
UNIT 1 RAJA RAO : CAREER AND WORKS

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Raja Rao and the Indian Novel in English
- 1.3 Two Contemporary Writers : Anand and Narayan
- 1.4 Raja Rao : Career and Works
- 1.5 Influences on Rao's Philosophical Outlook
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 References
- 1.8 Glossary
- 1.9 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to introduce Raja Rao to you as a writer of fiction whose contribution to Indian writing in English is much valued. We also tell you briefly about two of his major contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, and their works. A brief life-sketch gives you the necessary background knowledge of Raja Rao and his writings. Besides, you get to know about his philosophical bent of mind and views on literary communication.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Block, we have attempted to tell you something about the Indian novel in English; how and when it appeared on the Indian literary scene; and what are its central themes. In this unit we have tried to place Raja Rao in the context of this literature. Information is provided on the achievements of two of his major contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. We have furnished some details of the life and literary career of Raja Rao and mentioned his major works. Next we have tried to tell you about the books and authors, both Indian and Western, that have exerted a lasting influence on his mind and shaped his genius as a writer. It is important to know how he came under the sway of some French poets and philosophers. Raja Rao's philosophical bent of mind and his views on literary communication are also introduced to you in Unit 1.

1.2 RAJA RAO AND THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

The art of story-telling attained a high degree of success in ancient India, as is evident from the popularity of the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and collections of short stories like *Kathasaritsagar*, *Puncha Tantra* and the *Jataka Tales*. In modern times, with the appearance of Indian writing in English towards the close of the nineteenth century, the novel came on to the scene rather late in India. It was the British who introduced the Indians to the novel as a form of literature. The Indian novel in English emerged in the 1920's and established itself as a popular form in the next thirty years. Social realism and the reform movement generated by liberal humanist ideals gathered momentum and assumed a national form between 1920 and 1940 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The Gandhian ideals of *Satyagraha*

(demands based on truth) find expression in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. Their blend of political ideology and social realism ensured that the English prose fiction would be the medium for the definition of a new India and its aspirations. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* belongs to the same class of Indian novel in English.

Raja Rao goes beyond common realism and dramatizes the national struggle as a mythic and symbolic event. The *Kanthapura* village in his novel is a piece of mythic land containing within it the memory of the village community's traditions and beliefs. While R.K. Narayan in *The Guide* is content to show the progression of events in the life of an individual, Mulk Raj Anand in his novels like *Untouchable* and *Coolie* gives evidence of a total commitment to the socialist doctrine. Anand also presents a cross-section of the Indian society through the national struggle for freedom, which is not only a political event but also a comprehensive emotional experience for the people involved in it. There is a shift of emphasis in the post-Independence Indian literature in English. The novelists writing after 1947 show a sense of disenchantment with the actual reality of freedom, and their anger finds expression through a sense of humanistic compassion for the suffering Indian masses.

A theme that has dominated the Indian novel in English is the contrast of cultures between East and West. Those who have written works dealing with this theme include Raja Rao, Balachandra Rajan, Kamala Markandaya and Shantha Rama Rau. While Rajan explores the theme of alienation, Shantha Rama Rau examines the conflict of attitudes and values. Kamala Markandaya, on the other hand, depicts the East-West encounter as an inevitable accident of history, and passes no judgement on it. Raja Rao's work is a class apart from that of the other novelists writing on the same theme, for his examination of the East-West dilemma is characterized by a deep sense of crisis in human relationships. In *The Serpent and the Rope* and other novels that he wrote after *Kanthapura*, he lays stress on this very aspect of the crisis. He believes that individuals are conditioned by religious and cultural diversity, and, therefore, they fail to recognize the essential oneness of the human spirit, which is the same everywhere.

One of the main traditional Indian precepts underlying Raja Rao's fiction is, "Brahmin is he who knows Brahman." At the back of his writing are a mind and vision of life that are concrete yet elusive. All his heroes are in one way or another involved with the problem of knowing God and thereby realizing themselves. To fully understand what Raja Rao says in his short stories and novels requires some knowledge of the philosophy and metaphysics of Hinduism. This guide-line also applies to his three early novels – *Kanthapura*, *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Cat and Shakespeare* – and later works like *Comrade Kirillov* and *The Chessmaster and His Moves*. Yet Raja Rao deliberately writes in English for a Western audience and an exclusive English-knowing Indian reading public. In his short stories, he writes of the privations of family life, frustrations of the widow in Hindu society, place of myth in India, impact of Gandhi's message on the youth of his time and the sad reality of the Indian peasant's life in the context of the struggle for freedom. All these primary concerns of Raja Rao figure as themes in *Kanthapura*, his first novel. S.C. Harrex avers thus:

Some of the short stories also contain various interior monologue and rhythmic effects which can be regarded retrospectively as a useful technical prelude to the stream-of-consciousness form of *Kanthapura*¹

He goes on to say:

It is clear that in his short stories and *Kanthapura* Raja was endeavoring to formulate a style which was capable simultaneously of faithfully rendering social behaviour and expressing nuances of Indian sensibility²

A seeker after truth. Raja Rao appears to have discovered the mantra of truth in the classical literature of ancient India. He is forthright in admitting

Career and Works

I am interested in discussing the problems of the truth-seeker. I publish what I enjoy, I believe one should seek truth, whatever it is, and pay the price for it.... All writers write only autobiography. Certain aspects of my life are emphasised in each book,³

In 'A Pilgrimage to Europe', a Kannada article contributed to the journal *Jaya Karnataka*, Raja Rao writes of his boyhood dreams of going to far away countries. G.S. Amur refers to it while highlighting Rao's firm determination to realise this dream:

[He] conquered with a firm mind all the odds of this world, remembered with gratitude all the friends who had maligned him, loved like a brother the father who had discarded him, starved when he could get nothing to eat, worshipped the food-giver as a god, refused to be cowed down by calamity, ... drove the soul onward as one does a pair of bullocks, obtained a scholarship from the Government, and left his town for Colombo with the joyous blessings of one and all.⁴

The Indian novelists in English have experimented with the foreign medium that they have adopted for their literary expression. Their style and language bear the influence of the regions to which the individual writers belong. All the three major novelists – Narayan, Anand and Raja Rao – have attempted an experimental prose style which successfully conveys their appreciation of the Indian way of life that they express through the medium of English. Anand renders the Punjabi expressions in English and thereby enhances the authenticity of his fiction. The simplicity of Narayan's language and style presents the reality of Indian life and character. Raja Rao goes a step further in mingling the grace and tone of the speech rhythms of his mother tongue, Kannada, with that of English, the foreign medium of his novels and short stories.

1.3 TWO CONTEMPORARY WRITERS : ANAND AND NARAYAN

K.R. Srinivasan Iyengar regards Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao to be the three major writers of the Indian novel in English. It is a significant coincidence that all the three of them started writing about the same time, i.e., the thirties of the present century and are still active in literary production. For this reason, they need to be studied together, and you have a rare opportunity to do so in the present course. Hence, we would like to give you a brief introduction to the other two in this first Unit on Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. The consistency and prolific output of Anand and Narayan are particularly admirable. Both of them have managed to hold on to their chosen course, and each has to his credit fiction of sufficient bulk and notable merit. Anand comes from North India and Narayan belongs to the South. Of them Iyengar writes in his *Indian Writing in English* :

Between them they comprise as it were the North and the South, extension and concentration, vigour and urbanity, vitality and artistic reticence.⁵

For the style, period and themes of Anand's novels, he is regarded as a pioneer of the Indian novel in English. Apart from fiction, he has written autobiography, works on art, cookery, criticism and philosophy. Despite the wide range of his literary activity, there is a unity to all his work. His novels identify with the outcasts and the oppressed while he attempts to affirm the true values of life and faith in the moral order. Anand is a 'committed' writer who, long ago, made the break from the literary and historical image of a passive India to a literature that reflects the new national awareness. By critically examining the traditions of Indian culture, he represents a new order. In spite of the tension between propaganda and literary realism, he maintains the balance in his works. His characters are victims, oppressors, virtuous social workers, and enlightened politicians, who must all together help to create a just social and economic order. When he wrote *Untouchable* (1935) in the early thirties, he stayed with Gandhi in the Sabarmati Ashram, and Gandhi appeared in this novel. It was followed in quick succession by *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), and the trilogy: *The Village* (1939), *Across The Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942). Later appeared an autobiographical novel, *Seven Summers: The Story of an Indian Childhood* (1951).

Born in Madras, in 1906, but living at Mysore, R.K. Narayan writes a distinctive regional fiction. While Anand is a reformer and Rao a philosopher, Narayan is a moral analyst. For his novels and short stories, he has created a special geographical identity. The imaginary town of Malgudi, which is the location of all his fiction, represents South Indian small town provincialism and culture. Most probably a fictional version of Mysore, it contains a rich variety of Indian life. Its busy markets are full of the hustle and bustle of life; the river is a place of sanctity, tragedy and recreation; the Memphi Hills with their forests and cave-temples attract hunters, archeologists and religious recluses. In fact, Malgudi is a microcosm of India, and its fixed setting allows Narayan to analyse the complex elements of the vast country. Narayan's multiple themes are nationalism, modernization, the impact of education, family planning, the attraction of going abroad, and the rebellion of the young against the old. But Malgudi shapes the gentle humour and irony that sets him apart from Anand and Rao. Though comedy is not a major form in the Indian novel in English, Malgudi provides a locale where humour is possible. Narayan recreates the web of life in a South Indian small town through clear and lucid standard English, which is a contrast to some of the vernacular touches of 'Indian English' that we come across in the works of Anand and Rao. Narayan's major works are: *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1927), *The Dark Room* (1939), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of signs* (1976). Makarand Paranjape sums up Raja Rao vis-a-vis the duo thus writes in his 'Introduction' to *The Best of Raja Rao*:

Raja Rao is generally regarded as one of the most important Indian novelists. The reasons for his pre-eminence are both historical because his first novel, *Kanthapura*, was published during the decade of the 1930s when Indian English fiction began to gain recognition... This coming of age was heralded by the publication of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935), and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938).

Artistically, Rao is important because of his unique formal and thematic accomplishments. Although his five novels seem modest in comparison to Anand's or Narayan's more prolific output, Rao's achievement is probably more impressive. Anand and Narayan are both highly regarded as novelists, but I would argue that not a single one of their works makes the kind of claims to great art as does Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* or *The Chess master and his Moves*.⁶



Raja Rao belongs to an ancient Brahmin family of Mysore, now part of the Karnataka state. After his birth in 1909, he was brought up in the neighbouring state of Hyderabad, now part of Andhra Pradesh, where he was exposed to two other Indian languages, Telugu and Urdu. He was the only Hindu student in the Muslim Public School of Hyderabad where the only teachers to impress him were British. So, at a very young age, Raja Rao came under the influence of the West. Later, he went for higher education to Aligarh Muslim University, where one of his teachers was Eric Dickinson, poet and painter, who taught him the appreciation of European art and philosophy. After graduating with English and History, Raja Rao went, in 1929, to study at Montpellier, France. Shortly afterwards, he married a French school teacher, Camille Mouly. She had a role in Rao's development as a writer since she advised him to explore the possibilities of writing in his own mother tongue. He complied by writing a long poem and a few short stories in Kannada. But the work that made people take note of him was his first novel in English, *Kanthapura* (1938), which is about the Gandhian *Satyagraha* Movement in a South Indian village.

Meanwhile, Raja Rao's French marriage failed as it was regarded as an act of rebellion by his orthodox Hindu family. Back in India, he visited a number of spiritual ashramas including those of Ramana Maharishi and Sri Aurobindo. In 1941, he spent some time with Gandhi at Sevagram. Six years later appeared *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories*, which is a collection of some of his translated Kannada stories and others written in English. There followed a period of long silence during which he studied philosophy. *The Serpent and the Rope* was published in 1950. It was widely appreciated as an exploration of intercultural encounter and won for Raja Rao the Sahitya Akademi Award. He was invited to teach Indian philosophy at a university in the USA, and, in 1965, married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. In the same year was published *The Cat and Shakespeare : A Tale of Modern India*. It is a short novel of great merit with some philosophical content and has evoked conflicting reactions from literary critics.

The reading public did not show much enthusiasm for Raja Rao's next novel, *Comrade Kirillov* (1976), which explores the depths of the mind and soul of an orthodox Brahmin communist who is a confused bundle of contradictions. *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) is a collection that includes some of the stories of *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* and a few new ones. *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) meant to be the first part of a trilogy, was awarded a prize by the Oklahoma University, USA. In this ambitious work of fiction, Rao returns to the theme of multi-cultural confrontation. *On The Ganga Ghat* (1989) is a collection of connected stories that presents vivid glimpses of the permanent reality of Indian life.

Raja Rao's second marriage also broke up, and his third marriage was with another American woman.



1.5 INFLUENCES ON RAO'S PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK

Most of Raja Rao's works have a philosophical content, and this is part of his literary art. He believes man to be 'a metaphysical entity', and his own writings have the bearings of a metaphysical life. To the Western educated mind, India represents spirituality, and Raja Rao supports this outlook. Therefore, he projects such a point of view in his fiction for the benefit of his Western readers. At the same time, he asserts the superiority of Indian philosophy over Western thought. Among the Indian works that have influenced him are the two classical epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the Buddhist texts in English translation, medieval Kannada poetry, the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi, and the philosophy of Ananda Coomaraswamy. Among the Western influences on him, Raja Rao himself mentions the Bible, Plato, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Gorky, Malraux, Kafka, Rilke and Andre Gide.

Raja Rao's Indian background does not provide him with a model for his fiction. The literary models that he seems to follow are all European and not British or American. His life-long struggle to come to grips with a foreign medium and literary form inevitably chains him to his European – mainly French – background. The quest for identity that runs through his works is, in fact, a quest for form. This is what he writes about himself in the Preface to *The Policeman and the Rose* :

A South Indian Brahmin, nineteen, spoon-fed
on English, with just enough Sanskrit to know
I knew so little, with an indiscreet education
in Kannada, the French literary scene over-
powered me.

According to Raja Rao, the key to man's existence as a social being lies in the soul, not in the body. The characters in his fiction live both at the physical and spiritual planes. They are moved by a code of conduct which preaches that the only commitment that one should have in the world is to oneself. The quest of the real self is the object of the heroes of Raja Rao. For him, literature is *Sadhana* (devoted practice), not a profession but a vocation. It is a severe discipline, painful and exhausting, not an intellectual adventure as for a Western writer. Therefore, he would like an Indian writer in English to discover and identify himself as an Indian first, and then commence to write. Raja Rao believes that a book has three constituents : the author, the word, and the reader. The word is in the middle and makes communication possible between the author and the reader. One cannot communicate unless one has the desire to communicate, and it is this very desire that makes writers possible. For Raja Rao literary creation is the transformation of subjective experiences into a work of objective art. His models in the narrative art are the ancient Indian *Puranas*, which are characterized by a lack of personal involvement of the writer. *Kanthapura*, the text prescribed for your study, is a novel that belongs to this very tradition. Its narrator tells the story of the action involved objectively even though she is part of it.

P.C. Bhattacharya writes thus on Raja Rao:

Next to Shankara and Ramanuja, Raja Rao was influenced most by Gandhi. The Gandhian movement was not merely a political one; it was a real social revolution, albeit without the concomitant hatred and violence. Gandhi, in his turn, was influenced by such Western thinkers as Ruskin, Marx and Tolstoy. His ideas about trusteeship, social justice and non-cooperation with the evil can be traced to these sources. However, the basic principles of Gandhi were derived from the thoughts of the ancient Indian thinkers, especially as contained in *Gita* and *Ramayana*. Even his fasts, which some thought to be a kind of political blackmail, were of a piece with the Brahminic spirit...

Naturally Raja Rao, [a] Brahmin, felt a strong affinity with Gandhi. *Kanthapura* is the story of such a Brahminic self-sacrifice. The village was destroyed; its men were beaten, arrested, or killed; its women raped, tortured and driven away... Yet there is no sense of despair, no feeling of failure, no bitterness at losing a battle. Rather it is just the opposite.⁷

According to G.S. Amur, Raja Rao's advice to Indians is couched in the following words of his essay, 'A Pilgrimage to Europe':

We may read Keats and Thackeray as often as we like, but unless we pore over the writings of our own great poets, the great seers who preached us their priceless philosophy, our knowledge will not be our own. It is our great misfortune that, blinded by foreign rule, we have forgotten our great men and have nothing but scorn for them. We have lost the knowledge that was our own, and the little that we got from the West rolls away and does not touch our souls. What great knowledge can we ever hope to find than the knowledge offered to us by the *Gita* and the epics? Don't they offer us the whole knowledge of the universe?⁸

Raja Rao's mind is firmly rooted in the Hindu culture and philosophy, but he is not averse to receiving ideas from the Western thinkers. His sense of nationalism does

not prevent him from assessing the narrowness and limitations of some of his countrymen. Being a product of the Gandhian Age, he believes in the free exchange of ideas between India and the West. For the readers, it is hard to remain unaffected by his sincerity of purpose and authenticity of statement; the message comes out bright and clear in all his writings – essays, short stories and novels. Ultimately, however as Makarand avers:

Raja Rao is an artist, not a philosopher. It is as an artist that he is to be judged and understood. And as such he has been true to his calling. In terms of language, style and theme, he has been perfectly consistent, fulfilling the promise he made in his *Foreword to Kanthapura*. It is this consistency, this integrity of purpose, this concern with the Ultimate Reality, coupled with stylistic innovation and an inspired use of language, that makes him one of the most significant and interesting writers of the world.⁹

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have given you a brief introduction to Raja Rao, placing him among the major writers of the Indian novel in English. Along with Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, he is the pioneer of this genre of writing. Though he shares much with them, yet he has a place of his own in the history and development of the Indian writing in English in the last sixty years of the twentieth century. We have also informed you about the life and works of Raja Rao as briefly as could be encompassed within the limited scope of this Unit. His *Kanthapura* dramatises the national struggle of Gandhian *Satyagraha* as a mythic and symbolic event in the history of a South Indian village. Elements of Indian and Western philosophy and cross-cultural concerns are projected in *The Serpent and the Rope*. The influences that shaped his mental outlook are the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, Kannada poetry, Gandhi, Plato, Shakespeare, and some Russian and French writers. Raja Rao, in his writings, lays more stress on the spirit of human beings than on their physical aspect. For him, literature is *Sadhna*, not a profession but a vocation. He believes that one cannot communicate unless one has the desire to communicate. His models in the narrative art are the ancient Indian *Puranas*, and *Kanthapura* is structured like one.

1.7 REFERENCES

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1.8 GLOSSARY

East - West dilemma:
Foreign medium:
Outcasts:

Conflict of the cultures of the East and the West.
English is basically a foreign language in India.
People thrown out of society.

Regional fiction:	Fiction about a particular geographical region.	Career and Works
Provincialism:	Manners peculiar to an area.	
Dostoevsky:	Russian novelist, author of <i>Brothers Karamzov</i> .	
Gorky:	Russian novelist, author of <i>Mother</i> .	
Malraux:	French novelist.	
Kafka:	Jewish writer born in Prague, author of <i>The Trial</i> .	
Rilke:	German poet, a great stylist.	
Andre Gide:	French novelist, dramatist and poet.	

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. Place Raja Rao in the context of the evolution of the Indian writing in English.
2. Compare and contrast Raja Rao's contribution as a writer to that of two of his major contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan.
3. Write a short essay on the literary influences that shaped Raja Rao's philosophy of life and literature.

UNIT 2 KANTHAPURA : BACKGROUND

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Historical and Political Background
- 2.3 Gandhian Thought and Its Impact
- 2.4 Raja Rao's English : Form and Style
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 References
- 2.7 Glossary
- 2.8 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to give you some background knowledge about *Kanthapura*. When you finish a careful reading of this Unit, you would have gathered information about the following topics :

- the sources of *Kanthapura*;
- the historical and political background of the novel;
- the impact of Gandhian philosophy on Raja Rao as presented in this novel;
- the form and style of English as a medium evolved by Raja Rao for narrating the events that form the plot of *Kanthapura*.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

While studying Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* as a text, one needs to have a background knowledge of several things. For instance, you, as a student, ought to know about the sources — ancient and modern — that inspired the author to write this book. The theme, structure, characterization, language and style of a novel are generally determined by the models that the writer has in mind and of which he is constantly thinking while writing the book. Hence, it makes the task of understanding a text easy if one has a fair knowledge of its sources. Similarly, since *Kanthapura* is a social document about a village in turmoil and the people living in it, you need to know about the historical time and the political movement that are shown to have caused the upheaval. Mahatma Gandhi is a living presence in *Kanthapura*, and his philosophy of life and political struggle is reflected by the thought and action of several characters. All this must be taken into account while proceeding with the study of the novel. There is yet another aspect of the book — its language and style — which you need to know so that you are able to appreciate the peculiarities of expression that you will come across when reading the novel. All these various elements of background study form part of this Unit.

2.2 SOURCES OF KANTHAPURA

In language and style that recall ancient Indian epics, Raja Rao describes in *Kanthapura* an archetypal South Indian village inspired by Gandhi's *Satyagraha* and

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crushed by the police force of the British rulers. The Skeffington Coffee Estate and what goes on within its boundaries represents the pattern of British oppression in India. In spite of its social realistic mode, the novel evolves round its mythic and symbolic framework. Rao writes a narrative that not only takes us back to the world of the Hindu epics, but also interprets experience in the forms of Hindu thought. Events of the plot are illusory; life is symbolic; and the struggle of the men and women of *Kanthapura* village is part of the continuing *Ramayana*. Gandhi is an *Avatara* (incarnation) of Rama sent from heaven to rescue India (Sita) from the British (Ravana). The old and the new orders are mingled together. Non-violence of *Satyagraha* is integrated with the ancient, violent tradition of the Indian epics, which repeats itself hundreds of times over in the course of Indian history.



Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Rao builds up an image of India that appeals to the West without sacrificing realism. Ancient history, religion, characters from the epics, natural landscape, and ordinary life of the village community of *Kanthapura* – all these elements are synthesised to raise the message of the novel above mere nationalism. The life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi provide constant refrains to hold the characters and various strands of the plot of *Kanthapura* together. Gandhi's moral values and practice in politics, Moorthy's socialistic ideas, the mythology of the man who tells the *Harikatha* (story of God), the personal likes and dislikes of the narrator, the ruthlessness of the oppressors – all these various elements of the novel offer interpretations of the place of nationalism and of good and evil in Indian life. No single view is allowed to dominate the novel. *Kanthapura* symbolises India, its capacity to absorb influences and yet remain essentially the same.

In the process of writing *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao was aware of the problem of expressing purely Indian experience through the medium of the novel of European origin. As a consequence, he does not strictly adhere to the Western model, but makes it suit his purpose by mixing into it the purely Indian elements of the epic, *Purana*, and *Harikatha*. In the process, he succeeds in his endeavour of achieving a fusion of theme, form and discourse, which are authentically Indian and modern at the same time. *Kanthapura* is a novel that has the freedom of the romance, the broad canvas of the epic, and symbolism of the fable. It is history and fictional narrative

unified to form a prose poem. Its historical action covers nearly ten years of Indian struggle for freedom, including Gandhi's famous Dandi March during the Salt Satyagraha and the Civil Disobedience Movement. As a *Purana*, it recalls the legendary exploits of Rama and Krishna, which are known to most Indians from their very childhood. Through the skill of his art, Raja Rao integrates broad Indian experience and Gandhian philosophy into the destiny of the village community of *Kanthapura*. As K.R. Rao writes in his book, *The Fiction of Raja Rao* :

Kanthapura does not project the Indian spirit isolatively, but as a living experience moving in time and space. The three levels of action in the novel, political, social and religious, are all related to unified concept of India both as a tradition and as a living culture, as a magnificent past to be rediscovered in the enormous present.¹

2.3 HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The actual historical and political situation of India in the 1930's provides the background of the story that is narrated in *Kanthapura*. The Indian National Congress Committee was already a broad-based political organization that had spread its branches in the length and breadth of India. Mahatma Gandhi, after his return from South Africa, was already recognized as a leader of national stature who had launched his revolutionary campaign based on *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* against the British rule. There are recurring references in the novel to important political events of that time, such as the Salt Satyagraha, the Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi, the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Round Table Conference, and the Gandhi - Irwin Pact. Whatever was happening on the political scene in India in those years finds its due reflection in the novel. Characters like Moorthy, Rangamma, Ratna and Range Gowda are not only aware of what is happening all over India, but they also take an active part in the rebellion against the British rulers. They subscribe to newspapers, which are read in communal gatherings, and thus the villagers of *Kanthapura* come to know about the great freedom struggle that was at its peak then in the length and breadth of the country.

The enthusiasm of the people truly reflects the actual mood of the nation. To defy the British symbol of oppression, the villagers go out on a protest march towards the Skeffington Coffee Estate to picket the country liquor shop (toddy shop) near it. The following passage, quoted from the Orient Paperbacks edition (1971) of *Kanthapura* tells us how the people of the surrounding areas supported the march. Subsequent references to the text will be from the same edition.

And we march on and on, winding up the Karwar Road to the Kenchamma grove, and at every step there are corn - people and puffed - rice and Bengal gram people and bangle sellers and buttermilk people and betel-leaf people, and they stop us and say, 'Take this, take this, Mahatma's men !' (193)

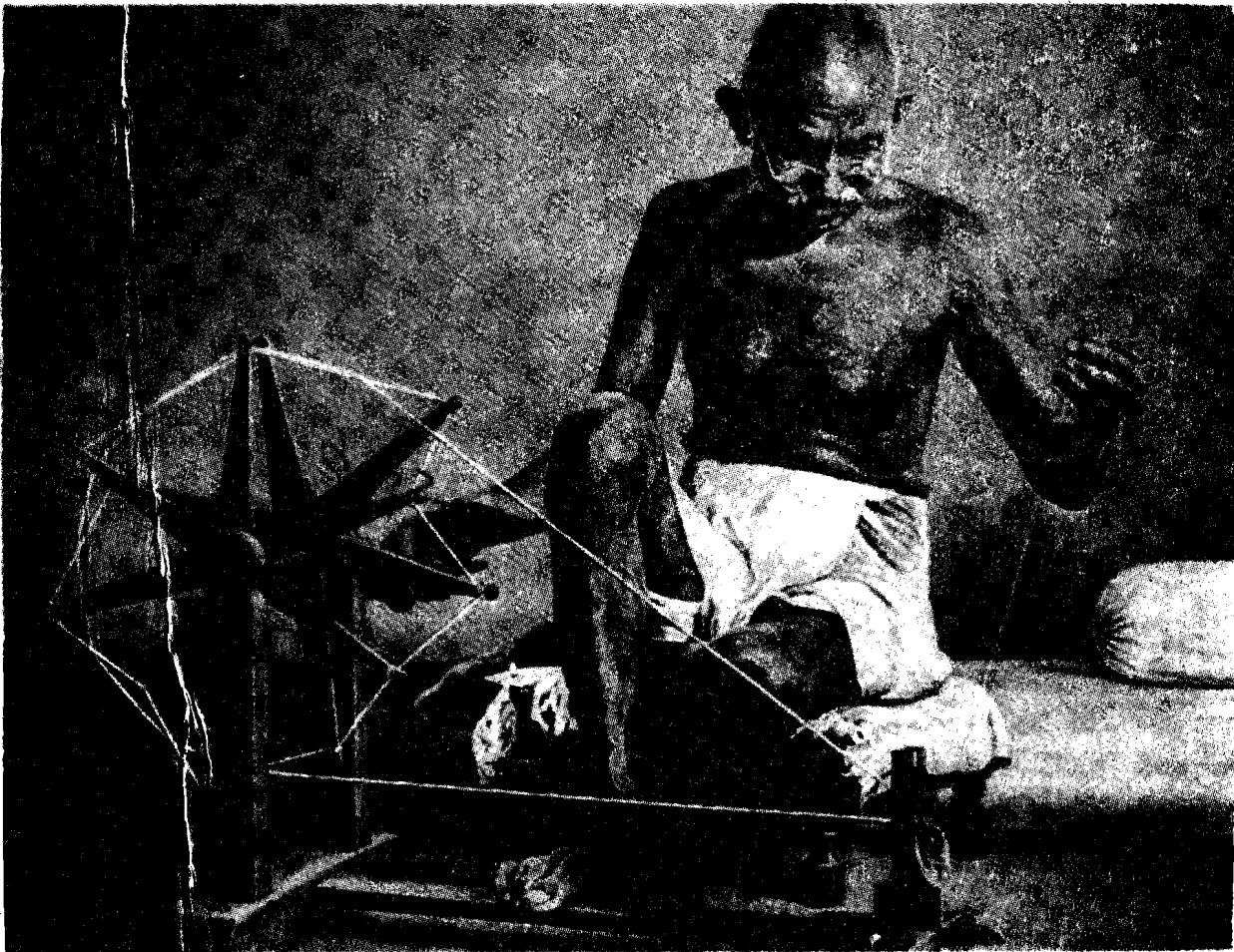
There is an oblique reference to the Round Table Conference in London, when they say that the Mahatma will go to the Red-man's country (England) to get them *Swaraj* or self-rule.

The action of *Kanthapura* dates back to the time when the Gandhian ideas fired the imagination of the Indian nation and paved the way for a non-violent revolution against the British rule. Whatever happens at *Kanthapura* was happening everywhere in India. This is equally true of the ruthless handling of the situation by the Red-man's police force. Bade Khan is a typical police officer in the service of the British

government. He strictly follows the orders of his masters to suppress the popular uprising in the village and its surroundings at any cost. His men shower lathis on the gatherings of the villagers and trample them under their heavy boots. They do not let go of any opportunity to molest their women. There is no exaggeration in Raja Rao's description of such happenings as things were the same all over India during the freedom movement. To counter the police brutalities, Moorthy advises his followers to take recourse to passive resistance in response to a call from Gandhi, but it does not achieve the objective of putting the oppressors to shame. It is an unequal fight, and the main leaders of the village are arrested and jailed. The villagers wait in suspense for them to return and resume their leadership of the movement against the Red-man's rule. K.R. Rao sums up the situation in these words :

Moorthy's release renews the dedication and enthusiasm of the community. The villagers launch on the 'Don't - touch - the Government campaign', which is succeeded by the 'no tax campaign' and other forms of Civil Disobedience ... But it proves an unequal fight and the satyagrahis are mercilessly put down, and all ends in a terrible fiasco. Yet the valiant struggle attains the dimensions of a heroic myth. Kanthpura is 'destroyed, but not defeated'²

4 GANDHIAN THOUGHT AND ITS IMPACT



Mahatma Gandhi does not figure in *Kanthapura* as a character, but his invisible presence and the wide impact of his thought is felt throughout the book. Gandhian philosophy is introduced into the novel through Moorthy, the main protagonist, who comes under the influence of Gandhi at a young age. Moorthy regards Gandhi as a role model, and follows him in every way, in word and deed. He preaches to the villagers the chief tenets of Gandhian philosophy such as to practice *ahimsa* and speak the truth. He also persuades them to make cotton yarn on the spinning wheel and to wear cloth spun and woven by their own hands. British made foreign clothes are to be discarded and destroyed in bonfires. Moorthy tells his village followers that Gandhi says, 'Spinning is as purifying as praying'. This creates the image of Gandhi as a Mahatma, a great soul and a deeply religious man, whom they venerate and whose words they follow as the law. To them, he is a mighty godly figure who emanates spiritual power that is going to overthrow the British rule in India.

The people of *Kanthapura* and the adjoining areas are exhorted in the name of the Mahatma not to drink toddy or liquor in any form. The toddy shops in the neighbourhood are picketed to prevent sale of liquor. Gandhi's practice of singing *Bhajans* (hymns) at his prayer meetings is generally appreciated. The people take out *prabhat pheries* (morning outings), getting up at dawn, gathering at the temple, and going through the streets in the twilight, singing religious songs. They also sing new songs in which Gandhi's image appears as that of a king of humble origin. Here is an example :

Our King, he was born on a wattle - mat,
He's not the King of the velvet bed,
He's small and he's round and he's bright and he is sacred,
O, Mahatma, you're our king and we are your slaves. (203)

And, again :

There's one Government, sister,
There's one Government, sister,
And that's the Government of the Mahatma. (207)

The villagers proudly declare that they are all for Gandhi; they are Gandhi's men and will do anything at his command. On several occasions in the novel, thundering slogans are raised to the skies; 'Vande Mataram !' 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai !' and 'Inquilab Zindabad !' They invest Gandhi with super-human powers. But there is one thing about Gandhi's teachings that the people of *Kanthapura* do not understand. Why should he advise the upper caste Hindus to mingle with the lower caste Pariahs - to live with them, to eat with them, and to inter-marry with them. They find such behaviour so un-Mahatma like. Some of them like Bhatta and Venkamma repeatedly belittle Moorthy in the eyes of the others for his association with the pariahs of the village. When Moorthy tells Renge Gowda, one of his ardent followers, that Gandhi wants people to pluck out hatred from their hearts and love even their enemies, Gowda replies, 'That's for the Mahatma and you Moorthappa - not for us poor folk !' The idea is that Gandhi and Moorthy have attained such an ideal height where they can practise whatever they preach but the lesser people cannot forget their simple enmities.

Gandhi believed in simple living, and all his life tried to live the life of the ordinary people. But an impressive image of Gandhi is projected in *Kanthapura*, when he is spoken of in the same breath as some of the gods of the Hindu Pantheon. Jayaramachar, the *Harikatha* man comes to Kanthapura and tells a new kind of tale in which he mingles Hindu mythology with contemporary politics. He compares Gandhi to Lord Siva when he says, Siva is the three - eyed, and Swaraj too is three - eyed : Self - purification, Hindu - Muslim unity, Khaddar.' Mohan being one of the names of Krishna, Gandhi's full name, Mohandas Karamchand , gives Jayaramachar the

idea of paralleling his achievement to that of Krishna. Just as the god as a young boy slays the serpent Kali, we are told that Gandhi goes from village to village slaying the serpent of foreign rule. Again, just as Krishna teaches Arjuna the wisdom of how to be a true man of action. Gandhi teaches Moorthy how to be a true satyagrahi. Since Gandhi interpreted self-rule as an ideal form of government in the manner of *Rama-rajya*, the Gandhi myth is finally expressed in these terms in *Kanthapura* :

They say 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 all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravna will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of air, and brother Bharatha will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the Master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya there will be a rain of flowers. (257)

On the fair carts of *Kanthapura*, the pictures of Rama, Krishna, Sankra and Gandhi are placed side by side.

Summing up his views on '*Kanthapura* and Gandhism,' P. Dayal writes in *Raja Rao : A Study of His Novels*,

Kanthapura remains primarily a novel about the Freedom Movement. It propounds the political beliefs of Mahatma Gandhi, as Gandhism forms the basis of the book. The novel expounds the Gandhian values on non-violence and abolition of untouchability. The tremendous religious activity, the mythicising of Gandhi and mother India and the spiritualization of the Freedom Movement within the framework of Indian cultural tradition suggest Raja Rao's zeal for Indian philosophy. The references to the *Karma* philosophy, the omnipresence of God, the immortality of soul and the doctrine of incarnation which are derived from the *Bhagavad Gita* signify the novelist's fascination for Vedanta.³

2.5 RAJA RAO'S ENGLISH : FORM AND STYLE OF *KANTHAPURA*

Raja Rao's 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura* contains significant comments on his literary style and diction. It shows that he uses these in a cautious, tolerant manner as instruments that mediate between the emotional quality of the Indian experience and its expression in English in intellectual terms. He says :

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language... English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians, We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. (5)

Rao's style in *Kanthapura* is so unconventional because he has attempted to introduce into English the speech rhythms of his own mother tongue, Kannada. His is not the English of the educated and sophisticated Indians; it is the natural speech of the South Indian villagers rendered into simple English. Summing up the effect, Srinivasa Iyengar writes :

... it is as though one sees a familiar landscape through coloured glasses. The colouring, the strangeness, is unavoidable, but it does not alter the essential truth of the things seen or the movements observed.⁴

Rao's objective in choosing English as his medium is to find in a foreign language the stylistic equivalent of the Indian experience. In other words, he has tried to express through English his understanding of the Indian life.

Raja Rao dissociates the English language from those elements which identify it with purely Western experience and culture. There is a profusion of 'local colour' in the speech of his characters in *Kanthapura*. It is a deliberate distancing effort to make the language shed its European connotations, and so to transform it into what is generally known as 'Indian English'. Rao borrows extensively from Kannada to replace the English idiom and proverbs that he discards. For instance, he writes 'a crow-and-sparrow story' instead of 'a cock-and-bull tale', and replaces the English 'nip in the bud' by the Kannada 'crush it in its seed.' When the poor untouchables of *Kanthapura* get their free spinning wheels from Moorthy, 'they go back with their spinning wheels upon their shoulders, their mouths touching the ears with delight.' (33) This is another example of Raja Rao using non-English forms of expression. Elaborating on this theme, Esha Dey writes in *The Novels of Raja Rao* :

Then there is a sprinkling of words connected with the physical reality of India and Hindu behaviour patterns, like *pollution, caste, coconut, camphor, lantana, bamboo, ablution, banana puffed-rice*, etc. in short the items which 'Indianize' the language essentially for their semantic function in respect of Hindu/Indian culture. But linguistic patterns remain the same, in the effort to present reality as actually perceived by the senses.⁵

In the context of Rao's synthesis of theme and style, Makarand Paranjape comments:

Both stylistically and thematically ... Rao succeeds in capturing the spirit of India in his works. His innovations with form and style have expanded the expressive range of English and have influenced other writers who share his predicament: the task of writing about a culture in a language that is not native to it.⁶

There is a poetic quality in Raja Rao's prose in *Kanthapura*, and this is especially noticed in his descriptions. He gives lists of sonorous South Indian names, indulges in repetitions, and strings together a number of clauses to build a rhythmic effect that sounds almost like verse. This is noticed in the opening pages of the novel where the author leads the reader up the winding road of the Ghats to the *Kanthapura* village. The same touch is again noticed in Rao's narration of how Goddess Kenchamma fights a demon to save the people from his attacks. As he says in the 'Foreward', *Kanthapura* is written as a *sthala-purana* (the exclusive mythic tale of a particular

place), its language has the tone and quality of an epic. This is particularly true of the story of Mahatma. And then, the description of the Kartik Festival of Lights is an excellent piece of rhythmic prose :

Background

Kartik has come to *Kanthapura*... with the glow of lights and unpreserved footsteps of the wandering gods; white lights from clay-trays and red lights from copper-stands, and diamond lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves; lights that glow from banana trunks and mango twigs, yellow lights behind white leaves, and green lights behind yellow leaves, and white lights behind green leaves; ... (118)

In this passage, there is a peculiar rhythm which is part of the magical scene that is vividly and imaginatively described by Rao. The reader feels himself inexorably drawn towards the fireworks of colours and lights created by the skilful use of suggestive words and images. The scene recalls many memories of the Diwali celebrations in the month of Kartik.

Raja Rao's prose style in *Kanthapura* has an orientation towards oral speech, and that is only natural since the story is told by a narrator who has a socially distinct manner of telling a tale. Achakka, a grandmother of the village, humble of origin but rich in experience, has a memory full of folk-lore and traditional myth. She uses these assets to enrich the narrative. Rao decorates her descriptions with repetitive phrases and sentences that are full of sound-effects in alliteration and assonance. This adds to the distinctive quality of his language and style. Raja Rao's skilful use of long sentences complements his descriptive power which he achieves through animated and rhythmic English prose. S.C. Harrex describes the overall effect in apt words as follows:

Considered in terms of the development of the Indian novel in English, *Kanthapura* clearly has a special place as the first work to demonstrate convincingly, in terms of form and content, that the novel in English was a medium which could be adapted to the Indian sensibility.⁷

Regarding the similarity between Raja Rao's style in *Kanthapura* and that of the ancient Indian Purans, Paranjape writes:

Kanthapura shares certain narrative techniques with the Puranas. The story is told rapidly, all in one breath, by a village grandmother and the style reflects the oral heritage also evident in the Harikatha... The Puranas contain detailed, poetic descriptions of nature; similarly, the novel has several descriptive passages which are so evocative and unified as to be prose-poems themselves. Examples are the coming of Karthic, daybreak over the Ghats and the advent of the rains.⁸

2.6 LET US SUM UP

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is about life in a South Indian village, but its central theme is the Gandhian Satyagraha Movement against the British rule in India. The author introduces parallels to characters and events drawn from the *Ramayana*. Mahatma Gandhi's story is told in the form of a *Harikatha* by Jayaramachar. The novel is projected as a *sihala - purana*, i.e., the mythic tale of a particular place. The three

levels of action - political, social and religious - present a unified concept of India. The action belongs to the decade of the 1930's when the Indian National Congress Committee spread the Gandhian message of Satyagraha and *ahimsa* through the length and breadth of India. The villagers of *Kanthapura* also follow these principles. They take out protest marches towards the Skeffington Coffee Estate and suffer harsh treatment at the hands of the police. Their leader, Moorthy, launches the Civil Disobedience Movement against the British. Gandhi does not figure as a character in the novel, but the various aspects of his philosophy and teachings are projected as the story unfolds. He is compared to the gods, Siva and Krishna, for destroying the demon of foreign rule.

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao conveys a purely Indian experience through the foreign medium of the English language. He uses his style and diction as instruments that achieve a balance between the emotional quality of the Indian experience and its expression in intellectual terms. He introduces into English the speech rhythms of Kannada. Instead of English proverbs, he employs Indian proverbs translated into English. The Indian rhythm of his prose lends it a poetic quality. His descriptions are rich in colour and imagery. Alliteration and repetition add to the flow of his narration.

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2.8 GLOSSARY

Discourse:	Expression, speech
Ahimsa:	A Sanskrit word meaning ' non-violence'
Toddy:	A kind of country liquor popular in South India
Picketed:	Placed men on watch to prevent customers from buying
Pariah:	One of low caste, untouchable
Pantheon:	All the gods collectively
Harikatha:	A story of some god or goddess told with the accompaniment of music and dance
Ghats:	The north - south mountain ranges along the eastern and western coasts of South India
Alliteration:	Repetition of the same initial sound in words
Assonance:	Recurrence of vowel sounds

2.9 QUESTIONS

Background

1. Write a short essay on the sources of *Kanthapura*.
2. What do you know about the historical and political background of *Kanthapura*?
3. How deep and wide is the impact of Gandhi's personality and his thought on the theme of *Kanthapura*?
4. How does Raja Rao convey in *Kanthapura* the spirit of Indian life through a foreign medium?

UNIT 3 *KANTHAPURA* : THEMES

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Village
- 3.3 The Skeffington Coffee Estate
- 3.4 Consideration of Caste
- 3.5 Moorthy Leads a Satyagraha
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Glossary
- 3.8 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to give you an overall view of :

- *Kanthapura* village and its surroundings.
- The happenings at the Skeffington Coffee Estate.
- The caste system and its influence on the villagers.
- How Moorthy leads the satyagraha in his village.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we give you a brief account of *Kanthapura* and the village community that lives there. The chief landmarks around the village and some of the main characters are also mentioned. We tell you about how Moorthy spreads the message of Gandhi in the village. There follows an account of how the Skeffington Coffee Estate was formed and the happenings there at the time of the action of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. A section of the Unit is devoted to explaining the distinctions of caste and how these influence the thinking of the villagers. Finally, we tell you briefly about the satyagraha movement in the village as this theme will be referred to again and again in the Units.

3.2 THE VILLAGE

Kanthapura, as described in Raja Rao's novel, is a village in the province of Kara in the former princely state of Mysore, which is now part of Karnataka. Far above the port city of Mangalore, it is high on the Western Ghats, up the steep mountains that face the Arabian Sea. In the lands around the village are grown coffee, cardamom, rice and sugarcane. While crops of coffee and cardamom are shipped to England, rice and sugar are consumed at home. The nearby forests are full of teak, sal and sandal trees. *Kanthapura* is situated on the road that connects the sea-coast with the interior. Day and night long caravans of bullock carts can be seen on the road carrying the produce of the land. The carts of two village traders, Rama Chetty and Shubba Chetty, are also seen carrying the merchandise on the winding road.

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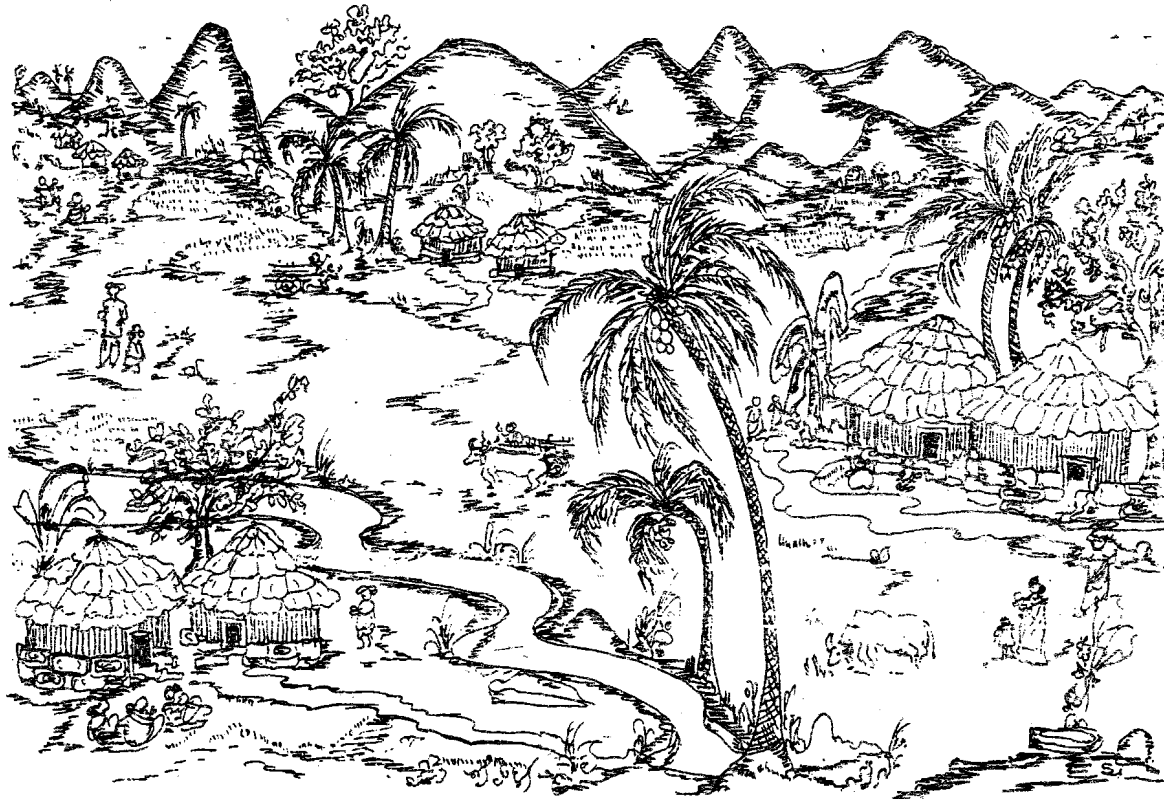
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Some of the landmarks of the village are the Main Street, the Potter's Lane, Chennayya's Pond, the Brahmin Street and the Temple square. There are two temples in the village. One is devoted to the worship of Kenchamma, the goddess of the hill of that name, and the other is dedicated to Goddess Kanthapurishwari, the deity of the village. There is a legend about Kenchamma that ages ago she slayed a demon who came to ask for the young men of the village as food and the young women as wives. The blood of the demon soaked into the earth to make the Kenchamma Hill red. The goddess is believed to protect the people of *Kanthapura* in times of famine, disease, death and despair.



The village is divided into several quarters. In the Brahmin quarter there are twenty-four houses, including those of postmaster Suryanarayana, Patwari Nanjundia, Bhatta, Achakka (the narrator), Front-House Akkamma, Waterfall Venkamma, Moorthy and Rangamma. (Note the narrator's habit of naming people according to their calling or some personal traits). The other part of the village consists of several quarters: the Pariah quarter, the Potter's quarter, the weaver's quarter, and the Sudra quarter - all together nearly one hundred huts. There is no social interaction between the Brahmins and the Pariahs. The nine-beamed house of Patel Range Gowda, who happens to be a Sudra, is near the Temple Square.

The villagers lead a calm and placid life till Moorthy disturbs it by bringing in the Gandhian Satyagraha Movement into their life. The village is no longer the same after that as it becomes part of the countrywide struggle against the British rule. The air resounds with the cry of slogans - 'Vande Matram', 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai', and 'Inquilab Zindabad'. People are exhorted to give up their foreign clothes and dress in Swadeshi Khaddar. Free spinning wheels are distributed so that people can spin cotton yarn. Moorthy tells them that the Mahatma himself spins for two hours every morning, and regards it as purifying as praying. Moorthy leads the villagers in an attempt to picket the toddy shop near the Skeffington Coffee Estate to prevent the coolies and other people from buying and consuming country liquor. The police tries to foil their attempt and beats them mercilessly. Protest marches are organized against

the repression let loose by the police. It provokes more lathi charges, arrests and police brutalities. But Moorthy and his followers remain firm in their resolve.

As time passes, it brings many changes in the life of the village community, but the village and its topography remain the same. The hill and the river, the land and the sky, and the surrounding fields are not altered by the passage of time. But the day to day life of the villagers and their social intercourse undergo a big change. Under the impact of the Gandhian national movement, the cross-currents of the time take the village to the brink of total destruction, but its permanent image lives on in the pages of Raja Rao's novel. Goddess Kenchamma and the River Himavathy symbolize the permanent quality of the traditional life of the villagers, which is buffeted by the winds of change. It is remarkable how the social life of *Kanthapura* revolves round an endless cycle of fairs, festivals, and religious gatherings. The Gandhian movement too is coloured by the ritual practices. The secular message of Gandhi is transformed into folk-song, prayer and *Harikatha*. That is the only way the villagers of *Kanthapura* can feel one with the national movement of Mahatma Gandhi. But what follows is the destruction of the village. Eventually, as Range Gowda reports at the end of the novel, there is left

Neither man nor mosquito in *Kanthapura*, for the
men from Bombay have built houses on the Bebbur
Mound, houses like in the city, for coolies, and
they own this land and that, and even Bhatta has
sold all his lands, ... and he's now gone back
to Kashi. (258)

3.3 THE SKEFFINGTON COFFEE ESTATE

As a counterpoise to the village in *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao presents the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The village stands for the Indian values, traditions, myths, faith and influence of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. The coffee estate, on the other hand, is a citadel of the British supremacy, colonialism, and enslavement of the people of India. It is a vast estate, spread across the land from the Babbur Mound on one side, the Kenchamma Hill, on the other, right up to the jungles of the Horse-head Hill. Nobody knew how large it was or when it was founded; but all said it was at least ten thousand acres wide. Some people in *Kanthapura* remembered having heard of the Hunter Sahib who used his hunter and his hand to reap the first fruits of his plantation. Then it grew bigger and bigger till it touched all the hills around the village.

More and more coolies came from below the Ghats. They talked Tamil or Telugu, and brought their families along. Half-naked, starving armies of coolies marched past the Kenchamma Temple and up to the Skeffington Estate. They carried bundles of their belongings in their arms or over heads and shoulders. The Sahib's maistri had gone to far flung villages to spread the news of availability of work in the Estate. He offered one-fourth of a rupee to a man and one-eighth to a woman for a day's labour. Still they came eagerly as there had been a drought in their province, and the maistri enticed them with the advance of a rupee to each and the promise of plenty of food in the Estate. He told them that the British master of the Estate was a kind and generous man who would be good to them. So the coolies left their homes, travelled part of the way in a train, and marched the rest of the distance on foot. When all of them passed through the entrance of the Estate, the maistri closed the gates behind them. He led them to the master, and told them that they would be treated well if they worked hard, but beaten up if they worked badly. Little did they realize that they had become virtual prisoners in the Estate, and slaves of the British Sahib.

The coolies were taken to the foot of a hill where they erected their thatched huts. They all said, 'This will be a fine place to live in,' and they slept the sleep of princes. The next morning they rose with the sun and were put to work. Then they realized what lay in store for them. The work was heavy and the wages inadequate; the Estate was crawling with snakes; the rainy season brought with it bouts of fever. The Sahib prescribed them pills as medicine, but there was no respite from hard labour. Some of them perished, but there was no escape from the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Years passed, the old Sahib died, and his nephew was the new Sahib. He was not harsh or cruel, but he wanted the young women of the coolies for his pleasure. When one man resisted this exploitation, the Sahib shot him dead. The case was taken to the British court where the Sahib was forgiven.

Two Brahmin clerks from the city, working at the Estate, took a few of the coolies to Moorthy at *Kanthapura*, asking him to do something for them. Consequently, Moorthy came to the Estate, but was prevented by Bade Khan, the policemen, from entering. There was a scuffle at the gates in which two coolies hit Bade Khan with his own lathi. The next day the family of one of them was expelled from the Estate, but they were provided shelter by Moorthy. The other coolies rallied together to rebel against the harsh treatment they received from their master. The villagers of *Kanthapura* went on a march towards the Estate to demonstrate their solidarity with the coolies. That is how the Gandhian Movement reached even the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and created a turmoil within its boundaries. It was only after this incident that Moorthy began his 'Don't-touch-the Government campaign', in other words, Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement.

3.4 CONSIDERATIONS OF CASTE

Achakka, the narrator of *Kanthapura*, is an upper caste Brahmin, belonging to the family of Veda Sastra Pravina Krishna Sastri. It is only natural that there are many references to considerations of caste in her narrative. When she begins her account of the social structure of the village, it is of the Brahmin households that she talks of first and that too in some detail. Only after that she mentions the other quarters of the Pariahs, Potters, Weavers, and Sudras. She frankly admits that she has never been to that part of the village, and has only a rough idea of the number of huts situated there. The only member of the lower castes that she speaks well of is Patel Range Gowda, who is well off and wields considerable authority in *Kanthapura*. She adds :

The other sudras were not badly-fed householders and they had as usual two or three sons and a few daughters, and one could not say whether they were rich or poor. They were always badly dressed and always paid revenues due and debts after several notices. But as long as Range Gowda was there, there was no fear. He would see them through the difficulties. And they were of his community. (15)

Moorthy is a prominent Brahmin youth of the village, but swayed by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, he learns to care for the lower castes and the untouchables. When he gets free spinning - wheels from the Congress Committee, he distributes them among the villagers of all castes. He even goes to the Pariah quarter, and the people there are so happy to have a Brahmin visiting them that they say 'Yes, yes, learned one.' They were going to spin, and if that Brahmin boy was to be believed they would have clothes to wear, blankets and shirts and loin-cloths. Later, when they are told about Russia, where pariahs and Brahmins are the same, they find it hard to believe in such talk. But Waterfall Venkamma, another Brahmin, is not impressed by

this 'non-sense.' She does not think much of Moorthy, whom she regards as a good-for-nothing fellow, who has taken to this Pariah upliftment business. She declares that because of his sins she will not give her daughter in marriage to him even when he is not keen on it. To his mother, she says that she is happy not to have tied her daughter 'to the neck of a pariah - mixer.' She goes on :

'Do you hear that, Narsamma? Well let him take care, Moorthy. And our community will not be corrupted by such dirt-gobbling curs. Pariah ! pariah !' She spat at the door and walked away, ... (57)

Bhatta reports that the Swami in the city was going to excommunicate Moorthy if he continued his pariah business. He also says that Moorthy retaliated in these words. :

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 ? ... He may be learned in the Vedas and all that. But he has no heart. (63)

From then on Moorthy sits by the kitchen threshold and eats his food served by his mother like a servant. It breaks the heart of his mother, but she feels helpless caught in the awkward web of casteism. Moorthy continues to visit the Pariahs, to give them cotton to spin and yarn to weave, and to teach them alphabets, grammar, arithmetic and Hindi. But he remains conscious of the fact that he is a Brahmin and the spirits of his ancestors are watching from above.

On one occasion, Moorthy visits Pariah Rachanna's hut. Rachanna's wife is overwhelmed, and invites him in. It is with a trembling heart that Moorthy crosses the threshold. When she offers him milk to drink, he finds excuses to avoid doing so. She persists :

'Touch it, Moorthappa, touch it only as though it were offered to the gods, and we shall be sanctified; and Moorthy, with many a trembling prayer touches the tumbler and brings it to his lips, and taking one sip, lays it aside. (105)

This episode shows how deep are the consideration of caste in a Brahmin, and that one might be a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi but one cannot, in spirit, be exactly like him. It is not only the upper classes but the lower classes too that are shackled by the traditional views about the distinctions of caste. What is true of the rest of India is equally true of *Kanthapura*.

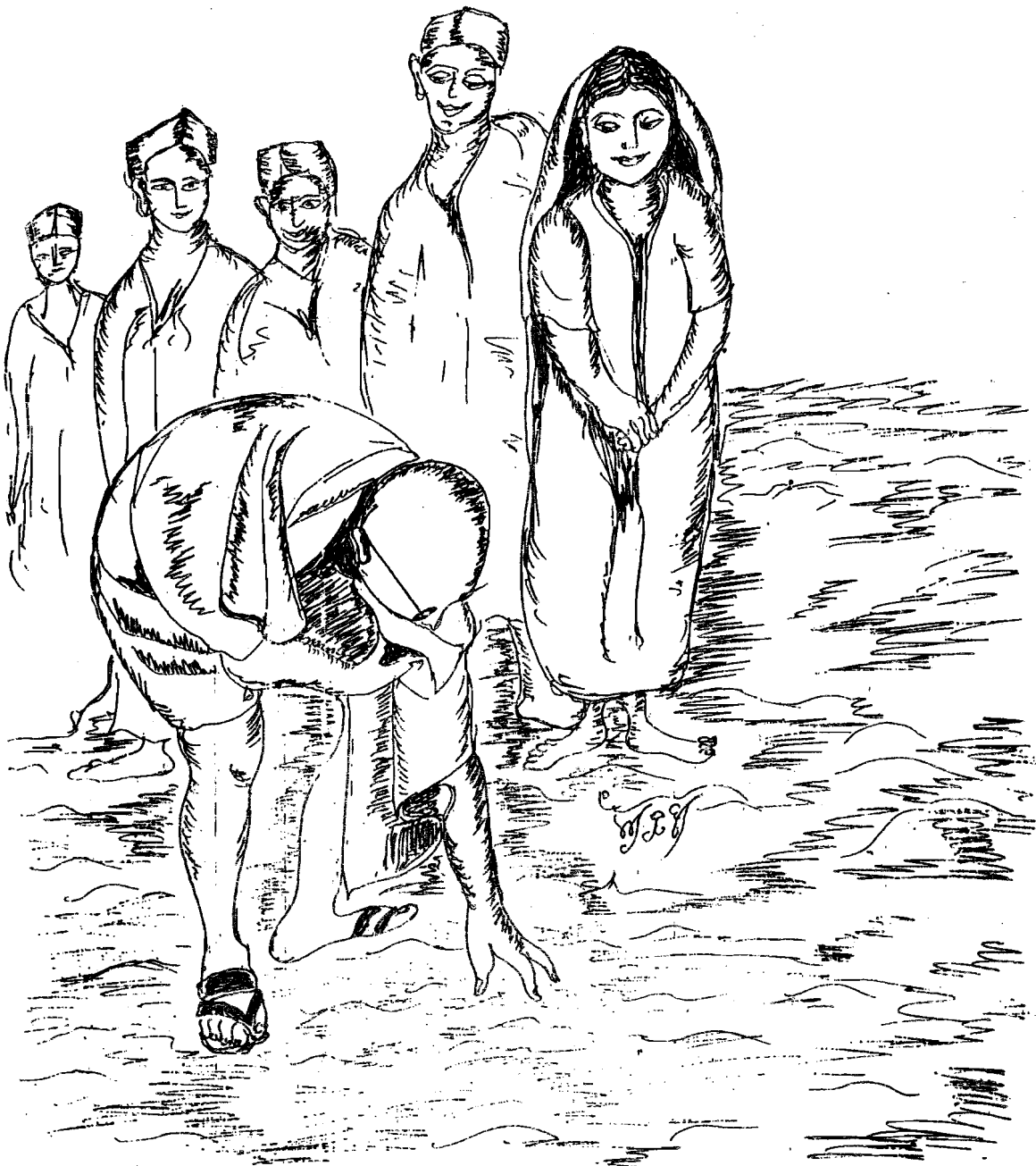
3.5 MOORTHY LEADS A SATYAGRAHA

Moorthy tries his best to educate the people of *Kanthapura* in the Gandhian principles, but they find it hard to break their links with the past which persists in the form of superstition, casteism and orthodoxy. Quite a few of them remain unaffected by his teachings and the personal example that he provides them. Waterfall Venkamma and Bhatta lose no opportunity of using their poisonous tongues against him. While struggling against the British oppression, Moorthy and his disciples have to fight the conservative forces entrenched within their own community. It takes time for the villagers to understand the true significance of the freedom movement and

Gandhian satyagraha. Moorthy never despairs, and continues his good work in spite of the heavy odds against the success of his mission.

Themes

Moorthy is encouraged by the enthusiasm of his followers like Rangamma, Ratna and Range Gowda. They realize that the villagers can be won over only through a religious approach. Hence, they project Gandhi as a Mahatma, a superior soul of great faith and tremendous spiritual powers. They arrange Bhajans and *Harikathas* at the temple and other places to subtly plant political ideas in the minds of the people in the form of religious preaching. Moorthy succeeds in persuading people from all sections of the village to spin cotton yarn and weave Khaddar. Range Gowda is elected President of the local Congress Committee. The national spirit is further strengthened when Rangamma subscribes to some papers that carry news about the activities of Gandhi and the Congress. She reads out choice items of news to those who care to listen to her.



A new wave of patriotism and national consciousness comes over *Kanthapura*, and the Satyagraha Movement gains strength. The villagers go on protest marches and picket the local toddy shop to prevent the coolies from wasting their meagre earnings on liquor. After arresting the main leaders of the movement, the police lets loose a reign of terror in the village. While Moorthy is in prison, Rangamma organizes the 'Sevika Sangha,' a voluntary group of women to continue the passive resistance against the British rule. The police force does not spare them, and uses brutal measures against them, but they remain staunch in their resolve. When Rangamma too is arrested, Ratna takes over the leadership of the group. After some time, Moorthy is released and he is welcomed by the people of *Kanthapura*. It gives them a renewed hope in the success of their unequal fight against the police. Moorthy tells them to contribute to Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement against the British by pursuing 'Don't - touch - the Government campaign' and the 'no tax campaign.' These campaigns coincide with the famous Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi, which formed part of his Salt Satyagraha. The protesters in the village are mercilessly beaten up by the police, but they do not yield, nor do they give up the struggle. Ultimately, *Kanthapura* is destroyed but not defeated. In spite of failure, the sources of inner resolve within the village community remain strong. This is mainly due to their following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and the leadership provided by Moorthy.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Kanthapura of Raja Rao's novel of that name is a village in the former Mysore state, now part of Karnataka. It is situated high on the Western Ghats on a winding road that goes down to Mangalore on the Arabian Sea. There are two temples in the village : one dedicated to the Goddess Kenchamma of the Hill and the other to Kanthapurishwari. The village is divided into several quarters according to the different castes. Moorthy, a young man of the village, brings the message of Gandhi to his people, and starts his own satyagraha movement against the British. The Skeffington Coffee Estate on the periphery of the village is a symbol of the British attempt to enslave the Indians. Moorthy carries the message of Gandhian teachings to the Estate, and it causes much turmoil all around as the police tries its best to suppress the movement. But the people of *Kanthapura* remain staunch followers of Moorthy even when he is imprisoned. One of his followers starts a 'Sevika Sangha' group among the women of the village. The people of *Kanthapura* suffer greatly at the hands of the police but remain defiant to the end.

Though Moorthy unites his community in the name of Gandhi and the principles that he stands for, it remains divided on considerations of caste. The tradition - bound orthodox Brahmin do not mix with the lower caste Pariahs and Sudras, who contribute equally to the satyagraha with the rest of the people. Even the emancipated Moorthy, a Brahmin by birth, has qualms of conscience when he visits one of the untouchable families. That shows how deep-rooted the distinctions of caste are in the Hindu mind.

3.7 GLOSSARY

Waterfall Venkamma:

The Character is so called for her talkativeness, words coming out of her mouth non-stop like the flow of a waterfall.

Sudra:

The lowest of the four main Hindu castes

Inquilab Zindabad:

Hindustani for 'long live the revolution'

Buffeted:

Blown this way and that

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. What picture have you formed of *Kanthapura* and its people?
2. What is the significance of the Skeffington Coffee Estate in the overall account of the village in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*?
3. Write a short essay on 'Considerations of Caste' in *Kanthapura*.
4. How successful is Moorthy in leading his followers in the satyagraha movement of the village?

UNIT 4 *KANTHAPURA* : STRUCTURE AND TECHNIQUE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Structure of *Kanthapura*
- 4.3 The Narrative Technique in *Kanthapura*
- 4.4 Achakka, the Narrator
- 4.5 The *Harikatha* Element
- 4.6 Myth and Symbolism
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 References
- 4.9 Glossary
- 4.10 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to give you some idea of the following:

- The structure of *Kanthapura*.
- The narrative technique used by Raja Rao in *Kanthapura*.
- Achakka, the narrator of the novel.
- The use of the *Harikatha* element in the novel.
- Myth and symbolism in *Kanthapura*.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

For students like you, it is important to know the structure of a novel that is prescribed for your study. So, first of all, in this Unit, we analyse the structure of *Kanthapura* for you. Next, we discuss the narrative technique that Raja Rao employs in this novel. It is an important element of the fictional art through which he communicates the story and his message to you. An important part of the technique is Achakka, the narrator, who tells you the story. Some of the other elements that Raja Rao makes use of are the *Harikatha*, myth and symbolism. In this Unit, we have given you information about all these important aspects of *Kanthapura*.

4.2 THE STRUCTURE OF *KANTHAPURA*

Kanthapura shows Raja Rao's artistic skill in achieving a fusion of theme, form and narration in a literary form which is Indian and modern at the same time. He superimposes the Indian tradition of imaginative romance over the Western form of the realistic novel, and mingles actual history with mythic 'Purana' to create a poetic work in prose. K.R. Rao rightly points out:

Kanthapura does not project the Indian spirit isolatively,
but as a living experience moving in time and space.
The three levels of action in the novel, political, social

Maistri:
Sevika Sangha:

Hindustani for a foreman
Women's service group

Themes

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. What picture have you formed of *Kanthapura* and its people?
2. What is the significance of the Skeffington Coffee Estate in the overall account of the village in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*?
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Kanthapura does not project the Indian spirit isolatively, but as a living experience moving in time and space. The three levels of action in the novel, political, social

and religious, are all related to a unified concept of India both as a tradition and as a living culture, as a magnificent past to be rediscovered in the enormous present.¹

In his 'Foreword' to the novel, Raja Rao describes the book as a *sthalapurana*, a legendary history of a particular place. He writes:

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthalapurana*, or legendary history of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village - Rama might have rested under this pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell. (5)

Let us now try to analyse the structure of *Kanthapura* in the light of these two statements, one of the author himself, and the other of his critic.

Taking up the author's statement first, on the very opening pages of the novel, Raja Rao creates a distinctive sense of the village *Kanthapura*. He situates it in a special location in the Western Ghats, surrounded by several hills and skirted by a river. The winding road passing through it connects it with the trade and commerce of the region. It brings the coolies to the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the Congress volunteers from the city to the village, and in their wake the formidable police force that causes havoc at both the places. The mood for the Puranic content of the novel is also set at the very outset through the narration of the legend of Goddess Kenchamma of the hill. After this virtual invocation to the goddess, her name is repeated again and again through the novel. At all times of trouble, the villagers turn to Kenchamma to come to their rescue, as she once did in the remote past. She is their powerful saviour who can overcome even the most formidable of enemies.

In the true Indian (Hindu) tradition, myth, religion, politics and social behaviour mingle to produce a *sthalapurana* that Raja Rao set out to write in the first place. Even a mortal like Gandhi acquires the status of a saint and avatar. The *Harikatha* man projects him as Krishna descended from heaven to destroy the serpent of foreign rule, and the villagers call him the Big Mountain, one of their names for Lord Siva. In the same breath, Moorthy is called the Small Mountain, and they hope the two mountains will protect them. Achakka, the narrator of *Kanthapura*, in a flowing, breathless style, tells the story not as a history of events, but as the Puranic tale of a village, which, even as it is nearly destroyed, acquires the permanence of a legend. The events of the novel belong to the first half of the twentieth century, but the manner in which they are described lend them the flavour of an ancient epic, where gods and mortals come together in sublime action. Raja Rao's attempt at writing a *sthalapurana* is not a failure, but a unique success.

Now, let us turn to K.R. Rao's comment that the three strands of action – politics, society and religion – are woven together in *Kanthapura*. No one can deny the fact that the novel has a political background. The central action of the book is Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement and how Moorthy draws his community into it. There are many references to Gandhi and his activities, to episodes from his life, and, in particular, to his famous Dandi March during the Salt Satyagraha. The villagers keep track of the march and celebrate it by their own march to picket the toddy shop near

the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The social content of the novel is found in the inter-relations and inter-actions of the villagers. It is also found in the extended space that is allotted to the considerations of caste and how it divides the community into distinct groups. Moorthy is singled out for special treatment in this regard on account of his voluntary mixing with the untouchables. It affects his prospects of marriage though he is not keen on it. Since he is the unchallenged leader of the village, social and political strands of the action mingle in him. But when he follows the Gandhian method of rallying the common people for a political purpose in the name of prayer and religion, the three levels of action are unified to form the triple-pillared structure of the novel. Supporting the same view, Esha Dey writes:

With the Mahatma's political programme translated into the paraphernalia of worship as practised in the Hindu religion, the whole political action of *Kanthapura*, generated by an *avatar*, an incarnation, has to centre in a temple, the temple of Kanthapurishwari. The election of the Congress Committee is preceded by a god's procession and devotional song. The aim of the Congress has to be explained with an offering of camphor and coconut to the gods. It is right in front of the gods in the temple that the very vow of spinning, practising non-violence (*ahimsa*) and of speaking the truth, is to be sworn.²

A special narrative feature in *Kanthapura* is the relationship of style to structure. As S.C. Harrex puts it,

A stylistic characteristic resulting from Raja Rao's rhythmic use of point-of view is seen in the way in which [he] frequently achieves a synthesis of conversational tones -- that of the narrator and of the characters in question -- while at the same time preserving a sense of distinct individual rhythms...

Raja Rao's often-used leviathan sentences also contribute significantly to the structure of *Kanthapura*, and are in keeping with his comments in the Foreword about the interminableness of the Indian story-telling style. Long sentences prove useful, for example, in transporting the reader to unfamiliar locality; in providing a sense of action, of diverse comings and goings and violent skirmishes; and in creating tangible images of the populous variety of India.³

4.3 THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN *KANTHAPURA*

Raja Rao presents the story of *Kanthapura* as a *sthalapurana* in English, coloured by the regional idiom of South India. The narrative that he offers recalls a visionary experience. The narrator of the story, Achakka, having herself gone through it all, is reliving in memory an unforgettable experience of the heroism and tragedy of the entire village. Since *Kanthapura* is a novel of memory, Raja Rao freely uses reflection, dream, flash-back, reminiscence and narration of inter-connected episodes. Rejecting the 'stream of consciousness' technique, he employs the local form of narration, which is a kind of non-stop, breathless style of story-telling. Starting with an account of the village and its surroundings, the narrator passes on to introducing the main characters, and straightaway plunges into describing how the Gandhian Satyagraha Movement came to the village and what repercussions it had on the village community. From the beginning to the end, it is a non-stop emotion-packed narration that is bound to touch the heart of the reader.

Raja Rao's narrative art retains the native Indian flavour in spite of his using the foreign medium of English. The narrator has an easy manner of presentation without being in any way – uneasy, awkward or self-conscious. Her language suffers from no distortion even though it belongs to the Indian situation and absorbs the Indian manner of speech and gesture. The peculiarities of the narrative art are in tune with the complexity of the experience that it presents. The captivating rhythm of narration may be noticed in the following description of the Satyagraha Movement:

... day after day Revenue Notices fell yellow into our hands, and we said, 'Let them do what they will, we shall not pay our revenues.' And the new Patel came, and behind the Patel came the policeman and behind, the policeman the landlord's agent, and we said, 'Do what you will, we shall not pay, (206)

That is how the indomitable and unwavering spirit of the satyagrahis is projected in an enduring narrative of the Indian experience. The reader of *Kanthapura* participates in the breathless action from the beginning to the end.

Raja Rao's narrative art in *Kanthapura* consciously represents the reality in its descriptions of the setting. The digressions in which he indulges from time to time help to fill the gaps in the story and also provide some breathing space to the reader. In the detailed description of the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the elaborate digression on the Indian poisonous snakes is perhaps presented for the information of the non-Indian Western readers. The legend of Goddess Kenchamma is, on the other hand, deliberately given at the beginning to set the tune of a *sthalapurana*. Through subtle changes in the narrative technique, from time to time, the focus of the novel is shifted, now narrowed down to the village, now broadened to include the whole of India.

The distinctive touch of Raja Rao's technique at the beginning of the novel is to give a wealth of detail about the location, the village, its various quarters, and the prominent people living there. Without wasting time over a lengthy introduction, he quickly draws the reader's attention into the activities of the villagers and their inter-relations. He employs a very intimate way of individualizing them by referring to the peculiarities of their houses, calling or mannerisms. In this way, the author fixes the reader in the living world of a South Indian village at a definite point of time. Take, for instance, the encounter between Patel Range Gowda and Bade Khan, when the policeman first comes to the village. Patel's expression of contempt for the policeman symbolically represents the reaction of an entire community against the British rule.

Esha Dey writes in this context :

The same technique, embodying a general idea or ethos in concrete details, individual and telling, is evident in various happenings, usually habitual or common visits to each other, village-women's meeting at river steps, their gossip and squabbles, nuptials and marriages, as well as expressive details of the mundane, perceptible reality.⁴

Raja Rao's telling of the story of *Kanthapura* is at the level of a mythical plane. The continuous flow of the monologue of the narrator is particularly suited for psychological analysis of characters and their motives. The uninterrupted monologue initiates the flow of speech, and helps to reveal the different levels of consciousness of the village community, including that of Moorthy.

Raja Rao's narrative style in *Kanthapura* accommodates descriptive and dramatic modes; thereby he maintains the interest of the readers and avoids monotony. In the words of S.C. Harrex,

Snippets of dialogue serve to spotlight a character or attitude, while Raja Rao's adaptation of the traditional Indian story-telling convention justifies the narrator's tendency... to present Moorthy in terms of an [sic] heroic archetype – that of the saintly sage (from Sankara to Gandhi) dedicated to Truth. Another virtue of the discursive style... is that political comment is seen to come spontaneously from the characters instead of appearing to be artificially imposed upon the narrative by the author.⁵

It is evident that Raja Rao is quite successful in making his kind of Indian-English 'an authentic basis for imaginative writing'. *Kanthapura* has a vitality of language and style which comes from the author's ability to put into practice the literary principles outlined by him in the Foreword of the novel. The appropriateness of his narrative technique is established by the life-story of Gandhi as told by Jayaramachar, the *Harikatha-man*, at the end of the first chapter of the novel.

Raja Rao's understanding of the folk psyche and his skill in rendering this understanding artistically is a genuine quality of *Kanthapura* that has the appeal of a novelty to the Western readers. Quite easily, he mingles popular superstition with metaphysical institution to present the belief of the villagers in Goddess Kenchamma's power of intervention in human affairs. Their unshakable faith in the ancient sayings, and the relevance that these have to the present, project the idea of a hereditary fate.

4.4 ACHAKKA, THE NARRATOR

The name of Achakka, the narrator of *Kanthapura*, appears only once in the novel, but it is through her eyes and from her point of view that we see everything that happens in it. She belongs to the upper caste Brahmin family of Veda Sastra Pravina Krishna Sastri, and is proud of that fact. Her grandson, Seenu, and Moorthy are of the same age and inseparable like Rama and Lakshmana in the *Ramayana*. Therefore, she has a high regard for Moorthy and great faith in the Satyagraha Movement that he launches in the village. Being an elderly grandmother, Achakka has seen life in *Kanthapura* for a long time, and has a good deal to say about it. Being a devout Hindu who knows the *Puranas*, she has a good collection of stories from legends and epics, which she refers to again and again while narrating the story of her village. She tells the story of Goddess Kenchamma at the very beginning, and it is apparent that she has great faith in the goddess and her power of protecting the village community from all calamities. That is why she invokes her name repeatedly in the course of the narrative.

Achakka is a garrulous old woman, who herself participates in the satyagraha led by Moorthy. No wonder, she narrates the events of the struggle with a sense of pride and a sense of achievement. Gifted with a sense of the past, she is a wonderful story-teller who, at once, grips the attention of the reader, and holds him captive as a listener to the end. Apart from her remarkable memory, she has a vivid imagination to be able to visualize what must have happened at the Skeffington Coffee Estate where she was not present. That is possible because Raja Rao employs her as his mouth-piece, and grants her the author's privilege of omniscience. After all whatever she says in her narrative is what the writer himself allows her to say. But it goes without saying that she appears to be an authentic and convincing narrator. This impression is strengthened by the way she tells us little things about and interactions among the characters involved in the story that unfolds through her narrative.

Srinivasa Iyengar discovers a consummate art of the narrator in Achakka's feminine touches and mannerisms, effortless rotation of the tongue, meandering sentences and massive paragraphs. He finds there is careful selection behind the artless abundance of detail that marks her narration. She does not divulge all the details about the characters but tells us only the essentials which are necessary for the development of the story. There is definitely a method in the plotless grandmother's tale. The

narrative method of her tale demonstrates the style of a village story-teller. It has all the familiar elements of the same: the garrulity, the use of direct address to the reader, the language with its repetition and lengthy description. Even the opening words of the novel evoke this feeling.

Our village – I don't think you have ever heard about it – *Kanthapura* is its name, and it is in the province of Kara. (7)

Achakka is a dramatized first person narrator that is an established tradition in European novel. Raja Rao has adopted this tradition as a suitable substitute for the oral tradition of story-telling by a common man. The intimacy and the personal touch predominate the narration of the grandmother in *Kanthapura*. And it is not by chance that Achakka is the narrator of the novel. Raja Rao has made his choice after much forethought. It is evident from what he writes of the story at the end of the 'Foreward':

It may have been told of an evening, when as the dusk falls and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding on the veranda, a grandmother might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village.

S.C. Harrex rightly points out:

The narrator is a physical and psychological presence in the the story, like that of the *Harikatha*-man, who, surrounded by an enthusiastic all-night audience in the village temple, retells the religious epics. Raja Rao employs a number of rhetorical devices to sustain the illusion that the reader is part of a live audience listening to the grandmother telling the tale of her village of *Kanthapura*... The narrator is a Brahmin and, accordingly, her perceptions and feelings derive from a tradition-oriented sensibility. Thus she is quite at home in the immemorial conventions of the story-teller. In her mind past naturally mingles with the present and gods with men, and so it is with proper and sincere reverence (as distinct from artificial rhetoric) that at the beginning of her story she prays to the village goddess, Kenchamma: 'O Kenchamma! Protect us always like this through famine and disease, death and despair...' ⁶

Achakka's personality and her art of rendering concrete mental impressions of the characters who figure in her story are a big draw to the reader. She is also endowed with an imaginative freedom coupled with a maternal compassion which comes quite naturally to her. Achakka's compassion is all-embracing and it includes even the vicious money lender, Bhatta, in its kind fold. The message that Raja Rao wants to convey is very clear indeed. In the Hindu society, the grandmother plays a special role. She presides over the household, binds it together with love and authority, and also narrates stories to her children and grand children. Achakka plays all these roles to perfection, and that is how Raja Rao intends her to be taken by the readers.

4.5 THE HARIKATHA ELEMENT

Harikatha is a religious ritual that a devout Hindu is expected to organize or attend from time to time. It may equally well be held at home or at a temple. As the term itself suggests, it is the telling of the story of an incarnation of Vishnu (also known as Hari) or any other god to the accompaniment of singing and dancing. Entire villages

or communities participate in a *Harikatha*. It generates religious fervour, and earns merit for the participants. As in the rest of India, *Harikatha* is equally popular at *Kanthapura*. All the villagers flock to the temple when they hear that a *Harikatha* has been arranged.

Jayaramachar is the famous *Harikatha*-man. He has a special way of doing the *Harikatha*. Somehow or other, he brings in an element of Gandhian teaching into the stories that he narrates. While telling the story of Siva and Parvati, he says that Siva is three eyed and Swaraj too is three-eyed, referring to the Gandhian message of self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity and Khaddar. The villagers of *Kanthapura* had never heard *Harikathas* like this before. Since Jayaramachar could sing too, he keeps them rapt in tears for hours together. They can never forget the *Harikatha* he did about the birth of Gandhi, which is a fine example of how the religious plank is suitably used for political awakening. The people of *Kanthapura* find no harm in this as both are desirable ends.

In his special *Harikatha*, Jayaramachar recalls the ancient glory of India that produced such great kings as Asoka, Chandragupta, Vikramaditya and Akbar, and such sages as Krishna, Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja. But this very land of the Himalayas, Ganges and Cauvery is enslaved by a nation of the Red-men from across the seas. The rishis beseech Brahma to do something to free the nation from foreign bondage. With the blessings of all the gods, there is born in a family in Gujarat a son such as the world never beheld before. He is named Mohandas and grows up to become Mahatma Gandhi, who wages a relentless fight against the serpent of foreign rule, and one day he will destroy it and bring Swaraj (self-rule) to India. The police take Jayaramachar away after this *Harikatha*, and he is never again seen in *Kanthapura*. His story of Gandhi is an allegory of India's freedom struggle.

Jayaramachar's story of Gandhi, apart from its appropriateness as a *Harikatha*, also serves to introduce the political theme of the novel. Being a true follower of Gandhi, Jayaramachar dedicates his art of narration to political education of the common people as also to free public entertainment. He gives his stories of the gods a contemporary relevance that is amazing even as it educates the illiterate villagers of *Kanthapura*. Jayaramachar's recounting of the birth of Gandhi as a symbolic saviour of the Indian people, and his pursuit of the chosen mission of eradicating the British rule in India, are politically effective ways of introducing Gandhi to the illiterate villagers in his role of the national leader of India. What Raja Rao implies through the *Harikatha* is that if the people of India, of all castes and creeds, are to accept Gandhi as their chosen leader, he ought to be relevant to them in the light of their inherited traditions and beliefs. It is a fact of Indian history that the Gandhian revolution spread in the length and breadth of the country because the great man's staunch principles evolved not only from the traditional wisdom, but were also presented to the Indian masses in the acceptable form of their ages-old attitudes to life.

Paranjape has this to say about the religious spirit of the novel:

Kanthapura is ... imbued with a religious spirit akin to that of the Puranas. An important idea which runs through it is that of incarnation [which] ... is central to the Puranas ... The avatar in this novel is Gandhi, whose shadow looms over the whole book, although he is himself not a character. Incarnation ... extends into *Kanthapura* itself, where Moorthy, who leads the revolt, is the local manifestation of Gandhi, and by implication of Truth.⁷

4.6 MYTH AND SYMBOLISM

Myth is defined as an ancient traditional story of gods or heroes, especially one offering an explanation of some fact or phenomenon. It is a story or allusion with a suggestive meaning. Myths are traditional as well as inventions of poets and writers.

Symbol, on the other hand, is an image which suggests or evokes an idea or conception. It is a manner of representation in which what is given (usually something material or concrete) suggests, through association, something more or beyond (usually something immaterial or abstract). In a poem or work of fiction, these two figures appear separately or together. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a novel in which myth and symbolism mingle to lend an exclusive colour to the narrative. The main reason for this is that the novel is conceived and structured as a *sthalapurana*, and myth and symbol are unavoidable elements of the Puranic tradition. The second reason is the author's preference for using these elements as aids to his narrative technique.

Raja Rao is keenly aware of the fact of individual experience having its roots in the native tradition. When he wrote *Kanthapura*, his object was to integrate his consciousness of the past tradition with his experience of contemporary time in the thirties of the twentieth century. Therefore, in his narrative art there is a mingling of myth and realism. At the very beginning of the novel, Raja Rao presents the legend of Kenchamma, the goddess of the hill, and raises it to the level of a myth. As the popular proof of the goddess having killed the demon of the legend, he points out that the earth near the actual spot of the killing is red. This cannot be accepted as a scientific fact but only as a traditional myth in which the people of *Kanthapura* have blind faith. Another belief arises from the same myth, which is that Kenchamma will come to their rescue whenever they are faced with a calamity. Hence, they invoke her name whenever they are in trouble.

Jayaramachar narrates Mahatma Gandhi's story as a *Harikatha*, which is a deliberate attempt on his part to mix politics and religion. But one could go a step further in saying that it is also a deliberate attempt at myth-making by Raja Rao. He uses it as a powerful argument in favour of the leadership provided to the Indian nation by Gandhi. He raises Gandhi to divine heights by comparing him to Siva and Krishna. Like Siva's three eyes, Gandhi's political programme is three-pronged. And, again like Krishna, he goes from village to village, slaying the serpent of foreign rule. The relationship existing between Arjuna, the Pandva prince in the *Mahabharata*, and Krishna is duplicated by Moorthy, the disciple, and Mahatma Gandhi, the master. Gandhi's teachings have the same significance for Moorthy as the message of the *Bhagvadgita* for Arjuna. Towards the end of the novel, Raja Rao draws a parallel between the Ramarajya myth and Gandhi's call for Swaraj. Gandhi (in London) is Rama gone into exile to rescue India (Sita) from the tyranny of the British (Ravana), while Jawahar Lal (Brother Bharata) awaits the return of his leader from the Second Round Table Conference. In this manner, Raja Rao transforms facts of real history into myths that fill the imagination of the people of *Kanthapura* with hope and enthusiasm.

Besides indulging in deliberate myth-making, Raja Rao also makes wide use of symbols in *Kanthapura*. When the village leaders are arrested by the police, the women of *Kanthapura* form a 'Sevika Sangha' or women's group to fight the forces of oppression. At that time, they are not ordinary helpless women, but manifestations of Durga or Shakti, the destroyer of demons. Moorthy is Gandhi's man or the symbol of Satyagraha; Bade Khan the policeman is the symbol of oppression; Bhatta is the symbol of false orthodoxy; and Waterfall Venkamma symbolises superstition and blind tradition. Srinivasa Iyengar adds to the list of symbols:

There is Range Gowda the symbol of sense and stolidity, a sort of Sardar Patel to Moorthy the village Mahatma. The river Himavathy is herself a Presence, and the Goddess Kenchamma of the Hill is a Presence too, the protectress of the people, the guardian of *Kanthapura*.⁸

Though it is nowhere clearly stated in Raja Rao's novel, but Great Britain, the island beyond the seas is obviously the Kingdom of Ravana. The red colour of the British (the red-men) indicates their violence, and the Skeffington Coffee Estate is a symbol

of the impact of European industrialization on the Indian way of life. Thus, you see, how myth and symbolism are very important aspects of the structure of *Kanthapura*.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao achieves a fusion of theme, form and narration. He superimposes the Indian tradition of romance over the Western form of the novel. *Kanthapura* is structured as a *sthalapurana*, a legendary history of a particular place. The three strands of action – politics, society and religion – are woven together to form the fabric of this novel. As elements of his narrative technique, Raja Rao employs reflection, dream, flash-back, and episodes. He retains the native Indian style of telling a story in spite of opting for the foreign medium of English. His digressions help to fill the gaps in the story. The continuous monologue of the narrator is particularly suited for psychological analysis of characters. Achakka, who tells the story, in her peculiar flowing style, is a garrulous grandmother of the village, interested in all the happenings, gossip and inter-relations of characters.

Jayaramachar's *Harikatha* about the birth of Gandhi is a special device, through which religion is mingled with politics. We are told that the Mahatma is going to slay the serpent of foreign rule just as Krishna killed the serpent Kaliya. Jayaramachar's *Harikatha* is an allegory of India's freedom struggle. Apart from this, Raja Rao also uses myth and symbolism in *Kanthapura*. A significant myth is that of Goddess Kenchamma of the Hill, which is given at the very beginning of the novel. Gandhi is transformed into a mythical figure in the *Harikatha*. But the central myth in *Kanthapura* is that of equating Gandhi's slogan of striving after *Swaraj* with that of the coming of Ramarajya, the victory of good over evil. And, then, most of the characters in the novel are projected as symbols, which adds to the significance of their roles in the story.

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4.9 GLOSSARY

Invocation:	Address in prayer
Avatar:	Incarnation
Dandi March:	Gandhi's famous march to the sea-shore in Gujarat to the British salt law
Calling:	Profession by which someone is known
Mannerisms:	Peculiarities of behaviour or speech
Garrulous:	Over-talkative
Omniscience:	Having all knowledge
Consummate:	Perfect of its kind

Meandering:
Allegory:

Long drawn out
Symbolical retelling

**Structure and
Technique**

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. 'The three levels of action in *Kanthapura* – political, social and religious – are all related to a unified concept of India. Discuss the structure of the novel in the light of this statement.
2. What are the main features of Raja Rao's narrative technique in *Kanthapura*?
3. How successful is Achakka, the narrator, in her attempt to tell the story of her village in the context of the Satyagraha Movement?
4. Explain how myth and symbolism are integral parts of Raja Rao's fictional art in *Kanthapura*.

UNIT 5 *KANTHAPURA* : CHARACTERS

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Raja Rao's Art of Characterization in *Kanthapura*
- 5.3 Moorthy, the Central Figure
- 5.4 The Women in *Kanthapura*
- 5.5 Some of the Other Characters
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 References
- 5.8 Glossary
- 5.9 Questions
- 5.10 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to give you a brief analysis of the following:

- Raja Rao's art of characterization;
- Moorthy, the central character;
- The women characters;
- Some of the other figures in *Kanthapura*.
- We also conclude our discussion of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, and provide you with a list of suggested books that might be useful in your study.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Every novel is built round a plot, which is some action involving a number of characters. In the first four Units of this Block, we have given you information on the background, themes, structure, language and style of *Kanthapura*. What remains is an analysis of the characters involved in the action of the novel. So, in the final Unit, we shall give you a general idea of Raja Rao's art of characterization in the novel. To illustrate that art, we examine the central figure of Moorthy – his traits, strengths and weaknesses, and the impact that he has on the other characters. We shall also discuss the special significance of the women characters since the story is narrated by a woman. Some light is also thrown on three of the other important characters. With that we conclude our discussion of *Kanthapura* and its various elements.

5.2 RAJA RAO'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION IN *KANTHAPURA*

Everything in *Kanthapura* proceeds from the point of view of Achakka, the narrator of the novel, whether it be the story of the village or the political struggle in which the villagers get involved. The characters too are projected from the same point of view. Since Achakka is a respectable grandmother of the village, most of the main characters of the novel are personally known to her, and she treats them as her children and grandchildren. She loves to describe them in familiar terms, and has a

Meandering:
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Long drawn out
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habit of giving their family and professional backgrounds when introducing them to the reader. Raja Rao himself has no opportunity to make direct comments on any of his characters as *Kanthapura* is a first person narrative. Whatever he would like to say about a person is put in the mouth of Achakka. However, there are occasions, when the characters make comments on each other, or they reveal themselves through their actions as reported by Achakka.

The characters in *Kanthapura* are villagers who have little experience of the city life. They are shown to be not highly educated, not very cunning, but mostly innocent, simple and truthful people. Prayer, worship, and religious practices sum up the way of life for them. That is the reason how their leaders find it easy to take them towards politics by the path of religion. While their blind faith is a positive point, it has a negative side in making them superstitious and reluctant to give up tradition. In the face of an appeal to give up old habits and customs, they are likely to be unreasonable and headstrong. Human nature being such a variable thing, the *Kanthapura* community has its quota of good and evil figures. To contrast the goodness and nobility of Moorthy, Rangamma, Ratna and others, there are evil characters like Bhatta and Waterfall Venkamma. The latter, in particular, has a vicious tongue, which is capable of turning against its victims like a waterfall of malicious words. But, in the ultimate analysis, she is not all that bad. As for the policeman, Bade Khan, he is evil incarnate.

K.R. Rao has this to say about Raja Rao's art of characterization in *Kanthapura* :

In drawing his people, Raja Rao maintains the balance between their individuality and their representative nature. There is no dichotomy between people but rather a fusion of all human differentials into the steady flow of a single racial personality.¹

Raja Rao presents his characters as sharing a common nature. Their broad acceptance is an essential element of the spirit of India. What the British writer, E.M. Forster, fails to understand about the national character of India is clear as daylight to Raja Rao, and he projects this understanding through his depiction of the characters in *Kanthapura*. He does not emphasize their individual traits, but presents them as a group with common inherited traditions and common goals. Moorthy, in spite of his revolutionary zeal, cannot totally cut himself off from tradition and common belief. Following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, he takes up the cause of the untouchables, but is still beset by doubt if he is doing the right thing by mixing with them. Similarly, Bhatta is not depicted as a person who is all bad. Some of the villagers consider him to be 'a fine fellow.' One has to consider him in the general perspective of human nature that Raja Rao presents in *Kanthapura*. He makes us look at the 'Red-man,' the master of the Skeffington Coffee Estate, not in anger, but from a humorous and ironic point of view.

Any other writer would have presented Mahatma Gandhi as a superhuman figure, unapproachable and beyond criticism. Jayaramachar, the *Harikatha* man does project him as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, but the villagers of *Kanthapura* are not overawed by this. They respect Gandhi for his teachings, leadership, and feeling for the down-trodden, but it does not prevent some of them from criticizing him and even talking ill of him. Raja Rao's villagers are practical men and women. When the repercussions of the satyagraha hurt them, they blame it on Gandhi. Moorthy's mother does not hesitate to curse Gandhi for influencing her son to mingle with the Pariahs. That is again human nature, a mother's protective instinct to see her son prospering in society and not being treated as an outcast.

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao presents life of a small village community in times of change and turmoil. This community shares the same traditions, values, beliefs and way of

life. Hence, their reactions to the ups and downs of life tend to be predictable. When you visualize one of them, you visualize all. Yet such is the variety of human nature that Raja Rao identifies individuals through subtle shades of difference. For instance, there is little in common between Moorthy, Range Gowda and Bhatta as individual human beings. They are contrasted with the poor and the down-trodden. Apart from distinctions of caste, Raja Rao also highlights distinctions of class. K.R. Rao rightly concludes :

The humiliation of the poor and the outrage of the helpless are frequently contrasted with blatant vulgarity and coarseness of the proud and the indifferent. The amazing chivalry of some is set beside the disturbing cupidity of others. The beautiful valour of some women is contrasted with the banal opportunism of others.²

5.3 MOORTHY, THE CENTRAL FIGURE

Moorthy, the central figure of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, is introduced to the reader on a significant note. Early in the novel, the narrator is commenting on Dore, the 'University graduate,' and contrasts him with Moorthy :

He was not like Corner-House Moorthy, who had gone through life like a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and brahmnical, a very prince, I tell you. We loved him, of course, as you will see, and if only I had not been a daughterless widow, I should have offered him a grand-daughter, if I had one. (12)

This simple statement of Achakka holds the key to the figure of Moorthy in the novel. The Hindus venerate the cow and give it the status of a mother for its milk that nurtures us. For someone to be called a 'noble cow' is giving him high honour. It gives us the first clue to the personality of Moorthy. He is kind and non-violent, and cares for others. In contrast to the vicious Waterfall Venkamma, he is quiet, and, in contrast to the greedy Bhatta, he is generous. And then he is calm, respectful and brahmanic, a very prince among the ordinary people of *Kanthapura*. They think he has all the good qualities, and they have no hesitation in accepting him as their leader in the Satyagraha Movement that he launches in the village.

Moorthy is a self-sacrificing young man, who has no personal ambitions. He cares for the others – the poor villagers, the pariahs and the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Moorthy has a good organizing capability. When Rachanna's family is sent away from the Coffee Estate for raising his voice against oppression and challenging the authority of the Redman, Moorthy immediately arranges alternative shelter for him. But when he, later on, goes to visit the family in their hut, he finds it hard to avoid the hospitality of Rachanna's wife. His brahmanic consciousness and upbringing raises a doubt in his mind whether he is doing the right thing. He hesitates to cross the threshold and tries to avoid taking the glass of milk offered to him. When his mother does not let him enter her kitchen for fear of polluting it, he accepts her verdict without protest.

In his analysis of the role of Moorthy, the central character of *Kanthapura*, Paranjape writes:

Kanthapura is really a novel about a village rather than about a single individual; nevertheless, Moorthy, the Brahmin protagonist of the villagers' struggle against the government, is a prototypical hero. Moorthy is the leader

of a political uprising, but for him as for Gandhi whom he follows, politics provides a way of life indistinguishable from a spiritual quest, Action is the way to the Absolute. In Gandhi, he finds what is Right Action. Thus, for him, becoming a "Gandhi man" is a deep spiritual experience ...³

The people of his community refer to Moorthy as a 'Gandhiman'. This is a dubious term, since it is used by both the followers as well as the detractors of Gandhi. For the followers of Gandhi, it is a meritorious and noble term, but, in the eyes of his detractors, it is a derogatory term. It all depends on who is using it and in what context. Very early, Moorthy comes under the influence of the charismatic influence of Mahatma Gandhi, when he listens to him at a public meeting in the city. From that day onwards, he models his life on that of the Mahatma. He tries to imitate Gandhi in every respect. Whatever action Gandhi initiates in his struggle against the British rulers, Moorthy duplicates it at the village level. He reads the *Gita*, plies the spinning wheel, and even mimics Gandhi's Dandi March by leading the picketing of the toddy shop. When his followers suffer from police atrocities, he is once again beset by self-doubt, and goes on a fast unto death, which he is later persuaded to give up. This action of Moorthy makes him out to be a parody of Gandhi.

Rangamma, a respectable and wise woman of *Kanthapura*, speaks of Moorthy the good, Moorthy the religious, and Moorthy the noble. At the time of the convening of the Congress Committee in the village, Range Gowda equates Moorthy with Gandhi, and everybody present laughs. Range Gowda admonishes them :

'There is nothing to laugh at, brothers. He is our Gandhi. The state of Mysore has a Maharaja, but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London and that one has another one in Heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma, and this Moorthy, who.... is now grown up and great, and he has wisdom in him and he will be our Mahatma', and they all said, 'So he is !' (109)

This is as good an interpretation of Moorthy's status in his own village community as there could possibly be.

In the ultimate analysis, Moorthy proves to be a weak Gandhian when his nationalism is transformed into Jawahar Lal Nehru's socialism. But he is a genuine son of the soil who retains his simplicity and sincerity even after all the experience that he goes through. The state of his mind may be compared to that of the common Indian before freedom. The happenings in *Kanthapura* are centred round the personality of Moorthy, and his mental growth parallels the transformation of *Kanthapura* from a sleepy village to a hotbed of active satyagraha. Following the basic Gandhian ideology, Moorthy avoids a direct confrontation with non-belief and criticism. Moorthy tries to preach the Gandhian precept of universal love, which ought to include one's enemies too. But Range Gowda, the strong man of *Kanthapura*, rejects the Gandhian ethic of love, which, according to him, is meant only for the superior human beings, not for the common people. Moorthy makes no attempt to counter Range Gowda's criticism, but, at the same time, accepts his help in spite of his lack of faith in Gandhi. One might as well conclude with Esha Dey :

In the final criticism of Gandhi and his pact with Irwin which necessitates the withdrawal of the agitation that wipes out *Kanthapura*, Moorthy's bitterness echoes the frustration actually felt by a whole generation of Indians.⁴

Moorthy admits to as much in the letter that he writes to Ratna from prison. (256)

Kanthapura is one of the best Gandhian novels in English. Its hero, Moorthy, represents in theory and practice the Gandhian principles of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*. Accordingly, as we said before, he is somewhat an idealized character. S.C. Harrex rightly points out

Moorthy is a young Brahmin and former student, and is independent-minded with respect to marriage; he becomes leader of the village Congress Committee and is excommunicated from the Brahmin brotherhood for putting in practice Gandhi's untouchable policy. Moorthy befriends the local Pariahs, mixes with them, and works for their educational advancement. He treats them as equals in the political struggle and fights for their social and economic rights as human beings. The effect on his orthodox mother of his excommunication – she dies of shame and guilt – is indicative of the moral intensity with which Hindu communal mores are felt and practised by its orthodox members.⁵

With reference to Moorthy's speech on *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* that he makes to the villagers after Mahatma Gandhi's arrest. Harrex writes,

If *Kanthapura* has a message, it is this. And in Moorthy's speech Raja Rao captures the profound spirit, the gentle firmness, the oratory of the heart in plain speech and homely understanding, which Gandhi's public person epitomised.⁶

5.4 THE WOMEN IN KANTHAPURA

Though Moorthy is the central figure of *Kanthapura*, among the other characters, women have an equal role to play with their male counterparts. Again, since the narrator is Achakka, we get to know the story of the various happenings in and around *Kanthapura*, more from the point of view of women than from that of men. The women take a prominent part in all the religious gatherings and prayer meetings, and also in the political activities. They take care of the households, feed the men, and look after the children. At the same time, they are the ones who are interested in maintaining the rituals and traditions. Jayaramachar's special *Harikatha* about Mahatma Gandhi fires their imagination to such an extent that they willingly become active volunteers in the Satyagraha Movement led by Moorthy.

The river bank is the regular meeting place of the village women, and they gather there every morning. Besides attending to their bathing and washing, they also get a chance to exchange gossip and news of the latest happenings. Waterfall Venkamma has a vicious tongue, and she enjoys using it against everybody else. She is particularly vociferous against Moorthy and his mother, Narsamma, for the former's mixing with the pariahs. But, in her heart of hearts, Venkamma is not so very bad. If one day she quarrels with Narsamma, the next day she makes it up :

And when Narsamma saw her at the river the next day, Venkamma was as jolly as ever and she said she had a bad tongue and that one day she would ask Carpenter Kenchayya to saw it out, ..., and they all talked together happily and they came back home, their baskets on their heads, content. (57)

Among the nobler women of the village there are Rangamma and Ratna. Both of them fight shoulder to shoulder with Moorthy, Range Gowda and others against the British oppression. When the Congress Committee is formed in the village, Moorthy says they need a woman on the Committee because the Congress is for the weak and the lowly. Everybody's choice is Rangamma, and she accepts the responsibility reluctantly on popular demand. Later, when Moorthy is arrested and taken away, Rangamma comes to the forefront and arranges for newspapers to be delivered from the city so that the villagers remain informed about the activities of the Congress in the rest of the country. When the news comes that Moorthy has been released and will return to his village, Rangamma organizes proper welcome for him. She also forms a special group of the women volunteers, and names it 'Sevika Sangha', for their aim is to serve the community. The men of the village are not very keen for the Sevika Sangha since they feel that the women will neglect them and the household affairs by remaining too busy in their political and social activities. But this does not discourage the women led by Rangamma from continuing on their chosen path. When she too is arrested, Ratna takes over the mantle of leadership from her.

During all the encounters with the police, the women of *Kanthapura* do not stay at home, but join the men in their defiant protest marches. They get beaten up with lathis and suffer broken bones, yet they do not give up the struggle. Ultimately, most of the houses in *Kanthapura* are destroyed and the village is reduced to rubble. Some of the men perish and others leave their homes to find shelter elsewhere. The women too leave. The people of Kashipura, a neighbouring village welcome them. Achakka proudly says :

They hung garlands on our necks, and
called us the pilgrims of the Mahatma. (253)

5.5 SOME OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS

Apart from Moorthy and the women characters, there are a few men who bear special mention from among the main figures of *Kanthapura*. They are Range Gowda, Bhatta and Bade Khan. Patel Range Gowda is a Sudra, and has a prosperous nine-beamed house in the Sudra quarter of the village. He is a big, sturdy man, a veritable tiger among the villagers. With his tongue, his hand and his brain, he has amassed solid gold in his coffers and solid gold on his arms. His three daughters live with him and his sons-in-law work with him though they own as much land as he does. His words are the law in the village. The villagers believe if the Patel says it, 'even a coconut - leaf roof will become a gold roof.' (14). Range Gowda is an honest man, and he helps poor peasants. The villagers respect him all the more since he is a terror to the authorities. It is not for nothing that he is known as the Tiger. When Bade Khan, the policeman, comes to the village for the first time, he goes to Range Gowda to ask for accomodation to live in but the Patel does not oblige him. On the other hand, he is one of the first volunteers to join Moorthy's struggle against the authorities. At the end of the novel, it is he who brings the final news of the transformation of *Kanthapura*. He tells Achakka.

I drank three handfuls of Himavathy water,,
and I turned away. But to tell you the truth,
Mother, my heart it beat like a drum. (258)

Bhatta is a scholarly Brahmin, well-versed in the religious lore of Hinduism. Wealthy and possessing vast lands, he does not know what it is to be kind and charitable towards others. He is a money - lender, and when some poor wretch fails to repay his debt, Bhatta quietly acquires his fields to add to his own big estate. Blinded by

orthodoxy and tradition, he does not see any good in the winds of change that come to *Kanthapura* with the Gandhian revolution started by Moorthy. Bhatta conspires against Moorthy and has him excommunicated from the Brahmin community for his Pariah leanings. The villagers fear him but do not respect him as they respect Patel Range Gowda. Towards the end, Bhatta sells his lands in the village and goes to live his last days at Kashi.

Bade Khan, a typical policeman under the British regime is evil incarnate. Corrupt, cruel and ruthless, he has no human qualities. Jayaramachar is not allowed by the authorities to return to *Kanthapura* after he narrates the *Harikatha* about Mahatma Gandhi. Two days later, Bade Khan comes to live in the village. When Range Gowda declines to provide a house for him, he swears to punish him and the other villagers. He goes off to the Skeffington Coffee Estate, where he is allotted a hut to live in. From that day, he misses no opportunity to torment the villagers for rising to the call of Mahatma Gandhi. Bade Khan and his fellow policemen terrorize the people of *Kanthapura* and end up with destroying the village. But they are not able to suppress the patriotic spirit of the people, which remains burning in them wherever they go. Bade Khan is presented by Raja Rao as an example of how low a person in authority can fall once he is given unbridled power to deal with people as badly as he can. He is a virtual *rakshas* of the British (Ravana), and has no rival to the title of the chief villain in *Kanthapura*. Bade Khan is a symbol of the British tyranny over the helpless masses of India. The British colonisers willingly made use of the services of native people like him to enslave the Indians.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

The story in *Kanthapura* is narrated by Achakka, a grandmother of the village. All the characters that figure in the novel are projected from her point of view. She has her own special way of looking at men and women of the village, and if the author has any comments to make on individual characters, he puts them in Achakka's mouth. The figures in *Kanthapura* are mostly simple-minded and unsophisticated villagers who look at the new winds of change that come to their village with a sense of surprise and suspicion.

Kanthapura is all about the life of a small village community. The leader of this community is Moorthy, a shadow of Mahatma Gandhi who inspires him to teach the villagers the path of satyagraha and non-violence. Moorthy is a self-sacrificing young man with no personal ambition. Without any distinction of caste and class, he cares for all the villagers, and tries to help them in whatever ways he can. In spite of being a high caste Brahmin, he mingles with the untouchables and sympathizes with them in every way. Moorthy is good, religious - minded and noble, and the villagers regard him as their Mahatma.

Women have an equal role to play in *Kanthapura* along with their male counterparts. In actual fact, they are more active in their social and political roles while looking after the children and the households. Apart from Achakka, three other women have some prominence over the others; they are Rangamma, Ratna and Venkamma. The first two are good Gandhians and they organize the Sevika Sangha in the village, when Moorthy and some of his associates are imprisoned. They also lead the women in protest marches. Venkamma has a vicious tongue, but she is not really bad at heart. The three men of prominence after Moorthy are Range Gowda, Bhatta and Bade Khan. Range Gowda is a noble and well - to - do Sudra of the village, who acts as the Patel for collecting the taxes. He does not think well of Bhatta and Bade Khan, who are two of the bad characters in the novel. Bhatta is a learned Brahmin, possessing vast lands, and he lends money in order to grab the fields of the poor and needy. He is

opposed to the Gandhian revolution. Bade Khan is a ruthless policeman posted to the village to prevent the people from succeeding in their satyagraha.

Characters

5.7 REFERENCES

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2. Ibid., p.64.
3. Paranjape M. *The Best of Raja Rao*. New Delhi: Katha, 1998. p.ix.
4. Dey Esha *The Novels of Raja Rao*. Prestige, 1992. p.31.
5. Harrex S.C. *The Fire and the Offering: The English-language Novel of India 1935-1970*, Vol. II. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1978. p.160.
6. Ibid., p.161.

5.8 GLOSSARY

Dichotomy:	Division into two parts
Chivalry:	Courtesy and bravery
Cupidity:	Greed and covetousness
Banal:	Commonplace, trivial
Dubious:	Doubtful, undetermined
Charismatic:	Graceful and attractive
Ethic:	Morality; (in this case love for all)
Vociferous:	Making a loud noise
Segregation:	Grouping apart, separating

5.9 QUESTIONS

1. How would you assess Raja Rao's art of characterization in *Kanthapura*?
2. What are those qualities that go into the making of Moorthy, the central figure in *Kanthapura*?
3. What do you think of the women characters in *Kanthapura*, and what is their role in the action of the novel?
4. Write a short essay on some of the male characters - other than Moorthy - in *Kanthapura*.

5.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

It is not necessary to go through all the books mentioned below. But, if possible and if you have access to a well - equipped library, you would do well to have a look into some of them.

Primary Material

Raja Rao:	<i>The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories</i> . Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1947.
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