

## The Portrayal of National and Spiritual Aspects in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

Dr. S. Rammanohar Pari

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to bring the National and Spiritual identities, which are portrayed in the novel “Kanthapura” (1938) by Raja Rao. He focuses on two individual leaders and their beliefs, the actual and the mythicized figure of Gandhi, and his transmutation into Moorthy, the saintly hero of the novel. Yet interestingly he never has an actual meeting with Gandhi. He has only seen him in a ‘vision’ addressing a public meeting with him pushing his way through the crowd and joining the band of volunteers and receiving inspiration by a touch of Gandhi’s hand. The influence of Mahatma Gandhi’s practical philosophy and the social and the political aspects of his working programme are immense on the novel.

### Introduction

The influence of Mahatma Gandhi’s practical philosophy and social and political aspects of his working programme is immense on the novel. The characters have been conceived in this light in it. As such, the village of *Kanthapura* becomes a sort of microcosm of the bigger universe of the movement all over India. It had a big international impact on the peoples of the world. The wave of freedom comes to sweep the country dead set against the colonial bondage. The concept of the Khaddar spinning renders the mills of England idle. Their exploitation of Indian receives a severe shock. Raja Rao’s main aim as a novelist is to reveal and interpret Indian sensibility through plot, characterization, atmosphere and setting, style and language in his novels. In “*Kanthapura*” of there is a distinctive Indian sensibility, to be precise, expressed in English language. The words are English, but the organization is Indian and the novelist has to organize himself.

The novel *Kanthapura* begins with the graphic details of the place, which is just a village of South India, and the people inhabiting the same. The social climate of the village is roughly divided between the two major sections; the Brahmins and the Pariahs. It is a traditional village which becomes the microcosm of the universal rural condition all over the country. Therefore, the novelist while writing this novel moves from the particular to the universal. In the village of *Kanthapura*, before the things are astir, life goes on with all its clock-wise routine. They are the believers in the Goddess Kenchamma who is the protector of the folks living there. It consists of the merchants, the moneylenders, the widows, the priests, the peasants and the professional weavers and the potters. With the appearance of Moorthy, a village young man imbued with the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, things do not look as they were. A new life of revolt comes to be injected into the people inhabiting the village. They seek for the new freedom, both social and

political. Since the novel has a moral theme, it moves on the problems, some side ones and some forming the cruse. Among the social problems, there is that of widowhood, the curse of which must be removed, then the problem of labour-exploitation, both localized and of foreign source, the British regime.

In the village, Bhatta, a Brahmin and Waterfall Venkamma are on one side looking at the whole issue with considerable misgivings. They cannot understand the idea of the removal of untouchability which Moorthy wants and takes practical steps in this direction. He is the first Gandhian to mix with the untouchables of the village which is an eye-sore for the caste-brahmins and the traditionalists of the village. Bhatta, the money-lender and the land-owner cannot tolerate this form of the pollution and therefore he gets Moorthy excommunicated through the Swami. It shocks the mother of the hero so much that she shuffles the mortal coils. But Moorthy does not budge on inch from the task to which he is wedded. Despite the appearance of the police, Bade Khan and the Jemadar, in the village, he goes on propagating the Gandhian ideals. Now life is not the same in the village. Women have started spinning Khaddar on the Spinning-Wheel. They are prepared to co-operate with men in the task of fighting the authorities.

There is the Skeffington Coffee Plantation owned by an Englishman, and this becomes the place of the battling forces, the natives and the authorities. The side issue of drinking toddy has also been taken up by the novelist. The Gandhian picket the toddy-booths. Moorthy is also opposed to the exploitation of the coolies by the Britishers. A real fight takes place and the passive fighters among the volunteers of Gandhi bear the brunt. A woman is raped; men are beaten and lathi-charged by the police. Yet they are determined to fight to the last. The volunteers are sent to the prisons. Moorthy too gets a sentence and they wait for his release with anxiety. With the pact with the Viceroy, the prisoners are released.

Moorthy, in the novel, recognizes the virtue of discipline. He also inculcates it in the fighters for freedom whenever they go out of control. A Satyagrahi must recognize the value of discipline. It is a force, a power and a potent instrument to spell the word 'non-violence'. The hero in the moral on the lines of Mahatma Gandhi. He is fearless and as such can face the police. Being spiritual he is moral. Even the force of arms (though Mao believes that the power is generated through the barrel of a gun, it goes against the concept of Gandhi). Gets subdued when faced with the Satyagrahis armed with non-violence and the love-force. It is reflected abundantly in the character of Moorthy. On the other hand, Bhatta, the fake custodian of brahminism, does not have the courage and as such not have the privilege of being a Satyagrahi. Moorthy as a Satyagrahi follows the line of Mahatma Gandhi who preached "the highest moral is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind" (*Kanthapura* 40). He works for the low and the lowly with all the courage one needs for the social work. Moorthy is a truly Gandhian being imbued with the virtues which resided in the Mahatma. Moorthy is a young man of sound determination and possesses organizing capacity. Like Gandhi, he does not believe in caste or clan. One must not marry early, and the widows must be remarried. And "a Brahmin might marry a pariah and a pariah a Brahmin" (Page 15), this is the Gandhian spirit. It contains the elements of his social philosophy. The proto-type of the social approach and tendency of Moorthy lies in the social philosophy and tendencies of Gandhism. There is,

however, not much in the novel towards the Hindu-Muslim unity; only it finds a casual reference (and Swaraj too is three-eyed; Self-Purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddar) in it. The self-purification is sought by the hero, and there is good deal of Khaddar-ideal and spinning in it but the Hindu-Muslim unity does not form even a part of the fabric of this. It may be that Raja Rao remains confined and concentrated on the theme of the Freedom movement. “Fight” he says, “but harm no soul”. “Love all”, says he, “Hindu Mohammedan, Christian or Pariah as for all are equal before God” (Page 18) it is contained in the social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Moorthy shares the same.

Truth is loved by Gandhi, and he seeks it in his own way. It may be even sentimental. It has been sought by different people in different manner. Truth is considered to be highly elusive in life. It may have the glare of the sun which is beyond human endurance to face. But Gandhi peeled the solid facts discovering the glistening truth behind the same. But who can discover Truth in the right sense of the word? The relative truth may be a possibility; the absolute truth is a fascinating myth. It has mentioned in the “Glorious Thoughts of Gandhiji” that he considered Truth and non-violence as his God. And like God, they remain mythically real. He prescribes humility for the seeker of truth. The seeker of truth should be humbler than the dust. For Gandhiji, God and Truth are ‘convertible terms’. Only God knows what he is, an individual, or a set of people or principle, but it is certain that truth is the thing. According to the Mahatma, truth is the first thing which ought to be sought. In “*Kanthapura*”, Moorthy is no seeker of truth, but believes in the applied-truth. He is no designer or thinker, he is just the follower of the programme of Mahatma Gandhi on the political lines. Gandhi is a working mind, and the working mind Moorthy is not. On the side of the intellect, he is blank or might be that side of his being has not been exposed by the novelist. But he certainly imbibes the magnificence of the character of Gandhi, his humility and love of the people. Moorthy has been designed by the novelist on the Gandhian sentiments. He also acts with such tenacity of faith which is the part and parcel of the character of Mahatma Gandhi.

In the sphere of economy of peace Moorthy in “*Kanthapura*” follows Mahatma Gandhi. He associates ‘Swadeshi’ with ‘humility and love’. His love is universal, he has no enemy. Even when he is out to fight the British Raj in the country, he has no animus against the whites ruling the country. As for as the Swadeshi programme is concerned, he lays great emphasis on spinning. He initiates spinning in the village and his followers.

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**Dr. S. Rammanohar Pari**

Assistant Professor

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Department of English  
KG College of Arts and Science  
Coimbatore – 641 035  
[rammanoharpari@kgcas.com](mailto:rammanoharpari@kgcas.com)