



Raja Rao's Kanthapura as a Deserted Village

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Abstract

The paper deals with a stylistic study of Raja Rao's Kanthapura an attempt have been made in the paper to study this Kanthapura novel from the point of view of the freedom struggle, social equality and British dominance. The paper shows about Kanthapura was a small village and in this novel corner house Moorti was the protagonist's character in this novel. He was admired about Mahatma Gandhi views and thoughts; he was real follower of Mahatma Gandhi then after some incidents happened that time Moorti change his ideal leader then he follows Jawahar Lal Nehru and his thoughts. This work said about some other characters also, finally after some incidents the Britishers vacated the town of Kanthapura.

Keywords: Freedom Struggle, Social Inequality and Dominance.

Introduction

Raja Rao's Kanthapura is a landmark novel that vividly portrays the impact of India's freedom movement on rural life¹. Set in a traditional South Indian village, the novel captures the rhythm of community life, religious faith, and caste hierarchies. However, as the story unfolds, Kanthapura, once a vibrant and cohesive society, gradually turns into a deserted village². Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's ideals, the villagers, led by Moorthy, rise against British colonial rule. Their nonviolent resistance is met with brutal repression — homes are burnt, people are imprisoned, and families are torn apart. The political awakening that initially seemed to promise hope and unity instead brings devastation³. As a result, many villagers are forced to flee, abandoning their ancestral homes and way of life⁷. In the end, Kanthapura becomes a symbol of destruction and displacement. Raja Rao shows that political struggle, though necessary, comes at a profound human cost. The village's transformation into a deserted landscape reflects the painful realities of social and political upheaval⁴. Through this portrayal, Kanthapura stands not just as a record of historical change, but as a poignant meditation on loss, sacrifice, and the price of freedom⁵.

Review of Literature: The Researcher discussed about Indo Anglican literature, Gandhian era (1920-1947) is a significant time in history of Indian writing in English. Indian English literature of 1930s is shaped by Gandhian era. Raja Rao's Kanthapura is a renowned political novel that depicts influence of Gandhian Satyagraha movement and its principles on humble inhabitants of Kanthapura. Sharma Kushal⁶ overviewed that Moorti is he central character in novel. This thesis encompasses Gandhian principles, Gandhian era, Indo-Anglican literature, as well as socialism.

Gulshan Kumar² examined Mahatma Gandhi's personality, his philosophy, the methodology of the Satyagraha movement, and Jawaharlal Nehru's worldview. The Researcher commented about Indian villages. This community exemplifies a quintessential Indian settlement. The populace is uninformed and credulous. Prasad and Kumar⁷ focused on the society is stratified by caste, and the village is segmented into four quarters. Through his depiction of life in Kanthapura, Raja Rao illustrates the essence of existence in Indian villages; Kanthapura serves as a microcosm of traditional Indian society, yet its themes are universal. Dr. Radha Narayan⁸ stated that Raja Rao's epic, Kanthapura, was published in 1938. This is Raja Rao's inaugural novel, written by him in France. It is regarded as his paramount and most consequential work. Kanthapura is also referred to as a historical fiction that provides an authentic and captivating account of the Indian freedom struggle.

The main focal point of this paper³ is to find out Gandhi's impact on the novel Kanthapura. The world of novels got their particular position by hand of the trio of novelist 'Mulak Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan'.

Aims and objectives of the Study: To study the social inequality in Raja Rao's Kanthapura. To study Mahatma Gandhi's ideology and mind set of people. To study Freedom movement.

Methodology

This paper is based on Descriptive and Conceptual methods. This paper has been covered both primary and secondary data. In this paper, researcher collect sources from original novel, websites, magazines, different author's research papers, Raja Rao's life and literary works related articles.

Author Introduction: An author of great renown in Indian English literature is Raja Rao¹. He came from a Brahmin family from South India and was born in Mysore in 1909. He went to Aligarh to further his education after completing his matriculation in Hyderabad. Professor Dickinson inspired him to seek out French literature and language study. A scholarship from Hyderabad University allowed him to fly to France and begin studying French literature after he earned his B.A. from Hyderabad College. Under Prof. Cazamian's guidance, he finished his doctorate at University of Sorbonne. France was his home from 1928 - 1939. In 1940 he went back to India, where he lived for around six or seven years.

In 1946 he went back to France, where he stayed until 1956². While residing in France, he wed American actress named Katherine, and they have a kid together. His debut piece, *Kanthapura*, was written during his time in France. Before his departure for France, Raja Rao wrote various works to convey his love for his country and to depict his intrigue with Indian culture, heritage, and Vedic philosophy. His sculptures demonstrate flawless integration of Eastern and Western views. He derived significant influence for his storytelling from James Joyce, Valmiki, Ved Vyas, and Joseph Conrad. Novel "Serpent and the Rope" articulately conveys his admiration for Indian culture. He received "Sahitya Akademi Award" for same novel, recognized as preeminent Indian English novel ever written⁶. He has been awarded "Padma Bhushan" by Indian government and has achieved both national and international recognition⁷.

Raja Rao had been renowned author of Gandhian time, whose writings demonstrate deep understanding of the dynamics stemming from Gandhian movement. His body of work includes *Kanthapura*⁹, *The Serpent and the Rope*¹⁰, and *The Cat and Shakespeare*¹¹. Alongside these novels, he wrote a novella titled *The Policeman and the Rose*⁴ and numerous short stories gathered in collections *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories*⁵ and *The Policeman and the Rose and Other Stories*¹². His short stories can be categorized into two distinct genres. The inaugural collection includes prominent narratives like as Akkayya, Javni, Narasiga, *The Little Gram Shop*, *The Cow and the Barricade*, and *Nimka*. The second anthology of short stories integrates various elements of fantasy, with realism serving as the backdrop. The stories are named *Companions*, *Kanakapala*, *Protector of Gold*, *Khandesh*, *The Policeman and the Rose*, *India: a Fable*, and *The Premiere of Shakuntala*.

Introducing the Novel

Raja Rao, author of *Kanthapura*, an English novel from India which explores impact of Gandhi's liberation fight on a South Indian village called *Kanthapura*. Story depicts India's circumstances throughout the turbulent era from 1919 to 1931. *Kanthapura* and its setting exemplify the events occurring throughout India during that period. Although Gandhi does not physically manifest in Mulk Raj Anand's novel, the *Untouchables*, his influence is perpetually seen via the

numerous nationalist movements and resistance against British imperialism that were burgeoning at that period¹³.

Moorthy, young man with urban education, main protagonist of book. He is ardent admirer of Gandhi, and when Moorthy from city arrives with messages from Gandhi, civil disobedience movement makes its way to remote South Indian village of *Kanthapura*. He endeavors to visit every residence in the hamlet, including the pariah areas, to convey Gandhi's message and elucidate significance of fight for independence¹⁴. Moorthy encourages locals for adopting charka spinning to produce their own garments and reject foreign products. In village, Congress Committee including volunteer corps are established, and promotional materials from city are disseminated in *Kanthapura* at no charge. The volunteers receive adequate training to uphold a non-violent stance throughout governmental repression. When Moorthy initiated the liberation struggle, he had backing from Ratna, forward-thinking local woman, as well as Patel Range Gowda, *Kanthapura* Patel.

To quell activities of Gandhi's supporters and hinder nationalist movement, government tries to take firm action. Bhatta, Swami, along with Bade Khan are British operatives who fiercely oppose Moorthy's independence movement. Because of his interactions with outcasts, Bhatta and Swami excommunicate Moorthy. Most people have positive view of independence fight movement, even though some people are affected. News of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March and his transgression of Salt Law energizes *Kanthapura*'s citizens. The *Satyagraha* movement is subsequently invoked nationwide, significantly influencing the villagers¹⁵. Under Moorthy's guidance, the people organized a *Satyagraha* outside the toddy plantation. In response, the police resorted to lathi-charging, resulting in numerous injuries among populace. Although some were incarcerated, the movement persisted¹⁶.

Residents intensified their picketing outside Skeffington Coffee Estate, facing greater pushback from authorities this time. Majority incurred injuries, and repression didn't spare women along with children, who suffered significant suffering¹⁷. This situation profoundly impacted emotions of estate labors, prompting their involvement in the movement. Slogans resonated throughout the venue as some exclaimed, Victory to Mahatma Gandhi. A significant number of individuals, including Moorthy, were incarcerated, and a lengthy sentence was imposed. Ratna oversees Congress's activities in area while Moorthy is away. Significant group of women has been assembled along with educated for impending war of independence.

Peasants' subsequent action is the no-tax campaign. Individuals became cognizant of the British's unjust appropriation of land income from uninformed and impoverished populace, prompting them to reject tax payments.

Villagers were determined to continue campaign tranquilly as well as maintain non-violence, in most adverse conditions. However, violence escalates, prompting the government to implement draconian measures to suppress the mob. They exhibited great resistance to the relentless tyranny but ultimately surrendered their cause. The people are forced to evacuate and seek sanctuary in a distant village many miles from Kanthapura. The courageous defiance exhibited by inhabitants of Kanthapura and many regions across the nation significantly startled British authority, which was ultimately dismantled in 1947¹⁸.

Linking the concept of "subalternity" to a broader discourse of research and analysis reveals the heightened significance of Rao's work. Subaltern studies examine history from a grassroots perspective, focusing on how power originates from lower strata and influence of persons and factors on this dynamic. This is seen in multiple situations within Rao's work. Gandhian movement is subaltern in that it aimed for an inclusive Indian identity and contested any preconceived notions that restricted it. Gandhi was not promoting independence that benefited only a select few. His was not a scenario in which entrenched power would be preserved. Instead, he pursued an extensive coalition, opposing all manifestations of social hierarchy¹⁹.

Upon this realization, it evolved into a narrative reflecting the experiences of broader populace, rather than a limited segment of the social hierarchy. Upon Moorthy's arrival in hamlet, he is promptly admonished for his subaltern beliefs, which aim to instigate change from grassroots level of the social hierarchy, arguing for the abolition of the caste system and assertion of individual political voices²⁰. The subaltern aspect of the work emerges as women assume authority in absence of their males, who have retreated to the jungle. Currently, their challenge to the Status Quo is subaltern due to minimal presence of a ruling class in power. Historical growth and consciousness are perceived from perspective of the masses, where change has become constant. Rao's story effectively examines permanence of subaltern movements, as reclamation of voice rarely reverts to quiet or marginalization.

Conclusion

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* vividly portrays the transformation of a once-thriving village into a deserted and desolate land, symbolizing the cost of India's struggle for independence. The physical abandonment of the village, along with the cultural and moral upheaval, reflects the larger socio-political displacement caused by colonial rule and nationalist resistance. The novel encapsulates the sacrifices made by ordinary people and highlights the irreversible changes that movements for freedom bring to traditional societies.

In the end, *Kanthapura* stands as a poignant reminder of both the resilience and the tragic disintegration of communities caught in the tides of history¹².

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