

**Impact Of Freedom Struggle Movement On Characterization In The Novel Kanthapura By Raja Rao****Afsar Nawaboddin Shaikh**

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**Abstract**

The present study deals with various aspects of Rao's novel *Kanthapura*. At the beginning, the narrative aims at providing the miserable conditions of India under the imperialistic rule. It describes the simple rustic life of a South Indian village, *Kanthapura*. The whirlwind of Gandhian freedom struggle reaches *Kanthapura* and the village enthusiastically participates in the movement. The novel describes the impact of the movement on the masses and its aftermath. *Kanthapura* is a novel dealing with the impact of the Gandhian freedom struggle on a remote South Indian village of that name and what happens in *Kanthapura* was happening all over India in those stirring years from 1919 to 1931 of the Gandhian non-violent, non-co-operation movement for the independence of the country. Gandhi does not make a personal appearance in the novel but he is constantly present in the background and at every step there are references to important events of the day such as the historic Dandi March and the breaking of the Salt Law. Hence for the better understanding of the novel it is essential to form a clear idea of the important political and social events connected with the Indian freedom struggle. *Kanthapura* is the story of a village with that name. It presents the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and abolition of untouchability. Like its spirit, the form and style of *Kanthapura* also follow the Indian tradition proved to be a turning point in the history of Indian novel in English.

**Key Words-** *Kanthapura*, impact, freedom struggle, Gandhian thoughts.

**Introduction****Characters Used In *Kanthapura*****1. Moorthy, the Village Gandhi :**

Moorthy or Moorthappa is an educated young man of *Kanthapura*. It is he who organizes the work of the Congress in the village and hence he is the central figure in the novel. He has nothing heroic about him nor can he be called the hero of the novel. He is an ordinary young man, with common human weaknesses. He is one of those thousands of young men who were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi to give up their studies, risk the wrath of the government and become fighters for the cause of their motherland. He is considerate and respectful in an affectionate way in which he is referred to by the people of *Kanthapura*. Moorthy was in college when he felt the full force of Gandhi and he walked out of it, a Gandhi-man. From the time we meet him in the beginning of the novel to the very end of the book, Moorthy is perched at the top in his ascetic strength and his capacity for action comes as a surprise in a visionary ascetic strength and in a visionary like Moorthy.

Religion is the most potent force in *Kanthapura* and so its action begins with religion. Before there is any mention of Gandhi or Swaraj, there is tremendous religious activity. Starting from

an invocation to "Kenchamma, Goddess" to the end of the novel, religion seems to sustain the spirits of the people of *Kanthapura*. The action begins with the unearthing of a half sunken linga by Moorthy and its consecration. The boys of the village hold a grand feast to celebrate the occasion. One thing leads to another. Soon they observed Sankara Jayanthi, Sankara Vijaya etc. Jayaramachar, the Harikatha man, is then invited to the village, Harikathas are held every evening and these Harikathas serve as a clock for Gandhi propaganda. The Harikatha man is arrested and taken away and so the Gandhi movement comes to the village.

One of the important planks of the Gandhian movement was the eradication of untouchability. Moorthy implements this programme and goes in the Pariah quarter from one college to another exhorting the women to take to spinning in their spare time. He is excommunicated by the Swami for this Pariah business and his aged mother dies of grief and shock at this disgrace. Still he persists in his mission but after all he is a human being, with common human weaknesses, and this Pariah business is too much even for him. He hesitates and falters and thus shows that he is made of the same common clay.

**2. Ratna, the widow:**

The Progressive Widow Ratna is a young widow. She became a widow when she was hardly

fifteen years of age. She is attractive and charming as is clear from the attention which Moorthy pays to her. There is just a hint of a love - affair between the two. However their love and liking for each other has not been properly developed and hence the novel lacks in love - interest. Ratna is an young educated woman of progressive views. Though she is a widow she does not dress and live in a conventional style of a widow. She wears bangles; colored sarees (and not the white dhoti of a widow) uses the kumkum mark on her forehead and parts her hair like a concubine, as Waterfall Venkamma puts it. She is also bold and witty in conversation and can hold her own against heavy odds. She is much criticized for her unconventional ways but she does not care for such criticism. She chooses her own path and sticks to it with firmness and determination.

She takes keen interest in the Gandhian movement and is a source of inspiration and help to Moorthy. When Jayaramachar, the Harikatha man, is arrested, she conducts the Harikathas. After Rangamma's death, she reads out the newspapers and other publicity material of the Congress for the benefit of the villagers. When Moorthy is arrested, she carries on his work and serves as the leader. She organizes the women volunteer corps and imparts to the Sevikas the necessary training. She displays great courage and resourcefulness in the face of government repression and police action. She is dishonored, beaten up and sent to jail as a consequence. She suffers everything patiently and unflinchingly. As the narrator of the story tells us, she comes out of jail a changed person, more humble and more courteous to her elders but more matured and determined.

### **3. Patel Range Gowda:**

The Tiger of the Village Range Gowda is the Patel of Kanthapura and as such a government servant. He, too, is a Gandhi man and a staunch supporter of Moorthy. He throws all his weight and authority in his favor and is of a considerable help to him in organizing the Congress work in Kanthapura. He is a man of forceful, commanding personality and wields considerable power and authority in the village because of his forceful personality and determination he is known as the 'Tiger' of the village. Nobody dares to oppose him or disobey his orders. Nothing can be done in the village without

Range Gowda. He is also kindly, sympathetic and generous and does his best to help the poor, the needy and the suffering of the village.

### **4. Bhatta, the First Brahmin Bhatta**

The first Brahmin, is the opposite of Moorthy - the agent of the British government, in league with the Swami in the city and works ceaselessly to frustrate and defeat the Gandhi movement. If at all there is any villain in the novel, it is he. Bhatta began life with a loin cloth at his waist and a copper pot in his hand but went on adding several acres of the peasants' lands to his own domain. Today Bhatta means money and money means Bhatta and he charges ten percent interest and has gone upto twenty percent interest even. The novelist, who has a higher conception of the avocation of the Brahmin, the type of whom he sees in men like Ramakrishnayya of the older generation and Moorthy, of the coming generation, now has witnessed his degradation in Bhatta - and yet he is the first Brahmin of Kanthapura. Bhatta is very learned in his art. Bhatta was always the first to reach the home of his host on a ceremonial occasion, say a death anniversary. He could make perfect grass rings and such leaf cups. It was also pleasant to hear him recite the 'Gita'. Then would begin the ceremony and such was Bhatta's skill that it would be over in the twinkling of the eye. Bhatta is an unworthy husband, too, with his lack of consideration for his wife at home. On the days he dines out, his poor wife has only dal - soup and rice. Bhatta has no thought of her. His wife dies and soon this middle - aged, pot - bellied priest marries a girl of twelve and half years old. There is dowry too: A thousand rupees cash and five acres of wet land and a real seven days marriage.

### **5. Bade Khan, the Policeman:**

The Policeman, with his long beard, is a symbol of the British Raj. He is the symbol of the British presence in Kanthapura. It is his duty to maintain law and order and put down the Gandhi movement and it may be said to his credit that he performs his duty loyally and sincerely. The Gandhites may consider him a villain but judged impartially, he is a loyal Government servant performing his duty in every circumstance. He may be an instrument of the foreign Government but it would be wrong to dismiss him as a heartless monster of wickedness. On arriving at Kanthapura,

the initial difficulty he has to face is that of accommodation. Being a Muslim, he finds it difficult to find a house in the village. He goes to the Skeffington Coffee Estate, where a hut is allocated to him in which he settles down with one of the Pariah women.

In short, he is one of those unpatriotic Indians, who made it possible for the British to rule India for such a long time.

#### **6. The White Owner of the Skeffington Coffee Estate:**

The Skeffington Coffee Estate is a very large coffee plantation at a stone's throw from Kanthapura. It is owned by a white man, who is popularly known as the "Hunter Sahib" because he always carries a hunter or whip in his hand and freely uses it on all those workers on his estate who neglect their duty. He is a symbol of the imperialist rulers of India who exploited Indians in various ways.

A large number of workers are needed on the estate and they are recruited by the white owner's Maistri of Steward under false promises. They are brought to the estate from distant parts of Mysore. Promises of attractive wages are made. Visions of happy, comfortable life with practically no work to do are held out to them. It is said that one who enters the gates of the coffee plantation never comes out of it.

#### **7. The Swami:**

The Swami lives in the city. He remains in the background. Like Mahatma Gandhi he never appears on the scene. He is an orthodox Brahmin, narrow and conservative in his views. He is a traitor to the cause of the freedom of India. He is in the pay of the British government. He has received twelve hundred acres of wet land from the Government. So he is a willing stooge of the Britishers. In league with Bhatta, he does his best to defeat the freedom struggle in Kanthapura. It is he who excommunicates Moorthy for "the Pariah business" and thus is indirectly responsible for the death of his mother who is unable to bear the shock.

#### **8. Advocate Sankar:**

The advocate, **Sankar** is a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He believes in his principles of truth and non - violence and tries to follow in his footsteps. He is a true patriot and does his best for the cause of freedom. He wears Khadi and does not go to functions where people come wearing dresses

made of foreign cloth. When Gandhi is arrested and sent to jail, he keeps fast with Gandhi. He believes that fasting is a means of self - purification. It gives him spiritual strength and illumination. He loves truth and does not undertake false cases. Bold and fearless, he is not afraid of the Government and takes up the defence of Moorthy, when he is arrested and tried in the city courts. He is noble, generous and kind - hearted. When his first wife dies, he does not marry a second time. He remembers his wife and regards it a sin to marry again.

#### **9. Narsamma, mother of Moorthy:**

She is the old widowed mother of Moorthy. She is conservative and orthodox unable to understand the implications of the Gandhi - movement and the noble work in which her son is engaged. She has a great love for her son and has high hopes of a brilliant career for him. Her hopes and dreams are shattered when he joins the freedom movement. She is literally shocked and her feelings are intensely hurt when Moorthy is ex - communicated by the Swami for the "Pariah business".

#### **10. Rangamma**

She is one of the few educated women in the village. She reads the newspapers herself and thus keeps herself and others acquainted with the day to day developments elsewhere. Waterfall Venkamma is jealous of her and roars and rails against her day and night. It is from her railings that we learn much about her. She is a childless widow but she has a very big home, much larger than that of Venkamma herself. Her relatives are in the city and visit her frequently. She is of a great help to Moorthy in organizing the Congress work in the village. She is a lady of enlightened views actively involved in the freedom struggle.

#### **Conclusion**

The author makes use of this situation and incorporates the religious flavour with the theme of freedom struggle with an account of the situation, the locale, of the village. Thus Kanthapura is not a novel dealing with the life and doings of any individual hero. It is certainly not the story of Moorthy but of the masses of the village, of their suffering, of their exile, of their momentary defeat which has in it the seeds of ultimate victory. It ends with an account of their life in Kashipura and gives us a sense of abiding

fulfillment which they have attained. Hence if there is any hero in the novel, it is Kanthapura itself and its people. But it is no political novel any more than was Gandhi's movement a mere political movement and pictures so vividly, truthfully and touchingly the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership: its religious character, its economic and social concerns, its political ideals, precisely in the way Mahatma Gandhi tried to spiritualize politics, the capacity for sacrifice of our people in response to the call of one like Gandhi.

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