



## EXPECTATION OF INDIAN DECOLONIZATION IN RAJA RAO'S "KANTHAPURA"

Prof. SANJAY KUMAR SWARNKAR<sup>1</sup>, Dr. DHARUV SHANKAR<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Head of English Department, C.S.J.M. University, Kanpur, U. P.

<sup>2</sup>English Lecturer, Mahamaya Polytechnic of Information Technology, Akbarpur, Kanpur Dehat, U. P.



Article Received: 09/08/2021

Article Accepted: 18/09/2021

Published online:21/09/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.3.241](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.3.241)

### Abstract

Raja Rao is one of the most marvellous, meditative and meaningful figures of Indo-Anglian literature that emerged energetically in the expanses of the twentieth century. He is a great and glittering son of mother India and his greatness has achieved not only national but international fame also. As a matter of fact, he is one of the most dazzling diamonds whose sparkling is rooted in the rays of Hinduism, nationalism, patriotism, casteism, religionism and Indianness. His first and foremost novel – *Kanthapura* – is nothing but a powerful and potential expectation of decolonization that is arisen through the dedicative efforts of Gandhian supportation. Indeed, it is the tale of an Indian village, Kanthapura, which was situated somewhere at the southern part of India. Moorthy, the major character of the novel, carries out all the nationalistic activities which are concerned with the freedom movement and thus he leads other villagers to play an active role in the freedom struggle that is getting a momentous strength through Gandhian movement. In fact, he is a staunch Gandhian follower who begins Gandhian civil disobedience movement in his secluded village when he returns from the city with the principles of Mahatma Gandhi. He goes from door to door and explicates to the villagers the importance of Gandhian strife and struggle for Indian decolonization. Besides, he inspires and encourages them to adopt charakha-spinning and weaving their own cloths. Very soon the Congress Committee is framed in Kanthapura, advertising material of freedom movement is brought from the city and distributed among the villagers. The volunteers for freedom movement are trained in order that they may remain non-violent and confront government suppression boldly. In this arduous struggle in Kanthapura, Moorthy is assisted by Ratna, a young lady of progressive perspectives, Patel Range Gowda and many other villagers. On the contrary, the representatives of foreign government counter the Gandhian movement and do not like any type of Indian improvement. Though the villagers in Moorthy's leadership bear a brave resistance, they are forced to leave Kanthapura ultimately. They are, more or less, defeated physically, but there is lying a glorious victory in their defeat as their courageous opposition has generated a dominative jerk that shook the foundation of the foreign rule. The heroic struggle of the villagers is thus a marvellous milestone in Indian movement towards independence. The prime purpose of this unending struggle between Gandhian movement and British

government is to eradicate foreign management and establish home rule of peace and perfection as all the villagers expect the static state of decolonization. Thus, this paper, basically, throws light on the expectation of Indian decolonization that is a thematic and analytic stream flowing from pillar to post in Raja Rao's noteworthy novel – *Kanthapura*.

**Keywords:** Expectation, decolonization, freedom, movement, struggle, Gandhian and government etc.

## Introduction

Raja Rao is one of the most prominent Indo-Anglian writers who achieved name and fame in the wide and tide province of English literature. His first novel, *Kanthapura*, is nothing but a sthala-puran of the Gandhian movement which highlights the oppression of the English people ruling over India. It is, indeed, a microcosm of Indian freedom struggle. Moreover, it may be classified as a Gandhian epic whose tale is narrated by an old grandmother, Achakka.

The meaning of the term 'decolonize' is 'to free a colony to become self-governing or independent' While the term 'decolonization' – de + colonization – is 'the withdrawal of a state from its former colonies, leaving them independent; the acquisition of independence by a former colony' (Brown 621). So far as the matter is concerned, the people of *Kanthapura* are most willing to be free from the shackles of foreign rule; so they are struggling hard to achieve the state of home rule. Broadly speaking, this strong desire of the villagers is nothing but an expectation of decolonization.

*Kanthapura* – the magnum opus of Raja Rao – delineates the predominance of Gandhian ideology on a remote village of Southern India. On a more profound level, the backbone of the novel is Gandhian ideology which is, really, a great source of Indian decolonization. Though Mahatma Gandhi does not emerge personally in any scene of the novel, the thematic analysis of the novel turns around his philosophy which becomes gradually a dominating and drastic cause of Indian decolonization. Moorthy – a factual follower of Gandhi – essays to inspire the villagers towards the struggle of Indian decolonization. However, the major purpose of Gandhian ideology in the novel is to extirpate the sovereignty of the Britishers.

Moorthy – the replica of Gandhi's principles – is the leader of freedom struggle surging in the village, *Kanthapura*.

### Role of Gandhian Impact in Indian Decolonization:

The protagonist of the novel, *Kanthapura*, is Moorthy who is, indeed, a counterpart of Gandhian principles and a staunch follower of Gandhian ideals. As a matter of fact, Moorthy is both follower and supporter of Gandhian philosophy. He adopts the principles of non-violence, non-cooperation and bravery and endeavors to eradicate the evil practice of untouchability from the society of *Kanthapura*. Gandhian impact was so deep in his trait that he did not obey even his mother in the matter of social evil – untouchability. In those days, untouchability was a black blot on the countenance of the Indian society. To remove this, he struggles hard as M. K. Gandhi suggests in the following passage:

"I want to say something about untouchability. If you want to do some real service, and want to save your Hindu Dharma, you must remove this. If you fail to get rid of this, be sure that Hinduism itself will be rid of you. That religion cannot be a holy religion in which hatred is taught against even one man." (69)

Throughout the novel, it is Moorthy who leads the movement of freedom struggle whose intense intention is, sooner or later, to procure the goal of Indian decolonization. Moreover, he opposes colonial exploitation that was going on in each and every part of *Kanthapura*. Considering the characteristics of Moorthy, Mallikarjun Patil says: "Moorthy shines with a rare radiance in his face. He utters truth is God and God is truth just echoing Gandhi." (112)

He tells the villagers about the advancement of Dandi march that is carried out by Mahatma Gandhi. Moorthy informs the villagers that Mahatma Gandhi along with his eighty-two followers goes to the Dandi beach to manufacture salt, and all of them will pray to God for the success of his expedition and that they will prepare themselves for the forthcoming fighting with the government. Moorthy further says:

“And the next day the White Papers told us the Mahatma had taken handful of salt after his ablutions, and he had bought it home, and then everybody went to sea to prepare salt, and cartloads and cartloads of it began to be brought back and distributed from house to house with music and clapping of hands....And so day after day men go out to the sea to make salt, and day after day men are beaten back and put into prison, and yet village after village sends its women and men, and village after village grows empty, for the call of the Mahatma had sung in their hearts, and they were for the Mahatma.” (Rao 174)

Following the principles of Gandhi, Moorthy tries to bring all the castes of Kanthapura such as Brahmins, Potters, Weavers and Pariahs under the umbrella of one religion – human religion – that is the religion of whole humanity. In this reference, Narsimhaiah appropriately says: “It is important to remember that religion became the nucleus of social regeneration in Kanthapura in the true tradition of India where social reformers have invariably been profoundly religious men.” (49)

Moreover, the impact of the march on Kanthapura is seen in the energetic activities of the people who celebrate the march as the Gauri festival. The march gives Moorthy an opportunity to deliver a lecture on the theme of oneness, unity and harmony. He dreams of ‘a thousand-pillared temple in which equality would reign supreme, of a sack of mustard, equal in shape and hue, of people being yoked to the same plough’. His lecture has a salubrious effect: “the Brahmin heart and the weaver heart and the pariah heart seemed to beat the same beat.” (Rao 110). They do not pay attention to their daily routine and accompany Moorthy

wholeheartedly. They grow curious about the Mahatma and desire to march like him. Nanjamma states that the Mahatma is like “the Sahyadri Mountain” and that the volunteers are the pilgrims of the mountain. They decide to march under the leadership of Moorthy, “the small mountain,” through anywhere whether it is in water or in fire. In spite of many unfavourable circumstances, Moorthy follows the path of non-violence and truth as he utters:

“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.” (Rao 50)

Indeed, it was the result of Gandhi’s greatness that he generated thousands of little Gandhis throughout the country. Moorthy was studying in a college when he felt the impact of Gandhi, and he walked out of it as a Gandhian follower. It is not unbelievable that thousands of young students throughout the country abandoned their studies in those days and preferred to be arrested for the benevolence of the nation. Although Moorthy did not receive any first hand experience of Gandhi and, in reality, he got a chance to touch Gandhi’s hand in a meeting while Gandhi was delivering a discourse in a large gathering. The touch of Gandhi’s hand gave Moorthy a staunch inspiration, consequently, he resigned the college for the welfare of the whole humanity.

On returning Kanthapura, Moorthy starts to organize the Gandhian duties in the village. The entire novel resounds with action, and all that action is centred round Moorthy. He forms the Congress Committee in the village, maintains constant touch with the city Congress Committee, and distributes newspapers and other publicity material so that the people may remain regularly in touch with the activities going on in distant parts of the country. It is he who calls the *Harikatha* man, who mixes religion with politics and likens Gandhi to Ram and Redman to Ravan, and calls *Sawaraj*, the three-eyed. He gives a practical and pragmatic form to the Gandhian programme of *Swadeshi* and eradication of untouchability by going from door to door, even in the Pariah quarters, and explicating to the people

the advantages of the *charakha* and *Swadeshi*. He persuades the women of the villages to take to charakha-spinning and later on unionizes the women voluntary troops.

Meenakshi Mukherjee regards Moorthy as an "idealized character who like Christ takes all the sins of the people upon himself and undergoes a penance for purification, a young man who conquers physical desire and self-interest.... For the old woman, Jawaharlal is a Bharatha to the Mahatma who she believes will slay Ravana so that Sita may be freed. For her Gandhi has attained the status of God and Moorthy is regarded as an *Avatar* in Kantthapura." (142)

#### Role of Nationalistic Approach in Indian Decolonization:

Kanthapura presents the narration of a South Indian village during the non-cooperation days. Undoubtedly, it deals with the theme of Gandhian impact on a village community. Moorthy, a firm follower of Mahatma Gandhi, advises people about 'Swaraja', 'charakha-spinning' and 'Khaddar' etc. Jai Ramacharan's 'Harikatha' also has the overtones of 'Swarajya'. Moorthy struggles for the upliftment of the untouchables and becomes a foe of the orthodox Hindus. Other than that mentioned, he is arrested for his nationalistic activities and sentenced to three months imprisonment. Having completed his period of imprisonment, Moorthy returns and starts his Civil Disobedience Campaign among the labourers whom he motivates and incites not to pay their taxes. Soon he succeeds in getting the favour of the village community. Considering the concept of nationalism sprouting in the streets of Kanthapura, S. C. Mundhra comments rightly:

"The atmosphere of Kanthapura is surcharged with nationalism. It is the story of 'Satyagrah Movement', 'lathi-charge' and the ruin that followed. The impact of Gandhi conveyed through Moorthy, transforms the life of an entire village community." (452)

Moorthy preaches the villagers the principles of Gandhian philosophy. He gives the meaningful motto from one door to another and tells the villagers about the benefits of spinning and wearing Khadi. He persuades the people to support the

nationalistic movement of Mahatma Gandhi as he states:

"More and more men followed him, as they did Krishna the flute-player; and so he goes from village to village to slay the serpent of the foreign rule. Fight says he but harm no soul. Love all, says he,... for all are equal before God.... Truth must you tell, he says, for truth is God, and verily, it is the only God I know. And he says too, spin every day. Spin weave every day, for our mother is in tattered weeds and a poor mother needs clothes to cover her sores. If you spin, he says, the money that goes the Red-man will stay within your country and the mother can feed the milkless and the clotheless. He is a saint, the Mahatma, a wise man and a soft man, and a saint. You know how he fasts and prays. And even his enemies fall at his feet." (Rao 15)

Moorthy wanted to unite all the sects of society living in Kanthapura in order that his mission of freedom struggle might flourish with the fruit of decolonization. Besides, he would like to be mixed with Pariahs – lower caste of Kanthapura and preached them that they should also help in the nationalistic movement of freedom struggle. He thought that the nationalistic movement of decolonization would become more and more powerful if all the sects of society would come forward and toil unitedly. When he is excommunicated because of his help for Pariah, he utters:

"Let the Swami do what he likes. I will go and do more and more pariah work. I will go and eat with them if necessary. Why not? Are they not men like us. And the swami, who is he? A self-chosen fool. He may be learned in the Vedas and all that. But he has no heart. He has no thinking power." (Rao 59)

Moorthy thinks that all the citizens of the nation are having the same blood and the same breath. Hence, they should be treated in the same manner and there should not be any type of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and colour. He does not care for some orthodox Brahmins and continues to help the downtrodden class of the society with extreme eagerness. M. K. Naik exactly examines the novel when he remarks:

"Kanthapura is, thus a brilliant attempt to probe the depths to which the nationalistic urge penetrated, showing how, even in the remote villages, the new upsurge fused completely with traditional religious faith, thus rediscovering the Indian soul." (167)

**Role of Skeffington Coffee Estate in Indian Decolonization:** Skeffington Coffee Estate is a very vast coffee plantation which was situated nearby Kanthapura. Its owner was a white man who is popularly known as the "Hunter Sahib", because he always carries a hunter or whip in his hand and freely flogs on all those workers who do not do their duties. Ostensibly, he is a symbol of the imperialist rulers of India who exploited Indian people in many ways.

The Coffee Estate is a land of storm, ceaseless rains, disease and death, suffering and exploitation; a cavern of snakes and human snakes who are more venomous than cobras as snakes bite only when annoyed, men exult in biting; a spectacle of fierce poverty where coolies are utilized as slaves and their daughters and wives are forced to lie with the sahibs; a cursed place from where no one has returned.

When the policeman, Bade Khan, is appointed in the village, he commences to terrorize and exploit the villagers both mentally and physically. Soon after, the villagers under the leadership of Moorthy proffer Satyagrahs and picketings outside the toddy plantation and the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The villagers are lathi-charged and many of them are injured seriously. Moreover, a large number of people are arrested and imprisoned. The repression as well as suppression of the government grows more merciless and all of the villagers – women, children and old men – are beaten ruthlessly. The environment of the whole village resounds with the shouts of 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai!', 'Vande Mataram!' and 'Inquilab Zindabad!'. With the passage of time, Moorthy is also arrested and sent to jail for a long term of imprisonment. In his absence Ratna executes all the functions and formalities of the Congress Committee very well. In addition, the people are instructed that they should not pay land revenue to the cruel ruling people. At

this, there are not only merciless lathi-charges but shootings also. The whole atmosphere resounds with shrieking, crying and patriotic dying.

It was the time when Moorthy began his 'Don't-Touch-the-Government Campaign'. The Mahatma never arrives at Kanthapura, but the news of his arrest comes, which generates a current of excitement. Men, women and children gather in front of the temple; even the Skeffington people join. A draft of the Don't-Touch the Government Campaign is prepared. It is resolved to picket the Toddy-grove and booths, to set up a parallel government, the first act of which will be to appoint Range Gowda as Patel and to refuse taxes and revenues to the government. A procession of a hundred and thirty-nine marches to picket the BORANA TODDY GROVE, chanting "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai." They pluck twigs and branches of the toddy trees and the police break them, beat them with lathis and arrest them. Again, the people come closer to one another; the twenty-two women volunteers while being carried by carts, perceive: "... Head against head and arm against arm, we lean over one another.... And the pariahs and the weavers and the potters all seemed to feel they were of one caste, one breath.... And now there shall be neither Brahmin nor Pariah" (Rao 105)

Thus Raja Rao depicts the development of Unity, Swaraja and Satyagraha movement of Gandhian idealism in the village of Kanthapura. K.R.S. Iyengar, honestly, observes the situation: "The hum-drum becomes the unique, the trivial becomes the heroic and the hectic excitement of a day becomes a permanent communal possession." (390)

From this brief sketch of the political movement emerges the theme of universal fraternity, oneness and harmony. The Brahmins, the Pariahs, the potters, the Sudras and the weavers are like 'seeds of mustard in a sack' or 'pillars in a thousand-pillared-temple' or 'yoked to the same plough.' The distinction of caste and status flies off in vapor when they strive unitedly for their motherland. A common mission unites the diverse people very intimately.

One minor theme of the novel is the East-West encounter that is noticeable in the Skeffington

Coffee Estate. The Sahib there represents the West and the coolies represent the East. The Sahib gives starving wages to the workers and makes them work from morning to night. He calls their wives, sisters and daughters for his sexual pleasure whenever he pleases and anyone who opposes is mercilessly whipped. The Skeffington Coffee Estate is a symbol of the exploitation of the black races by the white ones.

The main theme of the novel is the impact of the Gandhian freedom movement on the people of Kanthapura. The village was formerly divided into many sections on the basis of caste, creed and money. The Gandhian movement made all the people feel like brothers and sisters. The sleeping village woke up and started its new life. A new spirit came in the people and they all became one. Indeed, this was nothing but the magical effect of Gandhian impact that changed the life of Kanthapura.

**Role of Political Approach in Indian Decolonization:** As a matter of fact, Kanthapura is a political novel delineating the scenes and sights of Indian political movement of freedom struggle. Kanthapura is the microcosm of India. Taking into account the vision of Gandhi, Moorthy forms a Congress Committee in the village and asks everyone to join it. He launches Satyagrah movement to bring cognizance in the society and then makes the people stand against high taxes, land revenues and exploitation of poor peasants. Besides, he involves women also in the freedom movement and unites them. In this freedom struggle, the people of Kanthapura suffered a lot and many times they were tortured brutally by the British government. The following lines delineate the agonizing picture of the Red-men's torture:

"And then more and more men crawl up, and more wounded are brought up, naked, half covered, earth covered are they brought up, with dangling legs, dangling hands and bleeding hands, and with bleeding mouth and bleeding forehead and backs are they brought up,.... and some speak in free voices and some in breathless sputters, and some can do no more than wallow and wail." (Rao 251)

On the contrary, the people filled with nationalism were shouting the slogans such as 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai!', 'Inquilab Zindabad!' and 'Vande Matram!' Really, a powerful political turmoil was prevailing all around the nation and which resulted everywhere as a rage of revolution. Simultaneously, the Satyagrahis were singing the following song:

O, lift the flag high,

Lift it high like in 1857 again,

Lift the flag high,

This is the flag of the Revolution. (Rao 245.)

Gandhi's vision of life finds an outlet in Kanthapura. Moorthy forms the Panchayat Congress Committee and keeps in touch with the City Congress Committee. Kanthapura assumes an alternative Panchayat Territory. The villagers express gratitude for the efforts of Moorthy and the enthusiastic women recite:

There is one Government, sister,

There is one Government, sister,

And that is the Government of the Mahatma.

(Rao 207)

### Conclusion

In the novel, Mahatma Gandhi was regarded as an *avatar* and compared with Ram and Krishna in the folk-tales and ballads. The Harikatha man in one of his narratives compares Mahatma Gandhi with Krishna who killed the serpent Kali. He says: "You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country." (Rao 12)

Besides, the grandmother narrates the story and describes Mahatma Gandhi as Ram. She narrates: "They say the Mahatma will go to the Red man's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be happy. And Ram will come back from exile...." (Rao 189)

Broadly speaking, Moorthy incarnates Gandhian consciousness that renews the political, social and religious life of the village as Mohit Ray

observes in Moorthy “the confluence of the three strands of experience that make up the action of Kanthapura – the political, the social and the religious” (285)

Here, it is worth-mentioning that Kanthapura is a great classic during the period of India’s Freedom Struggle. In addition, it is a book which depicted the Gandhi’s ideology and Gandhian Period. M. K. Gandhi says Satyagraha is for the sake of all as he states in his autobiography:

“To see the universal all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet with all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.” (420)

So far as the matter is concerned, Kanthapura is the tale of Gandhian whirlwind that passes fiercely through a southern Indian village and essays to eradicate the British rule which was a great source of miseries and difficulties for the Indian people. Indeed, all the people whether they are living in Kanthapura or any other part of India are longing for home rule and want to make themselves free from treasonous oppressions of red-men. On a more profound level, they expect for decolonization so that they may form self government and may live peacefully under the umbrella of Indianization. Finally, it is right to argue that the expectation of Indian decolonization is the thematic concern that runs from pillar to post in Raja Rao’s remarkable novel – Kanthapura.

#### Works Cited

1. Brown, Lesley. et al. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
2. Gandhi, M. K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1999.

3. Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994.
4. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974.
5. Mundhra, S. C. *A Handbook of Literature in English for Competitive Examinations*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2009.
6. Naik, M. K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1999.
7. Narasimhaiah, C. D. *Indian Writers Series Vol. IV, Raja Rao*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1973.
8. Patil, Mallikarjun. “Kanthapura: A Portrait of Village Gandhi”. *The Fiction of Raja Rao*. Eds. Rajeshwar Mittapalli & Pier Paolo Piciuccio. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors Pvt. Ltd., 2001.
9. Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014.
10. Ray, Mohit K. Ed. *The Atlantic Companion to Literature in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors Pvt. Ltd., 2007.