides one’s self-declaration. In other words, it is important that other members of Hindu/Arab nation recognize the person as one among them apart from his own choice to be a member. “This dual process and the fact that it fits within a particular cultural context limits, on the one hand, the elite’s room for maneuvers because individuals must be able to identify themselves with the proposed (or imposed) representation and, on the other hand, people’s freedom to choose their identity according to projected benefits” (13). In the case of Kanthapura, the self-identification of the villagers is not a choice of identification. The rustic minds do not rationally choose to be a member of Gandhian group, but are forced/ pressurised to do so. The rustic mind is conditioned to view itself as a part of Indian nation in the name of Gandhi. So in this case, the elite’s instrumentalisation or manipulation mainly leads the villagers to be a part of Indian nation. It reduces the scope of self-identification in the case of subalterns, whose identities are intended, structured, and imposed upon by the centre. Here, the elite powers do not only manipulate identities to “safeguard their influence”, but they are also the creator of these identities.

In a political novel like *Kanthapura*, Ambedkar is conspicuous by his absence particularly when the novel elaborately portrays the pariah issues and refers to Gandhi. Ambedkar, who had been active on the political scene since 1920, led a ‘Satyagraha’ in Mahad to fight for the right of the untouchable community to draw water from the main water tank of the town in 1927.²⁵ He claimed that he was the true representative of the untouchables and he worked in the area of social inequality. In 1931, he led Satyagraha at Kalram Temple, Nasik to secure for the untouchables the right of entry into the temple. Raja Rao, a Brahmin himself, is consciously or unconsciously inclined towards Brahmanism; he explores the issue of untouchability in a limited space, without giving any reference to Ambedkar.

²⁵“Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.” *Maharashtra NavNirman Sena*. Maharashtra NavNirman Sena. Web. 21 Feb. 2015.

Women

Rumina Sethi says that women, in the novel, are “marginalised in the essential representations of nationalist discourse” (131). Harish Trivedi, like the other subaltern issue in the novel, disagrees with Sethi at this point also. He says:

And as for the women being marginalized, they are in fact, with Moorthy, the chief Satyagrahis in the novel, which is indeed narrated by one of them, Achakka. Their prominence in the novel aptly reflects historical fact: a new development which marked the Civil Disobedience movement of Gandhi in 1930-32 was that ‘women were a further new and unexpected source of support’ (Brown, p 279), and that ‘the women of India certainly demonstrated in 1930 that they were second to none in strength and tenacity of purpose’ (Chandra et al., p.276) (117).

Undoubtedly, the national movement brought women into public life. “Can you imagine even today the idea that an Indian woman, whether a widow, an unmarried girl or a married girl for that matter, would go to jail voluntarily?”(Chandra, Bipan *Essays on Indian Nationalism* 42-43). The active participation of women in the freedom struggle was a “revolutionary development”. However, Anna Guttman in “Introduction” to *The Nation of India in Contemporary Indian Literature* draws our attention to Gandhi’s guidelines for and treatment to women that can be objected to and criticised. She says:

...Gandhi, though keen to dignify domestic activities and female suffering, demanded that women prioritize their family responsibilities and only embark on nationalist activities after undertaking a vow of celibacy. Even then, the roles advocated for them were generally of a maternal nature; they were specifically forbidden to participate in the famous Salt March, for instance. (6)

In-depth study of the novel, in fact, reveals that the women are encouraged to participate in the freedom struggle within the set boundaries prescribed by men in the gripping socio-political Indian society; they are not actors who take initiative; they are directed to act by men; they are “marginalised in the essential representations of nationalist discourse” (Sethi 131).

In the novel, the development of women characters is not through the stream of consciousness, which provides insight into the mindset of characters. The narrator presents the other women characters, as she perceives about them. Her approach to the character-exploration is restricted due to her limited omniscient point of view, which, at times, appears to be inauthentic or pseudo-narration when the narrator transcends objective sensibility. Consequently, the women are portrayed as types though their roles are exemplary in the novel. Rangamma and Ratna display fervor and force; Rangamma with the sheer strength of her leadership contributes to the movement, and Ratna soars to the level of understanding where being a male or female is insignificant and a desire for comradeship reigns supreme. Moreover, although Raja Rao delineates the participation of women in the nationalist discourse, yet he does not elaborate women centric issues. There are only passing references to woman education, dowry system, domestic violence, etc.

“Let no one be born, But if one must, Let no one be a girl” (Pandey 219). These lines of Vidyapati (early 15th century A.D.) truly exemplify the eternal suffering of being a woman. This suffering is obliquely referred to in the novel also. The marriage of Purnayya’s twelve and a half year daughter is solemnized with Bhatta (Rao 29). This marriage-cum-business deal satirises the objectification of women. Puttamma, who is brutally raped, has grown up in a society that has conditioned her to think of herself as a sinner. The other women assure her that “the gods will forgive you” (160). Through the character of Puttamma, Raja Rao presents the pathetic picture of a helpless, innocent woman who is caught in the web of the spurious social stigma of impurity. Ironically, Ratna’s motivation for ‘non-violent’ fight reveals that domestic violence is a common practice in Kanthapura. She says, “Be strong, sister. When your husband beats you, you do not hit back, do you? You only grumble and weep. The policeman’s beatings are the like!” (127).

Rao shows the attitude of the orthodox people towards woman education through Bhatta's following dialogue: "We live in a strange age. What with their modern education and their modern women" (33). Ratna lives her life in accordance with her wishes, and her mother believes that "she (Ratna) ought never to have been sent to school, and that she would bring this dishonor to the house" (37). The society has set some limits for women in day-to-day life. For e.g., post office house Chinnamma forbids Venkamma to speak rough. She says, "After all it is not for a woman to hold out in such speech" (43). The use of the expression "not for a woman" gives here an advantage to men, who dominate in the society. Consequently, nobody ever questions Range Gowda for using rough language or crossing the similar limits because there are no such limits for men.

At a number of places in the novel, Rao indirectly draws important distinctions between women and men. About Rangamma the narrator remarks, "...she was a tight jawed person and she could speak like a man" (105) and about Ratna, "Ratna ran like a boy" (121). Ratna, in tough times, says to all women, "Oh, don't be a woman" (157). When Rangamma motivates women to fight with the English, they say, "Nay, nay, we are not men" (108). Men, who cannot accept change in social roles so easily, get uneasy to see the women practising for the struggle. Suryanarayana objects to his wife's participation in Sevika Sangha. He says, "Why, soon it will be as if the men will have to wear bangles and cook, so that you women may show yourselves off! You shall not set your feet in Rangamma's house again!" (110). Women are not expected to be expressive and assertive like men. The women who are conditioned to be orthodox do not like those women who prefer modern ways of life and assert their individuality. Ratna, a self-assertive girl, is reluctantly given the task of reading out the texts: "Well, her tongue would not pollute them" (107). All these examples throw light on the different social norms, values, and roles ascribed to men and women in the male dominated society. Moorthy epitomizes male chauvinism when he feels awe-struck for the pariah women who are unable to understand him: "Moorthy feels that this is awful, and nothing could be done with these women" (78). He does not understand that these

faultless women have been conditioned to spend their lives in the domestic confinement.

Most of the women in the novel behave like slaves to their husbands. Rachanna's wife says, "If my husband says 'Spin', I shall spin, learned one" (79). Even men enjoy their dominance over women. Rachanna says, "They (women) will do as we do" (79). Judy Syfers in her essay "I want a Wife" also presents a satirical view of a woman's traditional role as a servant to her husband. She sarcastically asks, "My God, who would not want a Wife" (104). It is notable that Rangamma, a childless widow, is able to tender her unconditional support to the Congress because she is not arrested in homely ties. Otherwise, men and social responsibilities create hurdles in the self-assertion of women. Suryanaryan openly says, "I don't know, aunt, but I want my wife to look after my comforts" (Rao 110). Moreover, the society considers man traditionally superior. That's why, Sankar's parents ask Sankar "to give us at least a grandson so that when we are dead our manes would be satisfied" (101). In *Mangalsutra*, Premchand's last, unfinished novel, for "the first time" a woman painfully voices the politics of male dominance: "...tradition, ideals, and god knows what other excuses are used by you (men) to exploit and dominate us" (qtd. in Bald 77). This level of resentment is missing in *Kanthapura*.

The references to Lakshmi Bai, Kamla Devi, Sarojini Naidu, and Annie Besant- "all the heroic daughters who fought for the Mother" (109) instil motivation in women. However, to the readers' surprise, the women are seen running away from the struggle. They are portrayed as weak creatures who do not show any result of the drills and moral preaching done by Moorthy and Rangamma. They want somebody's help. During the confrontation, they do nothing substantial; they are shown wailing, crying, weeping, finding refuge, and running here and there. Nobody goes to save Puttamma when she is being raped (153). The women say, "Siva, Siva, protect us! Siva, Siva, protect us!" (157). They don't understand that Shiva is within²⁶, or God helps those who help themselves. The women don't rely on their inner strength but look for some outer help. Women believe, "They are coming to

²⁶ The novelist writes, "I am Siva. I am Siva. Siva am I" (Rao 69).

our rescue, they are coming to help us” (157) and “[t]he people of Tippur are coming to free us, the people of Rampur are coming to free us” (159) during the freedom struggle. They need somebody else “to free” them (157). It undermines women’s individual strength and shows the ineffectiveness of Gandhian lessons given by Moorthy and his comrades.

City vs. Village in the Nationalist Discourse

Nehru was “entirely the townman and disliked, if he didn’t loathe, the life of the Indian villager, just as, being a declared agnostic, he disliked the villagers’ religion and social rules” (Crocker 13). Ambedkar, in almost the same manner, believes, the village is “the black hole” (Chakrabarty 103) of Indian civilization. For him, the structure of village settlements shows the basic tenets of Hinduism which never recognizes ‘Dalits’ as an integral part. He believes that Indian villages represent a kind of “colonialism of the Hindus designed to exploit the Untouchables” (103). According to him, the Hindu society insists on the discrimination against the untouchables. It is not a case of social exclusion, a mere stoppage of social interaction for a transitory period; it is a case of territorial segregation and of “a cordon sanitaire putting the impure people inside the barbed wire into a sort of a cage. Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The Hindus live in the village and the untouchables live in the ghetto” (*The Untouchables* 21-22). On the other hand, Gandhi always eulogizes villages. For Gandhi, the village is the basis for building a republican society, unpolluted by colonialism. The Indian village has a design, a way of life with the potential to become “an alternative to the city-based and technology-driven capitalist west” (Chakrabarty 104). Gandhi’s concept of the village is not anchored “on the modern notion of development but on the post-modern perspective of quality of life”.

In the novel, the construction and sustenance of the nationalist discourse is portrayed in Kanthapura and the city. The influence of city is magical and enticing. The narrator says, “A day in the city is always a pleasant thing” (Rao 27). The villagers of Kanthapura rely upon Moorthy because he has gone to the city: “We know Moorthy had been to the city and he knew of things we didn’t know” (15). It

is probably the reason that the villagers give their nod to invite the best Harikatha men of city. City, a hub of activities, attracts Rangamma (98). After her return from the city, Rangamma has become more expressive and assertive and the women ask, “Rangamma, Rangamma, is it the city that gave you all this learning?” (108). Bhatta who once used to read out from Gandhi’s *My Experiments with Truth* suddenly changes after paying a visit to the city.

The village thrives on myths, beliefs, and traditions, whereas the city is presented as a source of information and influence. Rangamma tells the villagers about Lakshmi Bai, Tantia Tope, the Soldiers Revolt about whom/which she has “read in the books in the city” (109). There is difference of outlook between the city men and the villagers. Everybody in the village says that “[t]he Goddess will free him (Moorthy). She will appear before the judges and free him” (98). On the contrary, Vasudev, who is a city boy, says, “No sister, they will give him a good six months...I know these people” (98).

Gandhi men and Swami, whose ideologies are diametrically opposite, try to justify their versions of the city to the poor, ignorant villagers who do not have direct access to the city. Bhatta tells Narsamma, “You have never been to the city. You cannot even imagine the pollutions that go on there...Well, well, one has to close one’s eyes and ears, or else the food will not go down one’s throat these days... ” (48). After listening to Bhatta’s version of ‘pollution’ going on in the cities, Narsamma feels forced to say, “Oh, this Gandhi! Would he were destroyed!” (48). However, Gandhi men, who are city boys, claim, “...the Government is afraid of us...and Khadi is the only thing that is sold” (163).

The city emerges as a role model. Rangamma says, “We shall go to meet him (Moorthy) like they do in the city” (110). The idea of Sevika-Sangh is also borrowed from the city: “In the city, there are groups and groups of women, girls, married women, and widows, who have joined together and become Volunteers” (108). The villagers believe, “Our Moorthy is a great man, and they speak of him in the city and we shall work for him” (82).

The city boys appear to be a great support to the villagers who are not self-reliant. They are very fascinating to the villagers; they are “like princess, fair and smiling and firm” (163). The city men are also shown as chivalrous, courageous, and firm in their mind and body. They broadly face the police and do not disperse even at the moment of firing (172). The city boys also ignite a ray of hope in the hearts of the villagers that “nothing sinister could happen to” (163) the villagers. The story of the city boy “who hoisted high the National Flag in prison” sets an impressive example before the villagers (147). One of the city men also refuses to bow down to the British Government flag and willingly sacrifices his life during a confrontation with the police (178). The villagers seek support either from the gods or from the city boys. They are hopeful that “the city boys would come to help us” (162) during the struggle. When “a first shot is shot into the air”, the condition of the villagers is presented in the following words: “like a jungle cry of cricketers and frogs and hyenas and bisons and jackals, we all groaned and shrieked and sobbed...we fell and we rose, and we crouched and we rose, and we ducked beneath the rice harvests and we rose, and we fell over stones...” (172).

The purity of traditions is not maintained in Kanthapura; Moorthy violates customs by visiting the pariahs; Ratna, the young widow, also infringes the traditional boundaries; she “not only went about the streets alone like a boy, but even wore her hair to the left like a concubine, and she still kept her bangles and her nose-rings and ear-rings...” (37). The village in the ending of the novel is dilapidated and dark, as “there’s neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura” (184). The village appears to be vulnerable, whereas the city, which has thrown its temple gates to the pariahs, emerges as a symbol of sustenance and strength.

In the nationalist discourse, the city turns out to be directing and dominating in the nationalist discourse. The writer proposes that the ideas of development and advancement are linked to the spirit of urbanization. Moorthy, the hero, leaves for the city in the ending; he does not come back to revive and rejuvenate Kanthapura. He decides to follow Nehru. It also supports the argument that the novel does not intend to glorify Gandhian nationalism, but it is inclined towards Nehruvian ideology.

Language and Communication

Kanthapura is known for its innovative use of English. The novelist, though writing in English, has successfully captured the very spirit of Indianness; he has successfully conveyed “in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own” (“Foreword” to *Kanthapura*). “For the first time, and provocatively during British imperialism in India, *Kanthapura* declared the importance of ‘shaping’ English, not being ‘shaped’ by it” (Alterno 132). In the novel, language is also emphasized as a great unifying factor among the natives. Sankar is used to talk with her mother in Hindi though she understands “not a word of it”. “He said Hindi would be the national language of India, and though Kannada is good enough for our province, Hindi must become the national tongue” (Rao 104). English is viewed as a representative of the English culture in the novel. When Ratna proposes to sing an English song on the marriage of Venkamma’s daughter, Satamma says, “Enough of this. Let our marriages at least be according to the ancient ways” (85).

Gandhi was not in favour of English language. He believed that the preference for English over vernaculars was a sign of “our slavery and degradation” (qtd. in Bhattacharya *The Mahatma and the Poet* 97)²⁷. However, in *Kanthapura*, while developing the discourse of Gandhian nationalism, Rao has not presented Gandhi’s views against the use of English. The novelist calls English a language of “intellectual make-up” in the foreword to the novel. He makes it clear that it is not a language of our “emotional make-up”.

The novel does not elaborate on the issue of language. However, it reveals that the discourse of nationalism is created and spread through verbal communication. Communication is an important factor which helps people to come together. Benedict Anderson has also emphasized the role of communication in the rise of nationalism in Europe. Newspapers “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36). In the case of India, Ram Chandra Pradhan says that the Press gave wide coverage to the Dandi march of Gandhi ji, comparing it with the

²⁷ M.K.Gandhi. “The Poet’s anxiety”, *Young India*, 1 June 1921, reproduced in Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet: letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore*, 1915-1941, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1997.

great march of Moses with the Jews towards the Promised Land. He adds, “In fact, people looked at the Dandi march as a march to the promised land of Swaraj” (173-4). In the novel, Jayaramachar’s *Katha*, Rangamma’s papers, Gandhi’s rallies, the Congress men’s meetings, and Venkataramayya’s *Young India* or stories of Tilak and Gandhi, and Ratna’s stories of women of Bombay and Sholapur (158) strengthen the discourse of nationalism; they motivate people to look forward to the common goal of ‘Swaraj’. The role of communication is significant here as it eventuates in “a pattern of considerable cultural similarity” (Akzin 32-33).

Communication encourages the growth of nationalism. “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’” (Rao 145). Print media strengthens national feeling, and there is “in house after house a picture of our Moorthy taken from city papers” (146). The novelist writes, “The Blue papers said there were four and twenty shops closed in Kanthapura *hobli*” (148). The information of Kanthapura’s struggle gives inspiration to other villages also. People in Rampur, People of Siddapur, and the people of Maddur also picket toddy booths (145). There are around three thousand people who indulge in hand to hand fight with the police. The discursive practice of obscuring caste lines helps the untouchables believe themselves to be members of a nation above caste lines. The Gandhian freedom struggle attempts to unify the Indian Subcontinent through the discourse of the Congress Panchayat and Swaraj.

Communication is not innocent and apolitical. The people are half-informed; they think that ‘Swaraj’ is the goal of the struggle: “He (Gandhi) will bring us swaraj” (183). In fact, the very basic demand for ‘autonomy’ was not an urgent demand for Gandhi during the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the novel, there is no mention of Gandhi’s eleven points of administrative reforms. If Lord Irwin accepted those points, Gandhi ji said, the call for civil disobedience could be withdrawn²⁸.

²⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru was compelled to remark in his autobiography “What was the point of making a list of our political and social reforms when we were talking in terms of Independence” (Chandra *Freedom Struggle* 160).

Interestingly, the idea of Gandhian nationalism is constructed in the dialogues of Gandhi men: "...the Government is afraid of us...and Khadi is the only thing that is sold" (163). Mahatma Gandhi is presented as a national figure, a chosen 'king' of the people (164). The Gandhian volunteers instil the spirit of national unity by telling the villagers the valorous tales of Gandhi men across the Indian subcontinent (164). Their version is the only dominant version available to the people. On the contrary, there is almost no communication between the villagers and the Britishers who remain socially and culturally aloof.

Through the discourse of Gandhian freedom struggle, the rustic minds are made to believe that the Congress is a national phenomenon.

...it is the same by the Ganges and the Yamuna and the Godaveri, by Indus and by Kaveri, in Agra and Ankola, Lucknow and Manipuri, in Madras, Patna and Lahore, in Calcutta, Peshawar and Puri, in Poona and in Benares-everywhere... (164)

The villagers have fears in their heart. But, they don't want to remain indifferent and aloof from the rest of 'imagined' community in the service of Mother. The villagers say, "But how can we be like we used to be? Now we hear this story and that story....and we say our Kanthapura, too, shall fight for the Mother..." (111).